

They could see the smoke from the end of the street. "It's our house!" Elsa shouted. "It can't be," Alan said. But he knew that Elsa was right and they both began to run. There was a small crowd in the street outside their house. Smoke was coming out of the front window of the downstairs room, but there was no sign of any flames. And there was no sign of old Mr. Cox, Elsa's father. He lived with them and had a room upstairs at the back of the house. He was not among the people in the crowd. "Alan!" his wife shouted. "He's asleep upstairs! He probably went to bed and left the fire on in the front room!" Her husband began to push his way through the crowd towards the front door. "Don't be a fool!" someone shouted. "Wait for the firemen. They'll be here any minute." But Alan knew that he must not wait. He put a handkerchief over his face and ran up the stairs. He pushed open the door of his father-in-law's room. Old Mr. Cox was sleeping peacefully. "What's the matter?" he cried as he woke up. "Nothing to worry about. Just a small fire downstairs," Alan told him. "Now, get a coat on and put a handkerchief over your face like this." At the top of the stairs Alan made old Mr. Cox climb onto his back. Then he put a handkerchief over his own face and went down the stairs as quickly as he could. There was a cheer from the crowd as he came out of the house. The fire engine and an ambulance arrived more or less at that moment. The first flames were just beginning to come out of the front window. "It's all my fault!" moaned old Mr. Cox as they carried him into the ambulance. "I was reading the newspaper and I left it near the electric fire