

JEFFERSON 229

(Concluded from page 23.)

have to cut out the spirit calls. Good-by, Madeline."

One of Central's attacks of temporary aberration had left the line in a jangling confusion of crossed wires which Sturgess, listening impotently, punctuated with unregarded jerks of the receiver hook.

"The spirit 'phone worked better," said Sturgess, half regretfully. "I wish—" His words died away into amazed silence, for coming to his ears clear and sudden out of the jangling sounds, he had heard a voice speaking, a woman's voice, low, and curiously clear.

"Yes, it's Madeline," said the voice, vibrating with fear that sent an answering tremor through Sturgess as he listened.

"Come," it said, "I want you to come at once!"

"Madeline," he answered, "it's I, Ward Sturgess; it's I, you know."

Over the wire he heard a little moan of terror.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Where are you? Where shall I come to you?"

"I don't know you." The voice was desperately hurried. "They've given me the wrong number. I don't know who you are."

"It's the right number," said Sturgess.

"I'm not the person you want. This is Jefferson, Jefferson 229."

In the midst of the number the voice was lost.

"You've cut me off," he said. "I want Jefferson," and with a flash of inspiration fantastic but exquisitely sure, "Jefferson 229."

THE girl's voice was in his ears, breathless with terror, setting his nerves tingling with unused strength.

"They don't answer," said Central.

"Give me information, then," said Sturgess.

When he came down the stairs it was still raining. The cab he had called came clattering over wet pavements.

The street number he had extorted from the telephone operator gave him no clue to the nature of his destination.

The door swung open suddenly. On the threshold, peering into the dark, a man confronted him.

"What do you want?" he said.

Sturgess laughed; the man in the doorway was John Lake.

"Is that you, Sturgess?"

Lake had spoken as usual, in a smooth, over-civil voice, but the face that peered at Sturgess was livid.

"I can't ask you to come in. I am sorry—"

LAKE stopped abruptly. From the floor above came a faint, echoing crash; a door had been thrown open. Some one was there, and Sturgess knew who it was. Before Lake could anticipate or prevent it, Sturgess was past him and inside the house.

Seen from within, the hall was a wide, low-raftered room, panelled from floor to ceiling with some dark wood. These details his brain recorded automatically. He was conscious only that a girl was coming toward him down the stairs.

The stairway branched and converged at a little landing a few steps only above the level of the floor. On the landing, the girl stood still and looked down at Sturgess. But though they met his eyes directly and bravely, he saw that her eyes were dim and wide with fear.

"It is all right now," Sturgess heard himself saying, "it is all right, Madeline."

"I don't know what you want," Lake

was saying to him, "I don't know why you came here, and I want you to go away. I want you to go at once."

"I will go," Sturgess said, turning to the girl, "when you are ready to go with me."

He felt Lake's hand grip his arm. He struck it off and swung round to face him. Lake stood breathing heavily, his face purple, his eyes narrowed to steel-grey slits, then he sprang forward.

When the waiting cabman five minutes later closed the door of his hansom upon a conventionally dressed and apparently respectable young gentleman, and a young lady who directed him to a house twenty blocks away, in the upper seventies, the man showed no suspicion that he was conniving at an abduction.

"I can't thank you. I don't know how to thank you. I want to explain. Last week I broke our engagement. Since then he has tried in every way to induce me to see him. He had succeeded to-night. I came in response to a note from his mother, which asked me to a supper party there after the theater. I wanted to make her understand why I could not marry him. But it was he who sent the note."

"Why did you go to the telephone?" said Sturgess.

"When you heard my voice," she said, "I meant to ask for help from some one. Before I had reached anyone, he was in the room again."

"I had heard your voice before," said Sturgess.

"What do you mean?"

"I want you to tell me. I think you know."

Looking out at the rainy dark, he felt suddenly that unbelievable things were challenging his sanity, and clamouring for his belief.

"I did not love him," she continued, "I never pretended to love him. I wanted money enough. I wanted to make a creditable marriage. The first time he kissed me, I found out something I had not known before—but—"

"A WOMAN has been dancing here in vaudeville this winter a set of Russian dances, original and clever; I have been to see them half a dozen times. Two weeks ago this woman wrote to me—out of spite, perhaps; I do not know why she wrote—a letter about the man I had promised to marry."

"I was alone when I read her letter. I wanted to talk to some one who understood. I thought about the men who had been my friends. I thought about the men I did not know; who could give me the advice I needed, and help me to regain my faith in men."

"You did not speak?" said Sturgess.

"You did not touch the telephone?"

"I did not speak," said the girl, "but I believe that I called, and that I was answered. I had an instant sense of comfort and safety, as if some one somewhere was sorry for me. Except on one occasion, that feeling has never left me since."

"On one occasion," the girl repeated, "on the evening when I broke my engagement. It was not an easy thing to do. It was not made easier because, in my ignorance of an angry man's propensity for making scenes in public, I had chosen the restaurant where we were having supper as the place for the interview. When it was over, and I was at home, alone, I waited for something to comfort me, something that failed to happen. Something for lack of which I cried myself to sleep."

"In the restaurant," said Sturgess, "was your table beside a window? Had

you roses to carry or to wear?"

"One rose," she said, "a red rose."

"What was the name of the restaurant?"

Her eyes questioned him, dark and wide.

"You needn't tell me," said Sturgess, "I know."

"You know? You heard me when I called to you? It was because I called you, that you came to-night?"

Sturgess reached for her hands. They were warm in his clasp, but they trembled.

"You and I," she said, "why should we have this thing between us; you and I, out of all the people in the world?"

"I have found you," said Sturgess, "with the combined assistance of a mechanical invention of which I disapprove, a man whom I cordially detest, and a tendency to insomnia on my part, aggravated by certain occult agencies whose existence I can neither account for nor admit. It is wonderful, isn't it?"

He felt her hands tighten in his. She swayed toward him. He took her very gently into his arms.

"If I had met you," he said, "at dinner, I should have fallen in love with you over the oysters, and wondered if it was my duty to society to postpone asking you to marry me until after the soup came in. That also would have been wonderful, as wonderful as this. How or why I have found you is of no importance; you are real, and I have found you. That is the only wonderful thing in the world."

One Witness.

So you have taken to motor cycling at last, have you?"

"How did you find that out?"

"I saw you on your machine yesterday."

"By George, I'm glad to hear that. All the rest of my friends saw me when I was off."

Saving Trouble.

Mr. Parrott wanted the picture hung to the right of the mirror; Mrs. Parrott wanted it hung to the left. For once he proved the more insistent of the two, and Joseph, the janitor, was summoned to hang the picture according to his orders. Obediently, Joseph drove in a nail on the right, as directed; this done, he also drove one in the wall on the left.

"What is that second nail for?" Mr. Parrott demanded.

"It's to save me the trouble of fetching the ladder to-morrow when you come round to the missus's way of thinking," said Joseph.

Earnest Endeavours.

"No," remarked the determined lady to the indignant taxi driver who had received his exact fare, "you cannot cheat me. I haven't ridden in cabs these last twenty-five years for nothing."

"Haven't you?" he retorted bitterly. "Well, you've done your best."—N. Y. Times.

AN EXPLANATION.

In the last issue of the Courier, following an article by Archibald MacMechan, on the Adventures of H.M.C.S. Grilse, we published an account of the changed conditions of navigation in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, and an account of the wedding of one of the officers of the Grilse. This material, separated from Mr. MacMechan's article only by an "end-line" dash was prepared in the Courier editorial rooms and was not, of course, written by Mr. MacMechan.

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