

A FAIR EMIGRANT

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CHAPTER XI
FURTHER MISLEADINGS

Never had there been more perfect weather for a journey, so far, but on the sixth day a gale met the good ship in the teeth. Bawn made this a pretext for staying in her cabin all day, and the Blue Cap weathered the storm on deck, feeling that he could not ask her to face it with him, and anathematically; the mischance that had lost him some of those hours which he had now begun to count as precious beyond price. Towards evening, when the wind was still howling and the steamer pitching, he could no longer control his desire to see her, and went down to look for her.

"Ask the young lady with the golden hair if she will speak to me," he said to the stewardess. So strictly had he respected her intention of keeping her name unknown to him that he had taken no measures to discover it from any other than herself. He would learn it only from her own lips.

She came to him at the foot of the stair, looking unusually pale, but quiet and unalarmed. "The worst of the storm is over," he said, looking at her with a glow of gladness in his dark eyes that made her heart beat faster. "You must be tired to death of that cabin by this time. Every one has been sick, I suppose, and everybody cross but yourself. Come up on deck, and I will take care of you while you get a little air."

"Yes," she said readily. Why should she not go? Her thoughts had been troubled with him all day, and she found such thinking a very unwise occupation. Better go with him and brace herself, if not him, by disenchaining him a little more than she had yet done. There were now only two days of the voyage yet to come, and after that were past she should see him no longer.

He drew her arm within his and piloted her to a spot where she could sit in safety by slipping her arms under some ropes, which kept her lashed to her place. "You have not been frightened?" he said, in a tone which made her suddenly repent of having exchanged the stifling cabin for the air, however grateful, of heaven.

"No; I am not easily frightened, I think, and I am not much afraid of death, perhaps because I can never realize it for myself. I am so young and strong that I suppose I hardly believe I have got to die. And just now life seems more alarming to me than death."

"Why?" "I cannot tell you." "Is it because you fear the shops of Paris may disappoint you?" "The shops?" "Have you forgotten the shops which contain your heaven?" "True. Oh! yes, of course. There may be things, you see, in those shops which I may not be rich enough to buy."

"Bawn—" "Do not so call me, please." "Why?" "You said you would not unless I gave you leave."

"And will you not give me leave?" "No." "I beseech you to allow me." "I cannot. It hurts my dignity too much." "Do you think I am a man who could bear to hurt your dignity?" "I do not think you are; but, at all events, I will not allow you to be. Do you think any nice woman would allow a mere fellow-traveller, the chance acquaintance of a week, to fall into a habit of calling her by her Christian name? Because I believe you a gentleman I have, being alone and in peculiar circumstances, accepted your kindness."

"I have shown you no kindness; I have simply loved you from the first moment I looked upon you." "You must not say so." "Why must not I say so? I am free, independent, able to give a home, if not a very splendid one, to my wife. Till now I have not cared to marry because I never loved a woman before as I love you. I have told you no particulars about myself, neither my name, nor where is my place in the world, nor any other detail which a man lays before a woman whom he asks to share his lot. I have avoided giving this out of pique at your want of interest in the matter and your persistent silence about yourself."

"That is a silence which must count." "No! no. Give me at least a chance of winning your love in time. You do not positively dislike me?" "No." "Nor distrust me?" "No."

"Then why should you thrust me so terribly away out of your life?" "Because I have to go my way alone, and I cannot allow any one to hinder me." "Those are hard words coming from so young a woman. Do you mean that you have pledged yourself never to marry?" "I have not so pledged myself."

"You are not engaged to any other man?" "No." "You have no mother nor father to exercise control over your actions?" "I am quite alone in the world, and as free as air."

"Then let me tell you that you are in need of a protector and of such a love as I offer you. I believe you are going to seek your fortune in

Paris; for I have made up my mind that you are not rich."

"Do wealthy young ladies travel across the sea alone? Good, noble, and true ones may do so, but the wealthy bring keepers and caretakers in their train. Then, though your dress is neat—as fit, and more charming and becoming than any other lady's garb that I see or have seen—it is not the apparel of a woman of property."

"I do not like seal skin; it makes me too hot. I am too healthy and vigorous to wear fur."

"You will not admit that you are poor, but it is one of the things about you that I know without your telling."

"I am not a woman to marry a man merely to get out of a difficulty."

"God forbid! I think I should not care for you if you were. You are, rather, a woman to reject what might be for your happiness, from an exaggerated fear of being suspected by yourself or others of any but the purest motives for your actions."

"I am capable of making up my mind and sticking to it. And I do not wish to marry."

"Never?" "I will not say never. I think I hardly seem to believe in my own future. The present—I mean the present of a couple of years or so—is everything to me."

"And your reasons for all this you absolutely will not tell me, not even if I were to swear to devote myself to assisting you in any enterprise you have got on hand?"

"I spoke of no enterprise."

"No, but all you say implies that you have one. There is some difficulty before you, and it is your romantic fancy to meet it single-handed."

"If that is your theory, what becomes of the salons and the shops?" "It may be a difficulty that lies among salons and shops. How can I imagine what it may not be? Can it be that you think yourself under obligation to enter a convent?"

"No; I fear I am not good enough for that."

"Then what can it be, in which the services of a man might not be acceptable, if not useful? What reason ought there to be why you and I should part, as utter strangers part, and never see or hear of each other again?"

"Some of the reasons I cannot tell you, but one may be enough. You want to persuade me to marry you; and I do not want to marry you or anybody else."

"You could continue to refuse me; or time might change your mind."

"It would be exceedingly inconvenient to me if I were to change my mind."

"You mean that you are afraid of that?" "I am a little afraid of it."

"Upon what grounds, if I may dare to ask? Do you distrust your own powers of endurance, and dread to be betrayed into marrying for a motive you consider unworthy, the weak desire to escape from a dilemma?"

"Not that."

"Are you afraid you could learn to love me?" "Yes."

"My God! And after such a confession you expect me to give you up?" "You will have to give me up," said Bawn sadly.

"O my love! do not speak so harshly. You have admitted too much."

"I fear I have, and you ought not to have wrung it from me. You ought to have been satisfied with my earnest statement that I am doing the only thing that I can do."

"Bawn, you do not know what you are saying. As well say that two people in the flush of youth and health would be justified in casting themselves, hand-in-hand, into the sea, to drown together. You would condemn us, with the love and happiness that are in us, to sudden death at the end of this journey which has been so fatal for us both. Do you really desire that we should never meet again in this world?"

"I do not desire it. But I know that it must be." "Never? Have you considered all that that word 'never' means? It is not absence for a year or for twenty years; it is entire blotting out for evermore."

"It may be," said Bawn, "that in years to come we may happen to meet again."

"And your difficulty may then be cleared away?" "It may be so, or, on the contrary, it may have deepened so terribly that I shall be glad to see that you have married and made yourself happy in the meantime."

"You are a heartless woman."

"Am I? It may be well for me if I can prove to myself that I am."

Science fell between them. The gleam had abated and the sky had cleared. He could see the expression of her face as she looked straight before her with a downcast, wistful gaze. There was much sorrow in her eyes—those tender and grey eyes which had seemed to him from the first moment he had met her glance to be the sweetest in the world—as made his heart ache to deliver her from the mysterious difficulty with which she was so sorely beset. That she had some great struggle before her he no longer doubted; that she was in the hands of people whom she had not seen and whom he feared. He did not for a moment question her own individual goodness and nobility of purpose, but his very faith in her made him the more alarmed for her sake. What might not such a girl undertake if she could only get

hold of a motive sufficiently lofty and unselfish!

That he should lose her out of his life through her fidelity to some worthless wretch or wretches, in some way bound up with her fate, made him feel wild; and yet, even as he gazed at her face, it seemed to grow paler and paler with determination, as, knitting her soft brows, she pushed away her regrets and strengthened her resolution to adhere to her own plans.

How, Bawn was asking herself, could she tell this man that she was the daughter of one who had been branded and banished as a murderer? How could she persuade him to share her certainty that her father had been wrongfully accused? And even were he to prove most improbably generous, and were to accept her faith and say to her, "Be you henceforth my wife and nothing more," could she then forget her father and his life-long anguish, and utterly relinquish her endeavours to clear his name in the eyes of the little world that had accused him?

No, she could not bring herself to say, "I am the Arthur Desmond, who lived under a ban for having taken the life of his friend." And even if she could thus run the risk of being rejected as the child of a murderer, she would not give up her scheme for throwing the light of truth upon his memory.

After all, what was this man to her this acquaintance of less than a week, in comparison with the father who had for twenty long years been the only object of her worship? Let him take his ardent dark eyes, his winning voice, and the passionate appeals and reproaches elsewhere. She could not afford to yield up her heart to his persuasions.

CHAPTER XII
LOVERS

Bawn got up the next morning fully determined that she would not allow herself to love this lover. Her heart might be shaken, but her will was firm. She was not going to give up the prospect for which she had sacrificed so much, and struggled through so many obstacles at the bidding of a person who last week was unknown to her. His eyes might grow tender when gazing at her, his hands be ready and kind in waiting on her, his companionship pleasant, and his voice like music in her ears, but she could not change the whole tenor of her life because those facts had been accidentally made known to her. She could certainly miss his face at her side, and his strong presence surrounding her like a Providence, but none the more was she willing to bestow on him suddenly the gift of her future. And there seemed to her no medium course between surrendering her entire fate at once into the hands he was outstretching to her and putting him back into the shadows of the unknown from which he had so unexpectedly and awkwardly emerged to cross her path.

And now she thought, as she finished dressing, there was only this one last day throughout which to keep true to her better judgment. To-morrow the captain expected to touch at Queenstown, and she must give her friend what she feared would be a painful surprise. She would bid him a short good-by, and leave him to finish his voyage as though such a person as herself did not exist in the world.

"People who fall in love so easily," she thought, "can surely fall out of it again as quickly. By next week, perhaps, he will be able to complain of me to some sympathising friend, and in a month I shall be forgotten, as completely as if I never had appeared on this horizon."

Such was Bawn's theory of loving. Love ought not to spring up like mushrooms in a night, but should have a gradual, reasonable, exquisite imperceptible growth, striking deep roots before making itself obtrusively evident. Her father was the only person she had ever seriously loved, and her love for him had had neither beginning nor end. How could a mere stranger imagine that in the course of a week he had learned absolutely to need her for the rest of his life?

In the meantime the man who called himself Somerset had passed a wakeful night. While Bawn in her berth summoned up all her resolution to resist for yet another day, and thus finally, the fascination which she unwillingly acknowledged he exercised over her, he lay and remembered but one saying of the woman who had suddenly risen up in his life and at once widened his heart and filled it with herself. She had admitted that she feared to learn to love him, and to his fancy the admission meant all that his soul desired. A girl who was afraid to cultivate his acquaintance, lest she should end by loving him, must already, he thought, almost love him; and a girl with so soft and young though so determined a face, having made such an admission, must surely be capable of being won by perseverance. He feared that he had shocked her delicacy by speaking to her so suddenly, but he told himself that the urgency of the circumstances excused him. He chafed to see how his chances of success were lessened by the mysterious difficulties of her position, and he set himself seriously to guess what that position and those difficulties might be. Looking at the case all round and recalling other words of hers besides those few which it made him so impressively happy to dwell upon, he summed up all the evidence he could gather as to her circumstances, and before daylight broke over a foaming sea he

thought he had made a tolerably good guess as to her purpose and the trials she felt herself bound to meet alone. For some reason which she believed to be compelling she was making her way to Paris to endeavour to earn money, not, as he conceived, for herself, but for the sake of some other person or persons. And he thought he had hit the truth when the idea flashed into his mind that it might be her intention to become a singer or an actress.

The idea made him sick. An actress going through training on a Parisian stage! He could not rest after the suggestion came to him, and got up and walked the deck, and was so walking and chafing when Bawn appeared.

He did not know it was the last morning on which he should see the trim, womanly figure, the fair, oval face under the round black hat, the little, strongly-shod feet coming to meet him steadily, and gallantly along the windy deck. No presentiment forewarned him that by the same hour next day he should be labouring under the sorrow of having lost her out of his life for evermore.

At eight of her his mind became suddenly filled with the one exultant thought that here she was still safely within his reach, and not to be lost sight of, even at her own most earnest bidding, unless death should lay hold of her or him and frustrate all his hopes. He would throw over the urgent business that had brought him hurrying back across the ocean, and which was waiting for him in London to be dealt with at a certain hour. He would throw anything, everything else to the winds, follow her to Paris, even if it must be so unknown to herself, be informed of her whereabouts and her circumstances, and after that leave the sequel of his wooing to the happier chances of the future.

His face was flushed, his dark eyes shining with the force of his determination to compel happiness, as he came forward with his morning greetings. She accepted silently and meekly the support he offered her in her walk, feeling warmed and comforted by his presence and protection, while thinking remorsefully of the necessary treachery of the morrow.

"Since daylight," he said, "I have been watching for you. I almost began to fear I had frightened you away, and that you were going to spend another day among the babies and the sick ladies."

"I should have been wiser had I done so," said Bawn. "I am not easily enough frightened."

"You would not have been wiser, if you were able to take care of yourself to hold your own against me. When you yield to my persuasion, to my counsel, you will do it with your eyes open, with the sanction of your own judgment."

"Shall I?" "I have been wanting to talk to you."

"You talked so much yesterday that I do not imagine you can have anything left to say."

"You have no idea of my talking capacity when you say so. I could talk for a week if you would only listen to me. But if deaf and cruel noises were to come between me and your ears, then I feel that I could almost become dumb for the rest of my life."

"Almost? That is, till some other young woman, like or unlike me, should be found willing to listen to you for yet another week—perhaps for months and years."

"Bawn, look at me!" "Why should I look at you?" she answered gravely. "I know very well that you are like; and I am greatly in earnest in saying I would rather you would talk of something else. After all I said last night you ought not to go on speaking to me like this."

"And after all I said to you last night you suppose I can talk to you of nothing but the weather until the moment for parting with you arrives?"

"It would be better for yourself and kinder to me if you were to do so."

"You think, then, that I am going to lose you so easily?" "I know you will have to lose me. You had better make up your mind to it, and talk to me for the rest of the time only about Paris and the shops."

"And the theatres, too, if you like. It would greatly amuse me to hear something about the theatres."

"You would rather be amused than loved."

"Anything is better than to encourage the continued offering of what one cannot accept."

"Perhaps you cannot accept what is offered because you have a preference for theatres."

"I do not understand you."

"An idea has occurred to me which seems to throw some light upon your mystery. You are going to Paris, perhaps, to prepare yourself for the stage."

Bawn blushed crimson, and her change of colour did not escape her companion's eye. It was caused by vexation that she should imagine her influence in rejecting him by what seemed to her such an ignoble and insufficient reason, but he took it as a sign that he had hit upon the truth, to her sudden embarrassment and chagrin.

"You are dreaming of going on the stage. This time I have guessed aright."

"I will not tell you," said Bawn, now as pale as the foam-fleck that touched her cheek. Let him, she thought, follow this false scent if he would. It would lessen the likelihood of their meeting again.

"Great heaven! You upon the stage!"

"What do you find so shocking in the idea? Suppose I am what you have taken me to be, a poor young woman with her bread to earn in the world, why should I not go upon the stage? Have not good and noble women been actresses before now?"

"I am not going to allow it for you."

Her hand trembled on his arm, and she turned her head away that he might not see the expression of her eyes. She was unexpectingly grateful to him for the words he had just spoken. Good women, greater women than herself, might spend their lives upon the stage, but such an existence would, she admitted, be intolerable to her.

"Tray how do you intend to interfere to prevent me?" she said after a pause.

"I do not know," he said, with something like a groan. "I cannot tell how I am going to find you and save you from such a fate; but I warn you I will leave no stone unturned in trying to do it."

Bawn withdrew her hand from his arm. "You mean that you will follow me—persecute me?" "Persecute you? No! Guard you from yourself—perhaps yes."

SARA'S WAY

The warm June sunshine was coming down through trees white with the virginal bloom of plums, and shining pines, making a tremulous mosaic upon Mrs. Eben Andrews' spotless kitchen floor. Through the open door, a wind, fragrant from long wanderings over orchards and clover meadows, drifted in, and from the window, Mrs. Eben and her guest could look down over a long misty valley sloping to a sparkling sea.

Mrs. Jonas Andrews was spending the afternoon with her sister-in-law. She was a big, sassy woman, with full brown peony cheeks, and large, dreamy brown eyes. When she had been a slim pink and white girl those eyes had been very romantic. Now they were so out of keeping with the rest of her appearance as to be ludicrous.

Mrs. Eben, sitting at the other end of the small tea table that was drawn up against the window, was a thin little woman, with a very sharp nose and light, faded blue eyes. She looked like a woman whose opinions were always very decided and warranted to wear.

"How does Sara like teaching at Newbridge?" asked Mrs. Jonas, helping herself a second time to Mrs. Eben's matchless black fruit cake, and thereby bestowing a subtle compliment which Mrs. Eben did not fail to appreciate.

"Well, I guess she likes it pretty well—better than down at White Sands, anyway," answered Mrs. Eben. "Yes, I may say it suits her. Of course, it's a long walk there and back. I think it would have been wiser for her to keep on boarding with the Morrises, as she did all winter, but Sara is bound to be home all she can. And I must say the walk seems to agree with her."

"I was to see Jonas' aunt at Newbridge last night," said Mrs. Jonas, "and she said she'd heard that Sara had made up her mind to take Lige Baxter at last, and that they were to be married in the fall. She asked me if it was true. I said I didn't know, but I hoped to mercy it was. Now, is it, Louise?"

"Not a word of it," said Mrs. Eben sorrowfully. "Sara hasn't any more notion of taking Lige than ever she had. I'm sure it's not my fault, I've talked and argued till I'm tired. I declare to you, Amelia, I am terribly disappointed. I'd set my heart on Sara's marrying Lige—and now to think she won't!"

"She is a very foolish girl," said Mrs. Jonas judiciously. "If Lige Baxter isn't good enough for her, who is?"

"And he's so well off," said Mrs. Eben, "and does such a good business, and is well spoken of by everyone. And that lovely new home of his at Newbridge with bay-windows and hardwood floors! I've dreamed and dreamed of seeing Sara there as mistress."

"Maybe you'll see her there yet," said Mrs. Jonas, who always took a hopeful view of everything, even of Sara's contrariness. But she felt discouraged too. Well, she had done her best. If Lige Baxter's broom were spoiled it was not for lack of cooing. Every Andrews in Avonlea had been trying for two years to bring about a match between him and Sara, and Mrs. Jonas had borne her part valiantly.

Mrs. Eben's despondent reply was out about by the appearance of Sara herself. The girl stood for a moment in the doorway and looked with a faintly amused air at her aunt. She knew quite well that they had been discussing her, for Mrs. Jonas who carried her conscience in her face, looked guilty, and Mrs. Eben had not been able wholly to banish her aggrieved expression.

Sara put away her books, kissed Mrs. Jonas' rosy cheek, and sat down at the table. Mrs. Eben brought her some fresh tea, some hot rolls and a little jelly pot of the apricot preserves Sara liked, and she cut some more fruit cake for her in moist plummy slices. She might be out of patience with Sara's "contrariness," but she spoiled and petted her for all that, for the girl was the very core of her childless heart.

Sara Andrews was not, strictly speaking, pretty, but there was that about her which made people look at her twice. She was very dark, with a rich, dusky sort of darkness; her deep eyes were velvety brown and her lips and cheeks were crimson.

She ate her rolls and preserves with a healthy appetite, sharpened by her long walk from Newbridge, and told amusing little stories of her day's work that made the two older women shake with laughter, and exchange sly glances of pride over her cleverness.

When tea was over she poured the remaining contents of the cream jug into the saucer.

"I must feed my pussy," she said as she left the room.

"That girl beats me," said Mrs. Eben with a sigh of perplexity. "You know that black cat we've had for two years? Eben and I have always made a lot of him, but Sara seemed to have a dislike to him. Never a peaceful nap under the stove would he have when Sara was home—out he must go. Well, a little spell ago he got his leg broke accidentally and we thought he'd have to be killed. But Sara wouldn't hear of it. She got splints and set his leg just as knacky and bandaged it up, and she has tended him like a sick baby ever since. He's just about well now, and he lives in clover that cat does. It's just her way. There's them sick chickens she's been doctoring for a week, giving them pills and things. And she thinks more of that wretched looking cat that got poisoned with Paris green than of all the other stock on the place."

As the summer wore away Mrs. Eben tried to reconcile herself to the destruction of her air castles. But she scolded Sara considerably.

"Sara, why don't you like Lige? I'm sure he's a model young man."

"I don't like model young men," answered Sara impatiently. "And I really think I hate Lige Baxter. He has always been held up to me as such a paragon. I'm tired of hearing all about his perfections. I know them all off by heart. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke, he doesn't steal, he doesn't tell fibs, he never loses his temper, he doesn't swear, and he goes to church regularly. Such a faultless creature as that would certainly get on my nerves. No, no, you'll have to pick out another mistress for your new house at the Bridge, Aunt Louise."

When the apple trees that had been pink and white in June were russet and bronze in October, Mrs. Eben had a quilting. The quilt was of the "Rising Star" pattern, which was considered in Avonlea to be very handsome. Mrs. Eben had intended it for part of Sara's setting out, and while she sewed the red-and-white diamonds together she regaled her fancy by imagining she saw it spread out on the spare-room bed of the house at Newbridge, with herself laying her bonnet and shawl on it when she went to sea Sara. Those bright visions had faded with the apple blossoms, and Mrs. Eben hardly had the heart to finish the quilt at all.

The quilting came off on Sunday afternoon when Sara could be home from school. All Mrs. Eben's particular friends were arranged around the quilt, and tongues and fingers flew. Sara flitted about, helping her aunt with the supper preparations. She was in the room, getting the custard dishes out of the cupboard, when Mrs. George Pys arrived.

Mrs. George had a genius for being late. She was later than usual to day and she looked excited. Every woman round the "Rising Star" felt that Mrs. George had some news worth listening to, and there was an expectant silence while she pulled out her chair and settled herself at the quilt.

She was a tall, thin woman with a long pale face, and liquid green eyes. As she looked around the circle she had the air of a cat daintily licking its chops over some tidbit.

"I suppose," she said, "that you have heard the news."

She knew perfectly well that they had not. Every other woman at the frame stopped quilting. Mrs. Eben came to the door with a pair of puffy, smoking hot soda biscuits in her hand. Sara stopped counting her custard dishes and turned her ripely-colored face over her shoulder. Even the black cat at her feet ceased purring his fur. Mrs. George felt that the undivided attention of her audience was hers.

"Baxter Brothers have failed," she said, her green eyes shooting out flashes of light. "Failed disgracefully!"

She paused for a moment, but, since her hearers were as yet speechless from surprise, she went on:

"George came home from Newbridge just before I left, with the news. You could have knocked me down with a feather. I should have thought that firm was as steady as the rock of Gibraltar. But they're ruined—absolutely ruined. Louise, dear, can you find me a good needle?"

"Louisa dear" had set her biscuits down with a sharp thud, reckless of results. A sharp, metallic tinkle sounded at the closet where Sara had struck the edge of her tray against a shelf. The sound seemed to loosen the paralyzed tongues and everybody began talking and exclaiming at once. Clear and shrill above the confusion rose Mrs. George Pys' voice:

"Yes, indeed, you may well say so, it is disgraceful. And to think how everybody trusted them! George will lose considerable by the crash, and so will a good many folks. Everything will have to go—Peter

Baxter's farm and Lige's grand new house. Mrs. Peter won't carry her head so high after this, I'll be bound. George saw Lige at the Bridge, and he said he looked dreadful cut up and ashamed."

"Who, or what's to blame for the failure?" asked Mrs. Rachel Lynde sharply. She did not like Mrs. George Pys.

"There are a dozen different stories on the go," was the reply. "As far as George could make out, Peter Baxter has been speculating with other folks' money, and this is the result. Everybody always suspected that Peter was crooked, but you'd thought that Lige would have kept him straight. He had always such a reputation for saintliness."

"I don't suppose Lige knew anything about it," said Mrs. Rachel indignantly.

"Well, he'd ought to then. If he isn't a knave, he's a fool," said Mrs. Harmon Andrews, who had formerly been among his warmest partisans. "He should have kept watch on Peter and found out how the business was being run. Well, Sara, you were the level-headedest of us all—I'll admit that now. A nice mess it would be if you were married or engaged to Lige, and him left without a cent—and if he can clear his character."

"There is a good deal of talk about Peter and swindling and a lawsuit," said Mrs. George Pys, quilting industriously. "Most of the Newbridge folks think it's all Peter's fault and that Lige isn't to blame. But you can't tell. I dare say Lige is as deep in the mire as Peter. He was always a little too good to be wholesome, I thought."

There was a cink of glass at the cupboard, as Sara set the tray down. She came forward and stood behind Mrs. Rachel Lynde's chair, resting her shapely hands on that lady's broad shoulders. Her face was very pale, but her flashing eyes caught and faced Mrs. George Pys' cat-like orbs defiantly. Her voice quivered with passion and contempt.

"You'll all have a fling at Lige Baxter now that he's down. You couldn't say enough in his praise once. I'll not stand by and hear it hinted that Lige Baxter is a swindler. You all know perfectly well that Lige is as honest as the day, if he is so unfortunate as to have an unprincipled brother. You, Mrs. Pys, know it better than anyone, yet you come here and run him down the minute he's in trouble. If there's another word said here against Lige Baxter I'll leave the room and the house till you're gone, every one of you."

She flushed a glaze around the quilt that cowed the gossipers. Even Mrs. George Pys's eyes flickered, and waned and quailed. Nothing more was said until Sara had picked up her glasses and marched to the room. Even then they dared not speak above a whisper. Mrs. Pys alone, smarting from her snub, ventured to ejaculate. "Pity save us!" as Sara slammed the door.

For the next fortnight gossip and rumor held high carnival in Avonlea and Newbridge, and Mrs. Eben grew to dread the sight of a visitor.

"They're bound to talk about the Baxter failure and criticize Lige," she deplored to Mrs. Jonas. "And it riles Sara up so terrible. She used to declare she hated Lige, and now she won't listen to a word against him. Not that I say any myself. I'm sorry for him, and I believe he's done his best. But I can't stop other people from talking."

One evening Hermon Andrews came in with a fresh bundle of news.

"The Baxter business is pretty near wound up at last," he said, and he lighted his pipe. "Peter has got his lawsuits settled and has hushed up the talk about swindling somehow. Trust him for slipping out of a scrape clean and clever. He don't seem to worry any, and Lige looks like a walking skeleton. Some folks pity him, but I say he should have kept the run of things better and not have trusted everything to Peter. I hear he's going out West in the spring, to take up land in Alberta and try his hand at farming. Best thing he can do, I guess. Folks hereabouts have had enough of the Baxter bread. Newbridge will be well rid of them."

Sara, who had been sitting in the dark corner of the stove, suddenly stood up, letting the black cat slip from her lap to the floor. Mrs. Eben glanced at her apprehensively, for she feared the girl was going to break out into a tirade against the complacent Harmon.

But Sara only walked fiercely out of the kitchen,