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The JOY of LIVING

By SIDNEY GOWING

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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"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 Aimee, 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; they prick most accursedly."

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 beatific 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 Jervaulx 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 Jervaulx 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. A warrant will still be brought to bear. 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 [illegible] to the village 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 Aimee 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 Aimee's face appeared furtively round the angle of the door.

"Hello!" she said, stepping inside.

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

"I couldn't help it, Billy!" she said suddenly.

"Couldn't help what?"

"You saw us getting away, didn't you? And the girl—and the Sphinx? Has Monsieur de Jussac explained to you?"

"I haven't seen him," said Billy, quietly, "but I guess it isn't hard to see how things were. You might as well tell me, though."

Aimee, very gloomily, described her encounter with Calamity Kate.

"I know," she concluded, sadly, "you're thinking me an idiot. I'd no right to take such a risk—with the police there and everything. I—I suppose she's a thief. But she's done such a lot for that man, and she was so miserable. He's her husband. And I couldn't help thinking about you and me, Billy, and how I should feel if you —you—"

She broke down and began to cry quietly.

"That's how it was. Are you very angry with me?"

Billy gasped and, stepping quickly to



her, pulled Aimee's hands away from her face.

"Angry—with you?" he exclaimed, holding them tight. "I was afraid you'd be mad with me! You ought to. Why, I did the same thing, and I'd no excuse! I ought to have made sure that woman was run in."

"You—did the same thing?" said Aimee, staring.

"Yes! Of course, I never dreamed you were in the pits, or I wouldn't have done it. That crippled crook in the cave got over me. They've got him for five or ten years; and he's earned it. But he was all broken up about his wife. Neither of them deserve a scrap of sympathy. But—the poor devil was in such a state, that somehow I fell for it. He never whined on his own account; he was thinking of his wife. It got me on a raw spot. He knew I must have tracked him through her—he begged me to say nothing about her.

"And I didn't. I gave him that much rope. Never told the police I'd seen her close by. Running down women is their job. If it's got to be done, let them do it. They haven't any choice—but I had. All the same," said Billy, "if I'd dreamed for a moment you were in the pits, I'd have chased fifty female thieves sooner than you should take a chance! I ought to be horsewhipped for riskin' it."

"I think it was fine of you, Billy!" cried Aimee with sparkling eyes.

"No!" he said. "It's you that were fine."

"This," said Aimee, "is what comes of growing sentimental. Neither of us would have dreamed of making such—such fools of ourselves a week ago. What will become of her? Will she get away?"

"I don't know or care. If she made the road, there's juice enough in the Sphinx to take her a hundred miles from here. I only hope they don't find her with the machine. But I'll bet they don't. She'll get clear and cover her tracks—she's the sort that does."

"But the Sphinx," said Aimee, with intense remorse, "our Sphinx, Billy! I've lost her for you!"

Billy laughed.

"We'll mighty soon have another—there's two hundred landed at the docks last week—same model; and a factory being equipped to build the new model over here. Mass production."

"What! You never told me it had got as far as that! But—I wanted the old one, Billy—our Sphinx."

"Maybe you'll have her yet. Only I'm not going to let her make trouble for you. We're pretty near done with trouble."

"But how—"

"Never mind. I'll tell you some time. Gee! how you'll laugh! But I'm giving you the cinch—it is so."

"Billy!" she cried, "isn't that splendid! Though I—I—"

"Well?"

"I haven't been worrying so much about it lately," said Aimee swiftly. "But it's good to know. And what's going to happen now?"

"I know one thing that's going to happen now," said Billy, and he kissed her with—as de Jussac would say—empressement.

"B[illegible]!" said Aimee a little breathlessly. "Aunt said we had to be de[illegible]us!"

"Here we are," replied Billy. He kissed her again.

Half an hour later Billy, passing the main porch, encountered Lady Erythea.

"Spencer," she said, "I was about to send for you. The person from Scotland Yard, who has just left, informed me that he had not only captured one of the thieves, but that you had rendered him invaluable assistance. It really seems a remarkable ending to the affair—but it does not surprise me in the least! I said from the first that you were more likely to make a success of this problem than all the police in the country, if they would only consult you. I was perfectly right—my judgment, in fact, is never wrong."

"Yes, my lady."

"I am quite capable of reading between the lines," said Lady Erythea with suppressed triumph. "It is my conviction that the capture of this abominable thief was due entirely to you. The police are imbeciles."

Billy shook his head.

"On the contrary, Inspector Arkwright is an uncommonly clever man, my lady," he said respectfully. "As for me, I had—luck. Luck's a queer thing. Even cleverness won't always beat it."

Lady Erythea looked a little out of her depth.

"In any case," she continued, "I am very pleased that this absurd suspicion of the police regarding you is cleared up, and that you come out of the affair with such credit. It confirms my opinion of you."

Lady Erythea contemplated Billy's tall figure and serenely handsome face with a certain regret.

"I am sorry," she said, "that you are leaving Jervaulx."

Billy smiled.

"The week I have spent in your ladyship's service," he said gently, "has been the happiest time of my life."

Lady Erythea was not given to expressing her emotions. But her austere face positively tinged a faint pink color with pleasure.

CHAPTER XXVI

"Where Is My Daughter?"

"Why can't we stay on for another week, Billy?" said Aimee, leaning a little farther out of the study window, duster in hand. "Go to Aunt—the Missus, I mean—and ask her to let you keep the job. She'll jump at it."

"Nothing doing!" said Billy sternly.

Aimee sighed. The hour was nearly noon on the day following the Odyssey of the crag pits. No news had been heard of Calamity Kate, who appeared to have drifted out of history on the Sphinx. A brief interval of peace had settled upon Jervaulx.

"There'll be a vacancy for a parlor-maid an' chauffeur," announced Billy with decision. He was standing on the gravel just outside the window. "All the bother with the police is wiped off the slate. It's only a fool that backs his luck too far. And it's time to quit the game and turn the lights out."

"That means Aunt has got to know who I am, and who Georgie is; and—and all the rest of it."

"There's no way out of that, I'm afraid."

"I know. But I do rather funk it, Billy. The worst if it is poor old Georgie is in a tighter place than I am."

"We'll have to see her through it."

"Don't you think," said Aimee, distinctly worried, "that it would be best if Georgina arranged to cut short her visit and went home—and Amy Snooks gave notice, or just cleared out. You as well. Then we—we could explain it all by letter, or something. I think it would look better that way."

Billy looked at her a little oddly.

"I am in a funk, Billy," said Aimee, trembling slightly. "I don't care for myself, but it's awful to think of poor Georgie having the storm break on her. She isn't built for it. I believe if the thing isn't sprung on us suddenly, and we manage it at the right time, we—we might get away with it."

"Right again," said Billy, "but I shan't go. I shall stay and put it through myself."

"No!" said Aimee quickly. "I won't hear of that."

"You just leave it to me," said Billy soothingly, "there's another way. I'll show you—"

The whirr of a motor interrupted him. A large automobile was approaching up the park road. Aimee looked at it. Such an expression of horror came over her features that Billy was startled.

"What's the matter?"

"That's absolutely torn it!" said Aimee in strangled tones.

"Eh!"

"It's Dad!"

Aimee dived back into the room like a rabbit retreating into its burrow.

The automobile swept up to the main entrance; the Very Reverend Lord Scroope descended.

"Is Lady Erythea in?" he said, almost curtly, to the butler. "Announce me at once, please. Lord Scroope."

Mr. Tarbeaux showed him into the empty drawing room. Lord Scroope deposited his hat among a cluster of Dresden ornaments. His brow, usually white and serene as alabaster, was clouded. Lady Erythea entered majestically.

"Anthony!" she said.

Lord Scroope, omitting any greeting, regarded her fixedly.

"I received your letter by last night's post, Erythea, announcing Aimee's engagement to Alexander. I borrowed the bishop's car, and I have been traveling from Closeminster since seven this morning."

Lady Erythea received the news with a smile of approval.

"The silly child wished me to delay announcing her betrothal. But that, of course, I could not consent to. I wrote to you at once, Anthony. I commend the energy you have shown in hastening to congratulate them—and me. One so seldom sees you in a hurry."

Lord Scroope deliberately placed a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez on his nose and stared at his sister-in-law.

"The news of this engagement," he said earnestly, "is unwelcome to me. Entirely unwelcome."

Lady Erythea stiff[illegible] every limb. Her ear-trumpet wa[illegible]

lorgnettes and directed them at Lord



Regarded Each Other Glassily.

Scroope. The two regarded each other glassily.

"I do not understand you," said Lady Erythea with frigidity. "Alexander is a young man of unexceptionable character and prospects. Jervaulx will be his. The Scroope estate is entailed, and I am sufficiently au fait with your affairs to know that when your two sons in the Service are provided for there will be no overpowering fortune left for Aimee. It appears that if there is any complaint, it should come from me."

"The financial aspect of the question does not weigh with me," said Lord Scroope with asperity. "I object to the match itself. If Alexander is to marry at all—"

"If he is to marry!" interrupted Lady Erythea warmly. "Of course he is to marry. Though I confess I was very much afraid he never would. Permit me to tell you, Anthony, that in taking up this attitude as to the marriage of priests, you stand on a very shaky foundation. You yourself are a Clerk in Orders, and an extreme Ritualist. Shall I remind you that if you had not married Delicia—and an excellent thing it was for you—this situation would never have arisen!"

"I am not conscious of having expressed any such argument," said Lord Scroope very stiffly, but with a certain pinkness about the ears. "As for Alexander, he is in every way an excellent young man. But if he is to marry, the last thing I should have desired is his alliance with my daughter. Their temperaments are so opposed that I am convinced nothing but unhappiness could result—in fact, your news seemed to me almost incredible. I do not know what to do—the position is very difficult for me, if the child has really become attached to him," concluded Lord Scroope, with visible distress.

"Good gracious, man, what did you expect?" exclaimed his sister-in-law.

"It never entered my head," said Lord Scroope, emphatically. "I thought that your influence, and that of Alexander, would have a steadying effect on Aimee, who was in some need of it. But this—!"

Lady Erythea showed increasing exasperation.

"You are talking rubbish!" she exclaimed, sharply. "Of all the girls known to me, no more suitable mate could be found for Alexander. Indeed, during her sojourn here Aimee has endeared herself to me scarcely less than to him. Her piety, her quiet devotion—the complete absence in her of all slanginess—all these speak eloquently in her favor."

Lord Scroope gazed at her in bewilderment.

"I really do not follow you, Erythea. And I am greatly disappointed," said Lord Scroope heavily, "greatly disappointed. I did not foresee this."

"I am not responsible, my dear Anthony, for your lack of foresight," said his sister-in-law, acidly. A shadow darkened the window, and she turned. "But your daughter can answer for herself."

Georgina stepped in through the open window, followed by Mr. Lambe. Suddenly observing Lord Scroope she halted and became rigid. Every scrap of color left her cheeks. Alexander halted also, and slowly turned a deep plum color.

"Since it is a fait accompli," said Lady Erythea to her brother-in-law, almost with a touch of pleading, "be amiable, Anthony, and bestow your blessing on the happy pair."

She raised her ear-trumpet as though to share in the benediction. Lord Scroope looked at Georgina dumbly and then stared at Lady Erythea.

"What did you say?" he asked dizzily.

"The happy pair!" said Lady Erythea, loudly and irritably.

"Where is my daughter?" exclaimed Lord Scroope with consternation. "Erythea, where is my daughter?"

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

"My dear Anthony," she said in a low voice, "come upstairs and lie down. It will soon pass off. Do not be alarmed, Aimee. Lean on my arm, Anthony."

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 fiancee. "I'm Georgina. I couldn't help it."

She collapsed into an armchair and burst into tears. Alexander stood over her like a large and protective dog; he laid a hand on her shoulder and glared at the others with defiance.

Lady Erythea turned pale. It was disconcerting to find two members of the Scroope family simultaneously smitten with insanity.

"Where is Aimee?" insisted Lord Scroope, turning upon her. "Where is my daughter?"

"Dad!"

The disheveled parlor maid darted in through the door. Aimee's cap was awry, her face was pale, her eyes very bright; the top of her apron heaved tu[illegible] she stopped short, as [illegible]red speechless.

"Don't cry, Georgie," said Aimee; "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. She has engaged herself again, however, to my chauffeur."

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, "is my daughter, Aimee. I am rather glad to find her—in any costume. I began to wonder what you had done with her."

Lady Erythea's frame slowly stiffened. Her fingers clenched the ear-trumpet as though it were the handle of a club. Her eyes were terrible. Before the storm could break, Aimee intervened.

"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!"

"Some explanation," said Lord Scroope quietly, "seems to be called for."

Aimee, avoiding her aunt's eyes, addressed herself to the quivering ear-trumpet.

"I didn't want to come here. Dad made me. I was—frightened of you. Anyway, I didn't think Jervaulx would suit me, and that you'd hate me. So I skipped the car at Burn Ash," said Aimee, her speech pouring from her like a torrent, "and made the chauffeur bring Georgina on here. And I went off on my own!

"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. That's what Georgie is! She can't lie—she can't even act—but she'd let you cut her in pieces before she'd get me into trouble!

"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. I was nearly caught, all the household chased me, the butler tore a great piece out of my skirt. But I got away, and at last, right down by the [illegible] roads, I ran into Bill—Mr. Spencer."

Aimee 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. I told him the awful mess I was in. Of course, the police were after me—I'd seen their car already. If they got hold of me, they'd know the—the silly thing I'd done," said Aimee with a gulp. "It would come out that I was your daughter—it would be all over the country, and in all the newspapers!"

Lord Scroope, very pale, drew a deep breath, and gave a prolonged shudder.

"B—Mr. Spencer told me I'd got to go back and make a clean breast of it all. He was right, to tell you. But I didn't dare. I [illegible]ed to let him say anything—I made him swear [illegible] It was my trouble, not his. So he did what I asked; even though it meant the police would suspect him, too. So he took the jewels to Aunt Erythea, and never said a word about me; and when she offered him the job as chauffeur he took it; so that the police wouldn't suspect him—or me! He came here and drove Aunt's cars!"

"And you?" said her father quietly. "What happened to you?"

"I went back to Scroope next day. I found Amy Snooks was coming here as maid—I made her go to Seabridge, and took her place, Dad. Just to be safe from those beastly police—in the hope they'd catch the thieves, if we gave them time—and then they wouldn't catch me and make me explain. And it's just what happened; Billy—Mr. Spencer—caught one of them yesterday, and the police have got him. Nobody knows anything about me, except you here!"

Aimee panted like a deer at bay.

"And Billy's asked me to marry him, and I'm going to!" she said desperately. "I love him! There's nobody like Billy—he's been splendid! He isn't a chauffeur at all—till Aunt made him one. And I'd marry him, even if he was!" declared Aimee, on the verge of tears.

There was a stunned silence. For 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, Aimee, to understand. I have a question to put. You came here on the day following the burglary. Where did you spend the previous night? What were you doing?"

"I was in a cave!"

Lord Scroope passed a long white hand across his brow.

"A cave?" he repeated, blankly. "You have reverted, it seems, to the customs of our Neolithic ancestors—"

"It was a ripping cave," said Aimee a little hysterically, "down in the crag pits. All the little rabbits for company. It was more peaceful than Jervaulx. I know it wouldn't have suited Georgie."

"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. I feel—"

The door opened and Monsieur de Jussac entered. He gave a slight start as his eyes traveled rapidly over the group.

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

To be continued

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