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.

In a fraction of a second the truth telegraphed itself to Aimee's flustered brain. Aunt Erythea!

Aimee leaped the ditch like a chamois, right over the top of Billy; plunged through the tall hedge as a circus rider goes through a hoop, and vanished.

"Is anybody hurt, there!" gasped Mr. Alexander Lambe. "Is—"

"Nope. Not here," said Billy's voice feebly from the ditch. A pair of booted legs waved among the brambles.

"I never saw anything so disgraceful in my life!" cried Mr. Lambe. "Your number! I want your number. I—!"

Lady Erythea, whose face was crimson, leaned forward and smote the coachman twice violently in the back with the handle of her parasol.

"Drive on—fool!" she said explosively.

The coachman started and whipped up the fat horses. Mr. Lambe staggered as the carriage went forward.

"Aunt," he said, "that—that woman, who was driving, ought to be apprehended! If I had my way—"

"If I had my way," retorted Lady Erythea, "she'd be whipped! She and all her tribe. But the idiot Gervase, of course, was on the wrong side; we've no case. I hope their wretched machine is wrecked. Sit down, Alexander, do you hear!"

Mr. Lambe obeyed, protesting faintly. Georgina, with one hand pressed to her bosom, felt as though she were on the point of heart-failure.

"Hussies," said Lady Erythea, quivering, "and louts! Country's overrun with them. Decency is dead!"

The carriage jingled round the corner and disappeared.

Billy Spencer collected himself from among the brambles and regained the road, with the air of a sailor cast away on an inhospitable coast. Aimee thrust an inquiring face through the hedge, and emerged.

"Billy!" she cried. "Are you damaged?"

"Not a bit. Only scratched."

"And the Sphinx?"

"Brake lever bent, that's all. Nothing serious."

Aimee suddenly sat down on the edge of the ditch and began to laugh. She laughed till the very road threw back the echo; scandalous laughter.

"That's good!" said Billy, grinning. "That's the stuff! I was afraid it might have shaken you. Go on—laugh!"

"You'll never let me drive her again!" gasped Aimee, mopping her streaming eyes.

"Won't I! Why, you've learned the game—you'll never do that stunt twice. Only thing I feared, it might have shaken your nerve. But you've no nerve to shake! You're the goods. That fool coachman was on the wrong side, anyway. Let's get on the Sphinx. You'll ride her like a bird after this. All the same," he added, "that tank-bar is a bit awkward for your dress."

"I don't care—I can manage."

"No—it's got to be fixed." His face cleared. "It's dead easy! I'll get you a pair of breeches in Syderford."

Aimee, dumfounded, turned and stared at him.

"What do you think you are!" she exclaimed. "The Universal Provider?"

Billy's chin stuck out sternly.

"I'm your partner! Get me?"

Aimee looked at him thoughtfully, and smiled.

"All right, Billy," she said softly. There was a pause. "Let's go back to Ivy cottage. You can drive."

Billy mounted the saddle joyously, stuffing his cap into his pocket. Aimee took her seat behind. The Sphinx meandered homeward at an easy fifty miles an hour.

CHAPTER VI

"Thou Shalt Not Lie."

Georgina Berners began the day well; though she came within an ace of beginning it very badly indeed—she was nearly late for prayers.

After the service the servants dispersed to their duties, and Lady Erythea led the way to the morning room. She kissed Georgina with the air of one conferring a benefit, and bestowed a word of approval on Alexander, who was looking at Georgina with some concern in his large eyes.

"You look a little tired, cousin," he said, "did you rest well?"

"Oh, y-yes," said Georgina, "the—the journey yesterday was a little tiring."

"Perfect health," said Lady Erythea, "is not only desirable, it is a duty, in the young."

Breakfast proceeded in silence, till Lady Erythea made her announcement.

"The carriage will be ready for us all at ten," she said. "Remember that one does not keep horses waiting. We shall drive to Syderford."

"In that case," said Mr. Lambe, "I must be excused now. I have many things to do before ten."

Lady Erythea watched his exit with some anxiety.

"For a man of Alexander's physical development," she said, "I feel sure he does not eat enough. A mouthful of whiting and half a cup of tea! He would rather die than indulge in meat on a Friday." Lady Erythea was making excellent practice with a grilled sole. "That, of course, is quite right. But he carries some things to extremes. I am not wholly sure that Alexander is sound on the subject of marriage," continued Lady Erythea, with her customary directness. "I am, of course, a High Churchwoman. Of that faith, I know very well, there are many who hold that a priest should be celibate. I do not agree with them for one moment. Let those differ from me who will—I say that even a clergyman is essentially imperfect until he has a wife."

Georgina flushed slowly scarlet. Lady Erythea turned the ear-trumpet to her inexorably, and waited.

"I am quite sure of one thing," roared Georgina into the ear-trumpet, with almost a touch of rebellion, "that Al-Alexander will do what he believes is right—and nothing else."

"He must be guided," said Lady Erythea firmly. "On no other point should I presume to direct a Clerk in Orders. But, in this matter, men—even such men as Alexander—are as children. The judgment of an experienced woman is alone of value here. Alexander is my heir. Jervaulx will be his. He owes a duty to his race and name; duty must guide us all. At times Alexander seems to me almost—almost too devout. I sometimes wish"—with a slight sigh—"that Alexander were a little more—human. A touch of Adam—a mere soupcon, as it were of naughtiness—is not wholly unattractive in a young man."

Georgina stared at her in amazement, wondering if she had heard aright. And Georgina was guiltily conscious that a similar thought had crept, unbidden, into her own mind. Lady Erythea's eyes, meeting her gaze, became stony.

"I was referring, of course," she said, with some sternness, "to the duty good women owe themselves in reforming young men of that type. In a girl, flightiness is abhorrent to me—absolutely abhorrent. Hussies are my especial aversion." She smiled, and laid a hand on Georgina's shoulder. "I don't know why I speak of them. Nor can I understand, my dear, how such a mistaken impression of you could have reached us, before we knew you.

"For," she added, rising, "I have formed my opinion of you, Aimee, and my judgment is never mistaken. The woman does not live who could deceive me. Aimee, my dear, you are free to follow any occupation you choose—until ten o'clock."

Georgina made her way upstairs and sank into the most luxurious armchair in her bedroom.

"How perfectly lovely it would be here," she sighed, "if only things were proper and regular. But they aren't!"

Georgina, gazing before her, fell into a day-dream. Presently, the sound of the carriage passing beneath her window roused her with a start, and hastily donning a wrap she ran downstairs.

"Sit next me, Aimee," said Lady Erythea, settling herself comfortably in the carriage. "Alexander, you will take the other seat. I dislike having anyone immediately opposite me."

For two hours, at least, all troubles were to be left behind. As the carriage bowled through the sunlit park Georgina, lying back against the cushions, under the benign gaze of Alexander, felt inexpressibly soothed.

* * * * * * *

When the carriage returned to Jervaulx, Georgina fell rather than descended from it. Almost in a state



"My Judgment Is Never Mistaken."

of collapse, she preserved some sort of outward composure and retreated to her bedroom as a hunted fox goes to earth.

The collision with the motorcycle on the Syderford road opened new horizons of terror for Georgina. It seemed to her like the climax of a nightmare. What in the world was Aimee doing? Who was the man—it was evidently a man, though Georgina had seen little of him except his boots—that was with her. What was happening to the wretched girl?

"It's too awful!" said Georgina hysterically, "and I'm responsible. I think I shall go mad!"

Later in the afternoon, in the natural course of things, she found herself alone with Alexander in the gardens. She looked at him with timid, yet hopeful eyes. Here, at least, was righteousness, kindliness, wisdom. Georgina felt she could keep things to herself no longer.

"I am afraid that narrow escape this morning has upset you, Aimee," he said sympathetically.

"Yes—I was rather upset. But I am better now. Don't let us talk of it. Cousin Alexander, there is something I want to ask you," she said suddenly. "I should like your—your guidance. Imagine that somebody who was dear to me—somebody one loved very much—had got into difficulties, and was in danger of exposure. And punishment. That it was in one's power to save them. Supposing that it would help, would it be very wrong to tell a—a fib?"

Alexander regarded her wonderingly.

"Let us give things their proper names," he said. "You mean a lie. You know the answer. A lie is in all cases not only inadmissible, but unthinkable."

"N-not even a little one?" said Georgina faintly. "I don't mean for one's own benefit, of course, but to shield the other."

"There is only one answer," he said sternly. "That other must make a clean breast of it, and bear his own punishment—or hers. No matter how bitter it may be. Whoever indulges in such shielding is equally guilty."

Georgina felt utterly chilled.

"Is not that a little hard?" she said.

"The hard way is the way of the transgressor," said Alexander, with some grimness; "there is authority for that. And yet the friend—I think you said a friend—may give all aid and succor to the sinner, even to the extreme sacrifice of himself. But deceit, even the shadow of it, must by no means enter into the matter. You are asking me what you know perfectly well. But why talk of unpleasant things," he continued, "tell me of yourself, and your life at Scroope, Aimee."

There was small comfort for Georgina the rest of that day. She dressed for dinner in a state of despair. Lady Erythea, as her custom was, even when en famille, came down splendidly bejeweled, and wearing the famous Lambe emeralds—said to be worth a prince's ransom—on her somewhat bony chest. As usual at dinner she was in a good temper.

There was a late delivery at Jervaulx, and a letter was brought into the drawing room afterward, addressed to Aimee Scroope.

"Surely, that is your father's handwriting, Aimee," said Lady Erythea. "My letter will have crossed his. Let us hear what he says."

Georgina would as soon have thought of picking a pocket as of opening another person's letter. But there was no help for it. The letter was dated Scroope Towers, Thursday. At the word of command, Georgina read it aloud, somewhat falteringly.

My Dearest Aimee:

I am writing to your aunt, to whom my love, but find myself with only time before the post goes to tell you I am obliged to leave Scroope earlier than I expected. As I wish to see you before I go, I will come over for an hour on Saturday. I'm sorry it is impossible for me to stay the night. I have news of importance for you.

Your loving,
FATHER.

"It will be the first time," said Lady Erythea, a trifle acidly, "that anybody ever saw your father in a hurry."

The letter put the finishing touch to such a day as Georgina had never dreamed of. She went to bed half an hour later. Before she fell asleep, her pillow was wet.

CHAPTER VII

The Way of the Transgressor.

Georgina awoke with a start. The light from a tiny electric torch dazzled her eyes; somebody was shaking her violently.

"Wake up, old thing," whispered Aimee's voice; "it's like trying to rouse the dead. I'm anxious about you. What did they say about that little stunt on the Syderford road?"

Georgina sat up with a gasp, and clutched Aimee with both hands as a drowning person clutches a life-buoy.

"It's you, is it!" she said fiercely. "I've got you, Aimee—make up your mind to it! This dreadful business is finished. We're done for—especially you!"

"Eh!" exclaimed Aimee, a little startled. "What have you got the breeze up about now?"

"You'll know very soon! Who," said Georgina sternly, still holding her, "was that Man that was with you? Who was he?"

"Man?" said Aimee. "Oh, you mean Billy. One of the best that ever stepped! A clinking good sort."

"B-Billy?" echoed Georgina in a shaking voice. "Tell me. Tell me all!" she said, tightening her grip.

"Well, why not?" said Aimee, and forthwith she related the Saga of Billy. The tale, as it proceeded, seemed to affect Georgina with creeping palsy. When it ended, she was trembling violently. She made two unsuccessful efforts to speak. She reminded Aimee of a hen with something stuck in its throat.

"You are staying with this Man?" gasped Georgina. "This Spencer—in Stanhoe? And he let you do it? The man's a cad!"

Aimee sprang up, tearing herself loose from her cousin's hands.

"How dare you say that! Cad? If there's only one gentleman on this earth, it's Billy!"

She glared at Georgina.

"There's no beastly sentiment in Billy, thank heaven. That's why we became pals; because we want to get away from it all. I see nothing wrong in it—nor does he."

"Then he's a fool!" said Georgina bitterly. "Oh, what can one say?" she groaned. "I know there's nothing wrong. That you are incapable of—of—" she choked. "And this man. From what you tell me, he is just such another as you. He is not a man—he is a child! Or he is from some place where things are—very different from what they are with us. But you are living in Eastshire—not in the desert. You know what Eastshire is. If ever this comes out—as come out it must—your reputation and your good name are gone—finished!

"That, I suppose, you do not care for," she said bitterly, rising and facing Aimee, "but one thing I can tell you and you may believe me. This thing will kill your father!"

Aimee stared at her blankly.

"I know your father, better, perhaps, than you do, Aimee. To Lord Scroope, black is black and white white. No one is more proud, more sensitive. That his daughter should be living in an obscure lodging, under an assumed name—with a strange man she picked up on the high road. I tell you, quite soberly and certainly, that it will break his heart."

There was a long silence.

Suddenly Aimee sat down on the bed and began to cry. She cried with the abandon of a child of ten, but very piteously.

"I never wanted to hurt Dad!" she snuffled. "I didn't think—I didn't see—!"

"Do you understand at last?" said Georgina grimly.

"Y-yes," gulped Aimee slowly; "I believe I do. Dad! I—" she caught Georgina by the arm. "I must keep that from him—I must!"

"We must keep it from him," said Georgina trembling, "at any cost. We must find a way, for his sake and yours. This muddle at Jervaulx cannot be hidden; we must face it. But your father must never hear of—the other thing. What are we to do? He is coming here tomorrow afternoon!"

Tearfully she gave her cousin the news in Lord Scroope's letter. Aimee stared in blank dismay.

"We have till five o'clock tomorrow," faltered Georgina. "I don't care what happens to me—there's nothing I won't do to save you, Aimee." Her face brightened suddenly. "I've thought of a way—"

"And so have I!" said Aimee eagerly. "There's just a chance—go on—let's hear your plan!"

"If we can keep the whole thing quiet till five tomorrow we shall pull through—with luck. Should anything turn up before then, to show that you're not here where you ought to be—we're done for," said Georgina, tragically. "My plan is this: You must go at once—"

A loud clanging interrupted her, as of a vibrating hammer striking a gong. It jarred horribly on the silence of the dark abbey. Followed the crash and tinkle of breaking glass, and the sound of a fall. A second gong spoke with a brazen tongue.

Georgina went very white.

"Great Scott! what's this awful row?" exclaimed Aimee.

Georgina pressed a hand to her bosom.

"It's—it's one of Lady Erythea's burglar alarms," she said faintly. "The house is full of them!"

In half a minute the abbey was galvanized into extraordinary activity. Swift running feet padded along the corridors. The squeak of a maidservant broke shrilly through the chorus.

Aimee and Georgina stared at each other open-mouthed.

There was a violent pounding on the



"Great Scott! What's This Awful Row?" Exclaimed Aimee.

door. "Are you awake, miss?" said an excited voice. "There's thieves in the house—her ladyship's jewels stolen! Keep your door locked till she comes to you!"

The speaker was heard retreating swiftly down the passage.

"That's torn it!" gasped Aimee, running to the door. "If aunt finds me here—!"

She unlocked the door swiftly and opened it.

"Aimee!" breathed the trembling Georgina, "don't—"

"I've got to get out, I tell you! I can't stay here!"

Aimee looked rapidly up and down the passage. It was all clear. She fled at an amazing pace, and, reaching the landing, was aware of a figure of wrath, very like Britannia, but holding a fire-shovel, striding toward her. It was Lady Erythea.

Aimee doubled like a hare.

"Stop that woman!" cried Lady Erythea. "Stop her!"

Aimee reached the head of the stairs just as Mr. Alexander Lambe, with a jacket over his pajamas, flew to intercept her.

"Stop!" he shouted commandingly.

Aimee, in full career, gave him a desperate two-handed push. Mr. Lambe's heels flew from under him, and he came down on the slippery oak flooring with a hearty thump.

Down the broad stairs, three at a time, sped the fugitive; in the lower hall the butler, his bald head shining like a comet in the gloom, rushed across the line of communications. Aimee dodged too late; the pursuer made an active plunge, and caught her by the skirt.

"I've got her!" shouted the butler triumphantly. His voice rose to a yelp as Aimee kicked his shins, but he held on inexorably. "I've got her!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Plot Thickens.

By sheer force of arrested impetus, Aimee and the butler spun round each other at arm's length like skaters on a rink; something ripped loudly, the butler, shooting off at a tangent, collided with a suit of armor pedestaled near the wall. The ensuing crash suggested an insurrection in a hardware shop.

Aimee skidded against the wall and, recovering, leaped wildly over the two prostrate relics of feudalism—the butler and the coat of mail—and dashed for the double doors that stood open before her. There was a curious flashing effect as she ran—a gleam, as it were, of whiteness. The next moment she had vanished into the night.

Alexander rushed to the open doors and stared out into the darkness. He heard the sound of the hunt somewhere beyond the fir-trees. For a moment he thought of joining it. But the starlit gloom gave faint encouragement—pursuit seemed very useless. With a sudden impulse Alexander ran back through the hall, turned on the light, and pulled open the door of the telephone call room. He snatched the receiver from the hook.

"Stanhoe police station—put me through quick!" cried Alexander.

Lady Erythea descended the stairs, a superb model for Boadicea among the wreck of the Roman legions. Her eyes flashed fire, her lips were compressed in a thin, tight line, her hand gripped the brass shovel. She glared at the disgruntled butler.

"Tarbeaux!" she cried sharply. "Tarbeaux!"

Mr. Tarbeaux came forward, limping. One hand pressed a crimsoned handkerchief to his nose, which had impacted rather violently upon the good knight's breastplate. His other hand grasped a yard of torn blue cloth, which he waved before him.

"Did you stop that woman?" cried Lady Erythea.

Mr. Tarbeaux' inarticulate answer was in the negative.

"Why not, idiot!" said his mistress. "A houseful of useless incumbrances unable to stop a single—" The empurpled handkerchief caught her eye. "Why, what is the matter, man? Are you wounded?"

"Proud—shed m' blood—ladyship's service!" snuffled Mr. Tarbeaux. "Couldn't help skirt tearin', m' lady."

"What!"

Mr. Tarbeaux, with a silent but splendid gesture, laid the piece of torn skirt upon the hall bench.

"Clue, m' lady," he said, with the air of a bankrupt making the most of his assets. "With this it should not be difficult to trace the thief."

"Trace her!" snorted Lady Erythea. "If you had held on to her there would would have been no need to trace anything!"

Mr. Lambe joined them; his mild eye at once apprehended the significance of the piece of serge.

"I cannot see that Tarbeaux is to blame," he said in his aunt's ear; "he did his best, and after all it is unimportant."

"Unimportant! The infamous creature has got clear away!"

"My dear aunt! That stupid girl cannot have been the thief. You do not really suppose this burglary was committed by a woman!"

"Most certainly I do!" cried Lady Erythea. "I can believe anything of the modern woman—anything! She hid when the alarm sounded, and made a desperate dash for escape when I discovered her. It is as clear as daylight to anybody but a fool! It is certain she had my emeralds upon her at the time, and it is lucky none of you are killed—though it would be very little loss. Tarbeaux, did you recognize the creature whom you allowed so egregiously to escape?"

"No, my lady. It was too dark. And the incident was somewhat sudden," said Mr. Tarbeaux apologetically. "It was a young person—I am unable to say more. But I am sure she was not one of our household."

"I have telephoned the police at Stanhoe," said Mr. Lambe; "they are coming immediately by car."

"A gleam of intelligence at last! Thank you, Alexander—and forgive me—I am overwrought. My censure does not apply to you. The whole affair is appalling!" said Lady Erythea, clenching her hands. "My pearls, the diamond chaplet—these comparatively are trifles—but the emeralds are gone. The Lambe emeralds!"

The audience shrank before her wrath.

"It is incredible! Twelve years ago the abbey was broken into—this is the second case. I had taken every possible precaution, under skilled advice. My safe is modern; I considered I had made the house itself impregnable at night. So it would have been, had I been adequately served. What measures did you take, Tarbeaux? I was absurd enough to think I could rely upon you, in an emergency like this!"

"I retired at the usual hour, my lady, to my room in the passage," said Mr. Tarbeaux unhappily, "as I have done for years, by your instructions, in view of—er—er—an emergency like this. One of the alarms roused me; I rose immediately, only waiting long enough to don a garment—"

"Go on, man, go on!"

"While putting them—while putting it on, my lady, I sounded my bell, which connects with the other menservants' rooms, and ran into the hall. At that moment I thought I heard feet on the gravel outside, and unbolting the front door I rushed out—"

(To be Continued)

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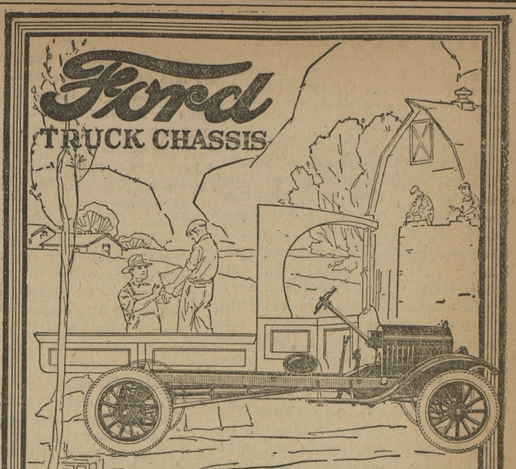
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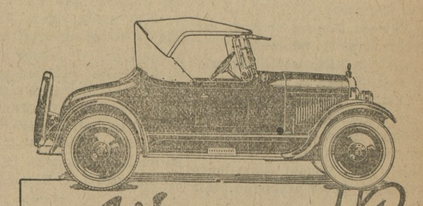
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