

# ***A Flier in Longevity***

# A FLIER IN LONGEVITY

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When the nine-fifteen steamed in from Los Angeles, every real estate dealer in San Bruno, proud city of corner lots, stood agog, a-tiptoe, his mind centered on the Santa Fe station, which sheltered the arrival of Mr. Cyprus Halloway mildly shepherding Halloway's Hundred Health Pilgrims. For Mr. Halloway was there to buy land, and San Bruno had it to sell in every quantity from a clod to a continent. Consequently the sellers of the soil vied with the hotel runners in their attentions to the eccentric stranger. They were all there—all, did I say? Nay; there was one, Brian Boru Blaney by name, who languished in a hall bedroom of the cheapest boarding-house in town, lolled among the pillows and smoked cigarettes. Cigarettes were his habit, but lolling was not; yet his languors of this morning were forgivable, since he was out of a job and considering the future.

Unattended, then, by Blaney or his thoughts, Mr. Cyprus Halloway, owlsh, Pickwickian, moderately wealthy leader of health cranks; marshaled his bedraggled hundred up from the depot to the hotel. As he advanced through town he beheld the wonders of booming San Bruno, which, trading cunningly on her annual crop of tourists, had increased in three years from a buxom village to an infant metropolis. On the strength of intemperate boosts for her temperate climate, she could now boast her seventy-five thousand inhabitants; in fact, she *did* boast that number and a little bit more around the new-antique Italian bar of the Grand Hotel. Main Street was no longer a lane—it was just the other end of Broadway extending across America. Big business was beginning to sprout out of weedy corners. The honey-breeze of California smelt of asphalt, and the twelve-story skyscraper of the Insoluble Trust Company loomed right next to the back yard where Mrs. Mary Casey's red hen scratched the roots of a real-estate sign. So Paradise must have looked when municipal improvement set in.

The shoddy establishment where Brian Boru Blaney roomed was called the Majestic, and it afforded Brian a sleeping compartment too small for an extra bureau, but large enough for his expanding thoughts. We may behold him now,

pajama-clad, sitting on the edge of his golden oak bedstead. Red-headed, pathetically Irish of eye, youth seemed to proclaim in him the incurable optimist. And he had good use for his optimism this morning, for, being out of work, he had everything to expect. His temperamental passion for his home town had earned for him the local title of the “Little Booster,” in distinction to the “Big Booster,” who was Mr. Charles W. Ketchum, of Ketchum & Sellers, real estate. Brian had, in fact, been the valued employee of the above-mentioned firm up to last night, when Ketchum had called the young man into the inner shrine and said:

“My boy, that Beulah Addition scheme of yours is a stroke of genius. We stand to lose a hundred thousand by it. You’re fired.”

As the auburn youth dangled bare toes and reviewed in his mind the details of this ultimatum, Mrs. Meecham, the landlady, coughed menacingly outside the door and slid two envelopes through the crack. One Brian recognized as a statement of board three weeks in arrears. The other, of a more prosperous stationery, he opened hastily, and uttered a whistle of reviving hope as he read:

*Dear Sir:*

Chas. W. Ketchum tells me you are the biggest fool in or out of the real-estate business. I am preparing to launch a deal requiring the talents of such an one. Can you meet me at the Grand Hotel bar at ten o’clock?

Yours truly,

WARNER E. HISSUP

“State Senator Hissup!” thought Brian Boru Blaney, with a sanguine flush, as he read and re-read the mysterious note. “Gee! It’s lucky I’m open to propositions this morning!”

Hope flamed rosier than his hair as he proceeded with his dressing, a process which, with Brian, included the adjusting of much gaudy raiment. First he rolled back his mattress and removed there from a pair of yellow-brown trousers pressed by slumber’s simple process to a fine edge. A pleated coat of the type known to the fifteen-dollar trade as “Norfolk” swung from the back of a chair. His shirt was pink, his tie was green, his mercerized socks were a combination of both colors.

“Senator Hissup can offer lots of things,” he repeated to himself, as he buttoned on his knob-toed shoes and strode forth to adventure.

On the way to the Grand Hotel, he paused and smiled as a squad of Halloway’s Health Pilgrims passed, moving two by two with the air of elderly boarding-school children. He recognized several real-estate men surrounding Mr. Halloway, gesturing eloquently and using the word “climate” with passionate frequency.

“That old guy needs special treatment,” he reflected, “and those simps ain’t got class enough to give it.”

Leaning against the mahogany of the Grand Hotel bar Brian observed State Senator Hissup, champion of oppressed corporations, a flat-faced person with the profile of a toy spaniel.

“Good morning, Mr. Blarney,” said the statesman, extending a flabby paw.

“Blaney,” corrected the Little Booster. “The *r* is silent, as in ‘bean.’”

“Hum!” growled the doggish State Senator. “My car’s outside. We’ll go look at the tract. Maybe you don’t want to handle such a fool proposition —”

“I’m the softest of my family,” chirped Brian Boru. “My brain’s a watery waste, and every drop of it at your service. What’s your proposition?”

They mounted a white touring-car outside and went rolling westward.

“As one D. F. to another,” explained Hissup, “I say it confidentially—I need the money. The only tract I can sell is not sellable. Does that look bright to you?”

“Where is your El Dorado?” asked Brian cheerfully.

“Ever heard of Slaughter-house Gulch?”

“Holy alkali!” whistled the young man. “Now I understand why Ketchum recommended *me*! Slaughter-house Gulch is Hope’s jumping-off place. It’s the rattlesnakes’ waterloo—”

“And mine,” supplied the State Senator sadly. “Ten years ago politics gave me a

chance to buy the tract at fifty cents per acre. I was crazy enough to think it a bargain. Even the slaughter-house moved away from the blighted spot. Taxes and gophers grow there in luxuriance—nothing else. Last year I tried to give it back to the city as a site for a poor farm.”

“The poor saw you first,” said Brian. “Nice bit o’ land! The slaughter-house shuns it, the poor pass it up—gilt-edge—what? However, many things have been done in my line o’ business.”

The car stopped at a depressing formation among the hills. Out of the limitless tangle of greasewood, innumerable real-estate signs reared like headstones in some giants’ graveyard. Trolley-poles showed dismally to the east. They plowed their way through the greasewood to a slight bump on the landscape.

“The ocean’s there,” said Hissup, pointing to a tiny distant speck of blue.

Brian sat himself on the stump of a decayed sign. Half a mile to the south his eyes beheld a spot of green, a fence-inclosed grove of trees and bushes surrounding a weather-beaten bungalow.

“Who lives there?” he asked, his eyes hazy with unborn visions.

“Uncle Steve Pottle—lived there for years. He and the gophers have completely queered the district.”

Brian Boru Blaney chewed a sprig of honey sage and concentrated. Uncle Steve Pottle was the oldest man in the world—all San Bruno knew that for a fact. He claimed a hundred and seven years to his credit, and could show abundant proof of his extreme age; for every morning he stood at the corner of D and Main streets, exhibiting an antiquated license stating that Steven E. Pottle, aged twenty-nine, was married in Trenton, New Jersey, seventy-eight years ago.

“Whoops! I got the straw!” cried Brian, suddenly leaping to his feet.


“Straw?” inquired the puzzled statesman.

“You bet! Every good boost’s like an orange phosphate—it needs a straw to draw it up through and make it taste natural. And I’ve got the straw that’s going to make ‘em thirst for this deal!”

“Straw?” repeated Hissup.

“Wait a minute. In the first place, this tract’s goin’ to be called Healthy-View-by-the-Sea. True, there’s only a quart of ocean in sight, but every drop o’ romance counts in the real-estate business. What’s that lane down there?” he asked, pointing to a rutty thoroughfare which led, apparently, nowhere.

“That’s the old slaughter-house road,” said the Senator.

“Hire a hundred ‘n’ fifty dollars’ worth o’ Dagos to smooth off the surface. Rename it ‘sculapius Drive’—see?”

“But how about the—”

“Oh, forget the straw for a minute. You’ve lived in San Bruno long enough, I guess, to know that most o’ the land around these parts is bought by tourists from the East—health fans past middle age, who think they can dodge the dread Reaper by nestling close to the soil and pulling the climate over ‘em. I guess you know, too, that Cyprus Halloway, the Grand High Totem of the Healthomaniacs, is here with a roll o’ bills like a China loan, cryin’ like a baby to spend it on a strip o’ land that nobody else wants? Health! Gee—what a prospectus I could write on this place!” An ecstatic flush overspread his freckles as he pulled out his pink cuffs and quoted from the Prospectus Beautiful: ” Fanned by old Pacific’s life-giving breezes, mayhap the tired business man may pause awhile and linger —”

“But,” interrupted State Senator Hissup, you mentioned a certain idea you had to make the scheme draw—a straw, I think you called it?”

“That straw’ll be Uncle Steve Pottle, the oldest man in the world,” answered the incurable optimist.

When Brian Boru approached Uncle Steve Pottle next morning, the latter had just made his regular daily appearance at the corner of D and Main streets, the observed of tourists. He stood straight as a string, and his cascade of snowy beard and hair gave to his withered face the appearance of a frost-bitten apple neatly packed in cotton.

“How long have you lived in Slaughter-house Gulch?” shouted Brian, standing close to the dotard’s good ear.

“Oh, tol’able, tol’able!” replied the oldest of men.

“How long’s that—ever since the Revolutionary War?”

“Come there two year before Rex Olcutt shot Bill Fry,”

“About seventeen years ago,” computed the Booster, recalling the celebrated unpleasantness. He again funneled his hands and shouted: “Uncle, it seems to me you’ve reflected a lot o’ glory on this burg without getting much out of it. Think how you’ve advertised the climate! You ought to have a monument, or something.”

“Oh, shucks!” sniffled old Pottle magnificently, with the air of Caesar refusing golden crowns.

“How’d you like a public testimonial lunch in honor of your hundred and seventh birthday?” Brian proposed suddenly.

“Huckus-pocus! My birthday was last March.”

“That doesn’t hinder our giving you a birthday lunch now, does it?”

“It don’t ezackly hender,” agreed the old man judgmatically, as he dropped his ivory upper set of teeth a quarter of an inch. “But it don’t ezackly *jibe*.”

“You’re getting on in years, Uncle. Maybe you’re scared of the food.” Brian sighed.

“Who says I’m gittin’ too old to enjoy my vittles?” The patriarch threw out his chest like a withered bird. “Ther ain’t a young whippersnapper in this generation kin walk further or eat more vittles ‘n I kin!” Uncle Steve’s black eyes snapped like electric shoe-buttons.

“That settles it, then,” said Brian cheerfully. “A week from Wednesday’s going to be Old Folks’ Day, and you’re to be the guest of honor. Presentation ceremonies, parade, lunch—”

“Brass band?” inquired the old man craftily.

“The best in town.”

Uncle Steve hesitated, and Brian could observe a look of miserly cunning creeping over the withered face.

“Time’s money,” he squeaked. “I got lots o’ things to ‘tend to this week. Ther’s taxes to pay on my house, ‘n’ all—”

“How much?” asked the Little Booster promptly.

“Fifty dollars wouldn’t be too much,” replied the graybeard, with equal spontaneity.

“That’s a lot o’ money, but I’ll be good for it,” said Brian magnanimously. “And now, look here. If I hire you, you’ve got to obey orders. Make yourself mysterious -see? Keep off the streets and don’t show yourself anywhere until Old Folks’ Day. D’ y’ get me, Unclc Steve?”

“Yep.” Suddenly the old man craned his little turkey neck over his shoulder with a worried look. “Got to promise one thing,” he whispered. “Don’t tell Betsy.”

“Who’s Betsy?”

“None o’ yer business. But y’ won’t tell ‘er, will ye?”

“Certainly not, Archibald,” agreed Brian readily. Uncle Steve Pottle gave the young man a withered claw, and walked away with the stiff dignity of a marionette.

Thanks to the able stage management of Brian Boru Blaney and the secret connivance of State Senator Hissup, Old Folks’ Day was epochal. The politician had lent a room on the third floor of the Insoluble Life Building to the purposes of the Booster; and it was from the window of this office that mysteriously labeled banners were let down from time to time during the week preceding. The first banner, many yards long and boldly lettered, flaunted the question:

WHO IS THE OLDEST MAN IN THE WORLD—AND WHY?

THE OLDEST MAN IN THE WORLD LIVES AT HEALTHY VIEW

was the half-answer which soon appeared.



THE OLDEST MAN—107 YEARS OLD—COMING AT 10 A. M.  
WEDNESDAY!!

announced another. And so on at hourly intervals.

Prominent among the many spectators arrested by these flaunting promises was an owlish gentleman of Pickwickian mien who took notes in a red morocco book with the air of a gambler studying a pool-room chart. Brian, watching the crowd from behind a closed screen, recognized in this earnest person Mr. Cyprus Halloway of the Hundred Health Pilgrims.

For a bribe of five dollars and a new hat, Brian was able to employ the services of Dr. Abe Meyer (retired from the active practice of patent medicine) to act as spokesman for the Old Folks and marshal a “committee” of twelve elderly tramps, shaved for the occasion and respectable-ized by means of bargain straw hats. It was the duty of this “committee” to ride in automobiles, wear badges, and wave placards announcing the glad but belated tidings of Uncle Steve’s hundred and seventh natal day.

Two hours before the time set, Brian Boru, from his third-story window, beheld the crowd gathering, and realized what an unexpected importance his celebration was assuming. Drove of humanity fought for places around the gaudy cars now assembled in front of the Insoluble Life Building. The air vibrated with emotion; and when Steinwinder’s Silver Cornet Band leaped into the melting strains of “Darling, I Am Growing Old,” two laborers were arrested for starting a riot, so great was the heart-throb.

Gray, white, and bald heads predominated in the throng below. But the Little Booster’s nerves most tingled with excitement when he noted the fact that Mr. Cyprus Halloway was there, close to the band, surrounded by his hundred motley pilgrims.

The pathos of “Darling’s” increasing longevity was thoroughly exploited by Steinwinder’s industrious trumpeters. Meanwhile Brian slunk to a side street, cranked up Senator Hissup’s white car, and met Uncle Steve Pottle, according to appointment. Exactly at the hour of ten, to the merry winding of a horn, the big car, all broken out with red and yellow streamers, boiled into the Square and took its place at center stage. Immediately there flaunted from the third-floor window a gigantic banner labeled:

## THE OLDEST MAN IN THE WORLD IS HERE!

Mr. Cyprus Halloway, his owl eyes goggling, edged closer, his faithful hundred following suit.

Brian Boru Blaney arose in the tonneau and laid his hand upon his pleated chest. Beside him sat a small, upright figure wearing a white vest and a silk hat many sizes too small for him.

“Neighbors,” began the orator, in a persuasive bellow, “we have the authority of such eminent bac-ter-i-o-lo-gists as Dr. Woods McCutchinson that no man has ever lived to the age of a hundred years. Dr. McCutchinson is doubtless a smart man—but are we good folks of San Bruno going to *believe* such a statement?” (Cries of “No—No!” from several enthusiasts.) “Thanks. I am glad to know that my fellow countrymen are still able to *think* for themselves. For have we not been eyewitnesses for a score of years to the maturity of this splendid specimen of old manhood, Colonel Steven E. Pottle?”

Cheers. Brian, encouraged, now dragged in Professor Metchnikoff to prove that certain favored strips of land grew old men, even as certain vineyards grow old wine. There was Servia, for instance. (Brian was not quite sure it *was* Servia, but it was worth taking a chance.)

“Servia is blessed with longevity, but need we go so far to find the El Dorado of old age?” inquired the Little Booster, in conclusion. He looked straight at Halloway, who now stood within six feet of him. “No! No! I repeat. For we have right here, my friends, at our very door-step, a tract of land so favored, I might say, by a generous heaven that it has enabled our distinguished townsman here to live to the ripe age of a hundred and seven!”

“What’s the name of the place?” inquired the chief of the Health Pilgrims, in confidential tones.

“The name of that place is Healthy-View-by-the-Sea!” thundered Brian passionately.

Brian sat down, which was the cue for Dr. Abe Meyer, flanked by his twelve elderly tramps, to deliver to Uncle Steve a large gilded key, presumably unlocking the gates of the city. Dr. Abe spoke in the finest vein of the patent-medicine school of oratory. Meanwhile an automobile circled around the throng,

tossing forth pamphlets of a decorative nature containing Brian's real-estate epic beginning, "Mayhap the tired business man —"

Uncle Steve spoke next. His remarks might have been more coherent had not his false teeth insisted on slipping down and interrupting his eloquence.

"Anyways, I'm a hundred 'n' seven, an' if y' don't believe it" (pause to adjust teeth) "ask the folks back to Trenton, where I was born in—lemme see—eighteen—"

"Eighteen hundred and five!" prompted Brian, after a lightning calculation.

"In 1805 I was born there." (Dental operation.) "An' if ye don't believe *that*, here's the marriage cetifkit to prove it. My birthday was the fifteenth o' last March —"

"To-day, to-day!" prompted the Booster, pulling his coat-tails.

"Hey?" inquired Uncle, leaning down with a hand held wing-like behind his car.

"Your birthday is to-day!" repeated Brian Boru.

"My birthday's to-day," went on Uncle, serenely addressing the crowd. "An' I never felt better in my life. I can walk further an' eat more vittles 'n any darn whippersnapper a-goin'."

Uncle Steve took his seat. Loud applause. Mike, the chauffeur, now began cranking up the car, and two small boys took their places in the van with a placard, "The Oldest Man in the World." Before the procession proceeded, Brian announced to the throng that Uncle Steve, to prove his digestive prowess, would eat his birthday dinner in the window of the Saddle Rock Restaurant.

Cyprus Halloway jumped on the running-board of Brian's car just as it was pulling out.

"How does one get to this Healthy-View-by-the-Sea?" asked the stranger.

"Tomorrow at three o'clock we give a testimonial pilgrimage and free bus ride to the home of this wonderful man. If you wish, we'll provide transportation for as many of your Pilgrims as you wish to bring."

“There are a hundred of us,” said Halloway. “We’ll try and make it.”

As they moved slowly toward the Saddle Rock Restaurant, Brian took Uncle Steve in hand and attempted to impress him with the importance of his office.

“Half the town will be rubbering at your performance. You’ve got to eat like a wolf.”

“Guess I kin!” responded Uncle Steve recklessly.

No Fifth Avenue wedding could have blushed more flagrantly in the public eye than did that noonday banquet at the Saddle Rock. A table for fifteen was set in the window to accommodate Dr. Abe’s twelve qualified tramps, Dr. Abe himself, Brian Boru, and, on a central throne, Colonel Steven E. Pottle. A floral piece inscribed, “107—Greetings,” hovered o’er.

Uncle Steve at first threatened to be a gastronomic disappointment. First came clams. The old man put on his spectacles and examined them.

“I don’t eat no raw food!” he declared stubbornly.

Brian, secretly wringing his hands under the table-cloth, beheld the tempting bivalves carried away untouched. Uncle was displeased at everything. He turned up his nose at soup, jeered at sweetbreads, snubbed the salad, scorned peach Melba.

“I want vittles!” he demanded morosely.

“What do you call vittles?” hissed the Little Booster.

“Ham ‘n’ eggs.” suggested the centenarian.

“Fry him a dozen—quick—before they mob the place!” commanded Brian of a waiter. The spectators in the window were beginning to see the humor of the situation.

During the pause Brian toasted the guest of honor in sparkling cider from gold-label bottles. As each bumper of his stage champagne was lightly tossed, the elderly chorus responded with applause. Uncle looked hungrily toward the kitchen. At last a huge platter of ham and eggs was set before him. And old

Pottle ate—ate as never dotard ate before, as though his life and his knife depended upon the performance. He never raised his head until he had stripped the platter clean and wiped it carefully with a wedge of bread. And the mob outside, like unto the ranks of Tuscany at sight of Horatius' Marathon swim, could scarce forbear a cheer.

“Ain't no young whippersnapper kin beat *me!*” chuckled Uncle Steve Pottle.

The luncheon closed officially with a final theatrical toast, the entire chorus rising. As a finale, the window-curtain dropped, disclosing the placard. “A Hundred More Birthdays Just as Happy.”

Before the crowd dispersed, Brian stepped to the door and announced his intention of tendering a testimonial pilgrimage to the home of Colonel Pottle on the morrow at three. Autobus rides would be free for all respectable persons over fifty years of age.

The Little Booster and the centenarian slipped quietly out through a back door. The old man was beginning to look sad.

“Better let me take you home in my auto,” suggested the young man.

“Lead me to the trolley!” grunted Uncle Steve gloomily.

Brian put him on a west-bound car at the corner of Main and D streets.

“I could take you home just as well.” he began.

“Y' can't force me to do nothin' I'm sot ag'in' ,” declared old Pottle, as he eased himself painfully into an outside seat.

“Be at home, ready for the big call, tomorrow at three!” Brian smiled.

“Um!” was Uncle's sole retort. The tram slid away down the track.

Early next morning Brian telephoned to Senator Hissup. “Your Old Folks' Day looks to me like a fool proposition.” said the statesman.

“Fool propositions are what you hired me for,” replied the Little Booster. “I've got to have a hundred dollars extra for bus fare.”

“Think I’m made of money?”

“No. But you will be, if you leave it to me. I’ve got Halloway’s Health Pilgrims on the string, and if we can drag ‘em to Healthy View there’s nothing left to do but tag ‘em, ‘Sold.’”

Hissup sent the money by messenger, and five buses were engaged for three o’clock.

Imagine, then, the young man’s surprise when, driving the Senator’s car into the Square at the appointed hour, he beheld what appeared to be the entire elderly population of the town struggling around the five buses, already arrived. Several hundred elderly ladies clad variously for motoring, surged around an almost equal number of elderly gentlemen, who alternately stormed the vehicles and were repulsed with great slaughter. The horrid truth dawned upon Brian Boru. Most of the old people who had heard the exercises yesterday had accepted his invitation for a free ride to-day. But Halloway’s Health Pilgrims, the only desirable clients of the lot, were not there!

Erstwhile staid and dignified persons were jumping aboard the vehicles with the agility of school children, clinging to every available seat as passengers cling to a life-raft beside a sinking ship. Brian was just ordering his chauffeurs to drive ahead and avoid further violence, when a messenger from the hotel brought a note from Halloway that read:

We are attending a health lecture. Will follow at four in our own autos.

The five buses rumbled westward, Brian leading in the Senator’s car, slightly overtaxed with ten passengers, mostly fat. Brian pretended to sit on the lap of an exceedingly stout gentleman, although the feat more closely resembled clinging to a cliff of jelly. He was obliged to lean lovingly over his shoulder to explain terms of sale to a timid lady in the tonneau.

As they approached Healthy View, he noticed, to his satisfaction, that Hissup’s faithful Italians had scraped off the surface of ♠sculapius Drive and set up signs here and there announcing, “To Home of Colonel Pottle,” *etc.* Such bright portents cheered him; yet his nerves thrilled menacingly as the car began bumping over the stony road leading to Uncle Steve’s place.

The bars were up at the gate, he saw, and a string of inhospitable barb wire was

stretched from post to post. No sign of welcome greeting the party, Brian got out, and was in the act of fumbling with the wire entanglements when he observed a flutter of gingham apron among the leafage, and, looking up, found himself gazing down the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun, at the other end of which stood a small, exceedingly pretty girl with her two black eyes fixed murderously on his heart. Two things that seldom fail to hold the masculine attention—a pretty girl and a loaded gun.

“Halt!” she commanded in that throaty voice which, elocutionists tell us, is supposed to convey the idea of resolution and desperate courage.

“Gladys Glenn, the Bandit’s Bride!” grinned Brian. “How do you do?”

“I warn you to turn right round and march back!” said she disdainfully, albeit the gun was now beginning to wobble in her fragile grasp. “I’m not here to fool!”

“Neither am I,” said the young man, lowering his voice and approaching so near that the muzzle of the gun scratched his eyebrow. “I can’t afford to be held up just now, no matter how much I like it. This is business.”

“I don’t like your business,” she sniffed.

“I love a cordial manner in a pretty girl,” he said sweetly. “If my line of talk bothers you, maybe I can interview Uncle Steve Pottle.”

“You can’t!” The gun wavered back to the firing angle.

“Are you his keeper?”

“Yes. I’m his granddaughter.”

“Oh. Then you’re Betsy.”

“Betsy Spencer, if you want it all.”

“Pleased to meet you, Miss Spencer.” Brian looked down the gun-barrel and said this politely. “Can’t you see how you’re getting me in wrong with all these rubber-necks?”

“Your rubber-necks can’t make a side-show of grandpa,” said Miss Spencer, with

*esprit.*

The muzzle of the heavy gun drooped earthward. Brian suddenly laid his hand on it.

“If I wasn’t such a perfect gent’ man I could take this cannon away,” he grinned.

“I don’t care. It isn’t loaded,” she answered calmly. “But I want to tell you one thing confidentially before you start that Glidden tour tramping over our flower-beds. Better not show ‘em grandpa, if you value your business standing.”

“Why?”

“He’d be the worst real-estate ad in the world to-day. Take my advice—send ‘em away!”

Something in her tone bode ill for the enterprise. Putting as bold a face as possible on the matter, Brian walked over to the buses and made excuses. Uncle Steve sent his greetings through his granddaughter, he said, but could not be with them for a few hours.

“Does he always send greetings with a shotgun?” a sarcastic voice from among the tourists was heard to ask, as the expedition wheeled slowly toward Slaughter-house Gulch.

Outwardly calm, raging vultures pecked beneath the fifteen-dollar-Norfolk of Brian Boru. Was not the old man just as much his grandfather as hers, in a way, considering that he had been engaged by Brian by the week, fed and exploited? What right had a little girl with a big gun to keep him from his rightful discovery? He would go back and settle the matter at once.

“Stop the car and let me out,” he whispered to Mike, the chauffeur. “There’s twenty dollars in it for you if you take this mob over the property and boost it hard. Terms hundred ‘n’ fifty down, balance in a year. I’ll join you later.”

The young man strode away in the direction of the little gray cottage among the trees. As he rounded the corner of the house he heard a small voice singing slightly off the key:

Mis-ter Brown, Mis-ter Brown



Had a vi-o-lin!”

On the rose-embowered steps looking toward a mellow California sun, peacefully slanting, he beheld Betsy Spencer mending the neck-band of a faded shirt. In the path at her feet a fat white duck sozzled its bill in a pan of water, daintily satisfied with this manner of fingerbowl. The scene was a pastoral one, bearing no suggestion of firearms or disputed grandparents.

“Now, look here,” began Brian, removing his hat and trying to look severe. “There’s been awful rotten team work about this job. I came to praise Caesar, and you pulled a gun on me. Cordial little thing, aren’t you!”

“I suppose real-estate men are all poets.” Betsy rang a tiny mocking bell of laughter. “Homer advertised Greece, Dante boosted Inferno. And now Mr. Brian Boru Blaney has written a perspectus on Healthy-View-by-the-Sage-Brush.” She drew one of his folders from her work-basket and began to read: “Fanned by old Pacific’s balmy breezes. mayhap the ti-erd business man —”

“Oh, Betsy!” moaned a feeble voice from within the house.

“Grandpa’s a very ti-erd business man to-day,” she announced, disappearing.

“Is he sick?” asked Brian, as soon as she came back.

“He’s getting all right now, but he’s been awful.” Through the half-open door Brian saw the old man, wrapped in blankets.

“What *did* you feed him at the famous health lunch?”

“Ham an’ eggs.”

“Murder!” she gasped. “He’s lived on buttermilk and toast for years.”

“He bragged he could walk further and cat more vittles than —”

“I know,” said the girl quite seriously. For a time she glanced over the silvery grass and sage glinting westward.

“Oh, look!” she said, suddenly regarding Brian’s apparel. “There’s a button off your pretty actor’s coat. Let me sew it on.”

Without a word, the Booster shed, while she selected a button and began to sew.

“Untruthfulness is a habit that won’t come off—like buttons,” she remarked, sewing. “Grandpa’s had the habit for years.”

“What!” Suspicion took possession of him.

“Grandpa is a great novelist gone wrong. He’s always amused himself telling tales. When he was fifty years old he began lying about his age—”

“The old—excuse me!”

“At sixty he swore he was seventy-five; at seventy he claimed to be a hundred. Are you in pain, Mr. Boru?”

“Then the old—excuse me—is only seventy-seven!”

“On the fifteenth of last March,” she replied serenely. “I never thought his fibs were doing any harm, so I’ve let him lie on for years—in the amateur class. But when I found you’d been offering him money I set my foot down. I don’t allow any professional fibbers in my family.”

“But he *must* be a hundred and seven,” grunted Brian, clutching at vain hopes. “Didn’t he show a marriage license to prove it?”

“That license belonged to his father, of the same name, who has been dead for twenty years.”

Brian rose and started up the porch.

“Where are you going?” asked the girl, intercepting him. “I’ve got to see him—right off!”

“No, you don’t,” she said, grasping the doorknob firmly. “He’s promised to tell the truth, and I’m going to help him. More than that, I know a reporter on the *Globe*, and I’ll give him the whole story.”

The Irish rage that seethed within him Brian suppressed by means of a diplomacy that was still more Irish.

“Miss Spencer,” he said gently, Celtic pathos gathering in his blue eyes, “in about ten minutes a man who can buy the whole tract is coming here with a hundred rubber-necks. The sale depends on whether your grandfather sticks to his fairy story or not.”

“I don’t see why grandpa and I should add our dishonesty to yours.” Her tone was firm.

“Who’s dishonest?” he asked very earnestly. “We’re offering those lots at a snap, considering what they’ll be worth in two years, improved and with a colony on ‘em. I’m boosting it as a health resort, and it *is* healthy—everything in this part of California is. I’ll be saving these people money by sellin’ ‘em this land, because they’ll be soaked lots worse by the other guy. Besides,”—Brian sighed, —“I ain’t making much commission on this job, but I need what little I get—need it bad.”

“For more bunco deals?”

“Nope. Straightest game in the world.”

“What, then?” Her voice was softening under his influence.

“I’m goin’ to get married,” he confessed huskily.

“Oh. *That’s* it!” He could feel the sudden give in her antagonism. “Well—if I see grandpa and ask about this, you must remember—he’s not to get a cent for his falsehood.”

After a minute Brian went in to the invalid, who sat, the picture of woe, swaddled in quilts and smelling of camphor. “Can’t do nothin’ fer nothin’,” announced the old man, fixing Brian with the eye of an angry hawk. “It ought to be worth at least ten dollars.”

“You’re not doing this for money,” said Betsy firmly.

In the distance Brian could hear the honk of approaching automobiles.

“You see, Colonel Pottle,” said Brian politely, “your granddaughter was so good as to promise that you and she would help me out of this fix —”

“You know I told you—he’s going to be married,” prompted Betsy.

“Be he? To who?” asked the dotard sharply.

“Oh, grandpa!” the girl chided, just as, with a bellow and a honk, the first car of Halloway’s Health Pilgrimage drew up at the gate outside.

“Gimme my slippers ‘n’ dressin’ -gown,” piped the old man. “Guess I’m ‘bout as old as I feel, anyhow.”

After the eminent Cyprus Halloway had cast his owlish glances on Uncle Steve, scrutinized carefully his records to observe them flawless, inquired into his ancestry, religion, and state of stomach, he suddenly paused, confronted his faithful Hundred, and uttered an oracular statement.

“A wonderful, wonderful case,” he said.

“I agree with you!” echoed Brian devoutly.

“And now, if we may, we will look at the land that has produced this ideal specimen,” he requested. Brian gave orders to the head chauffeur with the inward sensations of one who orders moving-vans to carry away bank-notes.

“Follow the road to the big sign-post below.” he instructed. “I’ll come down ‘cross lots in about ten minutes.” The buses thundered away.

“Will them buy?” asked Betsy, as the two stood at the gate and watched the caravan filing across the acres below.

“Will a cork float?” he queried, in reply. “The signs never fail. Look down there. Already I can see half a dozen old gents pacing off the street-fronts, while their wives are poking umbrellas into the places where flower-beds are going to be. Add me to that landscape and you can tag the picture. ‘Sold’”

He took her hand and half turned toward the road.

“I’d like to thank you in my bum language.” he stammered. “I can’t, because it would need an orchestra to get it over.”

“Good-by.” she said, raising her dark eyes.

“Gee!” said the Little Booster. “When I’m seventy-seven I hope I have a descendant like you!”

“A favor for a favor.” she requested, looking away. “What’s the name of that helpless maiden you’re going to marry?”

“You.” said Brian Boru Blaney softly, as he released her hand and began racing toward Healthy View with the stride of a champion training for a Stockholm event.