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The Joy of Living

By Sidney Gowing

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Dillicking the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea Lamb, at Jervaux abbey, and her cousin, Alexander Lamb, Almee, vivacious daughter of the very Reverend Viscount Scroope, is in a rebellious mood.

CHAPTER II.—She wanders into the park, there encountering a strange youth in trouble with a motorcycle. He laughingly introduces himself as "Billy," American. The two cement the acquaintance by a ride on the motorcycle, the "Flying Sphinx," and part. With Georgina Berners, her cousin, Almee sets out for Jervaux. On the way she decides that Georgina shall impersonate her at Jervaux, while she goes on a holiday. Georgina's horrified protest is unavailing.

CHAPTER III.—Happy in her new freedom, Almee again meets "Billy." He tells her his name is Spencer, and she gives her as Amy Spooka, at present "out of a job." Billy offers to take her into partnership in selling the Sphinx. In a spirit of madcap adventure, she accepts. The two proceed to the town of Stanhoe, taking separate lodgings in Ivy cottage.

CHAPTER IV.—That night Almee visits Georgina and learns that the deception has not been discovered. By her dominant personality she compels Georgina to continue the subterfuge.

CHAPTER V.—On a trial spin next day on the Sphinx, with Billy, Almee almost collides with a carriage in which are her aunt, Georgina and Alexander. The pair escape unrecognized.

CHAPTER VI.—Georgina learns that Lord Scroope is coming to visit Lady Erythea and, realizing what will happen on his arrival, is in hopeless bewilderment.

CHAPTER VII.—While Almee is secretly visiting Georgina at Jervaux, the place is burglarized. Almee escapes.

CHAPTER VIII.—Georgina learns, with much relief, that Almee has got away.

CHAPTER IX.—Police Inspector Panke decides that the robbery is the work of "Jack the Climber" and "Calamity Kate," noted thieves, who travel on a motorcycle.

CHAPTER X.—Billy, aware of his "partner's" nocturnal jaunts, is troubled. He follows her, on the Sphinx, to Jervaux. He hears the commotion, at once suspects burglary, and follows two figures on a motorcycle who are apparently in a desperate hurry. Cornering the pair, Billy knocks out a man who attempts to shoot him, picking up a package the fellow had dropped. He discovers the other fugitive to be a woman. Stopping to aid her, she strikes him with a stone, rendering him unconscious, and the pair escape.

CHAPTER XI.—Recovering, Billy discovers the package he had picked up is a jewel case, containing emeralds. Telling them they must be part of the loot from Jervaux, he starts for the abbey. On the way he meets Almee, with the police in pursuit. In a secure stopping place, at once among the crag pits, Almee tells him the whole story. He urges that she make a frank confession to her father, but on reflection both realize Almee's good name has been compromised by her two night's stay at Ivy cottage.

CHAPTER XII.—Assuring Almee she has a plan to save her, Billy leaves her in the cave and, proceeding to Jervaux, restores the emeralds to the astounded Lady Erythea.

CHAPTER XIII.—Rejecting any reward, after explaining how the emeralds came into his possession, Billy accepts the position of chauffeur to Lady Erythea, seeing in the situation a promise of a way out of the emporio.

CHAPTER XIV.—Realizing what her father's visit to Jervaux would mean, Almee goes secretly to her home, disables the family auto, thus preventing his journey, and induces a parlormaid to let her take her place at Jervaux.

CHAPTER XV.—Alexander recognizes Almee as the woman on the motorcycle which ran into the Lamb carriage, denouncing her as "Calamity Kate." Georgina divulges Almee's identity. Hearing her story, Alexander consents to keep the secret.

CHAPTER XVI.—Alexander finds himself very much in love with Georgina.

CHAPTER XVII.—The approaching visit of Alexander's sister, Lady Diana (who, of course, knows Almee) brings consternation to the two girls.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Another visitor to Jervaux is the Viscount de Jussac, Diana's suitor. Diana recognizes Almee and threatens to denounce her.

CHAPTER XIX.—Interested in the Lamb collection of armor, De Jussac, during the night, tries on a suit. Diana, investigating an alleged ghostly apparition, meets him. He declares his love, and is accepted. Almee finds them together and binds Diana, to secrecy concerning her affairs.

CHAPTER XX.—Alexander and Georgina become engaged. Lady Erythea, believing Georgina to be Lord Scroope's daughter, is delighted.

CHAPTER XXI.—Billy and Almee reach an understanding as to their mutual love.

CHAPTER XXII.—A Scotland Yard official arrives and demands to see Billy. Almee overhears him. Learning Billy's whereabouts, she offers to help him.

CHAPTER XXIII.—Billy finds "Jack the Climber," his leg broken, in the crag pits. He hears the thief's story and has a feeling of something like sympathy. "Jack" is arrested and the police search for "Calamity Kate."

CHAPTER XXIV.—Almee, hastening to the crag pits to warn Billy of his danger, meets "Kate" and, touched by the girl's devotion to her husband, allows the woman to escape on the Sphinx.

Suddenly Almee stooped and caught her by the shoulder.

"Come with me!" she said swiftly and, turning, crept in through the screen of brambles, into the cave.

Kate looked up comprehendingly. Then, with the instinct of the hunted animal she dived through the bushes and went to ground. The girls found themselves together in the cool gloom of the cave.

Kate stared at Almee with wondering eyes.

"I'm sorry for you!" said Almee unsteadily.

"I never thought," said Kate, "to find any woman sorry for me."

She glanced round the walls of the cave.

"They'll find me here—just the same."

"They may not," Almee, very pale, looked at the fugitive. "Don't you think," she said, "that if you got clear this time, you might—drop it all? Try—something different?"

"I might," said Kate slowly. "But—they'll get me."

She caught sight of the Flying Sphinx, standing in the dim light at the cave's end.

"What's that?" she exclaimed, and moved swiftly to the machine. Almee watched her.

"You couldn't ride it," said Almee, "not even if the way was clear."

"I can ride anything with an engine to it!" said Kate desperately. There was a gleam of hope in the hunted eyes; already her hands were busy with the levers; searching, examining. But she stopped, baffled. The controls of the Sphinx were too much for her.

The next moment Almee was beside her.

"That's the throttle!" said Almee swiftly. "Here's the starter—this changes the gear—you have to be careful with the intake. On the second speed she goes over the roughest ground like a bird—on the level road she'll do eighty. If you could get her out clear of the bushes—but you'd never get away with it—"

The woman turned to her, gasping.

"Will you let me try—?" she exclaimed.

It was then that a shock of revulsion came over Almee. This was the female rattlesnake who had nearly killed Billy, and caused all the trouble. Why should Almee feel pity? The broken man in the hands of the police—

A rustle among the bushes at the cave's mouth made the two women turn quickly. De Jussac, stepping inside, halted and stared blankly at them both.

"Ten thousand devils!" exclaimed Bertrand, momentarily startled out of politeness.

"You needn't be frightened for me," said Almee quickly. "She'll do me no harm."

Bertrand's active brain took in the situation briefly.

"No harm!" he said. "Name of a name! If the police found you here with that!"

Almee turned very white. That aspect of the case had not even occurred to her. In the stress of her emotions, the realization of danger to herself had been crowded out. If she had to explain to the police—

"Yes," said Almee quietly. "If they come here—I'm done for."

The strident voice of Inspector Arkwright was heard, very close at hand. Monsieur de Jussac pushed his way out through the brambles and regained the open air. The three policemen together were converging towards the spot.

"Another cave there!" cried Inspector Arkwright. "I thought so. This way, Panke!"

De Jussac halted before the entrance, and, selecting a cigarette from his case, lit it deliberately.

"You may save yourself the trouble Inspector," he said amiably. "There is nothing here."

Arkwright hesitated.

"Are you certain?" he said, coming forward again.

"I have proved it," said Bertrand "at much expense to my skin. Curse these briars!"

"All right," said Arkwright, turning away; "push on and search the other end, Panke. No use wasting time here. I think we're on the farr's errand after all."

The three police passed out of sight round the bend of the pits. There was a long pause. Almee's face peered cautiously through the brambles.

"What a fearful liar you are, VI come!" she said with mingled remorse and admiration.

Bertrand, without turning, bowed gravely.

"I do my best," he murmured, "in defense of a lady with such a genius for setting into difficulties. But I beg of you to remain where you are."

"Are the police out of sight?" said Almee eagerly.

"For the present, yes. They are away round the corner—all three. But they may come back."

A moment's silence followed the warning. Then the brambles parted and the Flying Sphinx came thrusting through. Kate was beside it, her hands gripping the bars, her face white and strained, her teeth tight set. She gave a swift glance to either side and began to run the machine down the slope.

De Jussac, with an amazed exclamation, turned to intercept her. He found a hand detaining him; Almee had gripped him by the arm.

"Let her go!" said Almee breathlessly. "Let her go!"

"Name of a name!" said Bertrand blankly. But he obeyed. There was little choice. Already Calamity Kate was well down the slope, running beside the free-wheeling Sphinx that gathered more and more impetus by its own weight. The deftness with which the woman steered it between the clumps of bushes was astounding.

"She hasn't a dog's chance," said Almee with a gulp, "but what chance there is—let her take it."

"A nation of sportsmen—quoth!" murmured Bertrand with a paralyzed air. He glanced to the left, where the police had disappeared round the shoulder of the bluff. There was still no sign of them. Kate, reaching the trodden path at the bottom, turned sharp to the right and swung herself into the saddle.

"It is one's duty to stop her," said Bertrand, twisting his moustache in perplexity. "But—one does not hunt a woman."

"She'll never get started on that ground," said Almee.

The engine fired, stopped, fired again—the wheels threw up sprits of sand, then getting onto harder ground the machine ran swiftly ahead with the faint pulsing whirr that was the Sphinx's song of triumphant progress. She shot forward much too fast, and was only just controlled in time.

No other cycle than the Sphinx could have made good over such ground; no other could have sailed so efficiently and noiselessly up the steep path through the gap towards the higher ground at the far end. It was a wonderful exhibition of riding. As the fugitive sped by, Billy, standing on guard beside the captive Jake, turned and stared in petrified amazement.

Jake raised himself to a sitting position on the gate, and stared, too.



He uttered a hoarse cry.

He uttered a hoarse cry—almost a cheer.

The Sphinx and its rider breasted the crest of the rise, staggered, and sailed away out of view.

CHAPTER XXV

Two of a Kind.

Almee gave a little gurgle of excitement as the Sphinx vanished.

"She's away! And I don't believe they've seen her! If she can stick to it over the field to the gate, there's open road before her and she's clear!"

Almee turned to de Jussac with shining eyes. He shrugged his shoulders faintly.

"A supremely foolish act, mademoiselle," said Bertrand.

"She was in trouble—just as I've been. Everybody's shielded me at their own risk," said Almee defiantly.

"How could I do less for her?"

"Alas, the morals of the age!" said Bertrand, and he laughed gently. "A sermon would not become me—I also am a conditor. I will observe the movements of the enemy."

He climbed quickly onto the shoulder of high ground that divided them from the end of the pit, and returned in a few moments.

"Obviously our industrious police did not see her," he said; "they are now searching the last of the caves."

"Then it's time I got back into mine," said Almee turning to dive back into her retreat.

"Not so!" exclaimed Bertrand quickly, catching her by the hand. "That is no place for you."

"Why?"

"The gentleman from Scotland Yard will search it before he leaves—he took my word for the moment, but he will make sure. It was merely that he was in a hurry. You must get out of this while you can; like your friend the lady burglar. Come along!" said Bertrand, setting off at a run and pulling her with him.

"You're right!" ejaculated Almee. With long strides they sped round the clump of bushes, Almee in tow of Bertrand, and, turning sharp to the right, scurried up one of the steep paths that led out of the pits.

Billy suffered yet one more shock as the pair of them came into his field of vision. He gaped at them, hardly able to believe his eyes. In a few moments they had passed; Almee reached the top of the pit, and Bertrand glanced apprehensively back in the direction of the police.

"All clear!" he gasped, utterly out of breath. "Get to the road—get out of sight. Back to the abbey, dear lady, and for pity's sake stay there, for you are very wearing. Go!"

"Thanks, awfully!" panted Almee, and departed as fast as her legs would carry her. De Jussac retreated into the pit, mopping his brow. Taking no notice of the frantic signals of Billy he returned to the cave, dived into it took a hurried look round and kicked plenty of loose sand over a pool of oil that was the sole legacy of the Sphinx.

He left the place with a sigh of relief and, encountering the search party of police, permitted himself to smile.

"Nothing doing!" said Inspector Arkwright. "Panke, will you go back! Bring the car down over the meadow; we'll get the man on it, clear the pits, and set a watch in the cave where we found him." He moved towards the late stable of the Sphinx. "But I'm going to look through this place and make sure."

"By all means, Inspector," said Bertrand yawning. "I am a mere amateur. All caves look alike to me. Mind the briars; their prick don't accuse."

Arkwright's inspection of the cave was brief.

"It is empty, but the place has been used, and recently," he reported. "Strange they should not have chosen it; it is the best hiding place in the pit."

"Perhaps they only recently discovered this desirable residence, and were about to shift their quarters," suggested de Jussac. "No doubt, if a few watchful policemen ambush themselves efficiently during the dark hours, they will catch the amiable consort of that cutthroat yonder. One hopes so. It is painful to the law-abiding to know that malefactors are at large. Particularly when they are females."

Inspector Arkwright looked at him dubiously, and made no reply. Billy, also, when the two rejoined him, eyed de Jussac with extreme thoughtfulness, and had some difficulty in suppressing his emotion. He was still mounting guard over Jake, who lay upon his improvised stretcher and gazed up at the sky with a singularly benignant smile. De Jussac offered him a cigarette, which he accepted silently.

"I think," said Inspector Arkwright, "I'll call on you two gentlemen to assist me and we'll get him out of this. I want the place cleared."

It was not an easy matter to carry the gate and its burden out of the pits. By the time they had achieved it, the car arrived from Jervaux and wound its way over the flat turf. Jake was lifted into it.

"I must trouble you to accompany me, Mr. Spencer," said Arkwright.

"Anything to oblige the police," said Billy, squeezing himself into the front of the car. It was a tight fit.

The journey to Stanhoe was made almost in silence. When the car arrived at the police station Jake was duly disposed of, while Billy cooled his heels in a dingy waiting room that had been whitewashed some time during the period when Sir Robert Peel was reorganizing the force. Presently Inspector Arkwright joined him. The Inspector closed the door, and regarded Billy with a sphinx-like but faintly humorous eye.

"I think, Mr. Spencer," he said quietly, "that you have no very high opinion of my intelligence?"

"Wrong there," said Billy, politely. "I don't know that I'd class the Stanhoe staff with the world's great thinkers. But I've heard a lot about Scotland Yard, and, if I may say so, you come fully up to sample."

"There is no harm now in my telling you that I know precisely what your movements have been, Mr. Spencer. I know that it was you, and not the prisoner, who stayed at Ivy cottage as the tenant of Mrs. Sunning. I know that your companion, at the same time, stayed next door. I have also a fairly accurate comprehension of the reasons which led you to accept temporary employment in the Jervaux abbey household. I did not, till now, know who you were. But the papers you gave me establish your identity. And that makes all the difference."

Billy was silent.

"I am, you see, in possession of the facts."

"There's one recent fact," thought Billy, "that you're not wise to."

"Your affairs, Mr. Spencer, though somewhat complicated, do not call for the intervention of the police," said Arkwright, with the ghost of a smile, "and no official cognizance will be taken of that matter; unless something unforeseen occurs. I am a thief hunter and not a castigator of rash young men. What I know, I shall, doubtless, keep to myself."

Billy felt an enormous sense of relief, combined with a sharp twinge of conscience.

"The irresponsible couple who ensconced themselves at Ivy cottage," said Arkwright, with a dry smile, "made a good deal of trouble for themselves."

"Inspector," said Billy, "did you ever do a fool thing?"

Inspector Arkwright twinkled.

"A good many, when I was your age. And, sometimes, even now. However, I wish you good fortune. I am not ungrateful to you for your share in the running to earth of Mr. Jake. It is the duty of the civilian to assist the police. The woman will still be brought to book. And I shall call on your formidable employer before I leave. Good-by, Mr. Spencer."

Billy walked out of Stanhoe police station and made his way back to the abbey on foot.

"Gee!" he said pensively. "But that last stunt was awful dangerous! Of course, I see well enough what happened. But it was just a lucky accident neither Almee nor that blamed nuisance of a woman was seen getting away. The luckiest sort of accident. Inspector Arkwright isn't the fool I took him for, by a long way. I wonder how much he knows? But he can't know that."

He shook his shoulders.

"It came near being a real crash—just when everything had come right. It put the wind up me worse than anything yet. But there's nothing to be scared at now."

Despite the excellent turn affairs had taken, Billy's mind was troubling him. He had the air of a small boy whose raid on the jam cupboard is about to be discovered. When he arrived at the abbey there was no sign of his partner. After lingering for some time near the most likely haunts, Billy sighed and retreated to the garage.

He had not been there long when Almee's face appeared furtively round the angle of the door.

"Hello!" she said, stepping inside.

She halted, and they looked at each other dubiously. Almee was decidedly pale, her eyes pathetic and rather frightened.

(Continued on page five)

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Dated and published the first time, this 27th day of February, 1923.

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