

# THE JOY OF LIVING

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## AMY SNOOKS

SYNOPSIS—Disliking the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea 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 Berners, 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 name 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 car, the driver of which is her aunt, Georgina and Alexander. The pair escape unrecognized. Georgina learns that Lord Scroope is coming to visit Lady Erythea 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, following 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. In a secure hiding place, a cave among the crags, Almee tells him the whole story. He urges her that she make a frank confession to her father, but on reflection both realize Almee's good name has been compromised by her two nights' stay at Ivy cottage. Assuming Almee has a plan to save her, Billy leaves her in the cave and, proceeding to Jervaux, restores the emeralds to the astounded Lady Erythea.

## CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

"Mr. Spencer, not being a policeman, uses his common sense," interposed Lady Erythea with extreme acidity. "Are you suggesting that he stole emeralds worth a fortune, for the pleasure of returning them with thanks—besides wounding himself on the head?"

Mr. Panke heaved a heavy sigh. "No, my lady, I am endeavoring to collect facts that may help in the tracing of the thieves." The inspector ran through his notes, detailing the information Billy had given him during the first part of the story. "Full name, William Spencer, on your way from Beechwell to Stanhoe railway station, intending to catch the 2:15 a. m. mail train to London, when you encountered the thieves about 1:30 a. m. Is that correct?"

"Precisely," said Billy, annealing the statements into his memory. It would not do to forget any of them. The thought of the work he was giving the Recording Angel caused him not a tremor. He was thinking only of Almee, hiding in her cave behind the bramble bush. "Do you want me to come to the station house?"

"Not necessary," said the inspector, after a moment's hesitation, "but I want to know where you can be found immediately in case anything further transpires—and your testimony will be wanted if we apprehend the thieves." He avoided Lady Erythea's eye.

"Overseas club, London, will find me. I've quarters there."

"What is your occupation?"

"Motor engineer."

"Engineer?" queried the inspector, glancing at his hands.

"Well, say motor mechanic," said Billy grinning, "and proud of it."

"Are you employed with any firm?"

"I am on my own at present."

Inspector Panke closed his notebook with a snap.

"I must return to my duties, your ladyship. I congratulate you on recovering the emeralds." He bowed gloomily to Mr. Lambe and darted at Billy a parting glance that said: "Young man, however little you desire to see me again, I shall find you when I want you. I am Inspector Panke."

The door closed behind him.

"It is a pleasure," said Lady Erythea grimly, "to reduce the self-esteem of that very fatuous person." She turned to Billy with increased interest. "You are, it seems, a motor mechanic. And out of employment. Would you care for a situation as chauffeur? I can offer you," said Lady Erythea, "four pounds a week, and all found."

Billy was submerged by two waves of emotion. The first was a strangled desire for laughter. The second, an instant determination to clutch at the offer, with its amazing possibilities and advantages that opened before him. Thought was a very fluid thing with Billy.

"Done!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Alexander Lambe coughed.

"Say, 'yes, my lady,'" he murmured.

"Yes, my lady!" announced Billy, into the ear-trumpet.

"Very good," said Lady Erythea with satisfaction. "I engage you. I must warn you," she added with sudden caution, "that I had to discharge my last chauffeur for dishonesty—an offense that in your case is obviously impossible—and also for one still more re-

volting; I found him philandering most indecorously with one of my maid-servants." She fixed Billy with her eye. "I trust you have no such propensity as that."

"I should," said Billy indignantly, "as soon think of drinking a gallon of petrol."

"Precisely," said Lady Erythea with approval. "Then I should like you to enter upon your duties today. Say this afternoon. There are quarters for you over the garage, and the uniforms of the man I discharged. You will only be required to go out once this evening. At five-thirty—" Lady Erythea checked herself. "But I forgot. You will require a day or two's rest. You have had a strenuous night, your head is injured—"

"That doesn't amount to a sketeer-bite, my lady," said Billy quickly. "My head's all right. I can be ready by this afternoon."

"Very well, if you are sure. It will be convenient. My coachman is away for the day. I believe the two motors are in order. Take the smaller one, the Panhard luggage-car, and meet the 5:30 train at Stanhoe. There will be a young woman on the train. She is coming here as parlor maid. Bring her and her boxes. You understand?"

"Sure—very good, my lady," said Billy. "What's her name?"

"The name is immaterial. She is for Jervaux. It is curious," added Lady Erythea impatiently, "how my memory fails me. I forget the woman's name. Alexander, you remember I spoke to you of this matter? The girl from Scroope, that I engaged on the recommendation of your uncle—she was in his service. The daughter of one of his keepers—Lord Scroope gave her an exemplary character, she is coming on a fortnight's trial."

"Snooks was the name you told me," said Mr. Lambe.

"To be sure. The young person's name is Snooks," said Lady Erythea to Billy. "That will preclude all possibility of mistake. I regret, Spencer, that you would not allow me to recompense you, but I have no doubt that I have acquired an excellent chauffeur. And now—you will be glad of a bath and a meal."

She rang for the butler, and gave him an order. Mr. Tarbeaux and Billy departed in each other's company.

Alexander Lambe breathed heavily. "My dear aunt," he said, "you are a law unto yourself, and I have known you do some remarkable things. But is it wise to engage as servant a man of whom you know nothing, without character or references?"

"Alexander," said his aunt, "you almost betray ineptitude. What better references could I have than the restoration of the Lambe emeralds and the refusal of a reward, when the man could have made a fortune for himself without any risk of detection?"

Mr. Lambe was dumb.

"That abominable creature Boxall," said Lady Erythea, "had unexceptionable references, and was chauffeur eighteen months to the bishop of Litchester. You know what his record was here." She turned upon Alexander. "Do you, a shepherd of men, pretend to say that you think that young man anything but absolutely honest?"

"I observed him, and I am certain he is honest," said Alexander after a pause. "But—er—his manner is very peculiar."

"We must make allowances," proclaimed Lady Erythea, "for the independence of the American. In theory I have always believed it detestable. Actually I find it not unattractive."

## CHAPTER XIV

### The New Parlor Maid.

Almee, sitting in the morning sunlight near the mouth of her burrow, heard a rustling among the bushes and at once dived back into shelter. Presently there was a soft whistle, which she answered. Mr. William Spencer parted the brambles very quietly and entered the cave.

"Billy!"

He clicked his heels together and touched his cap.

"Anything I can do for you, miss?" he said grinning. "Got a new job. Chauffeur to her ladyship. Four a week and all found."

"What?"

Billy sat down beside her and made his report. Almee heard it, at first, with the air of Desdemona listening to Othello. Then she rolled on the sand in helpless spasms of laughter.

"How absolutely gorgeous," she panted, sitting up and wiping her eyes. "You've done splendidly. I wish I'd been there to hear you bluff the fat policeman. But—what's the good of the chauffeur's job, Billy? That will hamper you."

"Not a bit! It's great. I just jumped at it. You see, I've got a sure berth now, right close here, where I want to be. I'm your aunt's man. And she's some old girl, too—she isn't taking anything from anyone. You should have heard her handing it to the policeman. I'm solid—so far. And," added Billy, gleefully, "I've two automobiles in my charge. Not bad ones either. We can't use the Sphinx. But, if we want to shift you quick an' lively, you've the call on those two cars."

"I never thought of that! You're right, Billy."

"Of course there's danger still. It wasn't any good my giving a false name. That would have been fatal in the end. But there's the trouble that they knew me as Spencer, in Stanhoe. I'm going off right now to try an' put that straight," said Billy. "I can see a light. Yes, I believe I can get away with it. That Inspector will be a nuisance, I'm afraid. But he's a fool, anyway."

Almee looked at him admiringly. "What a lot of whoppers you must have told, Billy. Did you mind?"

Billy put a twig between his white teeth and bit it in half thoughtfully.

"Where I come from, we hate a liar," he said. "But there's just one time when a man can lie, an' it's up to him to do it. Mind? I—enjoyed it."

"But I don't see how you can do it so well, if you've had no practice."

"It's wonderful how you fall into it, when there's something worth doin' for," said Billy simply. "Well, I must get busy. I've got till the evening, when I fetch a hired girl from the station. She's from down your way. Name?" he added, grinning, "of Snooks. What'd you think of that, partner?"

"What?" cried Almee. "It must be Amy Snooks—daughter of Dad's second keeper, who was killed in the war. I know her as well as I know—myself. I gave you her name when you asked me mine—it was the first I could think of. You say Aunt has engaged her?"

"Yes. On your father's recommendation."

"How beastly awkward! Directly she sees George she'll get the game's up!"

"That's rotten," said Billy seriously; "we've got enough on our hands as it is. If she wasn't a woman, I'd spill the car and put her out of action for quite awhile, so she couldn't give you away. As it is, seems to me the only thing is for me to get hold of your cousin Georgina an' show her how to keep the Snooks girl quiet. I think it can be done, if Georgina has any sense."

"Yes, that might do. I don't think we need worry much about Amy Snooks, after all. I wish I could get a word with Amy myself. She'd do any blessed thing I told her—even if it was to throw herself into a furnace. I can manage Amy. You'll just have to do your best, though. But look here, Billy," said Almee earnestly, "you haven't told me yet how you're going to pull me out of it all. It's getting a worse tangle every hour. What's the plan?"

"I'll be back here about seven this evening," said Billy seriously, "and by then I'll bring you good news—you trust me. Gee! why didn't you remind me?" he exclaimed with self-reproach, dragging a paper parcel from his pocket; "you must be starving."

"I had some chocolate from the Sphinx's pannier."

"Well, try this," Billy exposed some rashers of bacon between slices of bread, and a lukewarm sausage. "I wish it was something better. They gave me a meal at the abbey, and I pinched these for you. And here's your blue dust-cloak from Ivy cottage."

Almee started to her feet in sheer panic.

Put that on. It'll cover the tear in your dress, in case anyone came across you. I'll try an' raise a new skirt for you. An' now I've got to slide out and get to work."

He rose quickly, and was gone before she could say a word. Almee went to the cave's mouth and watched him out of sight.

"I wonder what he'll do," she said to herself. She reflected on the situation. The difficulty concerning Amy Snooks, the new parlor maid, was uppermost in her mind.

A flash came into Almee's eyes; it announced the birth of a brilliant idea. She laughed impishly, and then sighed.

"Can't be worked, I'm afraid," she murmured. "Too far away, and there isn't time. But what a pity!—"

Suddenly Almee started to her feet in sheer panic.

"Oh, great heavens, what an idiot I am! Dad! I quite forgot—"

The stress of the past ten hours had utterly driven from her mind one vital fact that now came back poignantly. Lord Scroope was coming to Jervaux at 5 p. m. Georgina had

said so. The burglary, intervening, swamped all memory of it. But, after all, Lord Scroope's arrival would be worse than the burglary.

"It absolutely tears everything!" said Almee desperately. "What am I to do? If only I'd told Billy! But even he wouldn't be able to do anything here."

She paced the floor of the cave. The bottom had dropped out of the entire scheme of things. Then her face lit up with a gleam of hope, and she stopped short, thinking swiftly.

"There might be time. It's frightfully risky. But if I don't try it I'm done for."

She buttoned up the dust-cloak with nimble fingers.

"As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," said Almee.

She left the cave, ran up to the crest of the crag-plot, and looked round cautiously. Then she picked up the skirts of the dust-cloak and scudded across the common like a hare.

The Panhard luggage-car from Jervaux wound its way through the lanes, with Mr. William Spencer at the steering-wheel, clad in a dark green uniform overcoat with brass buttons. The time was 5:15 p. m.

The Panhard was running badly. In spite of Billy's overhaul, two of the cylinders misfired; presently the car stopped with a cough and splutter. Billy, using blood-curdling language anent the profligate Mr. Boxall, late chauffeur of Jervaux abbey, got down and opened the bonnet. It took him several minutes to start the Panhard again, and when finally he arrived at Stanhoe railway station, the train from Burnt Ash was alongside the platform.

A painfully obvious policeman in plain clothes was lounging in the station approach. He did not waste a second glance on Billy; the driver of the Jervaux abbey car had no interest for him. Billy, anxious to pick up his passenger, the disastrous parlor maid, hurried onto the platform.

He sighted his quarry at once. A young woman in a cheap black tight-fitting coat was standing by the luggage-van. Baggage checks are unknown in England. A tin trunk was hurried out of the van by a blind, invisible force, and Billy, approaching the passenger, raised his peaked cap politely.

"Are you for Jervaux abbey?" he asked.

The young woman turned round. "I'm the new parlor maid," she said primly in broad Eastshire dialect. "You might carry my box for me, if that ain't too heavy."

Billy's head swam. His fingers opened, and feebly closed again. His eyes bulged.

It was Almee. Almee in a black coat over a print dress, and sensible boots. Her bronze hair was drawn straight back and plaited into a respectable knob, her eyes were preternaturally solemn.

They passed out. Billy took his place at the wheel, Almee seated herself beside him.

"I'll sit here," she said serenely, "and you can tell me about the place as we go. What's it like? They say her ladyship is something chronic."

Billy glanced at her dazedly, and let in the clutch. The transit of Stanhoe was made at something over the speed limit. When clear of the town, Billy gave the coughing Panhard a full throttle and roared along the Jervaux road. He did not look at Almee, who was staring straight in front of her. Billy switched the car down a narrow lane, covered by overarching trees, and stopped the engine. He turned to face Almee.

"Partner," he said, "what in thunder does this mean?"

Almee looked at him, and dissolved into spasms of laughter.

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

"It don't go!" said Billy, almost fiercely. "Let me in on this. What have you been doing?"

"When you left me this morning, I remembered something positively awful. Dad was coming here this afternoon—at five o'clock."

Billy whistled with dismay.

"The police business had driven it right out of my head. And I couldn't consult you. I thought the only thing was to get to Scroope Towers and try to put it right. I knew there was a train about ten at Stanhoe, and I started for the station. But I never got there."

"Thank the powers you didn't!" said Billy fervently. "All the stations are watched. You'd never have passed through alone without getting pulled by the cops."

"Well, the train wasn't necessary. A car overtook me on the road—driven by a young man. He pulled up and offered me a lift."

"Oh!" said Billy.

"He was quite a good sort. Inclined to be a bit sentimental; but it was a fast car, and he was rather new to driving. What's the matter with you?"

There was an expression on Billy's face that she had not seen there before. He was looking sour.

"Got on with the song and dance," he said shortly.

"Well, I was dropped near Scroope, and I got across to the Towers; creeping about like a Red Indian, so nobody saw me. I had a look in through the morning room window and saw Dad reading his letters. I had a mind to go in and kiss him, but, of course, that wouldn't do. He was looking pleased—I think he was reading Aunt Erythea's letter approving of me. Of course he hadn't heard about the burglary. There's no telephone at Scroope—"

"Dad won't have one."

"Then I stalked the garage, where old Grundle, our shover, had got the

head off one of the cylinders, and I heard him grumbling to the gardener about having to drive Dad to Jervaux and back the same evening. I hid in the laurels till Grundle went to his dinner, and then I attended to the car—especially the magneto. I did it artistically. You can take it from me, the old bus will never leave Scroope today. Dad's visit is a washout. He's no time to get here except by car—I know he has to catch the ten o'clock mail train from Seabridge. He'll have to take the carriage there—and start early, too."

Billy emitted a stifled noise.

"It's all to save Dad pain and worry," said Almee complacently. "One must consider one's parents. Never do to have him coming here just now."

"Great Christopher!" said Billy. "But that doesn't explain how—"

"I'm coming to that. I made a circuit through the Home wood to the cottage where Amy Snooks lives with her old grandmother. I tacked up and down in the offing till I saw grandmamma toddle away on her usual after-dinner visit to the woodcutter's wife, and I nipped indoors to have it out with my dear old Snooks. I found her packing for Jervaux, and I told her what I wanted her to do."

"Amy Snooks is what you call stolid, and I've broken her in very well—but I'm bound to say she was absolutely paralyzed this time. But she surrendered, before I'd done with her. She just came to heel. It may surprise you, Billy, but she simply adores me. Amy never refused me anything in her life."

"Having melted her into flexible condition, I borrowed one of her print dresses (she hadn't another black one) and her second-best coat, and did my hair like hers. I'm jolly good at doing hair."

"To cut it short, I cleared out and tramped across country to Pilbrook station and took the afternoon train. Amy joined it with her two tin boxes at Burnt Ash, and I got into her carriage at the next stop. I gave her all the money I had, and made her go to Seabridge with one of the boxes. She'll get herself lodgings there and have a good time till further orders—she can last a week, anyhow. I took the other box and came on here. And now, partner—what about it? Wasn't it a brain-wave?"

Billy took off his cap and made disorder of his honey-colored hair.

"You mean to tell me," he said dizzily, "that girl fell for it—just because you told her to?"

"Ah, you don't understand the feudal spirit," said Almee complacently. "There have been Snooks in the Home wood ever since there were Scroopes in Scroope Towers. They help each other. When Amy and I were kids and went birds-nesting, she was always underneath when I fell out of the tree. She has irregular features, but a heart of gold. And, by the way, of course Aunt Erythea has never seen Amy—she engaged her on Dad's recommendation."

"But she's seen you!" exclaimed Billy, "when you crashed the Sphinx into her carriage."

"Only for half a second. She's blind as a bat. She'll never know me. Isn't it great, Billy?"

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" he said, explosively. "It is! You're right. The last place on earth those fool police would ever find you or look for you, is the house where the burglary happened. It's better than the cave, anyway. You'll be right under my eye; and among your own folk in case real trouble came. But—"

"But what?"

"Why, you can't do it! You, parlormaid to Lady Erythea? It's the acid test! Partner, you could never get away with it."

Almee regarded him pityingly.

"Billy, I may not know anything about men," she said, "but you know less than nothing about women. There isn't the woman living, from six years old upwards, that isn't a born actress, when she has to be. Most of us are acting all day and every day—whether you guess it or not. I don't do that myself—that's why you and I get on. But I can! I can get away with it, Billy!"

He put on his cap with a bang.

"Then let's get on!" he gasped. "There's nothing else for it now. The boats are burned. Away for Jervaux!" He leaned over and opened the rear door of the car. "Jump down, partner, and get in behind."

"I shan't! What for?"

"Get down, I tell you," said Billy, sternly. "I've been warned about this. If I'm seen talking to parlor maids I get fired. In with you!"

Almee obeyed like a lamb.

"This has got my nerve," groaned Billy, as he let in the clutch. "Here's where we get ours."

He drove at a furious pace till, turning into the park he approached the abbey and drew up at the side entrance. The door stood open, and Mr. Tarbeaux, seeing the car, came out as Amy descended.

"Miss Snooks?" he asked patronizingly.

"Yes," said Almee shyly.

Mr. Tarbeaux stared. In spite of the screwed hair and the print skirt, he had never seen such a vision of beauty at Jervaux.

"Her ladyship wished to see you immediately you arrived. This way."

He strode before her through the corridor into the great hall, past the suit of armor with which he had collided in the gloom of the past dreadful night. Now, however, Mr. Tarbeaux was himself again. There was a gleam of appreciation in his somber eyes.

He opened the door of the wide South room, where Lady Erythea sat

erect before the fire, knitting. She did not turn her head.

"The young person, my lady," said Mr. Tarbeaux softly.

## CHAPTER XV

### Exposed.

Lady Erythea laid aside her knitting, and picking up a lozgette, inspected the new parlor maid with icy deliberation. Almee, though presenting an unmoved front, trembled inwardly. There was a faint chance that her aunt might recognize the female cyclist. Lady Erythea's lips tightened to a thin line.

"I was given to understand," she said in the voice of counsel for the prosecution, "that you were considerably less prepossessing in appearance than I find you."

"Yes, m' lady," said Almee meekly. "I'm!" said Lady Erythea.

The lozgette continued to direct itself at the parlormaid's face.

"Really, Anthony should wear stronger glasses," muttered Lady Erythea. The neatness of the girl, however, her demure air, and the hideous manner in which her hair was dressed, diluted her ladyship's disapproval a little.

"I need not examine you as to your capacity for your duties, or your character. These have been vouched for



"The Young Person, My Lady," Said Mr. Tarbeaux Softly.

by Lord Scroope. My housekeeper will instruct you in the rules of the establishment, which all my domestics are required to keep rigidly. There is, however, one warning that I must give you."

She was interrupted by the arrival of the butler with a telegram. Lady Erythea opened it; its message was not unwelcome to her.

"Car broken down. Regret impossible arrive Jervaux. No time. Must leave for Closenminster tonight."

"ANTHONY."

"There is no answer," she said to the butler. "Lord Scroope is prevented from coming. Cancel the orders I gave you regarding his arrival."

"Very good, my lady."

Almee's heart leaped with joy. But her face remained unmoved. She continued to look demurely at the carpet.

"I was about to warn you," said Lady Erythea, "that your predecessor was discharged at a moment's notice for allowing one of my menservants to make advances to her of an amatory nature."

"I don't understand, my lady," said Almee faintly.

"She permitted," said Lady Erythea grimly, "my chauffeur to kiss her."

The startled look of horror and disgust which Almee's features respectfully expressed, carried conviction even to Lady Erythea's mind.

"It is an unpleasant subject," said her ladyship, "which I should have wished to spare myself mentioning to you. It was necessary, however, to clear the ground. I hope to hear good reports of you. You may go to the servants' hall."