The JOY of LIVING

By SIDNEY GOWING

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Disliking the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea Lambe, at Jervaulx abbey, and her cousin, Alexander Lambe, Aimee, 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, Aimee sets out for Jervaulx. On the way she decides that Georgina shall impersonate her at Jervaulx, while she goes on a holiday. Georgina's horrified protest is unavailing.

They whirred down the long slope with the westering sun broad on their right above the fir-trees. It was a roughish ride on the carrier. There was no pillion-seat; Billy was evidently not accustomed to carry passengers.

"Say," said Billy, over his shoulder, "I didn't catch your name, did I?"

"Aimee—Snooks," replied the passenger on the spur of the moment, as well as she could for the wind whistling in her teeth.

"Snooks!"

Aimee laughed. It was very like Scroope, and quiet as musical.

"Near enough!" she gasped. "But 'old chap' will do. Is that American?"

"American? Gee, no! It's the only English I know. Let it go at that—Amy is too feminine for a partnership. And now we'll let her out. This," said Billy joyously, as he opened the throttle wide, "is what the doctor ordered!"

The Flying Sphinx with the partners, reached the hill and devoured the

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On the outskirts of the market town of Stanhoe was the guest's rest-house. Here the travelers had tea under a laburnum on the lawn. Billy locked the amazing motorcycle in a shed, by the proprietor's leave, and the pair walked into the town on foot.

Two more utterly insouciant and care free young people never entered an English village on an April day. No jot of doubt, of fear, or hesitation assailed them. Billy, intensely masculine though he was, appeared to be possessed of a virgin mind. Such a thing, though uncommon, is by no means nonexistent among the sons of Adam. It may be that the air of the Colorado foothills favors its growth. His possession of it called for no comment from Aimee. Her mind was of the same color.

It did not enter into their heads for a moment that anybody could put a dubious construction on their association with each other. Had such an idea dawned, they might possibly have turned and parted company on the spot.

Aimee left Billy suddenly and addressed an inquiry to an elderly man who stood beside a farmer's cart. In a moment she rejoined him.

"Mrs. Sunning, 2 Ivy cottage, lets lodgings," announced Aimee triumphantly. "You don't mind lodgings, do you? Better than a hotel—more freedom."

"Freedom for mine!" said Billy. "Let's try it!"

Ivy cottage proved to be a pretty little Jacobean building fronting on a green lane just outside Stanhoe. An apple-cheeked woman, who was picking weeds out of the path, announced herself as Mrs. Sunning, and Billy at once stated his needs, offering to pay in advance.

"Why, yes, sir," she said, smiling, with a civil bob to Aimee. "I've a nice sitting room and a li'll bedroom; Mrs. Dale, next door, has another, if you can do with that?" Mrs. Dale appeared, and confirmed the offer. Both of them looked at the pair with smiling interest and wonder.

"Great!" said Billy. "You take the room here, old chap, and I'll take the other. We'll share the parlor."

Aimee accompanied Mrs. Sunning indoors; the little parlor was clean and cozy, the bedroom, upstairs at the back, tiny but clean.

Aimee made her toilet, descended to the parlor and ordered a meal. Mrs. Sunning acquiesced in everything.

"He's a wunnerful pleasant gentleman, Mr. Spencer," she remarked, and then, hesitating and reddening, she looked at Aimee. "I—I suppose, miss," she said with much embarrassment, "it's all right?"

Aimee stared.

"All right? How?" she said. "Everything's all right. Very much so!"

The woman's eyes betokened belief—and relief.

"Bless your pretty face, who'd think anything else?" she said. "You'll excuse my askin', miss. You see, Lady Erythea is my landlord, and she owns all Stanhoe."

Aimee felt a galvanic shock.

"Whom did you say?" she asked dazedly.

"Lady Erythea Lambe of Jervaulx abbey, the big place half a mile south the cross roads. She fare wunnerful strict, she do. It's as much as my tenancy's worth to have any goings-on here. That's all."

The woman left the room. Aimee stared round her blankly, then collapsed into a chair. She flung her arms across the table, buried her head in them, and broke into paroxysms of impish laughter.

"Oh, my Christian aunt!" she sobbed. "My Georgie! My Alexander!"

Her shoulders were still shaking wildly when Billy came in.

"Say, what's wrong?" he exclaimed in alarm, as Aimee raised a tear-stained face. "Crying—eh? No, laughing! That's good! That's the cure for sentiment! But what's the joke?"

"Just something I thought of, that's all," said Aimee, wiping her eyes.

"That's all right," said Billy imperturbably. "Guess I ain't inquisitive. But folks mostly tell me their troubles sooner or later."

"I suppose they do," said Aimee, regarding him thoughtfully.

Mrs. Sunning brought an abundant meal; chiefly eggs and tea. Aimee found it the merriest feast she had ever sat down to. Finally, she accompanied Billy to Mrs. Dale's door, and, returning, retired to her own room. She was about to let down her hair, but desisted, and instead sat on the bed for some time, thinking. She heard Mrs. Sunning retire, and presently silence reigned throughout the house.

A curious sense of loneliness crept over Aimee's spirit. She remained sitting for nearly half an hour. Presently she blew out the candle, and leaned out of the open window. The window of Billy's room at the other end of the building was in darkness. It had not taken Billy long to retire.

Aimee stayed awhile at the window. She returned to the bed, and reflected again. In that reverie a vision floated before her as of trees and sunlight, and her partner's yellow hair flickering in the breeze.

"Billy!" she murmured thoughtfully. "Old chap!"

She laughed gently.

"He isn't a frump, anyhow!"

The reverie took shape. Then, with a little sigh, she slipped off her shoes, and, carrying them with her, stole very softly down the staircase to the front door. On trying the door cautiously, she found it bolted, and the latch immovable. Also no key was visible. She realized she was locked in the house.

A feeling of intense annoyance seized Aimee. Where was the freedom



She Dropped.

she had sought? She returned to her bedroom, put on her shoes, leaned out of the window, and inspected the wall critically. It was covered with ivy and trellis-work.

She swung herself cautiously out onto the sill, and began very quietly to descend the trellis. Aimee, active and long-limbed, could climb like a cat. And as noiselessly as any member of that great feline tribe, she dropped upon the soft soil of the garden plot.

CHAPTER IV

In Deep.

Georgina Berners paced the floor of her bedroom at Jervaulx abbey, and wondered why the universe had not crashed in ruins about her head.

"It's like a dream," she said dazedly, "I can't believe in it at all."

To Georgina it came as an incredible climax that she had, after five hours at Jervaulx, been dismissed to bed with an august but approving kiss from Lady Erythea, and a protective, cousinly hand-shake from the sedate Alexander Lambe. She had not been denounced as an impostor, flung out with ignominy, or handed over to the police. All these things had seemed to Georgina not only possible but likely.

"What on earth will happen when they find out?" she said, shivering.

She commenced to disrobe, but had not proceeded very far when a hustle and a click were heard. Georgina turned with a gasp of fright. Someone was trying to force a way in at her window. She caught sight of a flushed face.

With a shriek of terror Georgina retreated to the bed, and prepared to dive under it.

"Don't make such a row, you fool!" hissed a voice.

The casements swung inwards, and Aimee, rather breathless, dropped onto the floor.

"Handy things, these verandas," panted Aimee. "How are you, Georgina, old thing?"

Georgina stared at her in paralyzed amazement.

Aimee sat down beside Georgina on the bed, and put an arm around her waist.

"Well, what's happened here?" she said cheerfully.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Georgina with infinite thankfulness. "Now we can clear everything up. It's been awful!"

"Why? Have you given me away?" said Aimee quickly.

"I haven't! You know I wouldn't!" cried Georgina hotly. "Though you ought to be whipped. I never said a word about you, and that's why I'm in this awful mess!"

"Dear old Georgina! You're a brick!" said Aimee, hugging her. "I was only pulling your leg—I knew you wouldn't sneak. But why is it awful? Have they found out?"

"When I got here," said Georgina feebly, "I thought I could explain somehow. But Lady Erythea met me on the steps and took me for you, and everything went right out of my head—"

"Good! I see. You hesitated and were saved."

"Saved?" ejaculated Georgina angrily.

"Well, I was saved. That's more important. You haven't done anything wrong, my snow-white lamb. What then?"

"And then Mr. Lambe came out, and she introduced him as my cousin Alexander. And—and I've been frightened to death all the afternoon, for I haven't had a chance to put things right."

Aimee sat back and looked at her in awestruck admiration.

"You mean to say they've no suspicion at all?" she exclaimed. "Dear old Georgie, how deep you must have been. I never thought you had it in you!"

"I didn't—I wasn't!" said Georgina in almost tearful indignation. "I've hardly said a word all day, except 'yes' and 'no.' And not even that if I could help it."

Aimee gurgled.

"And a jolly safe line, too! I can see we've always underrated you, Georgie. And you mean to say they never even got an inkling, all through, that there was anything unusual? That does rather beat me."

"There were one or two little things that puzzled them for a moment, I think," said Georgina reflectively, "but it all seemed to smooth itself out. And oh!" she concluded, with a great gasp of relief, "I am so glad it's over and we can stop it. Now, how are we going to clear things up and make it all right for you?"

"Stop it? I wouldn't stop it for a kingdom. It's perfectly splendid!"

Georgina stood up.

"You are out of your senses," she said dazedly; "I won't listen to another word! Think how fearful it would be if Alex—if Mr. Lambe knew. He—"

"Aha—Alexander! Yes. Is he as owlish as his photograph? What did you say to him, Georgina?"

"I—I—hardly anything. He told me all about his missionary work in Manchuria. He—"

"Where was that?"

"In the rose garden—" Georgina broke off suddenly.

"Did he squeeze your hand?"

Georgina was speechless with indignation.

"You were thinking about him when you stood at the window!" said Aimee, with the air of a prosecuting counsel. "You were being sentimental. I saw your face. It had that gooey look."

"Aimee," said Georgina, fairly roused at last, "how dare you! I am going straight to Lady Erythea, and you can talk to her! I have done—"

"No, no! I'm sorry, Georgie," said Aimee soothingly. "I couldn't help pulling your serene leg, I won't say a word against your cousin Alexander."

"He is a gentleman, at any rate," said Georgina, rather spitefully "he is a person one can respect."

"I am sure he is."

"Well, what are we going to do?"

"The thing for you to do," said Aimee, "is to go on respecting Alexander. And for him to go on respecting you. Think how awful it would be if it came out now. Alexander," said Aimee, with a pathetic little break in her voice, "is good. He doesn't get into scrapes. He isn't in horrible trouble like me—and nobody to help me. I didn't think," she added with a gulp, "that you'd go back on me, Georgie!"

"I won't and I can't," said Georgina mournfully, "and you know it." But she softened visibly. "You haven't told me where you've come from, and what you've been doing! I've been frightfully worried about you."

Aimee regarded her thoughtfully. It was clear that Georgina already had all she could bear. This was no time to tell her about Billy.

"You needn't worry about me. I'm staying at a little place nearby. I'm quite all right, and I've got some money. We simply must keep it up for a few days—father is leaving Scroope Towers soon, and then I'll show you how we can smooth it all over."

"But don't you see how impossible it is! Your father will come here to see you before he goes. And he—he'll expect you to write to him!"

"How bright you are tonight, Georgie. You think of everything," said Aimee briskly. She sat down at the writing table by the wall, selected a sheet of the Jervaulx note-paper with the Lambe arms—three fleeces argent on a field vert—and with an immensely serious face began to write rapidly, pausing occasionally for thought. Georgina watched in fascinated horror.

"Listen!" said Aimee, blotting the sheet and reading it aloud with much satisfaction.

My Dearest Daddy: I arrived here safely, and already I'm quite one of the family. Aunt Erythea likes me much better than she thought she would; she is very nice and kind, and I have a lovely bedroom. I am enjoying myself very much at Jervaulx. (That's all perfectly true.)

Cousin Alexander is awfully interesting, and I like hearing him talk about Manchuria. He is a gentleman, and one feels he is really good, and that makes me respect him.

I'm awfully sorry I made such a fuss about coming here, but I never thought I should have such a lovely time as I'm having. So you needn't worry about me, because I'm going to be quite happy.

Your loving daughter,

AIMEE.

P. S.—In case you thought of coming over to see me soon, I ought to mention that the whole place is simply devastated with mumps. Of course it's quite all right for me, because I've had them.

Georgina emitted a moan.

"A very proper letter," said Aimee, affixing a stamp to the envelope, with a determined thump. "One should always consider one's parents, and spare them pain. And that postscript is a touch of genius; the only thing in the universe Dad is afraid of is mumps. He hasn't had them, and he says they are a formidable affliction to the aged, and very undignified. And it's quite true; I saw five children at Stanhoe with mumps this afternoon. I should hate to tell a fib. Unless," she added, wrinkling her smooth brow, "it became absolutely necessary."

She moved toward the window.

"Aimee!" cried Georgina, starting up panic-stricken. "You're not going! Are you serious about this?"

"Not a bit. And don't you be, either," said Aimee, as she clicked off the switch of the electric. "See you tomorrow—if I can. Good night, old thing."

The room was plunged in darkness, and there was a scraping sound at the window.

"Aimee!" gasped Georgina wildly, fumbling round the wall for the switch. It was some time before she found it, and when she turned it on the room was empty.

"Aimee!" cried Georgina, leaning out of the window.

There came a sudden thumping on the bedroom door.

"Aimee!" said the stern voice of Lady Erythea. "Why is your light on at this hour? What are you moving about for? Is anything wrong?"

"No-no—aunt!" said Georgina, choking, "n-n-nothing much."

"Extinguish your light instantly, and go to sleep!"

With shaking fingers Georgina turned off the switch, and undressed pathetically in the dark. She crept into bed and thought of Alexander—the one touch of untroubled calm on the waters of Jervaulx.

CHAPTER V

On the Job.

Morning and the song of birds.

The sunshine streamed into the room, bringing with it the God-given fragrance of an April morning; the scent of rain-sprinkled earth, wall-



"Aimee!" Cried Georgina.

flowers and greening thorn-hedge. Aimee stood and drank it in thankfully, till she realized with a shock that it was past ten.

The only bath available at Ivy cottage was a tub of spring water. Aimee made the most of this, and, dressing hurriedly, came downstairs glowing like a picotee. Billy was in the parlor.

"Morning!" he cried.

"Have you been down long?" exclaimed Aimee.

"'Bout three hours!" he chuckled. "I've covered sixty miles since then. Just a little breather."

"Why—you haven't waited breakfast for me, have you?" she cried.

"Oh, that's all right. Rang a baker up an' got a roll an' milk at Syderford. Nothing done yet—couldn't breakfast without my partner."

Mrs. Sunning, with bare, dimpled arms and her face wreathed in smiles, brought in the breakfast. There were brown ducks' eggs, cream, watercresses and a brace of brook trout.

Billy glanced at his companion from time to time, with a quiet watchfulness.

"Sleep all right, old chap?" he asked presently.

"Rather. Didn't wake up till just now," said Aimee, taking a large spoonful of comb honey. "Did you?"

Billy paused.

"Middling," he said slowly. "Say, partner, what'd you like to do now? Rest a bit?"

"Rest!" said Aimee scornfully. "I want to live, not rest!"

"Ready to get busy on the Sphinx, an' cleave the ether?"

"Yes, right away."

"Good! I'll get her fixed."

Twenty minutes later they met by the shed where the Sphinx was stored. As Billy wheeled the machine out, he looked keenly into Aimee's eyes.

"Partner," he asked, "you haven't anything on your mind, have you?"

Aimee laughed aloud. Her eyes sparkled.

"Do I look as if I had?"

"No, by the Great Horn Spoon, you don't!" said Billy, eyeing her with a flash of admiration. "You look as if you'd face the world and laugh at everything it handed you—from a bunch of roses to sudden death. You're IT! Come on."

They went out through the little gate. Billy did not offer to mount the Sphinx till they were clear of the lane. When he stopped, Aimee observed for the first time that the Sphinx had a brand-new spring pillion-seat clamped to the carrier.

"What's this for?" exclaimed Aimee.

"Why, for you, old chap. Easier riding."

"I didn't need it, Billy. The carrier was good enough."

"Nope," said Billy with determination, "not nearly good enough. Carrier! You ain't baggage, are you?"

"Don't know. It's what a lot of people have called me."

"Who?" said Billy indignantly.

"Oh, frumps."

"There's a lot of indiscriminating people about," said her partner abruptly.

The Sphinx started, and Billy threaded lanes at an easy pace. The soft wind of the morning caressed them as they rode. Not that it had any pacifying effect on Aimee's spirit. The sense of adventure mounted to her head like wine.

"Here we are!" said Billy, turning onto a long, deserted stretch of high road, running delightfully level and straight. He let the Sphinx out. For eighty seconds the hedges flashed by like long green streamers. At the end of a mile and a half Billy stopped and dismounted.

"Now," he said, "we're not going to talk about how to sell the Sphinx yet awhile; the first thing is to put you wise to her. You've got to know her inside out and backwards—and she's the sweetest thing that ever burned gas. Now, look here!"

Aimee kneeled eagerly on the grass, and Billy fluently explained, dismantling the parts as he talked.

For twenty minutes she followed him, testing for herself.

"Why," said Billy with delight, stopping and looking at her, "it's like teaching a duck to swim! You catch on quicker than I can show you—you were born to it!"

"I'm an infant to you," said Aimee admiringly. "What a head you've got. It's everything a motor engine ought to be but never is. Let's take down the cylinder."

They busied themselves dismantling and re-assembling the engine.

"I'll show you how to drive her now," said Billy. "Stationary, till you get the hang of her."

Aimee mounted the saddle, while the machine remained on its stand, and Billy showed her how to control the engine running free with the clutch out. She took longer to grasp this. The controls, though simple, were of an unusual type. In ten minutes, however, she mastered them pretty efficiently.

"Fine!" said Billy enthusiastically. "Partner, the Sphinx is your big sister! Now we'll run her on the road—I'll ride the pillion an' coach you. But for the land's sake go easy with the throttle. She'll rush you clean off the British isles if you give her any gas."

Aimee started dead slow. The ease and resiliency of the drive, once the Sphinx was running, astonished her. Gradually Aimee increased speed to fifteen and twenty miles. She was intoxicated by the sense of power, answering to the least touch of her fingers.

"Glorious!" she gasped.

"You're doing fine," said Billy, watching keenly. He made her practice stopping and starting, including emergency halts. "Say, isn't she the last word in lady's mounts?"

"Rather!" said Aimee, in spite of a sense of difficulty with her dress and the Sphinx's tank, low though it was. "Except—I feel as if I were all stockings."

"Shucks! what of it?" he answered impatiently. "There's nobody here to see. Try her on the high gear now."

Aimee changed gear deftly enough, and for awhile drove steadily. But the intoxication of speed confused her senses. She made the one mistake she had been warned against. The Sphinx dashed forward like a whippet, and, in trying to rectify the error she made it worse.

"Throttle down!" said Billy sharply.

Intending to obey, Aimee blundered again, and closed down the extra air inlet. The Sphinx roared in protest, and shot ahead like a bullet from a gun. The pace was awful. How the machine kept on the road was a miracle. Every moment promised a dev-



Billy Leaned Swiftly Forward.

astating crash. In front was a right-angled bend, inviting sudden death. Billy leaned swiftly forward.

"Valve-lifter—left!" he said quietly in her ear. Aimee's left hand tightened on the lever—just in time. The steady voice—when a fool would have yelled aloud—brought all her faculties back; she throttled down as the machine slowed, and swung round the bend safely at a bare eight miles an hour—but without sounding the horn.

There was an astonished shout and a cry of warning ahead. A large carriage, with two fat horses and a fat coachman, seemed to be right on top of Aimee's handlebars. She swerved and braked violently, while the horses were reined back on their haunches; the Sphinx toppled sideways, shooting Billy clean through the screen of brambles that covered the ditch.

Aimee performed a sort of semi-somersault, and landed on her feet with an intoxicated stagger. For one awful moment she found herself facing the amazed occupants of the carriage.

She was conscious of the face of Georgina, very white, staring at her open-mouthed, with eyes as big as saucers. Beside Georgina sat a tremendous, elderly lady, gripping a lorgnette, and speechless with anger. A large young man in black, his eyes matching Georgina's for size, had started up and was grasping the side of the carriage.

(To be Continued)



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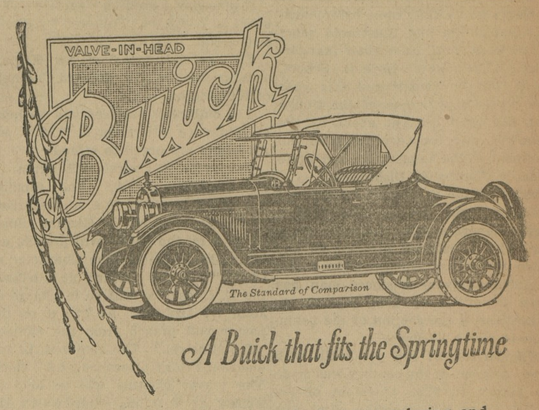
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