

then she must be my cousin," he said. "I am John Campbell. My uncle and aunt come from Birmingham."

"Why—I have heard of you!" stammered Rita. "How odd! Ida always used to speak of her city cousin and hoped that some day we should meet. But you have lived in the city all your life."

"Pretty nearly," said John smiling.

"But I thought you were so lonely and told my brother to speak to you."

"Well, I am," said the young man, laughing. "At least, I was."

The ice was fairly broken, and soon they were all chatting like old friends, in the intervals of the performance. Rita found the young man delightful, and Jim—well, Jim was pleased, because somehow it seemed to ease his own guilty conscience. But in the midst of the mirth a thin wisp of smoke was seen to curl out of the side of the stage. A moment later a thick, black cloud drifted toward the audience.

"Fire!" shouted somebody.

The stage manager appeared and held up his hand. "There is no danger!" he said quietly. "Please leave your seats in an orderly manner and go toward the elevators."

The panic was checked, but as the three drew near the entrance those who were in front came running back, shrieking. The cause of the new alarm was manifest. A roaring sheet of flame shot up each elevator. The top floor of the hotel below was blazing.

Caught in the terror-stricken crowd, Rita looked at Jim in dread. She was being crushed by the seething throng that surged back from the elevators toward the parapet. But the next moment she felt herself lifted in a pair of strong arms and carried through the mob.

"There is no danger!" she heard John Campbell whisper in her ear.

A minute later he had set her down

in a niche in the parapet, while he himself and Jim stood guard in front of her. Around them surged the wild, uncontrollable crowd of pleasure-makers, but she rested securely. And, still faint and almost numb by the realization of her predicament, she heard her brother say:

"It's all right! Here come the engines!"

The crowd cheered wildly as the firemen appeared, and presently a stream of water from each of a dozen high-pressure hoses was playing upon the upper story. The smoke became more intense, but the flames died. And presently firemen appeared among the throng.

"It's all right now," they were shouting. "Leave by the elevators, please."

Although much of the upper structure of the hotel had been burned away, the elevator shafts were not seriously damaged. The elevators, which had been at the bottom of the cages, were soon running up and down and conveying the crowd to safety. Rita, her brother, and their new-found friend found themselves at last in the hotel lobby, which was quickly assuming its normal aspect. White, and still shaken, Rita sat down.

"I don't know how we can thank you enough," said Jim to John Campbell. "I hope this is the beginning of a friendship that will last."

"I hope so," answered John, looking earnestly at Rita.

Somehow they seemed waiting for her to speak. But as she did not, Jim blurted out:

"I don't know whether our friend knows it, Rita, but I ought to tell you that Miss Ida Campbell and I—"

"I know it very well," said John, smiling.

"Jim!" exclaimed Rita. "You don't mean that—"

"Will you be very angry with me, Rita?" asked Jim.

"Why, it's wonderful!" cried Rita,