

THE JOY OF LIVING

By SIDNEY GOWING

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Illustrations by ELLSWORTH YOUNG

DE JUSSAC

SYNOPSIS.—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, 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, Aimee sets out for Jervaulx. She forces Georgina to impersonate her at Jervaulx, and she goes on a holiday. Aimee again meets Billy. He tells her his name is Spencer, and she gives him names 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. While Aimee is secretly visiting Georgina at Jervaulx, the place is burglarized, and the famous Lambe emeralds are stolen. Aimee escapes. Police decide the thieves are "Jack the Climber" and "Calamity Kate," who travel on a motorcycle. Billy, who has shadowed Aimee to Jervaulx, follows the thieves. He is knocked out, but emerges from the fight with the Lambe emeralds. He meets Aimee, with the police in pursuit. In a secure hiding place, a cave among the crag pits, Aimee tells him the whole story. He urges her that she make a frank confession to her father, but on reflection both realize Aimee's good name has been compromised. Assuring Aimee he has a plan to save her, Billy leaves her in the cave and, proceeding to Jervaulx, restores the emeralds to the astounded Lady Erythea. Billy tells a story that satisfies the police, receives a reward and accepts a chauffeur's job from Lady Erythea. Aimee gets the place of parlor maid at Jervaulx. Alexander thinks he recognizes Aimee as "Calamity Kate." Georgina divulges Aimee'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 Aimee and threatens to denounce her. Aimee 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 Aimee, 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 Aimee 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, Aimee, that I should have wished to save. I would sacrifice myself 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 braggart, Alexander. And you'd better go, and not hear any more—I'll keep you out of it if I can," said Aimee quickly.

Alexander looked at his cousin.

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

"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 Aimee 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—fol de chevalier! The morning shall bring, not disaster, but happiness!"

Aimee 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 Aimee'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

"But I did not! I thought you were pretending to be one! Let me bear 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."

"Thrill 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—"

"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 Aimee 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.

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 thongs 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 n-n-a-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-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, happest of men!"

Diana struggled.

"How dare you!" she said wildly.

"How dare you—pretend to be a ghost!"

"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—fol de chevalier! The morning shall bring, not disaster, but happiness!"

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