

IT IS DIFFICULT to imagine anything more fascinating than our new serial story

The Joy of Living By Sidney Gowing

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Disliking the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea...

CHAPTER II—She wanders into the park, there encountering a strange youth in a motor-cyclist's outfit...

CHAPTER III—Happy in her new freedom, Almee again meets "Billy." He tells her his name is Spencer...

CHAPTER IV—That night Almee visits Georgina and learns that the description has not been discovered...

CHAPTER V—On a trial spin next day on the Sphinx, with Billy, Almee almost collides with a carriage...

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

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...

CHAPTER X—Billy, aware of his "partner's" nocturnal jaunts, is troubled. He follows her on the Sphinx...

Lady Erythea started. She glanced at Georgina's horror-stricken face, and then, with deep concern, moved to her brother-in-law's side...

Lord Scroope shook himself free. "Are you in your senses, Erythea? This is my niece by marriage—Georgina Berners. What is she doing here?"

"Y-yes," gulped Alexander's fiancée. "I'm Georgina. I couldn't help it."

The disheveled parlor maid darted in through the door. Almee's cup was awry, her face was pale, her eyes very bright...

"Don't cry, Georgie," said Almee; "it wasn't your fault."

"Have I been transported into Bedlam?" asked Lord Scroope, dizzily. "Or are you rehearsing a charade? What is she doing in this costume?"

Lady Erythea struggled for breath. "This," she said grimly, "is my parlor maid, Snooks, whom I foolishly engaged on your recommendation..."

Lord Scroope looked at his sister-in-law with commiseration. "This," he said, in the soothing tone with which one would address a delirious person...

"It wasn't Aunt's fault, Dad," she said breathlessly, "nor Georgie's—nor Alexander's. It was all mine. And if you all want to beat somebody, it had better be me! I—I'm here to explain!"

Almee, avoiding her aunt's eyes, addressed herself to the quivering car-trumpet. "I didn't want to come here, Dad made me. I was—frightened of you..."

"Georgina arrived here, and you took her for me. You insisted she was me. And she didn't dare explain, for fear of getting me into a row..."

"I got here the same night, and climbed into her room. And Georgie begged me to own up, and I wouldn't. And I came the next night; Georgie was ready to give it all away—and then the burglars got in..."

"Almee paused for breath. "Who," inquired Lord Scroope, in the hush that followed, "is Mr. Spencer?"

"A motorcyclist. He had come across the thieves getting away, had a fight with them—they were too many for him, but he got back some of the jewels..."

"Almee paused for breath. "Who," inquired Lord Scroope, in the hush that followed, "is Mr. Spencer?"

"I beg your pardon, Aunt," said Alexander, pallid but calm, "I also, knew everything that was to be known—from the moment Almee entered this house..."

"Under correction, Lord Scroope, said de Jussac gently; "a gentleman cannot betray a woman's confidence without her consent."

"I've been looking for you everywhere," he cried. "You—"

"Go out!" said Lady Erythea fiercely, looking at him judiciously. "I include you in my thanks."

"Mr. Spencer bowed and passed out quickly through the window. He was holding the door of the car open when Almee and her father got in..."

"Keep right away through the park here to the north gates," said Billy, pointing, "and drive like h—ll."

"Billy" gasped Almee, turning toward him as the motor slid by. Billy stood to attention and gravely...

once speech denied itself even to Lady Erythea. Georgina was sobbing gently in the chair, Alexander still stood over her and said nothing...

"I seem to find a thread of enlightenment in this story," said Lord Scroope, slowly. "Yes, I think I know enough of you, Almee, to understand..."

"May I ask when this unknown young man permitted himself to propose to you?"

"Yesterday!"

"We will not pursue that matter," said Lord Scroope, gloomily; "this hardly seems the time or place for detailed explanations..."

"A thousand pardons! A family matter, I perceive," he said quickly, "I will withdraw—"

"Don't go, Vicomte!" exclaimed Almee. "Anyone who's a friend of mine is welcome here..."

"If I can be of any service—" said Bertrand. He bowed courteously to Almee's father. "Lord Scroope, I presume."

"You," said Lady Erythea to Bertrand, trembling with wrath, "were also in this conspiracy! You appear to know the whole story!"

"Oh, of course he knows it," said Almee, wildly. "Just as Billy knew it, and Georgina, and Diana, too..."

"It seems," said Lady Erythea, gripping the back of a chair, "that everyone in my household knew all about this—except myself and my nephew! Who, through his position and his innocence, now finds himself—"

"I beg your pardon, Aunt," said Alexander, pallid but calm, "I also, knew everything that was to be known—from the moment Almee entered this house..."

Lady Erythea stared at her nephew blankly. A curious expression came into her eyes. At last she seemed to detect in Alexander the one thing she had believed was lacking—the touch of the original Adam...

"You!" he said grimly. "You also knew the truth? The action of the others, I can understand. But—a Churchman cannot lend himself to such a conspiracy as this."

"Under correction, Lord Scroope, said de Jussac gently; "a gentleman cannot betray a woman's confidence without her consent."

"I'm receiving instruction from a layman?" he inquired.

"It is the last thing I would dare," replied Bertrand humbly. "It is I who seek instruction. Does not the Church respect the seal of the confessional?"

"I make no claim, and no excuses!" said Alexander suddenly. "I have only this to say. I loved Georgina Berners from the day I saw her..."

"Well done!" cried Almee. "Alexander, you're a man. I'm proud of you, cousin!"

"Thank you, Almee," said Alexander. "It is for me," said Lord Scroope sternly, "to apportion the blame. Georgina Berners is here under—"

He was interrupted by the volcanic arrival of Billy through the window, panting and eager, the tuft of hair on top of his head erect like the crest of a cockatoo.

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"Pardon me," said Billy, advancing. "but I guess my place is here. Whatever blame is, I take it. Lord Scroope, I know that what I've done is just apology, but—"

"Shut up, Billy!" exclaimed Almee. "I've told them everything—I've said all there is to say. And," she added, under her breath, "for once I think I've made a better hand of it than you could."

Before anyone could reply, Georgina rose, sobbing, and made a dive for the door.

"Let me go!" she said brokenly. "I want to go away. I want to go—"

Billy, glancing quickly from her to Almee and Lord Scroope, turned and flitted out again through the window. No one noticed him. All eyes were on Georgina.

Alexander intervened—but it was Lady Erythea who, with an extraordinarily determined movement, overtook Georgina. Passing a supporting arm round the girl's waist, she turned and faced the stupefied company.

"Let me remind you all," said Lady Erythea, in a voice that compelled silence, "of one thing that is in danger of being overlooked. I am mistress here at Jervaux! I have listened with an unexampled patience. Hold your tongue, Anthony! I have welcomed the alliance of Georgina with this family, and Alexander will have such a wife as I myself would have chosen for him..."

"Do not interrupt me, Alexander!" said his aunt. She turned to Almee. "As for you," continued Lady Erythea, idly, "I really find myself in your debt. I can never be sufficiently thankful that you did not come here as my guest, and that Alexander was spared your authorized companionship! One shudders to reflect on the possibilities."

"You appear to have enlisted the services of everyone but me to shield your disreputable escapade, and to have enrolled many simple-minded persons in your defense. You may have deluded these men," said Lady Erythea, with a scornful wave of her hand towards the company, "but you do not delude me! I find in you no qualities but selfishness and deceit—and I am glad that your sojourn in my house has been confined to the servants' hall, though I dread to think what your influence may have been on my domestics, from whom I require honesty and decency."

Almee, very white, suddenly broke into a flood of tears. The next moment Lord Scroope had his arm around her and held her to him.

"Not another word, Erythea!" he said sternly. "You have had provocation—but you have said enough and much more than enough. Gentlemen, I thank you for what you have done on my daughter's behalf. And you, too, Georgina. Come, Almee, little girl, let us go home."

He led her away; Almee clung to her father, sobbing as she went. Before they reached the door it was opened quickly, admitting Billy, who closed it again. Over his arm was a long hooded driving cloak of Lady Erythea's, ravished from the lobby.

"Put this on!" he said to Almee. "Billy," she gulped, darting at it, "you think of everything!"

In a moment the cloak covered the parlor maid's dress and the hood was drawn over her cap. Lord Scroope stared in surprise at Billy.

"I've told your chauffeur, sir," said Billy, "to bring the auto round to this side—I thought you would like to avoid the front and the servants."

As he spoke the big motor slid to a standstill on the drive opposite the windows.

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"You Were Also in This Conspiracy."



Billy Stood to Attention.

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(Continued on page five)