

## A CRUSHING DEFEAT

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Pearl was looking for Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne. She was on her way to the parsonage when she caught sight of something like a parasol down in the trees where the horses were tied. She ran down to the picnic grounds hastily, and there in a grassy hollow, shaded by a big elm, she found the objects of her search.

Bill Cavers, with purple face and wide open mouth, lay breathing heavily. Libby Anne was fanning him with her muslin hat, and Mrs. Cavers was tenderly bathing his swollen face with water. Libby Anne had brought from the river. Her own eyes were red with crying and hopeless with defeat.

"We've just found him, Pearl," she said. "He's been here in the hot sun I don't know how long. I never saw him breathing so queer before."

"I'll get the doctor," said Pearl.

She ran back up the road and found the doctor at the stable behind the hotel.

"Come quick, Doctor!" cried Pearl. "We need you."

They reached the grassy slope. Mrs. Cavers had made a pillow of her coat for his head, and was still bathing his face. The doctor hastily loosened the drunken man's clothing and listened to the beating of his heart. Its irregular pounding was unmistakable, it was making its last great fight.

Dr. Clay took out his hypodermic syringe and made an injection in Bill's arm. Bill stirred uneasily. "I don't want—it—Bob," he said thickly. "I promised—the—missus. She's—with me—to-day."

The doctor listened again to the sick man's heart. It was failing.

Mrs. Cavers, looking up, read the doctor's face.

She fell on the ground beside her husband, calling him every tender name as she rained kisses in his livid cheeks, uttering queer little cries like a wounded animal, but begging him always to live for her sake, and crying out bitterly that she could not give him up.

The sick man gazed into her face, and a look of understanding came into his bloodshot eyes.

"Ellie," he said with great effort, "I—did—not—want—it—at first," and with his eyes still looking into hers, as if mutely pleading with her to understand, the light faded from them . . . and the last long, staggering breath went out. Then fell silence . . . that never-ending silence . . . and quite perceptibly the color went in patches from his face.

Dr. Clay gently touched Mrs. Cavers's arm.

"Yes, doctor, I know . . . he's dead." She talked like people do in their sleep.

"I did my best, Will," she said, as she smoothed his thick black hair. "I tried my hardest to save you, and I always thought I would win . . . but they've beat me, Will. They were too strong for me . . . and I'm sorry!" She bent down and tenderly kissed his forehead, damp now with the dews of death.