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38. The Story Of A Fire

Thirteen years have passed since, but it is all to me as if it had happened yesterday, -- the clanging of the fire-bells, the hoarse shouts of the

firemen, the wild rush and terror of the streets; then the great hush that

fell upon the crowd; the sea of upturned faces(1) with the fire glow upon it; and there, against the background of black smoke that poured from roof and attic, the boy clinging to the narrow ledge so far up that it seemed humanly impossible that help could ever come.

But even then it was coming. Up from the street, while the crew of the

truck-company were labouring with the heavy extension ladder that at its longest stretch was many feet too short, crept four men upon long slender poles with cross-bars, iron-hooked at the end. Standing in one window,

they reached up and thrust the hook through the next one above, then

mounted a storey higher. Again the crash of glass, and again the dizzy

ascent. Straight up the wall they crept, looking like human flies on the ceiling, and clinging as close, never resting, reaching one recess only

to set out for the next; nearer and nearer in the race for life, until

but a single span separated the foremost from the boy. And now the iron

hook fell at his feet, and the fireman stood upon the step with the rescued

lad in his arms, just as the pentup flame burst lurid from the attic window,

reaching with impotent fury for its prey(2). The next moment the) were

safe upon the great ladder waiting to receive them below.

Then such a shout went up ! Men fell on each other's necks, and cried and laughed at once. strangers slapped one another on the back with glistening

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faces, shook hands, and behaved generally like men gone suddenly mad.

Women wept in the street. The driver of a car stalled in the crowd, who

had stood through it all speechless, clutching the reins, whipped his

horses into a gallop and drove away, yelling like a Comanche(3), to relieve

his feelings(4). The boy and his rescuer were carried across the street

without anyone knowing how. Policemen forgot their dignity and shouted

with the rest. Fire, peril, terror, and loss were alike forgotten in the

one touch of nature(5) that makes the whole world kin.

Fireman John Binns was made captain of his crew, and the Bennett medal

was pinned on his coat on the next parade day.

火灾见闻

事情已经过去十三年了，然而对我来说，它仿佛是昨天才发生似的--报火警钟的当当声，消防队员声嘶力竭的喊叫声，大街上人们狂奔乱跑，惊恐万分。突然，人群寂静无声。熊熊的火光照着那无数张向上仰望着的脸。那边，小男孩紧紧地拽住墙壁上狭窄的突出部分，后面是屋顶和顶楼里喷涌而出的黑烟，他离地面是那么高，看来人力是无法搭救他的了。

但是，尽管这样，还是有人来搭救了。消防梯车上的救火队员正在费劲地架起笨重的伸缩梯，但是那梯子伸足后还是太短，差了一大截。这时候，四名消防队员缘着细长的杆子从街面往楼上爬，杆子上装有横档，顶端用铁钩钩住。他们站上一扇窗口，把杆子伸上去，用钩子钩住上面的窗子，随后又爬上一层楼。接着，又一阵砸碎玻璃的砰砰声，又一次令人头晕目眩的攀登。他们沿着墙壁笔直地往上爬，看上去小得好似天花板上的苍蝇。四名消防队员紧贴着墙，不歇气地一个窗台接着一个窗台向上爬。在这场争夺生命的竞赛中，他们愈爬愈近了，爬在最前面的消防队员离小孩只剩下一柞的距离了。这时候，铁钩落到了孩子的脚下，接着，消防队员站在踏脚上，用双手抱下了小男孩。就在这一刹那，一片火

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光，烈焰终于冲破浓烟，猛地从顶楼窗口喷了出来，想攫住它嘴边的猎物，可是却只能白白地冒火了。接着，消防队员和小男孩安然踏上了在下面候着他们的大梯子。

一下子，爆发出一阵热烈的欢呼声。男人们互相搂着脖子，又是叫，又是笑。互不相识的人拍打着对方的背脊，相互握手，脸上喜气洋洋，一个个象突然疯了似的。女人们在街上哭泣。一个马车夫连车带人被阻塞在人群里，他紧握缰绳，自始至终没说过一句话，这时一声响鞭，策马驱车，飞驰而去，象科曼契人那样叫喊着，以发泄他心中的情感。那个小男孩和他的救命恩人被人们高抬着穿过大街，谁也不知道怎么会这样的。警察也忘了他们自己的身分，跟着别人高声欢呼。这四海之内皆兄弟的本性使人们把大火、险情、恐惧和损失全都忘得一干二净。

救火员约翰·宾斯被任命为消防队长。在下次检阅中，宾斯的外衣上给佩上了一枚贝内特奖章。

雅各布·里斯

(1) **the sea of upturned faces**: 无数张仰起的脸。一般用 **a sea of. . .** 表示"许许多多，一大片"。这里作者回忆从前的情景，一切都历历在目，所以用定冠词。

(2) **prey**: 猎物，牺牲品。这里是指火焰所要攫取的小男孩。

(3) **Comanche**: 科曼契人(美国印地安人)。

(4) **to relieve his feelings**: 发泄其感情。

(5) **the one touch of nature**: 自然赋予人类的感情，本性。