

THE JOY of LIVING

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JACK THE CLIMBER

SYNOPSIS.—Distilling the prospect of a month's visit to her austere aunt, Lady Erythea Lambe, at Jervaulx abbey, and her cousin, Alexander Lambe, Almee, 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 Georgia Berners, her cousin, Almee sets out for Jervaulx. She forces Georgia to impersonate her at Jervaulx, and she goes on a holiday. 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 famous of Lambe emeralds. She accepts. 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 Georgia at Jervaulx, the place is burglarized, and the famous of Lambe 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 Jervaulx, follows the thieves. He is knocked out, but awakes from the fight with the Lambe 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 to make a frank confession to her father, but Almee refuses both a reward and the police's name has been compromised. Assuring Almee 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, refuses a reward and accepts a chauffeur's job from Lady Erythea. Almee gets the place of parlor maid at Jervaulx. Alexander thinks he recognizes Almee as "Calamity Kate." Georgia divulges Almee's identity. Hearing her story, Alexander consents to keep the secret. Alexander finds himself very much in love with Georgia. 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. De Jussac is accepted by Diana and Almee makes her promise to keep silence. Alexander is accepted by Georgia. Lady Erythea, still in the dark, is delighted.

CHAPTER XXI—Continued.

He passed along the wider lane in the direction of Jervaulx, his eyes scanning the ground and the ditch. A little distance short of the gate through which Billy had wheeled the Sphinx when dodging the police, he stooped quickly and picked up a scrap of metal. It was the broken end of an exhaust silencer.

"I was right!" ejaculated Billy. "Here they crashed again—or the engine gave out for good. And they came the very way I did myself. And one of the two was lame—dead lame. One sure thing—they couldn't have got far that night. And if they weren't able to ride the thing, what did they do with it?"

He hurried to the far end of the field, where the last of the tracks had faded. He hesitated, and glanced towards the distant crag-pits.

"What should I have done myself—if I hadn't known the ground?" he thought. "I'll try here first."

Less than a hundred yards to the right was a clump of brushwood, growing alone, a little oasis on the bare field.

The bushes masked a narrow clay pit, twenty feet deep, that had been delved in times past to bring up the heavy marl subsoil and spread it over the sandy field. It was now completely cloaked with brambles. Billy pulled them apart, and saw something gleaming dimly at the bottom of the pit.

It was the buckled frame of a big twin-Indian motorcycle.

With a whoop of triumph Billy clambered down the steep side of the pit and disappeared through the brambles. He remained below some time.

When at last he emerged and stood on the brink, Billy's face was rather pale, and his eyes troubled.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" he said. "Who'd have expected this? Now—if I can pick up the other track, I'll have the game in my hands!"

He hurried in the direction of the distant crag-pits, then suddenly pulled up short and glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Almee!" he exclaimed.

He had an appointment with Almee at five, and an urgent one. It was already past the hour. Billy set off at a run, and in ten minutes reached the rendezvous. Almee was there already, in a rough serge walking-cloak and a Snooks hat trimmed with calico violets. In spite of the costume she looked vividly lovely.

"Mr. Chauffeur," said Almee, severely. "I don't know if you think I want to waste my afternoon off like this. You're late."

"I'm sorry," panted Billy. "Came as quick as I could."

"What are you looking excited about?" she said, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Oh—just seeing you," blurted Billy. "That isn't true. I've never seen you look excited before. You've found out something. What is it?"

Billy paused.

"It's true. I have found out something," he said quietly, "but there's more to do, and I haven't quite all the cards in my hands. It's the most amazing stunt yet. I'll tell you about it the moment I've got it set."

Almee looked at him wistfully.

"I don't think you ought to have any

secrets from your partner," she said. "I always tell you everything."

"Give me till tonight," pleaded Billy. "I hate to talk about it now. It's ugly. By tonight we shall have either won or lost—but we'll win! Will you trust me?"

Almee seated herself on the turf beneath the sweetbriars.

"All right then," she said happily. "Let's forget our troubles for a bit. Sit down—you look so tall, towering up there, that I can hardly see you—and I'll tell my news. It's much more interesting than yours. Do you know that Alexander has got himself engaged to my dear fat Georgie, and they're idyllically happy?"

"Has he?" cried Billy, dropping beside her. "Good for him! She's a real trump of a girl, that. And the parson's as white as they make them—he's a fine fellow."

"Yes, Georgie will exactly suit him. I shouldn't have a bit."

"You!" exclaimed Billy.

"Exactly. Aunt Erythea's idea is that Alexander's marrying me. You're not very bright today, Billy. They'll have a funny tangle to straighten out, when the crash comes."

"Gee! They will. We'll have to help them somehow."

"Of course we shall. But I wonder how we'll do it. And that's not all—the Vicomte has suddenly become betrothed, as he calls it, to Alexander's sister—Cold Lambe."

"She'll tone him down," said Billy.

"Not a bit. He'll tone her up," replied Almee confidently, "and a jolly good thing, too. So there they all are."



Billy Stared Before Him Gloomily.

I oughtn't to have mentioned it to you, Billy—I know how it depresses you. It's horrible—all this sentiment."

Billy stared before him gloomily, and was silent.

"Isn't it!" insisted Almee.

"Sickenin'!" said Billy, bitterly.

Almee glanced at him and, looking away, stirred the grass with the point of his shoe. There was a long pause.

"What was it you were saying about things?" said Almee.

"I told you," replied Billy, "that before tomorrow it will either be a complete crash—or all clear."

Almee nodded.

"I see. That means, in the first case, that I'll be exploded—broken—done for."

"No!" said Billy, sharply.

"It does, though. But in the second, if things go better—I shall just be back at Scroope, in a sort of mild disgrace—stood in the corner. That's nothing much. I'm used to it. And there you are! Well, the curtain's soon going to ring down. Our partnership—"

Billy turned to her quickly.

"Is finished," continued Almee quietly, looking out across the park. "I shan't be able to ride the Sphinx for you, Billy. I'm sorry about that. It would have been fun."

Billy caught his breath.

"You mean," he said slowly, "that I shan't see you again?"

"I mean that. How can you? Our little holiday is over, Billy."

His fingers closed on the turf on either side of him, and dug deep.

"I understand. It's up to me. Tomorrow—we don't even know each other."

He let go the turf, and caught her hands.

"Almee!"

"Billy!"

Before either of them knew how it happened, he had her in his arms.

"I can't let you go!" said Billy wildly. "You're the darling of the world. The loveliest, brightest thing that ever breathed. Almee—do you think—you could try and love me?"

"Love you?" said Almee, trembling. "Who could help loving you, Billy!"

He held her tight and kissed her.

"I was so frightened—" said Almee, in a stifled voice.

"Frightened—" He held her tighter.

"That you'd be frightened—" "Me!"

"—of being sentimental," panted Almee.

Billy felt stunned.

"If you knew what I've been through," he said a little hoarsely, "this past week—trying not to let you see it!"

He kissed her again—more than once. Then he sat back, his head in a whirl. There was the longest pause yet; a silence that seemed interminable.

They were recalled to earth by a staccato noise.

"Yap! Yap! Yap! Yap! 'Yipe-yipe!"

Almee and Billy started violently. A small white Highland terrier, with its four legs braced, was barking at them excitedly, but not wholly with disapproval.

Almee felt stricken as though by a sudden paralysis. Behind the terrier stood Lady Erythea, erect and rigid. The glare in her eyes was the glare of a destroying Gorgon.

CHAPTER XXII

Not Guilty.

The guilty pair arose to their feet. Almee, from rosy red, had turned extremely pale. There was every excuse for it. Lady Erythea's expression was enough to unnerve the stoutest heart.

"And this," in a voice like the clashing of a motor's gear-box, "in the face of my express warning! You are discharged." She took a step towards Almee. "And as for you—"

Billy interposed his large figure between them.

"Madam," he said, "if you have any comments to make, please make them to me. Or, better still—do not make them at all."

His voice was quiet and respectful. But his chin was lifted remarkably high, and his lips compressed dangerously.

Lady Erythea struggled for breath. "Are you presuming," she said, in a strangled voice, "to dictate to me!"

Mr. William Spencer bowed.

"I hope—my lady—that it will not be necessary. What I do presume is to defend Miss—Snooks—against any reproaches whatever. This is her afternoon off."

Almee looked at them both—especially at Lady Erythea. And for once the "sand," on which she had so often been complimented, deserted her. Almee turned suddenly and fled.

The terrier, under the impression that it was all an extremely interesting game got up for his amusement, pursued her out of sight round the bushes, giving tongue excitedly.

Billy kept his eyes fixed on the intruder.

"If you require an explanation, Lady Erythea," he said quietly, "I guess I can give you one very briefly. I have just asked Miss Snooks to marry me."

Lady Erythea was mentally staggered. "You have asked her—to marry you?" she said, staring at Billy.

"And she has done me the great honor to consent."

Billy's grim expression relaxed into a very charming smile.

"I feel sure your ladyship will not throw any obstacles in the way of this humble romance," he said gently. "We shall be very happy to have our employer's approval."

His employer gazed at him dumbly. The announcement came as a shock. And it was difficult even for Lady Erythea to resist Billy's smile. As well attempt to resist a sunbeam. She melted imperceptibly. Her faculties were benumbed. Billy, despite the smile, looked so extraordinarily dignified that Lady Erythea almost felt an impulse to apologize to her chauffeur.

She made an effort to recover her austerity.

"You have asked this girl to marry you—after an acquaintance of four days?" she said acidly. "Is that an American custom?"

Billy's smile intensified.

"I haven't much experience, my lady," he said, "but I think it's a British custom, too—sometimes."

With two such recent examples at hand, her ladyship felt unable to contradict him. She looked at him steadily, wondering why she felt no resentment. There was something so remarkably disarming about Billy.

"What you tell me, Spencer," she said at last, "places a new aspect on the case. It is, I suppose, within your discretion to engage yourself to a young woman if you wish to do so. The situation in which I found you led me to suspect mere irresponsible philandering—a thing most stringently forbidden within the precincts of Jervaulx. Admitting the seriousness of your intentions," she continued with returning indignation, "I am still unable to consider your behavior decorous."

"I was very careful to choose a place just outside the park boundary, my lady," said Billy gravely, "and I was obliged to make use of the small amount of free time at my disposal."

Lady Erythea drew a long breath.

"I am making unprecedented allowances for you, Spencer," she said, "since I cannot forget how far I am indebted to you for the recovery of my emeralds. If I was under a misapprehension as to your conduct just now, it was natural. I will say no more. But I gather from this event that you will be leaving my service in any case, so I will merely give you a week's notice—if you are willing to stay so long."

"Yes, I guess I shall be quitting rather soon," said Billy, "but I'll be very glad to serve your ladyship till the meantime, and I hope I'll give satisfaction. But, may I take it that you

won't put it across—that you will not say anything to—Amy?"

"I have nothing more to say in the matter whatever," replied her ladyship abruptly. "But you must understand that the conduct of both of you will have to be rigidly circumspect and correct."

Billy twinkled.

"We shall be careful to give your ladyship no grounds for complaint," he said.

Lady Erythea had a vague impression that Billy was laughing at her. It was stranger still that she did not seem to feel any resentment.

"You may go!" she said, with a gesture of dismissal.

Billy saluted and walked away. She watched his tall figure till it had receded some little distance, and then recalled him.

"Spencer!"

Billy returned. Lady Erythea inspected him through her lorgnette.

"Are you sure that this is a wise thing you are doing?" she said slowly. "You seem to me a somewhat superior young man. I think you could do much better for yourself."

Billy twinkled yet more brightly.

"I should hate to disagree with your ladyship," he said, "but I am quite sure I couldn't."

Lady Erythea turned and walked away with a dazed air.

Billy passed through the gate into the lane, and made for the abbey at his best speed. He hoped that Almee might be waiting for him somewhere within call, but there was no sign of her. Thinking it likely she would be in the neighborhood of the garage, he hurried in that direction. He was within sight from the park boundary, when Monsieur de Jussac, approaching the fence from the abbey, saw him and called him by name.

Billy was too far away to hear. The Vicomte whistled, without result. He saw Billy disappear in the direction of the crag-pits. De Jussac hesitated, uncertain whether to follow.

"Our amazing chauffeur appears to be in a hurry," murmured Bertrand. He took out a cigarette, and smoked it reflectively. Bertrand was looking a little puzzled and anxious. Finally he wandered slowly back towards the abbey.

As he neared the main entrance the quack of a motor horn was heard, and an automobile drove up rapidly. It contained the stout Inspector Panke from Stanhoe. Beside him sat a slim and active-looking man in a gray tweed overcoat.

De Jussac, raising his eyebrows, drew near unobtrusively. The man in tweeds got out and stepped briskly up to Mr. Tarbeaux, who was standing on the steps.

"You have a chauffeur here," said the man in tweeds quietly, "who calls himself William Spencer."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Tarbeaux.

Bertrand de Jussac moved away, with the air of one retreating from a situation with which he had no concern. He lit a cigarette as he went, but once on the far side of the rhododendrons, Monsieur de Jussac began to move with uncommon swiftness.

"Is he on the premises at the moment?" said the visitor.

"I do not know, sir," replied Mr. Tarbeaux with cold reserve, eyeing the ladyship. "If you wish to see her police car—"

"I do. Inform her at once, if you please, that the police are here."

Mr. Tarbeaux went indoors, leaving the visitor on the step. It was some little time before Lady Erythea herself came to the entrance, grim and forbidding, ear-trumpet in hand.

"I am Detective-Inspector Arkwright from Scotland Yard," said the visitor. "I wish to see your chauffeur, my lady—William Spencer."

"For what purpose?" said her ladyship.



Lady Erythea Inspected Him.

ship, examining him icily through her lorgnette.

"That will transpire as soon as I have seen him," said Arkwright a little sharply.

A face peered down cautiously from a second-floor window. It was the face of Almee, very white and scared. She drew back quickly behind the window curtains, one hand clutching and kneading them tightly as she listened.

"Does this mean," said her ladyship with distinct hostility, "that you propose to arrest my chauffeur? If not, what do you mean? He is the man who restored the emeralds to me, when the police failed to achieve any-

thing whatever, and I have complete confidence in him. If that really is your intention, it is my opinion you are about to make fools of yourselves."

Inspector Arkwright looked both surprised and irritated.

"I am here with full authority, my lady," he said abruptly, "and my task is to clear this matter up. Out of consideration for you, I have come here quite openly, and what my intentions are I must at the moment keep to myself."

"It is Spencer's afternoon off, I believe," said Lady Erythea coldly. "I do not think he is on the premises."

The inspector was plainly taken aback by his reception. His lips tightened to a thin line. Just then a policeman on a bicycle came riding rapidly along the drive. It was Constable Polson.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, dismounting and saluting the inspector, "have you found the man you are looking for here?"

"Why?" said Arkwright abruptly.

"Well, sir, I know him by sight, of course," said Polson in a lower voice—"the chauffeur, I mean—and as I came off the Stanhoe road awhile ago, I saw somebody like him crossing the forty-acre field and going towards the crag-pits. I thought I'd better hurry on and tell you. I'm sure it was he."

"Excellent! You are a man that keeps his eyes open," exclaimed Inspector Arkwright. "Come, Panke—leave the car here. Polson, show us the way."

The three of them departed together hurriedly in the direction of the park boundary.

Lady Erythea stared after them with mingled anger and anxiety. She waited for some time on the steps, pondering, and then went slowly indoors. Her eyes were troubled.

The three police, crossing the park, left it by a wicket gate near the sweet-briar clump. After a short consultation with Polson, Inspector Arkwright gave an order. The three men spreading out in a wide semi-circle, stalked the crag-pits by way of the lower window.

CHAPTER XXIII

Jack the Climber.

Mr. William Spencer, after arriving in the fallow-field where stood the clump of bushes that hid the broken Indian motorcycle, made a rapid survey of the situation. He resumed his task of quartering the ground for tracks.

This, being unfruitful, occupied but a little time. He gave it up and went forward again, dipping down into the crag-pits beyond.

Billy had formed upon the factors already in his possession a theory which appealed to him strongly. He hoped to prove it. But the hope was very slender.

"If I'd only got wise to this two days ago," he said gloomily, "I might have done something. But there's no saying how old the tracks are. And there's so little time."

He looked about him thoughtfully. The area of the crag-pits covered some twenty acres; a wide bottom of red sand studded here and there with tangled bushes. The place was shut in by low red bluffs of coralline crag, with a few gaps in them through which winding paths sloped up to the higher ground.

"The soil tells me nothing," said Billy to himself; "too loose and wind-blown to hold a trail more than two days. But there's five—maybe six caves, most of them too plain and easy—anybody can see 'em. Still, I'll go over them. My own first. I guess there's nobody could have found that."

He wound his way through the bushes to the screen of brambles that masked the cave where Almee had taken refuge on the night of the burglary, and after scanning the ground near its approaches, pushed the briars aside and entered cautiously. The cave was empty—save for that super-motorcycle, the Flying Sphinx, which stood waiting in patient dumbness at the far end, weeping slow tears of oil into a little pool beneath the silencer.

Billy laid a hand upon his Arab steed, and sighed. Then his face brightened amazingly.

"Your time'll come again—and mighty soon!" he said with affection. He turned, and left the cave. It was holy ground to him now; for one night it had been Almee's refuge.

He passed farther along the pits, inspecting a second and much more obvious cave on his way. He was just about to emerge from it when something caught Billy's eye, on the far side of the cave's mouth, and flattened himself against the wall, watching.

The object which gave him pause was very small, and fully four hundred yards distant. But it showed against the sky-line, and to the eye of a frontiersman anything that cuts the sky-line, and that moves ever so little, is at once apparent. What Billy saw was the upper part of a head, peering over the edge of the little cliff on the opposite side.

A pair of shoulders followed the head, and their owner was obviously watching the pit with a desire to discover whether the coast was clear. There was a curious furtiveness about the figure that presently appeared, and dropping down the cliff by a steep path reached the lower ground and crossed it at a run.

Billy crept from the gloom of the cave's mouth and, crouching behind the briar bushes, peered through them eagerly. The running figure was a woman—a small woman clad in a khaki-colored dust-cloak, carrying a little red bundle. She ran with a stooping gait, bending low as she

threaded between the bushes. She reached a point against the cliff on Billy's side, three hundred yards farther along, close by a tangle of undergrowth. There she halted, and, looking round her quickly, disappeared with extreme suddenness.

"Great Christopher!" said Billy.

He rose to his knees, staring at the place where she had vanished. His eyes were bright, his face had lit up. "I was right," he said in a hushed tone. "But, gee! I never thought of this."

He rose, as if to follow, but on second thoughts subsided again and waited. He remained there fully ten minutes, when the figure reappeared, and hurried along the pit bottom in his direction.

Billy wormed himself hurriedly under the tangled briars at some cost to his skin. The woman passed him within seventy yards, walking rapidly. She was no longer carrying the bundle.

When she had passed, Billy peeped after her. Though he could not see her face, he had not the slightest doubt who she was. She disappeared round the bend of the pits.

Billy extricated himself cautiously from the bush and waited for some time on his knees, staring in the direction she had taken. There was nothing more to be seen of her. Then, springing to his feet he sprinted to the spot where she had first vanished with the bundle.

The bushes partially cloaked the mouth of one of the many crag-caves; the entrance was not difficult to find when one was close to it. Billy walked in without hesitation. He found precisely what he expected.

On the floor of the cave, stretched upon a couch of dry bracken, lay a man. He was not a spectacle which in any way gladdened the eye.

He was big and lusty of limb; what little could be seen of his face through a week's growth of brown stubble was haggard. His beak of a nose jutted between two fierce deep-sunk eyes. One of his legs was extended, and swathed from foot to knee in dripping-wet calico bandages that looked as if they had been ripped from a woman's garment.

Billy found himself looking down the muzzle of a small repeating pistol, held in a hairy but very steady fist.

"Stop right where you are," said the occupant of the cave, reclining on one elbow. "Don't move a step forward, nor yet a step back. Get me?"

Billy stopped obediently. He calculated the distance between them to be a dozen feet; there was no likelihood of capturing the pistol before the bullet struck him. The eyes of the man showed that he meant business. He was in fact, less like a man than a crippled wolf.

"Jack the Climber," said Billy blandly, "I am pleased to meet you. I've been looking for you quite a while."

"Don't give me that fool name!" snarled the caveman. "My name is Jake."

"Anything to oblige. Mr. Jake, there's the little matter of the Jervaulx burglary against you, among others."

"What are you givin' me!" retorted Jake.

"The bluff doesn't go," said Billy. "Your motorcycle's yonder in the clay pit. All the cards are out."

The man's face twitched.

"Are you the police?"

"No," said Billy.

Jake stared at the tall form in front of him, and emitted a startled oath.

"I b'lieve you're the guy that slugged me, last Saturday night," he said.

"Quite correct."

"You're on your own, eh?" Jake's head craned forward, his eyes on Billy's face. "And alone, I guess!"

"Do you take me for a fool?" said Billy calmly.

The man shivered. The expression in his eyes was dreadful.

"See here!" he said sullenly. "You've got me set. I can't move. I'm up against it. I know they'll pull me. Well, I'll take my dose. I'll throw my hand in!"

"Wise of you."



The Running Figure Was a Woman.

"Let her go!" said Almee, breathlessly. "Let her go!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Honest. "Can you pick out a good cantaloupe," "Not even for myself," replied the truthful grocer.