

Saved by Kindness

by T. Francis Henshaw Baden

“Yes, Good, though only *thought*, has life and breath—
God’s life—and so can be redeemed from death;
And evil, in its nature, is decay
And any hour can blot it all away.”

“What a remarkable looking person that nurse of yours is, Nellie,” said Mrs. Markham to her friend Nellie Livingston.

“Remarkable, in what way? For her plain, almost ugly face, I suppose,” replied Mrs. Livingston.

“Yes—that it is; almost ugly, you say. Why, she is positively, painfully bad looking; indeed, I do not think I could have such a—I must say hideous person, about me,” exclaimed her friend.

“Why, you do not really mean so; look at her honest, clear eyes, her very pleasant mouth; we do not see her ugly looks; we see only the true, brave heart looking through her eyes, and know her patience and endurance. To us she is almost pretty, and the children love her (I sometimes think) better than me—”

“But that terrible ugly scar she has across her face. Did you know her before she received that wound?” questioned Mrs. Markham.

“That scar does not make her look any the worse to us. On the contrary, it endears her the more, for it was received in our service. Most likely but for that my little ones might have been motherless.

“How was it? Do tell me; you know this is my first visit to you, except for a few hours, since you were first married, so this is the first time I have seen this woman. What is her name?”

“Nora Parsons. She has been with us twelve years; indeed, I do not know what I should do without her. We do not look on her as a servant. She is as near to me as one of my sisters. I will tell you about her, and then you will know how she won my esteem and love:

“I was passing though the Protest Asylum the first year of my marriage, for the purpose of obtaining one of the girls to send to my husband’s mother, living out of town a few miles. I was much interested in the institution, and the matron, a very worthy lady, was very kind in showing me the different objects of interest. As we were passing through a room where all the girls were sewing or knitting, she stopped before a girl about fourteen years old and said:

‘You are very slow in your knitting, Nora. I told you that stocking must be finished this afternoon, and it does not look much like it now.’

‘Indeed, ma’am, I can scarcely see, my head aches so badly; that is the reason I’ve done so little,’ replied the child.

‘An excuse for idleness, I think,’ and passing on a few steps, she said to me, ‘She comes of a very bad set. I fear I shall have much trouble with her. She is inclined to be stubborn, and rather hardened, I think.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘not hardened, I am sure. I noticed her under lip quiver when she spoke, and from that I know she has a sensitive nature. I never knew it to fail. There is something good in her, you’ll find out some time. May I speak to her?’ I said.

‘Having obtained permission, I returned to the girl, and, taking from my eubar an orange, I said:

‘I am very sorry your head aches,’ and putting my hand on her head I found it very hot. ‘Yes, I know you are suffering; take this orange, won’t you? and I will ask Mrs. Bland to let you go put and sit in the cool.’

‘She did not speak. I saw her heart was too full. I went and spoke to the matron. She returned with me, and said:

‘Certainly, Nora; put up your work. I did not know your head was aching very much. Go out and sit in the garden, or lie down either.’

‘I gave her my little bottle of salamonia, and saying, ‘Be a good girl, dear,’ left the asylum.

‘Eight years passed by, when one morning I was standing at the basement-window, holding up the two youngest children to hear an organ-grinder, when I noticed a girl looking at the window very intently, and then coming up to the door, she pulled the bell.

‘In a few moments the servant opened the room door, and said:

‘Some one to see you, Madam.’

‘What is it?’

‘Do you want to engage a nurse, or help of any kind?’ she said.

‘No;’ I told her I had an excellent nurse just then, and three other servants I liked very well.

‘I can sew nicely, and cut and fit. I wish you would take me. I want to live with you so much. Do please take me,’ she pleaded.

‘I was surprised at her earnest manner, and said:

‘Why do you wish to live with me so much? What do you know of me?’

‘She put her hand in her pocket, and drawing out a little smelling bottle, said:

‘Don’t you remember this? I am the girl you gave it to years ago in the Asylum.’

‘I recognized the little bottle, and soon called to mind the girl I had given it to.

‘You spoke kindly to me; those gentle words were the first said to me since my mother’s death. You said I was not hardened; that there was good in me; and you bade me “try to be good,” and I did try to do right, and please, Mrs. Bland; and every day I prayed to God to bless her whose gentle words had broken the spell of evil that was creeping over me; and see, I gained a good name.’

‘Where have you been staying since you left the asylum? How long have you been out of employment?’ I asked.

‘I have been living with my brother, keeping house for him—but’—and she hesitated, and then said:

‘He is not a good man, and I cannot win him from his bad ways; so I have left him. Oh! Please let me live with you, I do not care for wages, only let me stay and serve you,’ and she caught my hand and held it clasped to her bosom.

‘I did not know what to do; I was considering it over, and had pretty much made up my mind to let her remain, when she began pleading again.

‘Take me, do! Just for a week, and then if I don’t suit you, send me away.’

‘You shall stay here for the present, and I will see what arrangement we can make for the future,’ I said.

‘If you could have seen the look of content and joy spread over her face then, you would not have thought her so ugly. When Albert came home I told him all concerning Nora; and after seeing her, he said:

‘I like her looks, and I think she may be of much service to you during my absence.’

‘Albert was to leave for Europe, (on business for the firm) in the next steamer.

“The second day after Nora came, he started. After bidding us good bye, he turned to her and said:

‘Nora, take good care of the little ones.’

‘With God’s help, I will, sir,’ she replied earnestly.

“Then he smiled approvingly to me, and said:

‘I am glad she is with you.’

“One thing about her I could not understand. I could not induce her to go out of the house, three or four times during the few days I sent her on errands, and instead of going, she would go and do the cook’s work, and send her out. At length I asked her the reason? She replied:

‘I will tell you the truth. I do not wish my brother to know where I am; so I thought it best to remain in for a little while.’

“She slept in the nursery, next to my room. The night Albert left, I could not help noticing her being very restless; if I turned or moved she would be in the room in a moment, and ask if I spoke. I do not think she touched her pillow that night.

“The next evening several friends came in and stayed quite late, and having lost much rest the night before, I felt very sleepy, and scarcely lay down before I was in dream-land.

“How long I slept I know not; I awoke in a great fright, and opening my eyes I beheld by the dim light, the most villainous face I ever saw. It told plainly of robbery, and if necessary murder. I opened my mouth to scream, but I was speechless.

‘None of your screaming; just be quiet and tell me where I can find your diamond jewelry and money; your plate is too heavy, and we are in a hurry this time. Come, speak quick, if you don’t want to take a pill from this pretty box,’ and he presented a pistol close to my face.

“I tried my best to speak and tell him what he wanted to know, any thing to get him away; but no sound could I utter; I was almost dying from terror, not for myself, but for my little ones: my baby beside me. I pointed and looked over toward my bureau, to tell him where my jewelry box was, when I beheld another man searching my drawers; the wretch near me exclaimed again:

‘Come, speak quick, or here goes,’ and he raised his pistols.

“Oh the agony of those moments; years in suffering to me. Then came the short quick report of a pistol, the gas was put out, and I heard a rush into the room.

“Then came the awful curses of the one standing over me, as he exclaimed:

‘Discovered! make tracks Bill!’

‘I got the box, cut down the back steps,’ whispered the other.

‘Cut down, and cut through, if needs,’ was the answer.

“Then again I heard a scuffle. Heavy blows, and a voice exclaiming:

‘You wild cat! If you don’t let go of me, I’ll cut you with my knife—although I don’t like to hurt a woman.’

‘Drop it Bill! They are coming; I’m off.’

“What more passed, I cannot say. When I became conscious, Nora was bending over me bathing my face; she said:

‘You are only frightened, thank heaven. Do not be worried, I have everything safe.’ I saw her face was tied up; I pointed to it.

‘Only a scratch; be still, all is right now,’ she said.

“It was near day then. In a short time there came a ring at the hall door.

“Nora was nervous, and said:

‘I had better look out of the window, had I not?’

“I assented, and in a few moments she said:

‘It is a policeman; he says there is a man with his leg broken lying at the basement door, and thinks it is probably someone that was either coming to, or going from here, has fallen on the ice. What shall I do?’

‘One of those dreadful men, probably,’ I said.

‘I will go and look,’ and she left the room. In a moment or two, she returned.

“Poor girl, despair was marked on every feature.

‘Nora, my child, what is it?’ I asked.

‘Fate! fate! Why did they not kill me, better than this,’ she cried.

‘What is it? Tell me, Nora. I will do anything for you. Speak, child, I owe you so much. What troubles you?’ I asked.

‘Can you trust me so much as to let me tell the policeman to let that man remain here for a little while—till I tell you all?’ she said.

‘Yes; go, and hurry back to me.’

‘Soon she returned, and dropping on her knees by the side of the bed, she sobbed piteously.

‘Nora, tell me all. Let me know the worst. Who is that man?’

‘My brother,’ she gasped forth.

‘What terrible mystery is this? Oh! Girl, can it be possible!’ a dreadful thought came into my mind. Was she an accomplice?—‘that you came here to try—’

‘To serve and save you,’ she meekly said.

‘Speak, tell me all!’ I demanded.

‘Lady, I told you I was living with my brother. I began to mistrust him, to think he was not living honorably, but I had no proof of it. One night I was sitting up, waiting for his return. I threw myself on a lounge in the little sitting-room. I heard him coming in the door with someone with him. I do not know what possessed me to make believe I was asleep.

‘I heard them whisper a plan of robbery. They had found out that the gentleman was going to leave town, and that there were diamonds and much of value in the house. My brother was a new hand, and not so bad as the other; he objected at first, but finally agreed. Then I heard the name Livingston. I remembered the name; it was marked on the little bottle. It was your name; the name of her who had lifted me from the dark, hardened existence I was sinking into, who had with one sweet smile and gentle words opened the closed heart, and let in the soft, warm light, and finally made me a true woman. I listened on, and heard the street and number.

‘First I thought I would plead with my brother, but I knew that would not do with the other; then I determined to quarrel with him, on some pretext, and leave to seek my own living. I thought if I went off without some cause he would suspect I had heard them. This I did, and now you know all. Why I pleaded with you to take me. I had hoped to hear them before they got in, and frighten them off. Night before last was to be the night. You know I was awake all night, and so I could not keep awake the second night, although I tried so hard. I did not know I had been asleep until I heard the voices in your room; then I did the best I could. This is all I have to tell, except I had hoped my brother would escape and not be found out by you. Oh, mother! mother! Look down from

Heaven and pity me. I tried my best to save your boy, but it is all over now,' she wept forth.

"I was deeply affected by this profound gratitude. And for what? A few words; for this she had risked her life. I must not be less noble than this poor girl. I had been taught what gratitude was, and must profit by the lesson, I thought.

"I hastily arose, wrapped myself in my robe de chambre, and asked Nora:

'Has your brother seen you, does he know you are here?'

'No. I looked through the blinds and saw him,' she said.

'Well then, perhaps he had better not know you are here, for the present, it might enrage him, and now, poor girl, rest easy, worry no more; put your trust in God, and ask his blessing on my efforts for you and your brother's welfare. I am going to have him brought in and cared for. Do not fear exposure.'

"I went down. The policeman was still below talking with the carriage driver. Fortunately the attempted robbery was not known by any but the cook, Mrs. Brown, who was awakened by the report of the pistol used by Nora. She was a very discreet woman, and I gave her to understand I did not wish her to mention a word of the affair. I knew I could trust her. She had been long in mother's family before she came to us.

"I directed the men to bring the boy in—he was only about twenty. We soon made him as comfortable as possible on the lounge in the sitting-room, and then I said to the policeman:

'Will you be kind enough to stop on your way and ask my physician, Dr. Arthur, to come here as soon as possible? The boy will remain here for the present. He was leaving here last night, and probably slipped on the ice. He is known to me so we will relieve you of any further trouble.'

"I wish you could have seen the look of mingled amazement, doubt and anxiety; but not a word was uttered all the time.

"O dismissed the driver, and then looked at the boy, and said:

'I know you and your purpose, last night, of course. You are not so badly hurt that you cannot speak, although you are suffering terribly. And we cannot tell what may be the extent of your injury. Your sin has met with a speedy punishment.'

'What are you going to do with me? Get the doctor to patch me up so as to be able to move me to the State prison?' he doggedly asked.

‘No, noting of the sort. I shall get the doctor to do everything he can for you, to enable you to go on your way wherever you choose; and I shall, in the meantime, do all I can to make you comfortable. I have no ill-will against you, believe me, and be sure you have nothing to fear from me. It has pleased Heaven to thwart your designs, and perhaps God had thrown you on my mercy for your salvation’s sake.’

“Just then Mrs. Brown came in with a cup of coffee. We raised him and gave it to him. Even then—so soon—I saw this strange treatment to him was making its impress. His face was losing its hardened expression, and, in place, came one of patient suffering.

“Doctor Arthur pronounced it a compound fracture of the knee. After sending for his assistant, and working over him for some time, they gave him an opiate and left.

“I returned to Nora, telling her what I had done, and should continue until he was better.

“I cannot describe her gratitude, for it was more of looks and actions than words.

“I learned from her something of their past life.

“Her father had been a very hard, harsh, but honest man; the mother, a poor, delicate creature, endeavoring in every way to soothe the harsh man and shield the children from his constant reproofs and punishments. William, her bother, was a really wild boy, loving play better than work or books, and this brought on him his father’s anger constantly. The mother would conceal his faults. This management, of course, was the boy’s ruin. The father’s cruelty, the mother’s blind indulgence, paved the way for his future evil life. Nora was three years older, and, when dying the mother besought her to take care of, watch, and save her darling boy.

“Her father placed her in the asylum, and bound the boy for a trade, from which he soon ran away.

“In two years after the mother’s death, the father died; and the boy, then free from all restraint, followed the example and advice of his bad associates.

“It was evident that this boy’s bad character was the result of bad management at home, and I felt hopes of an entire different course of treatment having a happy result.

“He had a tedious time of it, and much suffering. I would often see his eyes fill, and the same tremulousness of the lip, that Nora has. two weeks passed, and one day I asked him if he had any relations?

“He told me of his parents being dead, and spoke very kindly of his sister, and ended by saying:

‘He often heard mother say: “God’s will be done;” and “everything happens for the best;” and I know it is so now myself. Mrs. Livingston I do not know how to talk to God—will you ask him to help me lead a different life?’

‘I have been, my boy, praying for you, and so has some one else. I will bring you one who has been the means of redeeming you, by her efforts, and God’s blessing,’ I replied.

‘I soon sent Nora in. I did not witness their interview. In about an hour she came up to the nursery, and clasping one after the other of the children to her bosom, said:

‘Oh God will reward you in these little ones.’

‘She told me he knew all. How grieved he was at her face being so hurt. She would never admit her brother’s doing it, but I think he must have, to make her let go of him. The more I saw of William, the more thankful I was of having saved him; I felt sure he would continue in his determination of endeavoring to be a good man.

‘Albert returned home in two months. William was just getting about on his crutch. I told him I had Nora’s brother, and what I had done for him. I thought I would not tell him the way he received the accident just then, until he had a chance of knowing him. I was fearful of the first impression.

‘Albert has always thought, or is polite enough to say so, ‘that every thing his wife does, was all right.’

‘After my telling him about William, he said:

‘And this is the way you have been amusing yourself, doing good. But this has been rather an expensive amusement, has it not?’

‘Yes, rather,’ I replied, ‘but it has been a great pleasure, and what is yours?’

‘To please you,’ he gallantly said.

‘Well go on, Nellie darling, we have enough and some to spare.’

‘I think about ten days after Alfred’s return I went into the room, and found him and William talking very earnestly, the latter very much affected.

‘Nellie, this boy had told me all concerning himself,’ Albert said.

‘Oh! Do forgive my concealing it from you; I intended to tell you after you knew him,’ I exclaimed.

‘As usual, you are right,’ he smilingly said.

‘But Nellie, I think it was rather risky. I believe, however, you have received your reward,’

‘Yes, sir it was risky, few would have done it,’ William said. ‘Oh, I wish to the good Lord there were more like her.’

“Now, my dear Mrs. Markham, I’ve told you why we love Nora.”

“But her brother, where is he, what became of him?” asked her friend.

“Ask Albert, here he is! Tell Mrs. Markham what William Parsons is doing.”

“My bookkeeper for five years past, and a noble fellow he is,” said Albert, warmly.

“Well,” said her friend, “this is wonderful. Truth is stranger than fiction; and all this was done by gentle words.”

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