

The Fool of the Family

By Mrs. B. M. Croker

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Letty's proud, sore heart, was the real, true and only reason for the sudden uprooting of the Lavender Family. For years she and Stephen Squire had been playmates. Stephen had been learning farming—he managed his father's land—was a smart, good-looking young man—and his father expected him to marry well. He would never fulfill their wishes, by loitering in the lanes with Letty Lavender, the daughter of a widow in humble circumstances. His sisters could not forgive her for her pretty face, his father could not overlook her empty pockets, but nothing could be said against her family—she was known that a hundred years ago, the Lavenders were great people—and genteel; their impressive monuments covered half the walls in the village church—but gambling and the loss of the estate had led down to the rank of cottagers in less than three generations; and all that remained to Letty, was her beauty, her self-will and her pride. She was aware that Stephen, her old betrothed, was "warped off" from her society. His sisters had insulted her in public—whilst his father had sought out and brought home an acceptable future daughter-in-law. Her father's attitude was staunch. With eager eagerness, he suggested to Letty that she should marry, and go out to New Zealand, and make their home there. But she refused. She would not leave her mother and brother, and make a sort of runaway match. Then she and Stephen had sharp words. He was, he said, ready to make a fortune and all his prospects, but Letty would not even meet him quarter way—and she was so cold and distant, he believed she did not care a straw about him. At this crisis, Stephen's father appeared on the scene. Stephen was seen in her company—at church—before the show—and the breach was complete.

Letty felt that she could not endure to remain in Silverstream, receiving the compassion of the villagers. After a final scene with Stephen, she made up her mind to escape from her old life and make a fortune for herself. As a dressmaker in London, for instance. Her mother would not listen to the word "separation," if Letty went, they would all go. But, the lady, shocked at her daughter's determination in family councils, Letty's imagination was active, she planned the move entirely. When the place was duly advertised, and a suit of the purchase—the dressmaker that they would take a nice little flat in London, where marketing was cheap, and everything was so convenient. She would go into the dressmaking business.

In London she would forget Stephen. Mrs. Lavender, a thin, fair woman—Dan, her sheek-headed, half-witted son of 16, and Letty—her pretty, enterprising daughter, came to Africa in the month of August, accompanied by "Muff," the cat. They took two furnished rooms in a house near the Vauxhall road, and prepared to enter upon their new life.

October came—with news of the war in South Africa—London flared, but trade was still slack, and faces were long and gloomy. Christmas arrived—and found the Lavender family still in the two squalid rooms, still unemployed, and one and all severely yearning to be back in Rosedale. Had news had arrived with the New Year. Mr. Tom—who was inseparable to Letty; or even telegrams, had suddenly bolted, having quietly disposed of all the effects at Rosedale. He owed two hundred and thirty pounds—he had only paid twenty on account. This disaster, so entirely unexpected, was a terrible blow to Mrs. Lavender, whose meager savings were rapidly disappearing in London. And the money was gone—Tom had secretly made away with all the stock and furniture, sent the key to the landlord for free, and vanished. His references had been supplied by a rascally solicitor—his co-accidenter—and he had enjoyed three months' residence in the country gratis—and carried off substantial booty.

Another grave piece of intelligence—Steve Squire having refused to fall in with his father's wishes, and marry Miss Bulger and four thousand pounds—had suddenly enlisted in the yeomanry, and departed for the front.

Poor Letty—misfortunes never come singly! Stephen wrote to her before he sailed, and bade her a dramatic farewell.

I blame myself, Letty for my hot temper—and hot words—forgive me—you may never see again—but who with his last breath, will ever be true and loyal to you. Letty, you did wrong to go to London—your pride (London pride) took you there; if you had stayed here—all would have come round in time, you might have trusted me—I was barely civil to Miss Bulger—and no more—I am off for the front now." Thus Steve departed—his hopes postponed—but not dispelled.

Meanwhile Letty had sufficient trouble on her hands at home. Her mother's health was indifferent—she suffered more than ever from bronchitis, and funds were depressingly low. Dan had taken to the London streets—as a fish to water, and because the pal and friend of sandwich men and newsboys—finally a newsboy himself—not being such a fool as he looked!

The year 1906 was a black one for many families—including the Lavender

ders. They had no near kin abroad—no one fighting and fainting on the South African veldt—but they had simple anxiety near home. It was now a question of how to get the wolf from the door, and Dan's was the hand that beat him off. Dan took round the Evening Scram, and his voice overflowed that of the most lecherous in the district, but his earnings were scanty—enough for one—but a pitiful supply for three.

Summer came with sunshine and gay jargony, and the usual London season, but to Letty and her mother it brought nothing but agonizing memories of the pretty rose-clad "Rosedale."

Christmas came round again, and found Letty doing "shop-work" with her machine—assisted by her mother—dramatic shirts, three-piece a dozen.

"Mother!" she exclaimed, "you and Dan ought to hate me, though this is the season of good will. I had a quarrel with Stephen—all because his sisters were rude to me, and I resolved to come to London, and be a success—look at me! Do I look like a success? And I have dragged you and Dan from your comfortable home, and simply worked on your affection, and you left Rosedale with me—left comfort—for starvation. Oh! oh!" and she bent her head upon her hands and sobbed aloud.

"What's that?" inquired Dan—"Ere is a nice Christmas gift for you, and I have brought you a Christmas present!" and in his (I regret to add) grumpy fingers he held up a little brown paper parcel. This she opened, and proudly displayed what looked like a diamond spray—and oh, how it glittered and shone—red, white and



Proudly Displayed What Looked Like a Diamond Spray.

blue, and how it compared with the one-dirty gas-burner!

"Oh, Dan, what a lovely gift!" she said—"how did you get it? It's surely real!"

I was looking on at one of them Saturday evening auctions last night—people sang in thistles—let them go to buy for charity, you see—and some one held this up from a basket of rubbish—for bidding, and one fellow, who I don't want much jewelry, but he had, and the thing shook and splashed, and looked at me so straight—and said: "Dan, you buy me for your sister—she loves pretty things—and 'tis Christmas." And so I did! Her had some extra copers for fetching a cab, and here it is, money wasted—fortune—but mighty pretty, ain't it? When I bought it, they all said it was a sassy."

"It is real, Dan?" "How could they sell it for five pounds?"

"How do I know? Maybe some wicked rich woman sent it as a payment for her sins—a what you call it?"

"Penance?"

"Yes, and to-morrow we will show it to young Levi. He is a friend of mine, and get him to value it—this morning I showed it to a man, and he offered me five pounds!"

"Oh, Dan, dear, what folly. You should have taken it," cried his mother.

"No, no, mamma, if it is worth five pounds—it is worth more. I know I'm a fool, but I tell you it is worth a fortune—a fortune to you and sis!" Dan's words came true. The ornament proved to be blue diamonds of the purest water, and was valued at two thousand five hundred pounds. It had no history—most fortunate fact indeed, no claimant, so it belonged to Letty Lavender, who, needless to say, sold it—and with the proceeds in her hand, suggested to her mother that they should return to Rosedale. The business arrangements connected with the sale of the ornament were necessarily protracted, but by the end of May the Lavender family had returned to Rosedale. Fortunately their old house still stood empty, and they lost no time in taking possession, and collecting their belongings—dog included—and settling into their usual groove—unless as if they had never left the village.

Stephen Squire had recently returned from South Africa with three wounds, two medals, and a heart still loyal to Letty Lavender—and old John, his father, no longer objected to the match. Forgiveness is never so easy as when convenient—the girl was a lady by birth—and had a tidy little fortune of two thousand pounds. He dispatched his son to the country camp with a flag of truce, in the shape of a fine home-cured ham—and all is now—peace, good will, and prosperity.

John's Message

By Mabel Quiller Couch

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John Carter stood at his own door with a coil of rope in his hand and an expression of fear on his face. His wife was within, scrubbing; she had cleaned her doorstep and was just scrubbing the last square yard of her kitchen. A shadow across the broad patch of sunshine which fell on the floor made her look up. When she saw her husband standing there with muddy boots on her clean doorstep her ire was roused, and quickly found voice.

"Why, John," she cried in an injured, argumentative tone, "what are you doing there right on my clean step? Get off, quick. Why were couldn't you have stood outside and called into me what you wanted, or have took off your boots and come in in your stockings? For, same as I've got to invest at the cost of catching cold—with some asperity—"rather than dirty up the place as soon as ever I've got it cleaned?"

John stepped back and looked down with fear and sorrow at the havoc he had caused. On the freshly scrubbed floor were two large muddy foot marks and the trail of a dirty rope. He had hurried up from the pond where he had gone to water the horses, and the end of the wet rope had trailed all the way through the white dust. His wife saw the mark too, and the first mutterings of the storm passed without a single break into the second stage, growing rapidly more pronounced.

"Of course your own great foot marks wash it enough, but you must try how you can make more work for me, I dunno—"her wrath working to a higher and still higher pitch—"I dunno, I really don't, what you then think women-folk is made for, unless 'tis to clean up after you and cook your victuals for you, and mind your house, and save your money, and look



"And You Calling Yourself a Man Too."

after you same as if you was poor helpless babes. It passes me, it do, it passes my understanding altogether. Here I am a working and a striving from five in the morning till late at night, all to keep up your place respectable, and no sooner have I got it all tidy and begin to think I can have five minutes' rest than in you comes, as regular as if you done it on purpose, to step over the floor I've been down on my hands and knees scrubbing my life out over. 'Tisn't no manner of use telling me you didn't know; 'tis my belief 'tis done on purpose—"tis done to aggravate me—shirly, 'kon't you put me down for a fool, John Carter, I can see, I can see same as other people can, and can come and tell me of it, 'tis done to aggravate me to try to make me lose my temper that you may go away and talk about it. But you won't get what you want John Carter, I can tell you; and you can out that in your pipe and smoke it. I haven't scrubbed your house through and through for the last twenty years without learning something, and it would be very hard if I hadn't got the length of your foot by this time. Do you think I didn't know that so soon as ever I'd got the place looking a bit clean you would come a-tramping it over with all the dirt you could find. What do you want to come here for?" John raised his head for the first time to speak.

"You didn't want nothing. I know that as well as you; if you'd a-wanted anything I wouldn't have minded. I'm not one who keeps their place for ornament and never allow anybody to walk over it after 'tis clean, as some people does; but I do hold that it shouldn't be made dirty willful, just for aggravation, and I shouldn't call myself a man if I had to stoop to such ways. If I let the place go and didn't keep it clean I know who'd be the first to run and tell the neighbors that his wife never did nothing, but left her place like a pigsty. Don't stand there like a great gawp—stamping her foot at him—"you can't undo what you've done. If you'd got the sense for it I'd make you go down upon your hands and knees and clean it same as I've got to ten minutes after I've done it once; but you haven't got sense, that's where it is. If you was a child you'd be slapped, and if you was a woman you could take and

man—Oh, my goodness!"—with awful scorn—"Then when you've stood there and worked the best endurance you'll go and tell folks as how I drove me to sleep. Just as if you never lost yours! And you've been standing there going on at me for ten minutes and more by the clock."

A change in her voice denoted that tears were near at hand. Once more her husband opened his mouth to speak, and once again had to shut it. For a part of an opinion drove me to it. So—"hysterically—"good-by, John Carter. You can wash your kitchen yourself, and you can get your meals yourself, and you can look after the children yourself, so good-by, and I hope you'll get on. I should like to see my poor little Johnnie once more just to say good-bye, if—"with boundless sarcasm—"you've no objections, I'd like to be allowed to hate him altogether, if you will kindly let me see him once more. Would you mind telling me where and when I can see him?"

For the first time she paused for an answer, and John was able to speak. "That's what I've been waiting to tell you," he said slowly. "Johnnie's in the pond!"

Trackless Trolleys in Europe. In districts where the construction of permanent tramways would be out of the question, owing to prohibitive initial cost, there are in use in Germany and France electric transport systems running on the ordinary roads, says a writer in Engineering. They draw their supply of electricity from overhead wires similar to those in use in tramway working. Provision is made for passenger traffic by means of omnibuses run singly or with a trailer, and for freight traffic is handled by motor vehicles drawing two or three trailers. The first of such lines was opened in 1901, and since that time quite a number of services have been inaugurated in the forest districts. The routes are for the most part comparatively short. One of the longest lines is that of the Charlottenburg-Hinrichs, near Lyons, which is worked with six motor cars of a seating capacity of 38 passengers each. A line is also worked between the towns of Neuenahr, Walporthain and Ahrweiler. A line is worked exclusively in connection with an industrial center in the neighborhood of Wurzen, Germany, over which some 30 wagons are taken either way daily.

To Tell Next Year's Weather. To predict weather a year in advance is the latest feat that scientists have tried to accomplish. The Technical World Magazine contains an article by John Elreth Watkins, in which he tells of the latest advances in weather forecasting and the new United States atmospheric laboratory in Washington.

Variations of the heat radiation of the sun are the basis for the new science of long distance weather prediction, and specially instruments have been devised to meet the requirements of this special work. One of the most interesting of these instruments is the bolometer, which will detect variations in temperature of the millionth part of a degree. Through the work of this branch of the weather bureau the government hopes to be able to tell the farmer whether or not he will have a wet, dry, warm or cold season, so that he may regulate his crops accordingly. The aims and methods of this new science are given a popular and interesting presentation and the article is well illustrated.

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