

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE

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Mrs. Perkins was enjoying an afternoon tea with Mrs. Watson. While they ate, the visitor's eye took in the surroundings.

"You'll soon have a real nice place here, Mrs. Watson," she said, looking around. "Poor Mrs. Cavers, who lived here just before you came, would have had things nice if she had had her own way. She was the greatest woman for makin' little fixin's—she and my Martha were always doin' something—dear me, the way she'd stick up for that man, and make excuses for him! 'Mr. Cavers has a headache,' or 'Mr. Cavers is quite tired out.' Mr. Cavers, mind you. Oh, I tell you, she was fetched up different. Any one could see that. When I saw her first she was as pretty a girl as you'd see, and Bill was a fine-lookin' man, too. We never knew he would drink, and I don't think he ever did until Sandy Braden got his license and opened up a bar. I'll never forget the first night he came home drunk. She came runnin' over to our house and told us she was afraid he was dyin'. Pa and I went over with her, and I told her right out, plump and plain, what was wrong with him just as soon as I saw him. I'll never forget the way she backed up from me, givin' queer little screeches, and then she came back quick, her eyes just blazin', and says she, grabbin' me by the shoulders, 'I don't—believe—it,' just as slow as that, and then she begged me to forgive her, the pore lamb, and straightened right up as stiff as a poker, but all white and twitchy, and from that day to this she has never let on to a livin' soul about him drinkin', but she's just as nice to him as if he was a good man to her.

"And when her little Georgie died, if ever a woman was tried sore it was her. She sent Bill for the doctor, and he fell in with a threshin' gang and forgot to come home; yes, and that poor woman was alone with little George choking with croup. Libby Anne ran over for me, but he was too far gone. Bill came home in the mornin' so drunk we couldn't make him understand that the child was dead, and he kept askin' us all the time how little Georgie was now. I came home in the mornin' to help to milk, and Martha went over to stay with her. Martha can't ever forget the sad sight she saw when she went in. Bill was on the lounge drunk. Little George lay on the bed dead, and she was sittin' there makin' the shroud, and even then she made excuses for Bill to Martha, and said he'd been up all night, and was tired.

"That was the first of the trouble, but Bill has been drunk a good many times since; for you see Sandy Braden's still in town."

Mrs. Watson, quietly listening, could not but breathe the prayer that Sandy Braden might not long remain in town.

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