

served—thinking the place empty—but the howl touched a chord in our hero's sympathetic breast, which was ever ready to vibrate. From whom the howl proceeded mattered little or nothing to Charlie Brooke. Sufficient that it was the cry of a living being in distress. He sprang at once through the open doorway of the saloon, through which was issuing a volume of thick smoke mingled with flame.

"God help him! the place'll blow up in a few minutes," cried Hunky Ben, losing, for once, his imperturbable coolness, and rushing wildly after his friend. But at that moment the thick smoke burst into fierce flame and drove him back.

Charlie sprang up the staircase three steps at a time, holding his breath to avoid suffocation. He reached the landing, where Buttercup ran, or, rather, fell, almost fainting, into his arms. At the moment an explosion in the cellar shook the building to its foundation, and, shattering one of the windows, caused a draught of air to drive aside the smoke. Charlie gasped a mouthful of air and looked round. Flames were by that time roaring up the only staircase. A glance from the nearest window showed that a leap thence meant broken limbs, if not death, to both. A ladder up to a trap-door suggested an exit by the roof. It might only lead to a more terrible leap, but meanwhile it offered relief from imminent suffocation. Charlie bore the half-dead girl to the top rung, and found the trap-door padlocked, but a thrust from his powerful shoulder