

Miss Reba's Titania Booth

The blue hills stretched away in the distance and the blue sky was mottled with fleecy clouds that lazily drifted beyond the hilltop. The young man who was slowly pacing up the sunny main street of the little town stopped now and then in admiration. He was a young man of artistic tastes and the beauty of the day deeply affected him.

"This is all right," he said with a little smack of his lips as if he fairly tasted the charm of the scene. "No matter what the fishing may be, I'm going to get out of this sleepy little hamlet."

He took off his soft hat and pushed back his thick hair. A pleasant breeze fluttered his blue scarf.

"This is several notches ahead of the sooty lung food of the city," he said as he sniffed audibly at the lilac flavored air. Then he replaced his hat and picked up his bag. "But I can't live on scenery alone," he laughed. "Must have a few of the creature comforts as well."

He looked ahead along the deep shaded street to where the business houses stood, and shook his head. "Don't like the idea of a country hotel," he said. "Wonder if some good Samaritan with a spare bed and a simple menu wouldn't take me in and do for me?" And his eyes rested on the neat cottages scattered along the highway.

The sound of approaching footsteps drew his attention. He looked around. A girl, a young girl of fifteen, perhaps, with great black eyes and a wild tangle of black hair beneath a big yellow straw hat, was coming down the gravel walk from the nearest cottage.

The young man put down his bag again and stared in admiration at the approaching figure. Here was a new and delightful type. How did this olive cheeked gypsy find her way here? What an elfin ideal of spring she would make with the birds singing at the wave of her baton, and the squirrels and rabbits staring up at her in big eyed amazement!

He took off his hat as the girl's brown hand rested on the latch of the gate.

"Can you tell me, Miss Titania," he politely inquired, "if there is anybody in this neighborhood who would be willing to take an agreeable boarder who is never troublesome?"

The girl's big black eyes dilated as she deliberately looked him over.

"We might," she tersely answered. He gazed past her at the neat cottage with its white walls and green blinds, and its roomy porch. It looked inviting.

"Well?" he interrogated.

The girl was closely studying him.

"What are you?" she asked.

A facetious reply rose to his lips. He checked it.

"I am believed to be an artist," he replied.

"Miss Simpson had an artist boarder last summer," said the girl.

"Yes?"

"And he went away owing for his board."

The young man laughed merrily.

"A decidedly artistic trait," he said and laughed again. "Evidently a true Bohemian."

"No, I guess not," said the girl. "He talked just as good English as you and me." She leaned a little forward. "What kind of artist are you?" she asked.

"I am what is called a newspaper artist," he gravely replied. "My specialty is cartoons."

The girl shook her head.

"Do you paint signs and barns?"

"No," he replied, "my work is confined to more modest dimensions. Stand still, please."

He whipped an envelope from his pocket and a pencil and rapidly sketched the girl's head.

"There," he said, "take this as a card of introduction. My name is in the corner—Paul Remsen."

The girl stared at the drawing in amazement.

"Oh, oh," she cried, "that's wonderful! Am I—am I as pretty as that?" And then without waiting for Paul Remsen's reply she turned toward the house. "Come," she said, and darted up the pathway. He followed her, but when he reached the house she had disappeared. He seated himself in one of the porch chairs and waited. Presently a pale faced woman dressed in black appeared in the doorway.

Paul arose and bowed.

"My daughter tells me that you want a place to board," said the woman. She looked at him earnestly. "If you can be suited with our simple fare you are quite welcome to stay here."

"Thank you, madam," said Paul. "I have no doubt that I will be suited. And if agreeable to you I will pay the first week in advance."

"No," said the woman. "That is not necessary. The board will be

\$4 a week and you can pay me when the week is up."

"Very well, madam," said Paul with another bow. "May I inquire your name?"

"I am Mrs. Hannah Gray," she replied. "Better known in the town as the Widow Gray."

"That was your daughter I met at the gate?"

"Yes, my daughter Reba. And I have a son several years younger than his sister."

Then Paul was taken to his room, a large and extremely clean apartment with two windows that looked out upon blue hills and the sunny fields. And as he started out Paul quite forgot that he wanted to tidy up a little before he reappeared below stairs.

He was aroused from his absorbed study of the light and shade on the near by meadow where the low hung white clouds dropped their shadows on the earth. A gentle rap at the door drew his attention from the scene.

"Mr. Paul," cried Reba, "our lunch is ready, and I've just been over to Maria Slaker's to show her that picture you drew of me, and she said it was good enough to frame. Are you coming right down?"

So Paul Remsen found himself a member of the Gray household, and a very agreeable homie he found it. Mrs. Gray was a person of intelligence, and the children were delightfully full of animal spirits. And besides, he learned that the house was very convenient to a trout stream that was famed both far and near. Henry Gray escorted him down to the stream that afternoon, and it was planned that he would go fishing early the next morning, and then they returned by the old grist mill and the glen, and so around the town and back by the way of the post-office, where he found a letter from the managing editor, in which that worthy asked him to make a few sketches for the anniversary edition. Anything that had his name attached would do. Paul frowned a little as he thrust this letter in his pocket. He had meant to forget the shop.

Then they turned towards the Widow Gray's, where an excellent dinner awaited them.

That evening as they sat upon the porch and Paul was listening to the voices of the night, Reba Gray, who was sitting close to him, watching him intently, suddenly spoke.

"Mr. Paul," she said, "do you know anything about fancy fairs?"

"No," he replied, "I'm very glad to say I don't."

"But they have them in the city, don't they?"

"Yes," Paul laughed, "but I'm always too busy to go."

"They are going to have a fancy fair in our church—you can just catch sight of the white steeple over there," said the girl, "and I'd like to raise money to get a new library for the church and Sunday school. It's next week Wednesday. I wanted them to let me take part, but they wouldn't. I said I'd be Rebekah in the well and sell lemonade, you know, but they had a Rebekah. It's Jane Sinclair, and her father is one of the deacons. Then I said I'd be the postmistress, and they said I was too young. They won't let me be at the candy booth, either. They said they couldn't trust me. Why, they won't even let me peddle button-hole bouquets. Some of the girls said I was too fresh. It's too bad I can't do something, because each girl is credited with what she collects, and is allowed to buy such books as she likes up to the amount she takes in—with Mr. Slaker's approval, of course."

"And who is Mr. Slaker?" Paul inquired.

"He's the minister. Just a young man like you. But he's awful smart. Takes all the magazines and papers and knows all about what's going on everywhere. And he's a fisherman, too. He knows just where to go and all about it. I'm sure he'd like to have you go with him. You wouldn't be afraid of him, would you?"

Paul laughed.

"I guess not," he said. "Not if he's a fisherman."

"Well," said the girl, "he's coming over to see you in the morning."

"Coming to see me?"

"Yes. I ran over to his house to show Miss Maria—that's his sister—the picture you made of me, and Mr. Slaker was there and wanted to see it. And he stared at it and looked close at your name in the corner, and I said 'Do you know him?' and he said 'A great many people know him,' and then he said he would come early this morning to see you, and when I said you were going fishing, he laughed and said you were the right sort, and he would like to go with you. And I told him you were a very agreeable young man, and

said I was sure he would enjoy your company."

"That was very kind," laughed Paul, "and I must do my best to live up to the description. And now as I am sleepy and want to get up very early, with Mrs. Gray's permission I will go to my room."

He was up early enough to see the sun breaking its way through a cloudbank that seemed poised on the eastern hills, and had enjoyed a tramp down to the brook and back when Mrs. Gray announced the early breakfast. When he came out on the porch again a tall young man with a smooth and kindly face arose and greeted him and added something so very complimentary that Paul fairly blushed. And the tall young man asked permission to be his guide on the coming trip up the trout stream, and showed that he was fully equipped for the journey, the equipment including a well filled lunch box.

So Paul and the minister went fishing, and a wonderful day for sport it was. No boys could have enjoyed it with a keener zest. And when Paul reached home late in the afternoon with his string of finny treasures, of course he and the Rev. Richard Slaker had planned to go again the very next day.

Paul was tired and hungry, but the appetizing early dinner his landlady served to him was both enjoyable and restful.

"Reba," he said as he sought the porch, "I want to borrow you for a little while. I am going to make the most of these early shadows and pose you for a little sketch I have in mind."

The girl clapped her hands as Paul led the way to a corner of the orchard, and finding a spot that suited him, had the girl perch herself on a low branch of an apple tree, where the rays of the sun would fall full upon her. Then he seated himself upon a stump a little ways off, and with his drawing paper resting on a board upon his knee, began his sketch.

"I am going to call this picture by the name I first gave you," he said. "Perhaps you remember it. It was Titania."

"And what is that?" the girl asked.

"She was a queen of the fairies," Paul replied, "and a most delightful little lady. You see, I have my own ideas about fairies. To me they are not fragile Dresden china dolls with flossy flaxen hair. No. They are creatures of the open air, with the sun's kiss upon them, and the sun's warmth in their blood."

"How beautifully you talk," said the girl on the swinging branch.

Paul laughed as his nimble fingers moved across the sheet.

"It's the size and age of my audience that inspires me," he said. "If there were one or two more of you, and if you were a half dozen years older, I would be as mute and dull as a clam."

There was a brief silence as Paul worked on.

"How would you like to have a booth all your own at this fancy fair of which you told me?" he suddenly asked.

"What?" screamed the girl, and it was only with a violent effort that she saved herself from falling from the limb.

"Steady, there!" cried Paul.

"Say it again," said the girl.

"Calm yourself," laughed Paul. "The minister and I have talked the matter over and it can be arranged. Steady, I say. But it must remain a secret. Yes, and it means some hard work, too. You see I want to make a little return to you for the posing you are going to do for me. In the city we pay cash for such services. I am going to pay you in another way."

"Why, I'm tickled to death to do it," cried the girl.

"I refuse to take advantage of your ignorance of commercial transactions," laughed Paul. "And besides, I am glad to do a little something to show my appreciation of your minister's kindness. He is a charming young man. There, that will do for a beginning. You may come and see it."

Paul Remsen worked as long as the light lasted and then they talked the matter over with the Widow Gray on the porch, and presently the young minister joined them, and after a while all the details were settled.

They were not to interfere with the fishing excursions, of course, but there would be time before and after them, and Reba, with Henry's assistance, could be kept busy while Paul was away. The town book store would have to be looted of its cardboard and its tissue paper, and the work must be commenced at once.

Paul laughed as he blew out the lamp in his room a little later and pushed aside the muslin curtain to let in the straggling rays of moonlight.

"You are a queer fellow," he said to himself. "Yesterday you flung down your pencils and ran away from

your work, and here you are in it again up to your neck—and enjoying it, too."

The big lecture room of Pastor Richard Slaker's church was a brilliant scene that eventful Wednesday evening. Pastor Slaker's flock were enterprising and zealous and whatever they undertook they undertook they tried to do as well as possibly could be done with the means at their disposal.

The hall was well lighted, the booths were gay with many colors, and the lady attendants were pleasant to look upon. There was music, too, and the hum of many voices added a pleasing undertone.

Paul Remsen stood by the tall young pastor's side as the latter swept the room with gratified glance.

"Creditable, isn't it?" he asked.

"Very," Paul replied. "And I hope the permanent results will be equally so."

The pastor laughed.

"There is very little of the artist in that decidedly practical remark," he said.

"We get hardened in the city," said Paul. "We don't give a pencil stroke without its golden equivalent."

The young pastor laid his hand affectionately on the artist's shoulder.

"How about Titania's booth?" he smilingly asked.

"Let's go across and have another look at it," said Paul. "Or rather at Titania. Did you ever see a happier vision? She doesn't know it, luckily, but there isn't another attraction in the hall that can hold a tallow dip to her."

And she certainly was a charming picture. It was a small booth, but it was glorified by its brilliant trappings and its glowing little queen. It was all gilt paper, and tissue folds, and thought and design and exquisite taste in every detail.

And fairy Titania, with the tinsel star on her forehead and the tinsel wings arching from her shoulders, was backed and surrounded by a retinue of minor fairies—cardboard fairies that dangled on strings, gilded fairies pinned against the bunting walls, big fairies and little fairies, and scattered among them were a dozen or more sketches of Titania in various poses, hold pen and ink sketches, with Paul's name in the corner, and on an easel in the background was a large and exquisite wash drawing of Titania in the apple tree.

There was an admiring little group about the Titania booth when the pastor and Paul approached, but the queen caught sight of them and beckoned them to come nearer. Then she leaned across the golden bar and hoarsely whispered in Paul's ear:

"Seventeen dollars and fifty cents. Rebekah at the well isn't it."

"I'm glad of that," murmured Paul and drew back.

As he moved away he noticed a stout, elderly man with an aristocratic elderly lady leaning on his arm, approaching Titania's booth. Paul smiled as he caught sight of the gentleman's face. He recognized it at once. The man was Judge Hamerton, an ex-member of a former president's cabinet, and a statesman of note.

"Why this is lovely!" said the elderly lady. "What an exquisite child! Are all these fairies for sale, my dear?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the queen in a little flutter for she had recognized the grand family of the town. "They are all prices—from 10 cents up."

"An except one," laughed the judge.

But Titania did not understand.

"That's for sale too," she said and brought forward the wash drawing.

"Good, isn't it?"

The judge nodded gravely over it. Then he stopped and looked at the name in the corner.

"Why, it's the child herself!" cried the lady.

"What is the price?" the judge asked.

Titania looked at the back of the picture and hesitated.

"It is marked \$30," she said in a faint voice.

The judge drew out his pocketbook and handed her the money.

"I will call for it before we go, my dear," he said. "Are you selling these for Mr. Remsen?"

"Oh, no," said Titania, "I'm selling them for myself—that is, for the church. Mr. Paul gave them all to me to sell for just what I could get."

"Why, that's fine," said the elderly lady.

"Is he here?" inquired the judge.

"Yes," said Titania. "But I wasn't to tell."

"I'll find him," laughed the judge. And he did.

It was much later in the evening when the tall pastor touched Paul's arm.

"Titania wanted me to tell you

that the fairy treasury now holds exactly ninety dollars."

"Good," laughed Paul. "And it isn't 'fairy gold,' either."

"I am going to break my promise to you," said the pastor. "I simply can't help it. Here is one of our worthiest citizens who is determined to know you. Judge Hamerton, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Paul Remsen. Mrs. Hamerton, Mr. Remsen."

"You have made some atrocious cartoons of me, sir," laughed the judge, "and I am very glad to know you."

"We would be greatly pleased to extend the hospitalities of our home," said the elderly lady.

"Thank you," said Paul, "you are very kind. I must decline your invitation this time. I return to work tomorrow, but I feel quite certain I will come again."

—W. R. Rose in Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Like Hot Cakes

Tickets for the Slavin-Barley game go tomorrow, Thursday, night, selling very rapidly at both the Anza and Pioneer saloons. As the fair is to be held in the A. H. every seat will be a vantage point. Both men are going in to win, only the contest will show who is the better man.

The event begins at 10 o'clock and will be a hummer from start to finish.

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