

# THE JOY OF LIVING

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## "PARTNER!"

**SYNOPSIS.**—Smiling the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythra Lambe, at Jervaux abbey, and her cousin, Alexander Lambe, Almee, vivacious daughter of the Very Reverend Viscount Scroope, wanders into the park, there encountering a strange youth. He laughingly introduces himself as "Billy," American. The two ride on his motorcycle, the "Flying Sphinx," and part. With Georgina Ferns, her cousin, Almee sets out for Jervaux. She decides that Georgina shall impersonate her at Jervaux, while she goes on a holiday. Georgina's horrified protest is unavailing. Almee again meets "Billy." He tells her his name is Spencer, and she gives her as Amy Snooks, at present "out of a job." Billy offers to take her into partnership in selling the Sphinx. In a spirit of madcap adventure, she accepts. The two proceed to the town of Stanhoe, taking separate lodgings in Ivy cottage. That night Almee visits Georgina and learns that the deception has not been discovered. She compels Georgina to continue the subterfuge. On a trial spin, with Billy, Almee almost collides with a carriage in which are her aunt, Georgina and Alexander. The pair escape unrecognized. Georgina learns that Lord Scroope is coming to visit Lady Erythra and is in hopeless bewilderment. While Almee is secretly visiting Georgina at Jervaux, the place is burglarized. Almee escapes. Police decide the thieves are "Jack the Climber" and "Calamity Kate," who travel on a motorcycle. Billy, who has shadowed Almee to Jervaux, follows the thieves. He is knocked out, but finds he has some costly emeralds. Realizing they must be part of the loot from Jervaux, he starts for the abbey. He meets Almee, with the police in pursuit.

## CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"Close call, partner," he observed. "I thought it must be they," said Almee breathlessly. "I wonder they haven't called out the military as well. All the countryside seems to be chasing me! Billy!" she said, with a suspicious tremble in her voice, "you'll help me, won't you? I'll tell you about it. I—I've kept it from you, but I won't any longer. I—"

Billy laid a hand on her arm. "Amy," he said quietly, "just repeat this piece to yourself. Say: 'I'm safe, my partner's lookin' after me.' Got that? I'll see you through; you've nothin' to worry for at all. But we can't talk here. We've got to beat it."

He picked up the Sphinx.

"Follow close after me, an' keep quiet."

He wheeled the machine along the field path at a run, passed through another gate, crossed a stretch of heathery common-land, and made for a small copse at the foot of the slope. Almee trotted behind silently, with an odd sense of relief and security. Billy would see it through. He had said so. He halted by the copse, and looked round to make sure of his bearings.

"It ought to be close handy here," he said. "Yes—I've got it."

He pushed on to a small bosky dell which led into a series of old crag-pits, masked with brambles. Almee wondered how he could find his way so confidently in the dark; she had not the remotest idea where she was.

"Wait here a minute. I'll come back for you," said Billy.

He wheeled the Sphinx away along a scarcely visible path, and presently returned without it.

"I was fooling around here on an off day, first time I came to Stanhoe," he said, "an' I hit on something that's goin' to be mighty useful. The old Sphinx has got to disappear for a bit, an' you'll soon understand why. Follow behind; there's only room for one at a time."

He led the way through the brambles and, pressing ahead, turned on the light of his pocket torch cautiously. Almee, close at his heels, presently found herself in the entrance of a sandy cave with a very small mouth, screened by rough creeper and brush.

"There's several of these around here," said Billy, "but this is one you don't find unless you hunt for it with a sounding pole. It's a heap quieter spot than the high roads tonight. Suppose we sit down."

They seated themselves on the powdered crag in the cave's mouth.

"It's time to show down our hands, partner," said Billy. "Do you mind putting me wise? Don't leave anything out. I want the facts."

Almee was silent some moments. She found it difficult to begin.

"It was like this, Billy."

She plunged into the tale, and went through it from beginning to end—leaving out nothing. It took some time. She could hardly see Billy in the gloom. He made no comments; he was so silent that sometimes she wondered if he was there. Billy was, for a time, too flabbergasted to speak.

At the finish, she heard a stifled, grunting noise, a sense of something shaking. It seemed to touch a spring in Almee. She bowed her head on her knees and laughed till her cheeks were wet.

"Haven't I torn it!" she moaned. "And I downed Cousin Alexander—"

and the butler's got yards of my skirt!"

Billy wiped his eyes with his sleeves. "An' you can laugh," he said, with intense delight, "after all that! Gee, but you're the stuff! Sand right through. You're all right. As long as you can laugh, the Red Gods'll stand by you! An' so will I. I'm one of 'em."

"Billy! There's nothing but you between me and those honest police. But I'll bet it's enough. What's to be done?"

"Hear my side of it!" said Billy, dropping on his knees and producing the jewel case. "Here's the first item!"

He opened the case and shone the torch upon it. Almee gave a little cry. Billy explained briefly how he had come by the gems. He said little



Almee Gave a Little Cry.

about the struggle; that point was as sore as the side of his head. The best of us have our pride.

"One of them knocked me out for a spell, and like a fool I let 'em get away," he said. "I guess I didn't get all the goods, but this looks like an ace flush to me."

"How splendid you are!" cried Almee, a catch in her voice. "Why, those will be the Lambe emeralds. I've heard of them—everybody has. They belong to my Aunt Erythra!"

"Then I shouldn't wonder if they scooped the jack-pot. But there's some high cards out against us. See here. We had to run for it. Here's the police prancin' over the country after a man and a woman on a motorcycle—for I guess they must be wise to it. Here's me with the stuff in my pocket, and you with a dress sample in the hands of the sleuth-hounds. Been the station-house for ours, if they'd got us just now—an' there'd be too much explaining to do. We'd have hit the cells for the night, sure. No place for you, partner. And all the newspapers spreading themselves over it."

"I know. It's f-ferful!"

"Not a bit!" cried Billy. "For now you can get in ahead of the cops. Don't you see? Put your folks wise to it—lay down all your cards. You're Lord Scroope's daughter—you ain't a burglar. Give it them straight. I'll stand by an' see you through."

"But—I can't, Billy! It'll all have to come out, then. Every bit of it," said Almee with a gasp.

"Why, of course it will! It was bound to come out anyway, soon or late. You didn't think you could keep up this Jervaux racket? I don't see any way you could do that. But you can keep it in the family. You've got to face the music."

"There was a long pause.

"I—can't," said Almee, scarcely audibly.

Billy was amazed. If it had not been so dark—and an incredible supposition in any case—he would have supposed from her voice that she was crying.

"You aren't afraid?" he said wonderingly.

"Of a row? No! It isn't that."

"What is it then, partner?" he said gently.

"I never thought of it—till Georgie told me," said Almee in stifled tones. "Told you what?" he answered quietly. "What's the trouble?"

"About staying there. I—Ivy cottage!"

Billy moved slightly.

"I—I don't quite get you," he said. "I can't tell Dad!" Almee put her hands over her eyes and burst into tears. "I daren't! Billy, what am I to do!"

## CHAPTER XII

### A Gambler's Chance.

Billy stared straight before him. When at last he found his voice, it had so dazed a tone that Almee hardly

recognized it. He laid a hand on her shoulder.

"This thing's got me guessing," said Billy slowly. "I—I don't know what—"

"Of course, you never thought twice about it. And no more did I!" said Almee. "I didn't care! And I don't care now! I wouldn't if it wasn't for Dad. But people—it's all this miserable sentiment—that's what's wrong."

"Yes?" said Billy dizzily. "Well—"

"And now—why, the police are lookin' for a man and woman on a motorcycle, and they'll find out we were at Ivy cottage. They'll get my description. And even when they find out who I really am—"

Billy drew in his breath sharply.

"Georgie told me it was my finish—even before this silly burglary happened," continued Almee gloomily. "Georgie knows about these sort of things. It isn't the burglary that matters. I could get over that. It's this—this other thing."

Billy was silent.

"The idea is," continued Almee, with the same remarkable calm, "that I've lost my character; like a housemaid that's been stealing, or a groom caught selling the corn. Only I haven't been caught—yet."

"But—if Dad knew! You don't know my father, Billy. I couldn't explain him to you. Dad is just about the dearest thing that ever lived—in his way. But he belongs to a time about two hundred years back. Mother would understand; but not Dad. It's his creed that a girl mustn't be even—suspected. It was only tonight Georgina told me this thing would—well, it would break his heart. And I know him; I see she's right. If you and I—"

"Stop!" said Billy hoarsely. "Don't say any more. I—I've got to think this thing out."

Almee found that he had suddenly left her. Presently she became aware of the outlines of his big figure, standing motionless just outside the cave. He was there quite a long time. Almee sat where she was, twisting her handkerchief between her fingers. She felt very much calmer. The trouble and the stress were now with Billy.

He came back, and stood over her. "I'm a coyote," he said quietly. "What I need is a quirt laid across me. I've been a fool."

"Not a bit!" said Almee quickly. "How should you know?"

"It was my business to know! There isn't any excuse. But—things are so different, where I come from. And I don't know anything about women. We think a lot of women, down my way, but we don't talk about them—much. Partner, this thing I've let you in for through my foolishness—it's broken me all up."

"Because I'm Lord Scroope's daughter?"

"No!" said Billy shortly. "Be the same if you were his housemaid. But it's up to me to see you clear—you and him, too. And I'll do it."

His voice was so confident that Almee's trouble fell away from her, as a sun-ripened chestnut sheds its prickly husk.

"What are we to do then, Billy?"

"It seems to me," said Billy gently, "that the simplest way is the best way. Let's you an' me go to the old man. No use talkin' about it here. I'll put it straight for you, partner."

"No!"

"I hope I can make him see sense—even if he's two hundred years old, as you say. It's all my fault. It isn't yours—not one scrap of it. I won't say much—but come right along with me to your father now—an' leave the talking to me."

Almee rose.

"Never! I won't have it, Billy!" she said desperately. "I don't know—I don't know what you might say. If it comes out I'm done for anyhow; I'm going to take the chance that it won't! There must be a way to stop it—there must be some way."

"It's my trouble—mine! And I won't have it given away!"

Billy drew a quick breath and straightened himself.

"Right!" he said. "Those are the orders. I accept them. I s'pose a man can't give away a girl's secret, if she wants it kept. I know that much."

"Why, of course," said Almee simply. "But will you please understand, Billy, that I'm not going to drag you into this. The best thing you can do is to get away out of it all. I shall manage all right. I don't want to—"

"Cut that out," said Billy very quietly. "It don't go." There was a pause. "I did think, for a while, it might be best—for you. But that's wrong. I've got to be right on hand, for I'll be wanted. Now hold on while I tell you what we've got to do."

"Yes!" said Almee eagerly.

Billy stretched out a long arm, plucked a leaf from the bramble that screened the cave, and chewed it pensively.

"There's just a gambler's chance," he said at last. "It's pretty thin—like drawing to a three-card flush. But it's wonderful how they come off sometimes, if you back your luck, good an' full."

He flashed the torch round the walls of the cave.

"What d'you think of this place?"

"It's—snug."

"Snug!" echoed Billy admiringly. "That's you! It would give some women fits. But you've said. Do you think," he added diffidently, "that you could make out here for a bit? Could you sleep here?"

"Certainly I could. Why, they'll never find me—!"

"Come up here," said Billy, leading the way along the cave, which turned in a long curve, narrowing to a very small space. At the end stood the Sphinx.

"She'll have to stay here, too. There's a bit of risk to that—but very little. We can't help it. In the pannier-case you'll find iron rations, a can-opener, biscuits, an' chocolate. I always carry those. Down the pit yonder, just by the alder bush, is a spring of water. That settles supplies."

"Now, the first deal is to keep you right out of the way. For a few hours, perhaps for a day or more—I can't say how long. But we've got to put up a bluff. And you'll be at least as safe here as anywhere in the British Isles."

"Our best chance is that the police may get the tracelets onto the real thieves right away. I'm not much stuck on that chance. Police, wherever you strike 'em, are—well, they're just police. We're in a lot more danger from them than that dead-beat who broke into Jervaux, and the female rattlesnake he had along. The police mustn't get you, at any price. And—they mustn't get me either. Only there's more to it than that. Half a hundred things. There's a mighty tangled deal in front of me."

"Now, I'm going to sail right in. All you've got to do is lie here in this cache till about seven or eight o'clock. I'll be back here by then. If I'm not," said Billy quietly, "it'll be because I've fallen through. You bet your life I won't. But—if I don't get here by then, you must throw your hand in. Just get straight to your father, best way you can. Do you promise that?"

"Y-yes! But tell me what you're going to do, Billy!" she said breathlessly.

"I can't tell you anything. I'll have to play the hand as it's dealt me; it just depends how the cards fall. And don't you worry any!" he said earnestly. "If you get doubtful or scary, just wash it right out of your mind, an' say this: 'Billy's running the thing for me, an' he'll see me through!' I'm off. Shake!"

With a sudden gesture Almee put both her hands in his. He gave them a crushing grip, and broke into the sunniest smile.

"We sure are seein' life, partner!" he chuckled.

Almee replied with a rather tremulous laugh. The next moment Billy had dropped her hands, and was gone.

Once clear of the crag-pits, Billy made for the road by another route. While climbing a gate he glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch, and emitted a whistle of consternation. Almee's account of herself was absorbing, but he did not realize till now what an unconscionable time they had spent in the cave. The night was nearing its close.

Billy avoided the roads. He struck right across country and reached Ivy cottage with a little loss of time as possible. But the eastern sky was rapidly lightening when he arrived. Entering the garden with extreme caution, Billy found everything quiet. He climbed the trellis deftly, and heaved himself through Almee's window.

With a certain sense of embarrassment Billy swept the walls with his torch, unhooked the blue dust-cloak that hung on the door, folded it small, and packed it inside his jacket. That was the main object of the expedition.



Billy Laid Before Her the Lambe Emeralds.

He also annexed a cake of soap, a towel and a brush and comb—these latter he had himself bought for Almee at Syderford on the first morning. Billy again descended the trellis, raked over his footprints carefully, and with all possible speed shook the mud of Ivy cottage from his feet.

It was broad daylight when he had crossed the fields and came within sight of Jervaux abbey. He hid the cloak and its accessories under a thorn bush, glanced at his watch again, seated himself under the hedge, and lit a cigarette.

He drew the jewel case from his pocket and examined the necklace, thoughtfully emitting puffs of smoke. Then he replaced the case in his pocket and finished his cigarette, his smooth forehead wrinkling into tiny lines. Finally he rose and walked briskly towards the entrance lodge of Jervaux.

There was no electric bell in the great porch. He pulled a pendant handle of wrought iron, and was answered by an archaic clanging inside. After a brief pause the doors were thrown open by Tarbeaux the butler. He looked at Billy inquiringly.

"I want to see the proprietor—on urgent business," said Billy. "Is he up yet?"

"If you mean Lady Erythra Lambe," said Mr. Tarbeaux with dignity, "her ladyship has not yet risen."

"I am a stranger here," said Billy, "but what I want you to do is get a message to her ladyship that it will be worth her while to see me as soon as convenient. Say I've important news about some property that's missing from here."

Mr. Tarbeaux became more alert.

"Come this way," he said, and Billy followed him.

In less than ten minutes Lady Erythra arrived, pallid after her night of stress, but unconquerable, clad in a purple wrap. Billy turned to face that tremendous presence.

"What do you want to see me about?" she said sternly.

With his sunniest smile, Billy opened the leather case and laid before her the Lambe emeralds.

## CHAPTER XIII

"Very Good, My Lady."

"Do these interest you, madame?" said Billy simply.

Lady Erythra stared at though the green gems hypnotized her. Then, with a little gasp of joy, she lifted them from the case with trembling fingers. It was one of the rare occasions of her life when Lady Erythra exhibited emotion.

She laid down the necklace and looked at Billy as one might regard a materialized angel. Before she could speak, however, Mr. Alexander Lambe entered the room.

It has been said that Mr. Lambe's eyes were large. They expanded indescribably when he saw the Lambe necklace lying on the table. He closed the door softly behind him, and approached the table in an awestruck manner.

He glanced from the emeralds to Lady Erythra's face, and then, somewhat sternly, at Billy.

"How did you come by these?" said Lady Erythra, pointing to the emeralds. Suddenly she presented the ear-trumpet at Billy. "Explain!"

The ear-trumpet started Billy a little. He felt—so he declared to Almee afterward—as if Lady Erythra had the drop on him. But his face, as he answered, was ingenious as a baby's.

"I was passing by your park gates early this morning, on my way to Syderford. It was past one, an' the house was dark. When I got to the place where the lane turns into the road I heard a motorcycle coming up behind, h—I for—coming mighty quick," said Billy, turning pink. "It came right by me, pretty near out of control. It hadn't any lights, there was a bend just ahead, an' I heard it crash."

Billy delivered this with a beautiful fluency into the ear-trumpet.

"I just ran in on them," pursued Billy, "for I didn't have to stop an' figure it out that an outfit traveling that way with lights out at one in the morning was up to any good. They were just picking themselves up when I arrived, and they went for me—"

"Was it a man and a woman?" exclaimed Mr. Lambe.

"You've hit it, sir."

"My dear aunt!" cried Alexander, "the inspector told me, after you retired, that he suspected a man and a woman, on a motorcycle, of being the thieves! They can be no other than those people who ran into us yesterday on the Syderford road—"

"Hold your tongue, Alexander," interrupted Lady Erythra impatiently, "and allow this amazing young man to continue!"

"There was some scrap," said Billy diffidently, "maybe if there'd been two men I'd have done better, but the lady harpored me, and somehow I took the count. They knocked me out, and got away. But they left this behind them," he pointed to the case of emeralds, "and it looks like they never knew they'd lost it. I don't know, madam, if there was anything else of yours they got. If so, I'm very sorry I didn't attach it, and rope the two thieves for you as well. But, with the pair of them, it was rather a roughhouse. I did my best."

There was a flush of admiration on Lady Erythra's high cheek-bones.

"Yes, there were other jewels stolen," she said, "but their value is the merest trifle compared to what you have restored to me. These emeralds are my most priceless family possession. They are historic—nothing could have recompensed me for the loss of them. Your conduct has been

not only intelligent, but extraordinarily gallant. May I ask your name?"

"Spencer, William Spencer."

"Mr. Spencer. It is impossible for me to express my gratitude in words. I thank you most heartily for what you have done; it is fortunate for me the emeralds fell into such good hands. Let me say that I was about to offer a reward for information leading to the recovery of the jewels; a reward of—"

Lady Erythra hesitated, and achieved an inward struggle—"one hundred pounds. But I must really ask you to accept a hundred and fifty."

Lady Erythra unlocked a desk, and produced a check-book. Billy flushed red.

"Madam," he said quietly, "the service I did you cost me nothing. I'm glad you have your jewels back. I'm a man who earns his living, but I don't accept gratuities. And people very sincerely ever offer them to me."

Lady Erythra turned somewhat pink in her turn. She slid the check book aside.

"I beg your pardon," she said, with some embarrassment, mingled with relief and a touch almost of annoyance. "It was the least I could do. You will accept no recompense?"

"None, madam. Anyway not in money."

"You are not English, are you?"

"American. And a Westerner, at that."

"Ah! You have done me a great service. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

Before Billy could reply, Mr. Tarbeaux opened the door.

"M'lady, Inspector Panke—"

Mr. Tarbeaux's gaze fell on the emeralds. He was very human for a butler, and it took him a fraction of a second to recover himself.

"Inspector Panke urgently desires to see your ladyship at once."

"Show him in here," said Lady Erythra grimly.

Billy did not move an eyelid. It seemed to him that Mr. Lambe's solemn eyes were watching him rather intently. Inspector Panke appeared. It was a great day in the Lambe emeralds' history. The inspector was the fifth person in whom they caused intense emotion.

"Well, have you caught the thieves?" inquired Lady Erythra, acidly.

"No-nc, my lady," stammered Inspector Panke, gazing at the necklace. "Perhaps you had better enlist the services of Mr. Spencer," said her ladyship, with a wave of her hand toward Billy. "This young man has already found the emeralds and restored them to me."

"Then," said Panke, with a searching glance at Billy, "I should like a full account, at once, of how you came by the jewels."

"Sure," said Billy genially.

Mr. Lambe set chairs for them both. All four seated themselves; Lady Erythra, with an avid determination to keep abreast of affairs, held her ear-trumpet close to Billy and the policeman.

Billy repeated his tale with fuller detail this time, and described, not without a twinge of embarrassment, his downfall at the hands of Calamity Kate. Lady Erythra's lips tightened grimly, the description did not surprise her. The inspector had his book before him and made careful notes. At the conclusion he regarded Billy pensively, and with a touch of envy.

"It's a pity you didn't hang on to them, when you'd got them in hand," said Panke. "But, of course, we know what Calamity Kate is."

"Who?" echoed Billy.

Panke described briefly the popular names of the two thieves, and what little was known about them.

"And now, Mr. Spencer, I have some questions to put to you—for the information of the police. This happened between one and two o'clock. It is now seven. What became of you in the meantime?"

Billy turned to the light and allowed Panke to inspect the wound on the side of his head, only partially concealed by his hair.

"If you'd had that," said Billy, "I guess you'd be lyin' on the grass yonder now."

"A severe cut," said the inspector, impressed.

"And you lay unconscious there till daybreak?" exclaimed Lady Erythra with intense sympathy.

"It might have been a week, for all I knew when I woke up. When I'd got my senses back, an' made up my mind what to do," said Billy calmly, "I came along here."

"Didn't it occur to you," said Panke, "that the right thing to do was to go to the police?"

"No. It occurred to me the first thing to do was to get the stuff straight back to its owner."

"And perfectly right, too!" said Lady Erythra sharply.

"How did you know," persisted Panke, "that the necklace belonged here?"

Billy turned over the necklace and pointed to the little gold-enamel pendant that bore the Lambe arms in a lozenge.

"Those three sheepskins—" he began.

"Fleeces—fleeces, argent," murmured Mr. Lambe.

"—are the same brand as those on the shields over the lodge gates here, which I noticed as I came by. And the thieves were coming from this direction when I struck them."

"What do you think of it, Billy?" she said. "Aren't I the complete Amy Snooks?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)  
Don't disturb yourself.