

THE JOY OF LIVING

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DE JUSSAC

SYNOPSIS.—Dismissing the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea Lamb, at Jervaux abbey, and her cousin, Alexander Lamb, Almee, vivacious daughter of the Very Reverend Viscount Serpion, meets a young man who 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 forces Georgina to impersonate her at Jervaux, and she goes on a holiday. Almee again meets Billy. He tells her his name is Spencer, and she gives her as Amy Spookes, 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. While Almee is secretly visiting Georgina at Jervaux, the place is burglarized, and the famous Lamb emeralds are stolen. 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 emerges from the fight with the Lamb emeralds. He meets Almee, with the police in pursuit, in a secure hiding place, a cave among the crag pits. 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. Assuring Almee he has a plan to save her, Billy leaves her in the cave and, proceeding to Jervaux, restores the emeralds to the astounded Lady Erythea. Billy tells a story that satisfies the police, refuses a reward and accepts a chauffeur's job from Lady Erythea. Almee gets the place of parlor maid at Jervaux. Alexander thinks he recognizes Almee as "Calamity Kate." Georgina divulges Almee's identity. Hearing her story, Alexander consents to keep the secret. Alexander finds himself very much in love with Georgina. Alexander's sister, Lady Diana, arrives. Another visitor is the Vicomte de Jussac, her suitor. Diana recognizes Almee and threatens to denounce her. Almee confides in De Jussac.

CHAPTER XIX—Continued.

"What does this mean?" he said sternly.

"Diana's found me out, and she's going to tell Aunt, first thing in the morning," said Almee, with the calm of despair. "And I've told Monsieur de Jussac. I simply had to tell somebody. And everybody will know tomorrow."

"Rather a delicate position, Monsieur le Cure—eh?" said Bertrand dryly, and not without satisfaction.

Alexander flushed to the ears and hung his head. He looked so ashamed and wretched that Almee felt a pang of remorse.

"For myself," he said unsteadily, "I will face the exposure and the penalty—for I have deserved it. It is you, Almee, that I should have wished to do it now, if there were any way, but I see none. You—and Georgina. That is all that matters."

"Tiens! The true ring!" cried de Jussac enthusiastically. He seized Alexander's hand and shook it with heartfelt warmth. "Never reproach yourself, mon ami. From first to last, you have acted en galant homme!"

"You've been a brick, Alexander. And you'd better go, and not hear any more—I'll keep you out of it if I can," said Almee quickly.

Alexander looked at his cousin.

"I will go, then," he said, "on condition that you return to your room immediately, Almee."

"All right, I will."

"Assuredly—she shall go at once! Till the morning then, Monsieur l'Abbe, and have no fear. The danger shall dissipate itself," said Bertrand, and almost forcibly he shepherded the bewildered Alexander out of the room. Bertrand darted back, and caught Almee by the hands.

"He is bon enfant, the parson!" he cried, "all shall yet be well. But it is impossible to require deceit from him. Leave that to me! Mademoiselle, I am a magnificent liar!" He smote himself proudly on the breast. "You shall see how my talent—"

"But—"

"Not a word! I shall consider it an honor—a privilege. It is the one situation in which prevarication becomes a virtue! Retire, then, mademoiselle, and sleep soundly. A way shall be found out of this impasse. I pledge myself to it—foi de chevalier! The morning shall bring, not disaster, but happiness!"

Almee was whirled out of the room, hardly less bewildered than Alexander. When she had gone upstairs, Monsieur de Jussac returned to the dining room. He paced the room with long strides, developing a series of plans that flashed through his brain. Some caused him to laugh aloud, others evoked a sigh.

"In this country of Puritans, schemes that elsewhere would glow like a golden mist, become impossible!" he mused regretfully.

Since the coldness of Lady Diana was the main difficulty, Bertrand's thoughts concentrated naturally upon

her, and it is to be feared that Almee's predicament faded into a secondary place. Allowances must be made for those swayed by the grand passion. Suddenly de Jussac halted among the suits of mail.

"Tiens! the armor," he said, brightening, "the same of which Diana should have told me the history, but declined. She shall come to it yet! She approves armor—she adores the days of chivalry long dead."

"Lived we in those days," cried Bertrand with rising fervor, "I would hack my way to her favor though a hundred spears barred the path." He struck the nearest breastplate with his fist. "You Sir Knight! If you



"What Does This Mean?" He Said Sternly.

did not pay swift homage to my lady," said Bertrand, grinding his teeth, "my lance should crash into your midriff! Sermon-non-non-non-non!"

He turned to inspect the pectoral of another suit, beautifully engraved and chased with gold.

"Of French workmanship, surely—never of this country. The English are a great nation, but severe—severe." He passed his hands over the breastplate. It detached quite easily from the stand. With a sudden impulse Bertrand fitted it to his broad chest, passing his arm through the things that had held it to the stand. He laughed as he caught sight of his reflection in a mirror.

"It becomes me a merveille! Name of a name! Let me envisage myself the conqueror of my Diana!"

He strapped on the greaves and cuisses over his dress trousers, donned the gorget and, lifting down the big helmet, placed it over his head, abrading his nose in the process. The suit—it was the same which had fallen during the night of the burglary—had certainly been made for a knight of great stature—it fitted de Jussac very well.

"Magnifique!" said Bertrand. "And, who knows—it may be the very suit of my ancestor! The—"

He turned slowly, aware of someone approaching. A tall, spectral figure, white and ethereal, stood in the doorway.

It was Lady Diana, in a long girdled wrap trimmed with white fur. In her hand was a rolled up paper that might have been a piece of music; it trembled visibly. Her face, as she gazed at the armored figure, was as white as her garments.

She controlled her nerves with a mighty effort. If it was a spirit, it was indeed a splendid one. To her, of all people, this manifestation of the infinite was vouchsafed.

For some moments she gazed, in a thrilled silence. Then she actually advanced a few steps, faltering.

"Speak!" she said, in a voice that quavered slightly. "Are you he? Speak to me. I am of the elect. I am a-n-n-not afraid."

De Jussac grasped the situation. He searched his mind swiftly for the most just—the speech of the Fourteenth century.

"Moult puissante dame—" he began, dropping reverently on one knee.

Diana, the moment the unmistakable voice smote upon her ear, gave a piercing shriek, and clasped her hands to her head. She swayed as if about to fall.

Bertrand rushed forward, and caught her just in time.

"B-B-Bertrand!" she gasped faintly.

The name, wrung from her by stress, was such music in the Vicomte's ears that he tore off his helmet and kissed her rapturously.

"Angel!" he cried. "Adored Diana! Say it again!" He made it somewhat difficult for her to say anything. "Say it—whisper it—Bertrand! Ah, happiest of men!"

Diana struggled.

"How dare you!" she said wildly. "How dare you—pretend to be a ghost!"

"But I did not! I thought you were pretending to be one! Let me hear the blame. I love you—I was in despair—and put on this mail that for one moment I might imagine myself approved. Dear lady of Romance, I am no ghost—I own it!"

He proved it with a kiss that was by no means ghostly.

"Oh!" said Diana faintly.

The mailed arms encircled her tightly.

"Sweetest of all earth's treasures!" exclaimed Bertrand. "You love me? You tremble—your heart beats. Say it! You love me!"

Suddenly she hid her face against his breastplate.

"I-I-I do," she whispered, hardly audible, "and—I should never have dared to let you tell me so."

"Thrice blessed accident! To my unhappy ancestor I owe my happiness! Ah, day of days! Diana, you will marry me, beloved?"

"I suppose so. I can't help it, now. Oh—Bertrand!"

"I said that armor was of no avail. But it has conquered!"

She glanced up at him shyly.

"I shall wear it for evermore!" said De Jussac rapturously. "It shall never be doffed, save at your orders. Diana—"

"But my aunt!" exclaimed Diana suddenly, her blushes changing to pallor. "If—"

"She will give us her blessing. In the morning—"

"But if she found out how it happened!" said Diana in a panic. "And the time—you do not know how terrible Aunt can be—"

"She will not know! I will put myself in order—I will propose to you again in the morning. We will announce it with all formalities." Bertrand was alarmed to find her almost collapsing; he led her to the table and raised a goblet to her lips. "A little wine, my angel! It will revive you!"

"No, no!"

"But yes! You are agitated. Just one sip!"

It was impossible to deny anything to the conquering Bertrand. Lady Diana permitted herself to imbibe a little of the wine; it restored the color to her cheeks.

"And now," said the Vicomte tenderly, "light of my soul—"

A piercing shriek from Diana jarred painfully on his nerves. Bertrand started and spun around.

In the doorway stood the unspoken parlor maid, capless, her bronze hair flowing over her shoulders. Wicked laughter convulsed her, her eyes shone with triumph.

"Bless you, my children!" said Almee. "You've made enough row about it!"

De Jussac started hastily towards her. Almee sprang back and closed the door in his face; the key turned with a click.

Lady Diana had sunk inert into a chair.

"Stop her—make her be quiet!" panted Diana trembling. "Bertrand—if my aunt—"

"Open!" hissed Bertrand, rattling the handle.

"Leave the door alone!" said Almee's voice, muffled through the panel. "You can't get out—either of you. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes! Mademoiselle—"

"Listen! Within three feet of me is a burglar alarm," said the voice, diabolically. "I'm going to start it. Before you can turn yourselves round, the whole household will be down on you—from Aunt Erythea to the pageboy. Especially Aunt. I'm going to count three. When—"

"Miserable!" gasped Bertrand. "Mademoiselle, I implore you! This is to return evil for good. How have we deserved—"

"I have no quarrel with you, Vicomte. You're all right. But I've got you both. You'll accept my terms—"

"Anything!" panted Bertrand distractedly. "Anything—"

"Stand away from the door, then. Get right back."

"Yes, yes!"

Almee applied her eye to the keyhole to insure that her orders were obeyed. She opened the door cautiously, and regarded the distressed pair with intense satisfaction.

"Let me be the first to congratulate you!" she said. "Vicomte, I don't grudge my cousin to you. You are welcome. Di!" continued Almee, fixing Diana with a glittering eye. "I don't want your explanation—you can explain the misqugerade to Aunt. But I shall hold my tongue about you—and you'll hold yours about me! I require your word of honor. For you daren't break it!"

"Yes!" gasped Diana feebly. "Don't—don't speak so loud, Almee—"

Almee looked at her, and exploded with laughter.

"Every happiness, dear people!" she said, and vanished.

"Bertrand!" panted Diana, rising unsteadily. "Did you know anything of this? Do you understand—? She is not the parlor maid—she is my cousin. I cannot explain; you must say nothing about it. Neither will she! Oh—let me go!"

He caught her in his arms before she could escape.

"My angel! In the morning, our love scene all over again. I have your promise!"

"Yes!" she said, wildly. "Oh, let me go!"

Lady Diana fled from the room and scuttled upstairs like an agitated rabbit. The Vicomte, following, blew her an impassioned kiss as she passed out of sight. Returning to the hall, he tore off his armor in a delirium of joy, and replaced it on the stand.

CHAPTER XX

Two Pair.

Lady Erythea beamed. It seems an impossible term to apply to that austere countenance. But it was so. When Georgina entered the drawing room at noon—after nearly twenty-four hours exile in her bedroom—she found her alleged aunt as near to beaming as her features permitted.

"I am glad you have recovered from your temporary indisposition, my dear Almee," she said amiably. "During your absence an event has occurred, both romantic and desirable. How seldom the two things go together!"

"Indeed! What is it?"

"Your cousin Diana and Monsieur de Jussac are about to contract an alliance. They became engaged this morning."

"How perfectly delightful!" breathed Georgina, after a pause of dramatic astonishment. "I am sure you are pleased—Aunt?"

"Indeed I am. I have not concealed from you my desire that this very thing should come about. It is the more satisfactory, because only last night I quite despaired of it, and came to regard it as hopeless. But Monsieur de Jussac's suit has prospered amazingly; it appears that Diana, as I suspected, has for some time since been far from indifferent to him. I am delighted that I gave them the opportunity. Only two hours after breakfast the Vicomte, with his customary impetuosity, brought Diana to me and begged for my consent. I need not say that I gave it gladly."

Georgina escaped into the garden.

It is possible that Almee was right when she said that all women are natural actresses in time of need. Georgina's assumption of astonishment at hearing Lady Erythea's news was wholly assumed, and not assumed badly. The announcement was, in fact, no news at all to her.

Having an excellent sense of direction, Georgina soon discovered Mr. Alexander Lamb walking on the sheltered paths of the old yew garden beyond the chapel-at-ease. He looked quite as relieved as Georgina. And his eyes lit up wonderfully when he saw her. He hurried forward to meet her.

"Mr. Lamb—!" exclaimed Georgina. Mr. Lamb halted, and looked deeply pained.

"Have I offended you?" he said almost wistfully. "I thought you gave me permission—"

"Alexander," murmured Georgina, flushing very attractively.

"That is better," said Mr. Lamb, regarding her with grateful eyes. "Have you seen your cousin?"

"Yes," said Georgina pathetically. "Almee came into my room very early



Wicked Laughter Convulsed Her.

this morning; she told me the dreadful thing that had happened—that your sister had discovered her and was going to tell Lady Erythea—and then, when I was nearly frantic with terror, Almee explained that it was all right, and Lady Diana wouldn't say a word about it. Oh, what a relief it was!"

"She told you that?" cried Alexander, amazed. "How could she have known? It was not till an hour or two ago Diana informed me that De Jussac had just proposed to her, and she was so happy—she felt she could not get Almee into trouble!"

Georgina stammered in confusion. She had nearly made a serious blunder—Almee had told no one but herself about the encounter with the ghost.

"She must have felt confident, I suppose, of Diana's g-g-goodness of heart!" faltered Georgina. "Are you pleased about the engagement? I do hope you are. I was afraid—"

Alexander paused.

"I am not displeased," he said. "De Jussac is a good fellow. I did not always think so. But—I have come to see that he is a very good fellow indeed. The love of a good woman is just what he needs."

"I hope they will be very happy," said Georgina softly.

Alexander was looking at her with an expression that made her heart beat.

"Isn't it splendid," she said quickly, "that Almee won't be suddenly betrayed? She'll have a chance now. She—"

"Almee!" Mr. Lamb, almost exploded. "It is nothing but Almee! It is you I am concerned about, Georgina—not Almee! It wrings my heart, the position you are placed in—through no fault whatever of your own. It cannot go on—it is bound to be known very soon now. And when that happens—"

"Yes," said Georgina, forlornly. "It will be dreadful. I shall have to face it. They won't defend me."

Alexander took her hands quickly in his.

"Give me the right!" he said.

Georgina caught her breath. She looked up at him. There was a wonderful tenderness in his eyes; his face was the face of a man inspired.

"Georgina, you have known me only a little while. But I love you. You are the only woman in the world for me. I love you! Do you think you could care for me—just a little?"

Georgina tried to free herself. "It is impossible!" she said, turning her face away.

"Why? Do you not care for me?"

"Oh—it is cruel!" gasped Georgina, brokenly. "I am not Almee. I am here under false pretenses. How can you? I am—"

"You are the woman I love!"

"Oh, let me go!" she said wildly. "You are not yourself—you have no right to say this to me," sobbed Georgina, "you believe that a priest in orders may not marry!"

"I never held any such belief! Of my order, there are some who hold the view. I am not with them. I am celibate, only because I have never loved till now. Look at me, Georgina!" he said almost sternly. "Do you believe that any human passion would cause me to do what was against my faith?"

Georgina looked at him through her tears.

"No," she whispered. "I know that you would not."

"Come to me, then, Georgina," he said, gently. "What good there is for us to do in the world, let us do it hand in hand. I will make the years wonderful for you. Just tell me that you care."

He took her masterfully in his arms.

"I do love you!" sobbed Georgina.

"I love you."

Alexander raised her face and kissed her.

"I never hoped to hear you say it," he said. She felt his heart beating strongly. "You love me!"

"I have loved you," said Georgina, her voice stifled in his coat, "from the first day I saw you."

There was a long pause.

"It is greater happiness than I dreamed of," said Alexander, humbly. "I have not deserved it."

Suddenly he released her and held her at arm's length.

"One thing neither of us shall endure. No subterfuge—no secrecy about this. It is too sacred. We shall make it known at once. It is you I am thinking of. Our betrothal must be announced," said Alexander decisively, "and then—"

Before there was any time for reflection, Fate was upon him in the shape of Lady Erythea, walking majestically along the path with her little Highland terrier at her heels. Alexander halted.

"Aunt!" he exclaimed. "Georgina—I—"

He stopped short.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" said Lady Erythea, raising her ear-trumpet.

For once Alexander was at a loss. He had turned very pale. Georgina came nobly to his rescue.

"Alexander," she said faintly, yet articulately, "has asked me to be his wife. And, with desperate confusion, she added—'may I?'"

The ear-trumpet clattered on the gravel. Lady Erythea gathered Georgina into a triumphant embrace.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, kissing Georgina warmly on both cheeks, "I am delighted!" Lady Erythea released her and kissed Alexander. "You have made me very, very happy. The match is in every way ideal. Alexander, you will have just such a wife as I should have chosen for you—and I never thought you would have the sense to choose one at all. My dear Almee, your excellent father, I am sure, will be as pleased about this as I am."

Georgina felt her knees giving way. She stooped and recovered the ear-trumpet.

"Would you mind not telling anybody for just a day or two?" she said desperately. "We have told you, but we—I—feel—"

Lady Erythea smiled.

"Foolish, romantic child!" she said, patting Georgina's cheek. "Well, well—we shall see."

She turned and disappeared towards the house. The betrothed couple looked at each other. Alexander squared his big shoulders.

"What on earth will happen now?" said Georgina faintly.

Alexander's reply was practical. He lifted her suddenly off her feet and kissed her.

"I don't care what happens!" an-

nounced Alexander. And he kissed her again.

CHAPTER XXI

A New Partnership.

"It rains all the time in this country," said Billy, discontentedly, "except when you want it to."

He addressed the remark to the dry and unresponsive soil. Billy's attitude at the moment was unusual. He was close to the footpath along which he had wheeled the Sphinx, after the encounter with the motorcycle thieves on the night of the burglary.

That event was now many days old, yet no rain had fallen in the meantime and here and there the track of the Sphinx's tires was faintly visible in the dried mud—to anyone who had unusually good eyes.

"If they've got a Scotland Yard sharp down here now," reflected Billy, "and he goes over the ground, it's just possible he might see what that fool inspector at Stanhoe never tumbled to. That there were two motorcycles, and not one, at the place where Jack the Climber got ditched. If they were to track up the Sphinx now it would be mighty awkward. They'd soon connect her with Almee and me. But I guess it's an outside chance."

The slight impression of a tire mark, a little to the right of the path, caught his eye. It had passed over a soft mole hill, and was clearly defined. Billy paused, and inspected it with a new interest. The fashion of his countenance changed; he went down on hands and knees, and looked very closely indeed.

"Snakes!" exclaimed Billy. He rose, and quartered the ground carefully for a considerable distance in either direction. The ground was too hard to show any continuous track. But mole hills were plentiful, and some way farther on he found another one, also showing the print of a tire.

"It's the same. And not the Sphinx's tire, by a mile!" said Billy, knitting his brow. "This one was steel-studded."

With growing perplexity he made a close examination of the soil, and pres-



He Kissed Her Again.

ently discovered other traces. There were a few footprints and, faint though they were, they bore some very marked characteristics.

Billy stood up straight and gave a liquid whistle. The furrows in his brow deepened. He carried his investigations still farther afield, but toward the healthy common the soil was light, wind-blown sand that shifted with every fresh breeze. There were no tracks left. The seeker was at a loss.

Billy stopped and reflected rapidly.

"It came this way, whatever it was," he said. "But why on earth did it—and how? Let's start from the beginning."

He struck across country and, breaking through a hedge, came out into the blind lane where Jack the Climber's machine had crashed on the fateful night; the spot where he had recovered the emeralds, and made acquaintance with Calamity Kate's resourcefulness.

The muddy lane still showed slight traces, very much mixed up and trampled, of the place where the thieves' machine had fallen; the ruts were now dried and hard. Billy also recognized what were evidently the hoof marks of the Stanhoe police.

"A herd of steers wouldn't have made more mess," said Billy. "And Panke found nothing after all, or he'd have— Well, I can't blow much, either. I've been here twice since, but never got wise to 'em till now."

He turned back down the lane toward the highway, his eyes noting the smallest details of the ground.

"Here's my track; pretty near washed out. And here's the other's. That cycle was a big Indian, by what little I saw of it. And likely it was half cripped when it got away. And here it got on the high road, and headed straight on past Jervaux again. That's mighty queer. I always reckoned they'd have gone the other way. Something must have turned them."

"I can't let you go!" said Billy, wildly. "You're the darling of the world!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Obedience is the price of spiritual knowledge.