

# The Joy of Living

By Sidney Gowing

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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**"CLOSE CALL, PARTNER!"**

**SYNOPSIS.**—Disliking the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea Lambe, at Jervaulx abbey, and her cousin, Alexander Lambe, and her 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 Jervaulx. She decides that Georgina shall impersonate her at Jervaulx, 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 hers 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 Erythea and is in hopeless bewilderment. While Almee is secretly visiting Georgina at Jervaulx, the place is burglarized. Almee escapes.

**CHAPTER VIII—Continued.**

"But when I reached the open there was no one to be seen," pursued the butler, whose throat ached with the effort to make his mistress hear; "there was, however, a dim light, a mere glow, in one of the windows; I shouted, asking whose it was—"

"Which window?" asked Mr. Lambe sharply.

"I am unable to say for certain—either her ladyship's or Miss Scroope's, which is next to it. Perhaps, if we went out—"

Lady Erythea immediately led the way through the front entrance.

"There is a light full on in one of the rooms now!" said Alexander.

"It is Almee's room," said Lady Erythea. Like a thundercloud she swept upstairs and beat upon the door of her niece.

"Almee! Open the door. Why is your light on?"

"I—I'm so frightened, aunt!" cried a trembling voice. "I dare not be in the dark—I dare not."

"I cannot hear you!" said Lady Erythea.

"Have they caught the thieves?" screamed the voice tragically.

"Caught them?" snorted Lady Erythea, shaking the doorhandle. "Is it

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"Good!" he said under his breath, and turned upon Mr. Lambe so sharply that that gentleman jumped. "Your telephone, sir—where is it?"

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"This way," said Mr. Lambe, and led him to the call-room. Inspector Panke remained at the instrument a considerable time. He emerged triumphant.

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"The woman, if anything, is more dangerous than the man. All that's known of them is that they're probably foreigners—some say Americans—and that they use a motorcycle when they're on the job."

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**CHAPTER X**

**Action and More.**

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Almee had not the faintest suspicion that anybody at Ivy cottage knew she had made an unconventional exit by the window the night before. Billy, however, was perfectly well aware of the fact. Early that same morning, before setting off for Syderford, he had observed the footprints beneath her window, which, to a keen eye, told plainly that Almee had dropped from the trellis, and later on had regained her room by the same path.

Clearly the partner had made a midnight excursion for a very definite object; people do not roam the countryside in the small hours for nothing.

The incident of the carriage on the Stanhoe road puzzled Billy; he had mentioned the carriage casually to Mrs. Sunning—saying nothing about the collision—and learned that it could belong to none other than Lady Erythea of Jervaulx abbey. He was told a good deal about that establishment. It was easier to start Mrs. Sunning talking than to stop her.

Obviously, Amy had something to fear from Jervaulx; something that bound her to secrecy, and led her to run risks. It annoyed Billy that she should have anything to fear whatever.

"Sometimes," said Billy to himself, as the lodge gates of Jervaulx came in sight, "a broncho filly with the spring blood in her will get down! It's the same with her. If she doesn't want me, why she doesn't. But if she does, I'm going to be right there."

He dismounted some little distance short of the park entrance. The dark pile of the abbey was visible, a quarter of a mile across the grasslands.

Billy paused and reflected. The journey could be nothing more than a scouting expedition. He wished very much that he had been closer on Almee's tracks.

Just then he observed a light flash out in one of the abbey windows. Faint, tintinnabulatory sounds were borne to him upon the night breeze—the clanging of a bell.

He watched the house with alert and thoughtful eyes. In a few moments two dim figures became visible, moving swiftly. An imaginative on-looker might have thought them to be goblins, gamboling across the sward. But they kept an uncommonly straight line, crossing the park and heading for a point a few hundred yards to Billy's right. Two people—running swiftly.

Billy followed them with his eyes. The foremost was long-limbed, scudding along with giant strides. The other, close behind, moved no less swiftly, but it was a figure of vague outlines, apparently wearing a cloak or dust-coat. They vanished from sight against the park fence where the lane turned.

"If that ain't a hold-up," said Billy, starting away from the fence, "there never was one yet!"

He heard the cough and splutter of a starting motorcycle under tall trees far up the lane. For one moment he listened, then made a dash for the Sphinx.

"A get-away!" said Billy. "My job!"

He threw his leg over the Sphinx and whirred off round the corner. He lifted his chin and gave a joyous laugh, like the bay of a hound. The lust of the hunter was in his blood.

The rider ahead, already aware that he was being chased, let out his machine at breakneck speed. The ray from Billy's lamp showed him a man crouching low between the handle-bars, his arms spread like the wings of a bat. On the pillion behind crouched a small, muffled figure.

"Give up!" shouted Billy, as he overtook them. "You can't make it. I've got you!"

A hand stretched out from the figure on the pillion, and emitted a barking flash of fire. It dazzled Billy for the moment. Something zipped through his hair; automatically his left hand tightened on the valve-lifter and the Sphinx slowed, allowing the other cycle to shoot ahead.

Billy made a lurid remark, and at once increased speed again to close with the fugitives. Right ahead the lane forked on to the main road, and thither the driver of the other cycle was obviously heading. But the lights of a car were in sight, approaching rapidly on the road. The rider of the cycle had evidently no ambition to meet it; at the last moment he swerved left and continued along the narrow lane.

Billy laughed aloud. "The guy's cornered himself!" he thought. "He's taken the blind alley. Me for him!"

The lane was very rutty and uneven. The cycle ahead had vanished round a bend; Billy, shutting off his engine, swung round it immediately afterward. As he did so he heard a crash. The driver of the other cycle, realizing too late that he was in a cul-de-sac, had swerved, braked violently, and came thoroughly to grief.

Billy sprang from the Sphinx, letting her fall on her side with the headlight still glowing. The other cycle lay prostrate; a small heap was huddled beside it on the grass.

The taller man, the driver, was just staggering to his feet when Billy ran at him. The cyclist whipped out a repeating pistol.