The Little Count

By VIRGINIA BLAIR

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Down the long corridor of the hotel came a girl in summer white, with a broad hat, rose-wreathed. In her hands she carried a bunch of valley lilies.

"You—" breathed the little count and stopped.

"Oh," she cried, "when did you come?"

"I have been here three days," he told her, "I have talked and talked—and there was nothing worth while—until now."

She caught her breath. So many men had said such things to her. But in her experience there had never seen anything like this little foppish foreigner, with his pale face lighted by some inner radiance.

"I am so glad you are here," she said, and they walked together to a window that overlooked the ocean.

"You are staying at the other hotel?" she asked.

"Yes. Grandmother likes it better. She has a lot of old cronies there."

He was not listening. "Ah, Miss Rene," he said, "you are more beautiful than ever."

"I have always been called 'Irene,'" she told him, blushing, "but I like the way you say my name."

"I have said it so often to my heart," he murmured.

The guests in the wide hall looked at them curiosly. A party of young people swept in, the girls all a-flutter like butterflies, the men making a background of well-groomed complacency.

"They are looking for me," Irene said.

"You shall stay with me." His tone seemed to command obedience.

But she struggled against it. "That man over there gave me my lilies and I have promised to go with him to listen to the band."

"I can give you lilies! I can give you more than lilies—I can give you love."

"Don't," she pleaded, "don't say such things to me."

A tall, dark young man came up to them. "Come on, Irene," he said.

For a moment she hesitated, then she said to the little count: "Forgive me—it is an engagement."

He bowed—a stiff little bow of acquiescence.

As she joined the gay party there was a ripple of laughter from the girls.

Later, the little count found her on the beach in a hooded chair. He stood looking down at her silently, then he said: "Why did you let them make fun of me?"

"Who?" she stammered.

"Your friends—this morning—at the hotel. They laughed and you let them."

"I am so sorry,' she protested—"that you heard."

"I do not care what they think" He drew himself up with a gesture of contempt. "They are nothing to me. But it is you—you. You shall not think I am to be laughed at—you shall not—" his small white hand gripped the arm of the chair. She had an impression of hidden power that thrilled her. "You shall not," he repeated.

"I do not," she said, gently. "You know that last summer at Newport I was your friend. Surely you must believe that my friendship may be as sincere this winter at Palm Beach."

"Place has nothing to do with it," he said, slowly. Then he broke off. "But what is there about me to make them laugh?"

"Well, you are different—" she tried to explain. "The other men are all big men, and they play golf and tennis and—and to them you seem effeminate."

"Ah, I see." Suddenly his head went up and his eyes flashed. "What do I care for golf?" he cried. "It's an old man's game, and tennis is for boys. When I am at home I ride and hunt—such things are sport for men. I ride through the forest in the wind and storm and the rains beat upon me and I shout and sing, and my horse is like a wild thing under me."

She gasped at the change in him. Small as he was and seemingly insignificant, she felt that the hand with the pointed finger nails could hold a horse with a grip of steel. She felt that he might hold a woman, too, only the hand would then be gloved in velvet.

But even as the thought flashed through her, he turned to her.

"And if there is a difference," he said, "between these men and me, it is the difference of my greater love. What do they know of romance? They would take you to a house in the city and you would go to dinners and teas and teas and receptions. And in summer you would do the same thing in a cottage that should be called a palace. But I would take you to my castle in the forest. And you should ride with me, or sit by the fire in the great rooms, while the wind blew outside, and you and I alone, within, dreamed together."

"Oh," she breathed, "life would be wonderful—lived that way."

But even as she spoke the crowd of the morning was upon them, and the tall, dark young man claimed her. "There's the motor-boat ride on the lake," he said.

So she went away, and when the tall dark young man had her on the lake he said: "For heaven's sake, Irene, what do you see in that little man?"

She flared up at that. "He's a man, Harold Manning," she said. "His love for me is something deeper than the rest of you give me. You condescend, but he reverences. He would hold me to the highest that is in me."

Harold laughed. "You are good enough," he said, "as it is, and you couldn't respect such a man."

"Couldn't I?" she asked, curiously. "Sometimes I think he is a bigger man than you, Harold."

"He is a fortune hunter," Harold remarked.

His words struck her like a blow. Perhaps she had been foolish. Perhaps the love that was beginning to grow in her heart had been called forth by a man who was only acting a part—perhaps—but she put the thought from her until that night. But when she was in bed she lay awake a long time, evolving a plan.

It was a week later that she met Harold in the corridor. "I have had a letter," she said. "Come on the porch and I'll tell you about it."

He went, and she gave him a hasty summing up. "The mine from which I have been getting my income has stopped paying," she said. "I shan't have a penny when things are settled."

The big man stared at her. "Oh, but look here, Irene," he said, "you don't mean that it's all gone?"

"All!" Her eyes studied his paling face curiously.

"By Jove," he said under his breath. "By Jove."

Presently he recovered himself a little, and said, awkwardly, "if there is anything that I can do—"

Still she studied him. "A week ago," she said, "you offered me your hand and heart—today I need you more than I have ever needed you."

He broke in nervously. "Of course—but you see my affairs are in something of a muddle."

"I see." Her voice cut. "You could marry me only when I could take care of you?"

"No—not that—only together we might have made things go."

"I understand." Her eyes went beyond him to where the little count was ascending the steps.

She stood up and hailed him, eagerly. "I wanted—to tell you," she said, somewhat breathlessly when he reached her, "that—that I—am going away."

He looked from her flushed face to Harold's gloomy one. "Why?"

"I—I have lost my money." She found the fiction a little difficult as his clear eyes met her. "Some investments have failed."

A sudden radiance illuminated him. "Ah, what difference does it make?" he asked. "I have enough for you and for me."

Harold interrupted with a short laugh. "I'd better get out," he said.

The little count surveyed him, squarely. "What else could I do?" he demanded, "at such a moment but offer her the love of my heart? My life is her's—to do with as she will."

And then, suddenly, Irene broke down and wept. "Oh, oh—I haven't been telling the truth. It was a test."

Through her tears she saw the little count stiffen and grow tense.

"A test of me—of my love?"

"Of your love—and of his." Her scornful finger went to Harold.

The count seemed to read the truth in the abjectness of that humbled figure.

"He failed?" he flashed.

"He offered me nothing today, except his sympathy," Irene said. "Yesterday he offered me marriage."

"But—" Harold began.

But now it was the count who interrupted. "Go," he said, "and leave us together. She is mine, and I am hers. And you—you are a little man—you would still be a little man if you weighed a ton."

For a moment Harold blustered, then before the dignity of that commanding gaze he slunk away and the little count turned to the woman he loved.

"Let's forget it all now, dearest," he said, gently, as she faltered her excuses. "It is of you and of our love that I must talk, and of our life together in my honeymoon castle in my own beloved forest."

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The Cherub.

He had lemon-colored curls and a nose like a pink button, and his age was close to four.

He came into the drug store accompanied by his mamma, and was lifted onto a stool at the soda water counter.

His mamma ordered two chocolate slips, and immediately thereafter the youngster's face wrinkled amazingly and he uttered an indignant "Waw-aw-aw!" His mamma bent over him.

"Make Algie a chocolate soda," she said.

The orders were filled.

"Waw-aw-aw!" shrieked the infant.

Again the mother bent down.

"Algie wants a plated holder for his glass."

The holder was provided.

"Waw-aw-aw!" howled the little customer.

"Algie wants a straw," said mamma.

Algie got the straw.

There was a moment's silence, during which the little angel intently scowled at the clerk.

"What is it, dear?"

Once more the mother bent down.

"Waw-aw-aw!"

"Algie doesn't like your face," she said to the clerk. "Will you please go away a little while?"

The clerk cheerfully went away.

HOUSES BUILT IN CIRCLE

Architect of Buenos Ayres Has Evolved New Idea Which Seems to Possess Attractions.

Buenos Ayres has an architect in Prof. Pierre Roveda who has devised a special plan for building whole districts of houses for the workingman. Instead of erecting the houses on the ordinary square block Professor Roveda has used a circle which has a diameter of from 100 to 130 yards.

This circle of ground is divided into ninety-nine radial lots converging to a center. The circle is concentrically divided to form an interior avenue four yards broad to allow communication with the center of the circle. Each avenue leads to external sidewalks and to longitudinal and transverse streets.

In the center of the circle is a plot of forty yards in diameter where children may be left to themselves without their parents' care, in charge of a specially designated person. In this garden a playroom, a school, a hospital, a fire station and an administration room are to be found.

Naturally this circular plot of ground leaves free four corners. In each of these four corners the professor proposes to build four chalets, such as grocery shops, dairies, haberdasheries and the like, which are intended to be carried on in a co-operative way. In each of the ninety-nine radial plots a workingman's house is to be erected on the English plan. Prof. Roveda argues for his circular arrangement that it will give continuous sunshine at all hours of the day and plenty of light and air.

Keeping Hubby at Home.

A New York matron proudly exhibited the lock of her front door to the afternoon caller. It was an intricate looking affair, resembling a gum machine more than it did a door latch. "You turn this," explained the woman, pointing to a tiny knob inside the door, "and you have fixed the bolt so it can't be shot back with the key. To release the tumblers you've got to drop a coin in the slot outside. The only piece of money that will fit is a five dollar gold piece. The idea is my own. A locksmith downtown worked out the mechanical part of it for me. Every night at 10:30 I adjust the coin attachment. If my husband is out after that hour it costs him five dollars to get in. He stays home evenings, as a rule."

Fish Wear Out a Bridge.

John Shafer, Jr., deputy in the office of County Surveyor Frank Haycock of Hennepin county, says that fish have butted and rubbed up against the piles of the bridge at Orono, Lake Minnetonka, until that aged edifice has become weakened, necessitating its closing.

Shafer and Edward Terrell, another deputy, were sent out to inspect the span.

"Yes, sir," said Shafer, "those fish kept on butting up against that pier until the wood was almost worn away. In order to get there we had to pound the water around the place to keep the finny things away until we could finish our inspection.

"Why those fish are so numerous at Minnetonka this year that they get pushed through the narrow passage so swift that they simply wear out the wood."—St. Paul Dispatch.

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