The JOY of LIVING

By SIDNEY GOWING

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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Aimee felt a sudden relief; a twinge almost of gratitude. She had not expected Alexander to do anything so sensible.

"I'll make it clear if I can," she said, and, looking Alexander in the face with an angelically simple expression, she told him the tale from the beginning, briefly, yet comprehensively. As she was speaking, Aimee watched Mr. Lambe's face. The waves of emotion that passed over his usually serene features made them interesting, suggesting some delicate instrument subjected to shocks for which it had never been designed. At the end he was gasping faintly, like a stranded but still dignified fish.

"And so," concluded Aimee, "you see it's a piece of my skirt the police have got. And it was I who tripped you up the stairs. I'm sorry—Cousin."

Mr. Lambe passed a somewhat unsteady hand across his forehead. He looked at Aimee, and then turned slowly to Georgina.

"Miss Berners—" he said.

Georgina's answer was a sob. Immediately Aimee stepped across, raised her from her chair and, with an arm round her waist, faced Alexander.

"Stop! Not a word from you to Georgina!" she said defiantly. "There's no one to blame but me. Everything she's done, I made her do. She wanted me to own up. All this, she's done to try and save me. Georgie's the best thing that ever happened."

Alexander looked at Aimee.

"My dear child," he said gently, "I have only one wish and that is to help you."

Aimee's lips parted; she stared at him incredulously. She saw the most human sympathy in the clean-shaven, priestly face; the kindliest light in his large eyes.

"Miss Berners," said Alexander, still more gently, "will you leave me with your cousin? I should like to speak to her alone. I will see you presently, if you will give me an opportunity."

Georgina nodded brokenly, and moved to the window.

"Georgie," whispered Aimee quickly, as she passed, "meet me by the little arbor down the gardens in half an hour—it won't be safe here—after this."

Aimee and Alexander were left together, facing each other. There was an embarrassed pause.

"Tell me, Cousin," said Alexander, quietly, "why have you done this mad thing?"

"Well," said Aimee, for once at a loss, "I—you see—I was afraid of you, Alexander." She glanced up at him almost shyly. "I didn't want to come to Jervaulx. I thought it would suit Georgie much better than me."

Alexander's firm lips twitched very slightly.

"I got fed up at home," continued Aimee, desperately. "Everybody was so solemn. They drove me to it! I just did it on the impulse. And then I—things sort of happened—I—"

She made an impatient, hopeless gesture with her hands.

'Oh, what's the use of talking about it? It's done, and here I am in this wretched mess. Police after me, and—everything! You've found me out—you can give me away. What are you going to do?"

"There is only one thing to do," said Alexander. "Make a clean breast of it."

Aimee's lips tightened.

"Come with me to Aunt Erythea," said Mr. Lambe soothingly. "I will accompany you. I'll do everything I can for you. There is no other way. For I can see," he said, "that you have courage."

"No," said Aimee decisively, "it is impossible."

Alexander's eyes became keener. He looked a little contemptuous.

"Are you afraid?" he said. "Do you not see that you must face the consequences of this foolish thing you have done? Once the truth is told, you have nothing to fear from the police."

"The police!" said Aimee scornfully. "I'm not afraid of the police. I'm not much afraid of Aunt Erythea. It isn't that at all. It's—the other thing."

"What other thing?"

Aimee looked at him with growing embarrassment.

"Oh!" she said at last, desperately, "have I got to put it in so many words? My staying at Ivy cottage! Didn't you understand what I told you? I was there—two nights."

Mr. Lambe, to her surprise, did not look forbidding or censorious. Instead, he looked a little puzzled. And in that moment Aimee conceived a liking for Alexander.

"Now that I have seen you, and heard your story," he said, "I attach no importance to that incident, whatever."

"Ah," said Aimee sadly, "but other people will, you see."

Alexander suddenly flushed crimson, and he avoided Aimee's eye. But his face grew peculiarly grim.

"I have only this to say. That man—that Spencer—who dared to expose you to such a situation, is the culprit I wish to see. He deserves—"

Aimee's heel smote the floor.

"Not a word against Billy! It's he who saved me, right from the beginning. He begged me to let him own up. But he has kept my secret, at his own risk, because I wanted it kept. He is a gentleman!"

Alexander winced. At that moment, out of the tail of her eye, Aimee caught sight of a tall figure in overalls crossing the gravel-walk beyond the lawn.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Aimee. "Let him answer for himself, if you want to see him."

She ran to the window and called recklessly:

"Billy!"

Mr. William Spencer looked towards her, glanced quickly left and right to see if the coast was clear, and hurried to join Aimee. He stepped in through the window.

"Billy," said Aimee, "this is my Cousin Alexander. And he's—he knows all about it. It seems this is our finish, Billy."

The two men turned and faced each other.

CHAPTER XVI

"They Must Be Told."

Mr. Lambe's serious eyes had become hard and penetrating as a pair of crystal lenses. They gave the impression of piercing the exterior of the man before him, and reading his mind. Alexander looked, at that moment, rather like an inquisitor of Torquemada's court.

"You are Mr. William Spencer?" said Alexander icily.

"That's so. You don't know me? I guessed you wouldn't. But I remember you very well, though I never connected your name till now," said Billy calmly. "You were chaplain to the Tenth Rutlands, in 1918. Came from China to join 'em, I heard."

Mr. Lambe was silent.

"I was a sub in the Ninety-seventh of the line, lying next the British Seventieth division at Arras," added Billy. "I remember you because you brought in six wounded who got left, after the raid on the pilliboxes. Two of them were ours. You got the military brass."

Aimee stared at Alexander in blank amazement.

"That will do," interrupted Mr. Lambe impatiently. "We are not dealing with the war. Do you realize," he said in his grimmest tone, "the position in which you have placed this lady?"

Billy looked straight at him.

"You are Miss Scroope's cousin," he said quietly, "and a parson. I guess I'll take lying down, from you, anything you choose to say or do. Of course I realize it, and it's why I'm here. I've been a fool. I didn't seem to know. But I ought to have known."

He sighed.

"Things are so different, where I belong. An' they were different in France—mighty different. But that's no excuse. I wish I'd broken my neck before I did such a fool thing. And here we are in the soup. I don't matter. And you don't matter either, parson. All that matters is Miss Scroope. Get me?"

"Come here," said Alexander.

He took Billy by the arm, led him to the window, and turned him so that the sun shone full on his face. Mr. Lambe looked at Billy for some moments in silence, with a peculiar intentness.

"Mr. Spencer," said Alexander, releasing him, "I will see you presently. I shall have something to say to you. For the moment, leave me with my cousin. And—go quickly!"

Billy nodded. He turned to Aimee with a smile.

"Don't you worry," he said quietly, "the padre's white."

Billy disappeared with extreme suddenness through the window. Alexander came slowly up to Aimee.

"That young man," he said, "has the heart of a child. It is a good thing to have. And rare, at his age. That does not alter the fact that your situation is dangerous, and even terrible. My decision is final," he said earnestly. "There is but one thing to do. The plain, honest course. Aunt Erythea must be told immediately. Then you will be safe."

"And I repeat it's impossible," returned Aimee quickly. "Can't you see? You understand. And Georgie understands. But there is one who will never understand. My father. He doesn't belong to our time. He'll consider only one thing—that his daughter has been disgraced before all the county. Her name a by-word among the rabble. That's how he'll take it. It will simply be Dad's finish."

Aimee sniffed miserably.

"I never thought about it. But Georgie told me what it would mean to my father. And she's right. You don't know Dad."

Alexander had turned rather white. He walked to the door and back, in some agitation.

"It is some years since I have seen your father. But I knew him very well. And I believe you are right. This would be a heavy blow to him. But—it has got to be faced."

"And I will not let Dad face it!" said Aimee hotly. "I don't care, for myself. But I'm not going to have him made miserable—for all the parsons in the country!"

"You have no choice. You do not suppose for a moment this thing can be concealed and overcome!"

Aimee turned to him with supreme confidence.

"Of course I do. Billy will see it through!" she said triumphantly.

Alexander gasped.

"I cannot countenance deceit. The whole thing is known to me—my position is impossible," he said. "I should be abetting a lie."

"There's no need for you to do anything at all. Nobody wanted you to butt in, Alexander. The secret is mine, not yours. Go to Aunt Erythea, if you must!" said Aimee bitterly. "Oh, I'm not complaining—I can see that you must. Only you'll do it without my sanction. Go to her, and tell her all you know about me."

Alexander groaned. For awhile he was silent. The perspiration stood out on his forehead. The anguish in his face was so plain that even Aimee felt compunction.

Alexander sighed aloud.

"I shall keep silence," he said. "It is impossible for me to betray a woman's secret without her consent—or to utter one word that may affect her reputation. But what will come of it—"

"Ah!" said Aimee eagerly, "you need know nothing at all. Whatever happens, I'll keep you out of it."

"On the contrary! I implore you, whatever difficulty arises, to come to



Aimee Seized His Hands in Hers.

me. I—I will do all I can." He gulped. "I want to help you, Aimee."

Aimee seized his hands in hers.

"Alexander," she cried breathlessly, "I am sorry I knocked you down!"

The next moment she had fled through the window.

* * * * * * *

Half an hour later Aimee, a somewhat furtive figure, was dodging to and fro on the path near the little arbor in the rose garden, keeping an anxious eye on all the approaches from the house. She was still feeling a little confused.

"Who would ever have dreamed he was such a good sort as that!" she said to herself. "It's a delirious sort of mess I've got them both into. I hope he won't jump on poor Georgie. Why on earth doesn't she hurry up? There she is—oh bother!—Alexander again!"

Aimee retreated out of sight into the arbor.

Georgina came slowly along the path, her countenance pale and downcast, like a recalcitrant novice who fears the Lady Superior. Mr. Alexander Lambe, looming through the forest of standard roses, quickly overtook her.

"Miss Berners!"

Georgina turned to him with frightened eyes.

"I wish to speak with you," said Alexander with suppressed agitation. "Shall we be seated?" He led her to a rustic seat close against the arbor.

"It distresses me," said Mr. Lambe earnestly, "to see, as I cannot help seeing, the effect this has had upon you. The shock to your sensibility. Let me set your mind at rest, as far as I can. I hardly dare to think how it will all end. But your cousin is as innocent as an infant of any real intent to deceive. She has behaved as inconsequently as a child—that is all. One—one must try to make allowances for her. She should be still at school. That is what I think of her."

"Yes," murmured Georgina miserably, "but what must you think of—me!"

"Of you!" said Mr. Lambe with strong feeling. "Your loyalty—your unflinching attachment to that young madcap, stirs my admiration. It is dreadful to think of what you must have suffered. Purely to protect Aimee. You faced my aunt." Mr. Lambe clasped his hand and drew his breath in sharply. "Yes, you risked the displeasure of my aunt! And—of course, the police. For days this sword of Damocles has been hanging over your blameless head. You—you have not been guilty of deceit. No, no! Only of silence. I think you have behaved, on the whole, admirably."

"Oh!" gasped Georgia faintly, hardly daring to believe her ears, "you cannot mean it!"

"I do mean it!" exclaimed Mr. Lambe warmly. "Miss Berners, from the first hour I saw you, I was convinced of your—your essential goodness! It betrays itself in all that you do. Anything that is underhand or questionable, glides away from you—" proclaimed Mr. Lambe, with a sweeping movement of his hand, "as the turbid stream flows over the riverbed of white marble, leaving its purity unsullied. My admiration for you is greater, if that is possible, than ever."

Georgina's heart fluttered delightfully.

"I think," continued Alexander, with growing enthusiasm, "that you exist to sacrifice yourself for others, Miss Berners. You have more than piety—you have charity. It is one of the sweetest qualities in a woman."

Georgina turned to him with swimming eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Lambe!" she murmured with delicious confusion.

Alexander answered her with a hollow groan. She was startled at the sudden distress in his face.

"The question is not what I think of you," he said bitterly, "but what you think of me! You know the principles I profess, and that I impressed on you. Out of my own mouth I am condemned. How can you feel anything but contempt for me! I have consented to connive at this mad escapade of Aimee's and all its consequences. To keep silent. To—to bolster it up," he said with a gulp. "I have passed my word."

Georgina's eyes shone.

"You have done that!" she cried eagerly. "Why, now that you are on her side, she may be saved from exposure after all! I think it is splendid of you—absolutely splendid!"

"How can you think of me, but as a hypocrite? You do not mean, Miss Berners, that you feel any respect for me now?"

"Mr. Lambe, when I first knew you, I thought you my ideal as a churchman. I think so more than ever. When I was in trouble, and consulted you, I seemed to find you a little hard. Poor Aimee had enough to bear. But now," gasped Georgina, quite carried away, "I consider your conduct noble—really noble! I admire you more than ever."

"Miss Berners," said Alexander, husky with emotion, "if only you knew what a relief it is, that I have not forfeited your regard! I have only known you a few days, but your kindness, your sympathy—" his hand closed almost convulsively on hers—"Miss Berners, may I call you Aimee—I—I mean Georgina—!"

"Poof!"

A stifled, explosive sound caused Mr. Lambe to start violently and look round him.

"What was that? A dog?" he said confusedly.

Georgina, pink to the ears, had risen to her feet; her eyes shone somewhat viciously.

"It sounded to me more like a cat!" she said in acid tones, and walked away down the path.

Mr. Lambe followed her.

When they were out of sight, the parlor maid emerged from the little arbor, her face crimson, her shoulders shaking, a handkerchief pressed to her streaming eyes.

"Poor old Georgie!" she gasped. "I couldn't help it. I should have burst in another minute."

She squeezed the handkerchief and controlled her emotion.

"They'll have a jolly old tangle to unpick, too, when Aunt knows!" she said thoughtfully.

"No use stopping here. I suppose I'd better finish my dusting."

Aimee made a circuitous journey to the deserted drawing room, and dusted with the energy of a high-power machine. The room was not much the better for it. She was only just in time, for the housekeeper appeared, and after some sour comments, stood by her while she did a good deal of the work over again. Then Aimee was marshaled into the library, to dust that.

The library overlooked the path leading to the garage. It was some forty minutes later that Aimee caught sight of the chauffeur approaching. She flung down her duster and ran to the window, giving a cautious whistle, as a poacher who calls his dog.

Billy made sure that the coast was clear, and came to her window. He looked at her and laughed joyously.

"The clouds have rolled by, partner!" he said.

"What has happened? Have you seen Alexander?"

"Sure. Just had a pow-wow with him in the garage."

"What did he say to you?" asked Aimee quickly.

Billy eyed her thoughtfully.

"Never you mind. The game's square. The padre's all wool and a yard wide. You're all right now. Unless—"

"But the police! Suppose they trace us and come back here?"

"They may not. I b'lieve I see a way through it. And I've all the time off, this evening. You sit tight."

"But if they come here!"

"Then they'll get me," said Billy, "but they won't get you; you're safe from the cops, anyhow. I promise you that."

Aimee leaned out of the window, with flushed cheeks, and caught his hands in hers.

"Billy," she said breathlessly, "how good you've been to me. How good you've been! I want—"

"I'd be flayed alive for you!" said Billy suddenly. "There isn't anything I wouldn't do—and I've done nothing, yet. You've got the grit of twenty." He held her hands tight in his. "Aimee—"

"Oh! Look out!" exclaimed Aimee, darting back. There was a heavy step on the gravel and Mr. Tarbeaux came round the corner. Billy walked briskly forward.

Mr. Tarbeaux bent a suspicious and accusing eye upon him.

(To be Continued)

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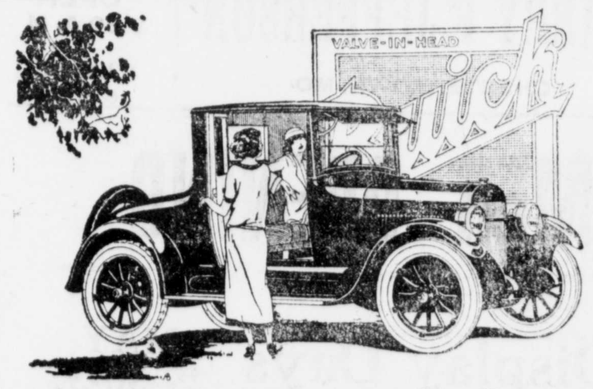
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(Weather Permitting)

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Tuesdays: leave Frederick for Baltimore at 9.30 a. m., leave Betterton for Baltimore at 10.30 a. m., leave Worton Manor for Baltimore at 11.15 a. m., arrive in Baltimore about 1.30 p. m.

Wednesdays—Leave Baltimore for Betterton, Worton Manor and Sassafras River landings 9.30 a. m. Returning leave Fredericktown for Balto. 3.30 p.m.,erturning leave Betterton for Baltimore at 4.30 p. m., returning leave Worton Manor for Baltimore at 5.30 p. m., arrive in Baltimore about 8.00 p. m.

NOTE:—Steamer will not stop at Worton Manor Wednesday July 4th.

Saturdays: Leave Baltimore for Fredericktown and Betterton 1.00 p. m. Returning leave Fredericktown for Baltimore at 6.00 p. m., returning leave Betterton for Baltimore at 7.00 p. m. Arrive in Baltimore about 10.30 p. m.

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Thursdays—Leave Baltimore for Betterton, Havre de Grace and Port Deposit at 1.00 p. m., returning leave Havre de Grace for Baltimore at 6.00 p. m., returning leave Port Deposit for Baltimore at 6.30 p. m., returning leave Betterton for Baltimore at 8 p. m. Arrive in Baltimore about 11.30 p. m.

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