

More Precious Than Gold

Inspirational Short Story by Cynthia B. Newby 3/18/2022

Amelia McKenzie walked out of the free clinic and looked at the dark gray clouds above. She wished it would rain to hide the tears streaming down her face. She walked down the sidewalk to the bus stop with her head low and hoped no one would notice her as she boarded the bus. Amelia chose a seat towards the back and wished no one sat near her. She stared out the window blankly as the bus headed towards her hotel on the other end of town. Relieved there were not many people on this trip. She said to herself, "why did this have to happen? Her head rested on the bus window. As the rain poured down the outside of the window, tears flowed down her face.

Once it stopped near her hotel, Amelia departed the bus and briefly looked around her hometown. She was grateful her new look hid her identity, and none of her friends or parents' friends recognized her. If Amelia saw any of them, she was able to avoid them to prevent them from recognizing her. Fortunately, it kept raining, and she didn't have an umbrella or raincoat, soaking her hair and clothes, so she didn't look like her old self or new self either. Finally, Amelia headed to a place she knew would bring some comfort. She knew she was a frightening sight with her hair and clothes soaked. But, at least with the weather, many people weren't out anyway. She kept her eyes gazing downwards whenever she passed someone and quickened her pace so they didn't have time to engage her.

New Haven was one of the few small towns left. That attracted Amelia's parents to relocate from a larger city and settle in New Haven. It wasn't so small that everyone knew everyone's name, making it easier for Amelia to hide from the past. Not that she hated the history in her hometown. She came back to be near her parents and didn't know where else to go. Amelia found it necessary to hide her identity, so childcare services didn't locate her and take her back to her foster home. She couldn't risk friends recognizing her for the same reason.

Amelia walked towards a small park that she and her parents would go to each Sunday for a picnic, weather permitting. Memories of them caused her to cry harder. The rain transitioned into a light drizzle as Amelia headed to her family's precious space. Her mood lightened when she located the bench behind a tall shady tree. There were tall bushes around the area, making it hard to see the bench or its path. Amelia followed the

short narrow path to her safe haven and sat on the left side of the bench under the tree. She would usually be on the ground on a blanket or sitting between her parents on the bench. It didn't seem right to sit in the middle of the bench now, which is why she sat to one side. She didn't feel entirely alone. She didn't even care that the bench was wet since she was too.

She remembered her mom saying God made the area just for the three of them. They liked the seclusion of it. The 3 of them enjoyed feeling like they were in their own little paradise. The area was mostly grass and wildflowers and dirt only around the riverbank. Amelia smiled with memories of her dad teaching her to skip rocks and fish. The sound of the river, gentle breezes, and birds singing made it easy to drift off to sleep for a Sunday nap after eating their picnic lunch. Her mom enjoyed reading, and sometimes she would share stories from her books. All of them seemed to have a reference to God in them. Her parents loved God. Amelia did, too but not anymore. Amelia softly whispered, "I wish you were both here now. I miss you both so much. This never would have happened if you were still here. God let you both die and leave me alone. I hate God for taking you away from me and not protecting me."

She looked up at the gray sky and started to talk to God.

"God, I know my parents loved you. I did at one time too. What have I done for you to allow all this bad stuff to happen to me? I remember everyone at church, including my parents, saying you are good. You are always there. You never leave or bring harm to us. You want only the best for us. Your love is unconditional. If this is true, how is letting my parents die being good? How is allowing me to endure abuse from the foster family the best for me? Why didn't you watch over me and protect me from this? If you loved me as much as I've been told you do, I wouldn't be alone with no place to call home. I'm only fourteen. I'm not able to face this alone. I'm not sure why I'm even talking to you now. I hate you now for allowing this to happen to me."

Amelia's thoughts ended when she heard a lady singing.

It was faint but gradually grew louder. Amelia remembered the song. It had to be at church as it was clearly a hymn. The lady's voice was captivating. If there were angels, Amelia wondered if they sounded like her. Definitely a choir voice. The lady approached Amelia's sanctuary, and Amelia heard the words clearly,

"Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms, He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there."

Her words tapered off at the last verse, and she prayed. "Lord, I love you. I praise you for who You are. Thank you for this wonderful, beautiful day! Put your arms around those carrying a heavy burden and let them know you care. In Jesus' Name, Amen"

While Amelia watched her, the lady spoke without looking towards Amelia. "Child, I see you found the best area of this park. I, too, enjoy the serenity here." She then smiled at Amelia "Would you be bothered by me joining you on the other end of that bench?"

Amelia was intrigued by the lady. She was African American and a bit on the heavy side, and she felt the lady was a grandmother with her demeanor and appearance. She was wearing a long dark purple dress with a gold belt and holding a brimmed hat in her hands that were the opposite colors of her dress. The hat was golden with a dark band of purple.

Amelia didn't know much about fashion, but she wasn't sure this was a good combination. Gray was sprinkled through the ladies' black hair. It reminded Amelia of snowflakes that had fallen on her mom's hair when they went out to enjoy the snowy winter days. Her face was one of those friendly faces, smiling and engaging. Looking into her eyes, Amelia felt a warmth she hadn't felt in a long time. Amelia gazed back towards the river and said flatly, "Do what you want. The bench is still wet from the rain." The rain had stopped, but everything was glistening from raindrops which added more to the ambiance.

The lady sat beside her and said, "I don't reckon a wet seat will bother me if it hasn't bothered you. I'm Millie, and who might you be, child?" Without looking at Millie, "Amelia."

"Nice to meet you, Amelia. That's a beautiful name". Still not looking at Millie and without emotion, Amelia replied, "Nice to meet you too."

The two sat in silence for a while, and Amelia appreciated Millie not asking her any more questions. After a few moments, Amelia decided to ask Millie a question about her prayer. She turned to look at Millie, who was smiling but with her eyes closed. Amelia didn't know if she was sleeping, praying, or meditating. Millie surprised her by whispering, "I was enjoying the sounds of God's creations." Millie opened her eyes to look at Amelia. Amelia gasped in awe when she looked into Millie's eyes. She couldn't tell much when Millie was standing and looking at her from the other side of the bushes. Amelia was close enough now to see every detail of Millie's face. "You have the clearest bluest eyes I have ever seen. So very pretty".

"Why, thank you, young lady." "You have a beauty inside you that's begging to come out if only you would let it. Do you have something you wanted to say, Amelia?"

"Yes, I have a question. I heard you thank God for a beautiful, wonderful day. What is so beautiful about it? Today, it's been dark and stormy, and the clouds are still gloomy. The rain has finally stopped, but it's still not beautiful to me."

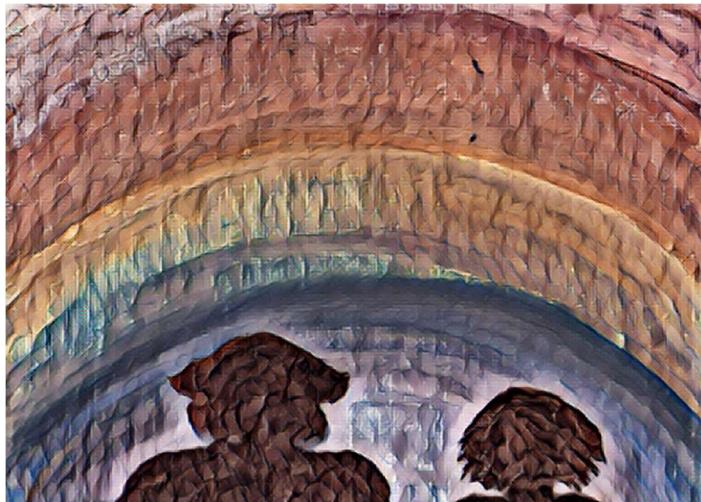
"My child, it is all in what you choose to see. You are correct that the sky is now gray, but is it really? Is not the blue sky and sun still there? The sun has not left, and neither has the clear blue sky. You focus on the clouds and the storm while I focus on the sun that never quits shining, even at night. We can choose to see the darkness or to see the light."

Amelia was fascinated by Millie's eyes and words and hadn't noticed the sky above her. Millie looked up. "See there, child. The sun is still shining, and not only that but there is also a rainbow. Do you know why God sends a rainbow?" Amelia remembered her Sunday school lessons and stories her mom would share. "Isn't it a promise? Something about never bringing a flood to destroy people again."

"You remember correctly, but it is also a sign of a new beginning."

Amelia thought to herself, "Yeah, right, a new beginning. But, if this is a new beginning, I want no part of it."

Amelia looked at the rainbow and remembered the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow story. She'd rather have a pot of gold than face this new beginning. Amelia found herself trying to find the end of this one. As she followed it, it seemed to end at her. She shook her head and told herself it was a combination of hunger, tiredness, and stress, causing her to see what was not there.



hate God now." Then, surprisingly, Millie said, 'That's ok, my precious one, God can take it. He knows you're hurting right now, and He also knows your heart doesn't mean that. "Yes, I do mean it, Millie!"

Millie calmly replied, "Your feelings and mind are telling you that, but trust me, all of this will pass, and you will experience the love of Jesus Christ again."

Rather than argue or explain more, Amelia said nothing and turned her gaze back to the flowing river.

Millie broke the silence by saying, "I don't know about you, child, but my tummy is begging for some vittles. Would you like to join me at the coffee shop next door? My treat. I think we're both dry enough to be presentable in public now."

Amelia wasn't too keen on the idea of being in public. However, she did like having Millie around. There was comfort from not being alone. She accepted the offer. When Millie stood up, she put her hat on and the way she placed it on her head, tilted

"Amelia, never doubt that you are precious to God the Father. He created you for Him to love and for you to love Him. You're more precious to God than a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." She winked at Amelia after that comment. Tears welled up in Amelia's eyes, and she said, "I can't believe that now, Millie." She paused before saying softly, "I

backward, and the sun shone behind her, reminding Amelia of a halo she'd seen in pictures of angels. Hers was glowing a light shade of purple.

On the way to "Cove Coffee," she looked at Millie and said, "I'm fourteen and not a child."

"Child, it makes no difference to our heavenly Father. We are all children to Him. I don't believe you're adult enough to carry what is burdening you." Amelia didn't ask her to stop calling her "child" as she was right. She's not old enough for what she's facing by herself. The two walked silently to the coffee shop. The only sound between them was Millie's humming a hymn that she couldn't recall the words but knew it was "Showers of Blessing." Her humming was calming to Amelia. While the two ate, Amelia was amazed at how many people stopped to talk with Millie. It was entertaining, too, as she listened and watched how she interacted with everyone.

When things quieted down in the coffee shop, Millie said, "You know what, child? I don't know one of the people who took time to talk with me!" She started laughing, and she had a very contagious laugh that Amelia found herself smiling with her. When Millie saw her smiling, she said, "Well, I see there's hope for you yet." She winked at Amelia and told her she had a beautiful smile.

The noise and activity inside "Cove Coffee" settled down. Finally, Amelia decided to confide in Millie.

Not wanting Millie to see her cry as she knew she would in explaining everything, she lowered her head and started to speak to Millie in a wavering voice, "Millie, my parents are dead. They were killed in a head-on collision about three months ago. I was staying at a friend's house while they were away. Mommy called me and said they were about an hour away and would be home soon. It was dark out and raining, but I headed home anyway. It was a short walk, and I only had a few more minutes to wait for my parents. An hour passed, and they weren't home. A police officer knocked on the door and told me that my parents didn't survive a head-on collision. He explained there was nothing my father could do. A drunk driver was speeding on the wrong side of the road with no lights on. When daddy saw the car heading towards them, there was not enough time for him to avoid it. He tried by swerving, but that caused their car to hydroplane on the wet road right over a steep embankment where the car flipped over several times." Tears started again, but she continued."

"With no known family, I was sent to a foster family until my parent's lawyer obtained a copy of their will to see if any guardians were named. Unfortunately, the only foster family available at the time to take in a teen was about 2 hours away from here".... she hesitated a few seconds before continuing. She appreciated Millie listening and not saying a word even when she couldn't look at Millie. The only reaction from Millie was her taking Amelia's hand into both of hers. This gave Amelia the strength to continue. "Not long after moving in with the foster family, while the wife was out for a monthly "Ladies Only Night". The husband, drunk as usual but seemed more drunk that night, forced himself on me. Once he left me, he went to their bedroom and passed out. I had to get out before his wife got home. I knew she was the type to accuse me of lying. I had retrieved our family emergency cash that my parents kept hidden at home before I was forced to move in with the foster parents. I knew it was enough to sustain me for a few months. I kept it hidden in a secret compartment of my suitcase". I left and bought a bus ticket to a city outside of New Haven.

I spent the rest of the night in a hotel under a fake name. No ID was needed when paying in cash. The next day I changed my look by cutting my hair short, dying it black to cover up the blonde, and changing my wardrobe style. I didn't want to report the foster parents or what happened. I've seen on tv shows and in movies how they treat women that have been sexually attacked. I didn't want to go through all of that. I just wanted to forget it ever happened. Once I had my new look and a new wardrobe, I headed here, my hometown, to be closer to my parents. This morning, I went to the free clinic because I have been sick to my stomach. Amanda began shaking and crying hard, remembering that night and its result. Not sure if Millie could hear her clearly through her weeping. "Millie, I'm pregnant." Amelia kept her head lowered through the entire story and didn't look up at Millie until she finished the news. She still had tears in her eyes as she looked at Millie to see how she reacted to her story.

Millie had the look of understanding, concern, and genuine compassion. Still holding Amelia's hand in hers and slightly caressing both sides, Millie asked, "May I pray with you, child"? Amelia never had anyone pray with her before. She wasn't sure she wanted prayer as what good would it do? Millie said, "It's ok if you don't believe in prayer or that God cares about you. Considering what you have been through and facing, it is understandable for you to be angry. I do not believe you hate God as much as you say. You are mad at Him for life not going the way you wanted. I still want to pray with and for you. May I begin?" Amelia nodded. The prayer wasn't long, but a lot was conveyed for Amelia to God. After the prayer, Amelia wasn't sure what to say other than thank

you. She did feel calmer. She wasn't sure if it was from the prayer or Millie's presence, or maybe both.

"Now, my child, you have been through an awful lot in a small amount of time. So, it's no wonder your emotions are all over the place. But, trust me, God still loves you, and He is still with you. He has been setting up a new future for you, watch and see!" Millie gave Amelia a wink, smiled, and patted her hand.

"Millie, would you be willing to go to my parent's gravesite with me? I really would like to be with them now. Even though I know they aren't there, it comforts me to be there sometimes" Millie smiled, and her eyes twinkled a bit and said, "That's a lovely idea, and I'd be happy to accompany you."

The cemetery was a good walk away but not far enough for another bus ride. Millie started talking about Jesus. She referred to him as her best friend and talked about Him like he was walking along with them. Amelia found herself wishing she could know Jesus like Millie does. Is He as loving and kind as she and her parents said He is? If so, she didn't feel loved. So Amelia didn't say anything but listened while Millie talked and sang about how much she loved Jesus and how he loved her and everyone.

As they approached the cemetery, Amelia asked if they could sit on the bench closest to her parent's gravesite. She looked at her parent's tombstone from where they sat. Finally, Amelia spoke while still looking at the gravesite. "Millie, how do I make sure I'll see my parents again in heaven? I know they are there. As much as they loved God and tried to teach me to. I'm just not sure I'll join them one day".

Millie looked at Amelia with a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye. "Your parents have done well planting the seed of God's love in you. You first need to determine if you hate God as much as you say you do or if you're just angry because of your circumstances." Amelia didn't answer. Millie continued to speak, "I've heard you talk about how God hates you because He allowed all these bad things to happen to you, so you hate Him back. Have you once opened your heart up to Jesus and just cried with Him, explaining how hurt and alone you feel? In other words, have you asked Him to comfort you and help you through this?"

"Millie, I'm so ashamed because I know my parents would be disappointed with my attitude towards God. They've shared the story of Christ's crucifixion and how God

loved everyone. He sent His only son to be a sacrifice for our sins. I do believe in God, Millie. I want to love Him. I want Jesus to be my friend like He is yours".

"Amelia, God always gives another chance. You can always start over with God. He is the God of new beginnings."

Amelia started praying, "God, I am sorry I said I hated you. I don't. I am so mad. Help me, God. Help me to love you the way you created me to. I believe in You, and I want a relationship with your son, Jesus. I'm so scared. I can't do this alone, but I know that You can. So, I think I'll let you. I give you my life and my love. In Jesus' Name, amen."

Millie had tears in her eyes. "God bless you, child" Amelia leaned over to hug Millie.

"I think I'll go to talk to my parents now." She stood and noticed a couple standing at her parent's gravesite.

Amelia looked at Millie, "I don't know them. Why would strangers visit my parents?"

"I dunno, but one sure way to find out is to go on over there and introduce yourself as Amelia McKenzie." Amelia was taken aback, "How do you know my last name? I have been using a fake name with everyone I come in contact here, and I never gave you my last name". Millie gave her a wink and said, "I have a friend in an extremely high place. He shares with me what I need to know. Now go on, child. Don't hide from them, and remember God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him."

Amelia walked up to the couple. "Excuse me, I'm Amelia McKenzie. May I ask how you know my parents?" Both turned around, but the woman spoke first. She was slim and lovely. Long blonde hair like Amelia's used to be and deep brown eyes. Something about her eyes seemed familiar to Amelia. "Mel, is that you? She hugged Amelia tighter than she remembered anyone doing and said, "we've been looking everywhere we could think of for you!" Only one person called her Mel, and that was her nanny years ago. Now she remembered why the eyes are familiar. They used to remind her of puppies' eyes back then. Amelia held her nanny tight and said, "are you really my Annie."

"Yes, dear, it's me."

They both were crying, but this time in relief. Annie was the closest family she ever had, other than her parents. Annie said, "Well, let me look at you." The two separated. "You look a lot different than I thought you would. You still have your father's green eyes and

your mother's beautiful smile". Amelia told her she would explain her latest look and recent events later. She was drained. The day turned out to be very long, emotional, and exhausting.

Annie introduced the man beside her as her husband, Trey Montgomery. Trey and Amelia said hello to each other, but Amelia didn't give him a chance to shake her hand. Right now, she wasn't comfortable with any man touching her.

She told Annie she'd like for her to meet her new friend Millie. She turned to walk Millie's way, but Millie was gone. "Annie, did you see the lady sitting with me earlier?". Annie said, "No, honey, we only saw you, and I didn't recognize you, or I would have come to you then."

Amelia went to the bench to see if Millie may have left something behind to prove she had been there. She looked over the cemetery to see if Millie was taking a stroll or possibly leaving the graveyard. She knew Millie didn't have enough for Millie to reach any of the exits.

Amelia sat down with confusion and sadness. Annie sat beside her and put her arms around her. "What's wrong, Amelia?"

"Annie, I've spent most of the day with Millie. I just had a light lunch at Coffee Haven with her. She walked with me here. We sat here and talked. She listened while I prayed"

"Amelia, Coffee Haven is closed. There was a family emergency. They won't reopen until next week. Neither Trey nor I saw a woman sitting with you."

Amelia's head was spinning. She wondered if she was going crazy. Is today just a dream? Is Annie even beside her? Suddenly everything went dark. The last thing she heard was Melissa screaming for Trey.

Annie and Trey rushed Amelia to the hospital. They were told Amelia was extremely dehydrated, but they wanted to keep her overnight to run a few more tests and observe. Annie told Trey to go back to the hotel and rest. She wanted to be with Amelia if she woke up during the night.

Annie sat by Amelia's bed in a chair that reclined. She moved it close enough to hold Amelia's hand while she slumped in the chair. She dozed off and was awakened by light

humming. A nurse entered the room. She said, "Pardon me, dear, I have a gift someone left for Amelia. You don't need to move; I'll set it here on the windowsill". With her back turned away from Annie, the nurse quietly started singing, "Precious memories, unseen angels. Sent from somewhere to my soul". Then, she stopped singing and turned towards the door. As she walked towards the door, she looked at Annie and said, "your Mel needs your love and support now more than ever. Always remind her Jesus loves her and will never leave her". She then exited the room while humming, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Annie quickly got out of her chair. "Wait, who are you? How did you know...". There was no use to continue speaking. It was like the nurse had disappeared. Annie looked out the door right and left, and there was no sign of her or anyone.

The following day Amelia awoke and was glad to see Annie there as she wasn't clear where she was or what happened. Annie was asleep in the chair beside her, turned on her side towards Amelia's bed so she could keep holding Amelia's hand. Amelia squeezed Annie's hand and said, "Good morning in a scratchy voice." Annie sleepily said, "Good morning, Mel. You had a visitor last night. I'm not sure, but I think it was Millie. She left you a gift. Do you want to open it now or later?" Amelia was very curious about the gift, but she preferred waiting until she was out of the hospital.

A few days later, Amelia, Annie, and Trey met with the lawyer, where she learned Annie was named her legal guardian. Amelia was more than pleased as she knew she could trust Annie. Amelia also discovered her parents left a large inheritance held in a trust for her until she turned twenty-five. She would receive a modest monthly allowance until then.

Once everything was settled with the will, the three of them headed to her new home out of state. Amelia would share the news about her pregnancy once they arrived home and settled in. She knew Annie would be compassionate and guide her through this phase of her life. They had to fly back home, and Amelia had put the gift from Millie in her carry-on bag. She pulled it out and unwrapped it. It was a Bible, and inside, Millie had written:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11 God bless you now and always, love in Christ, "M'."

Amelia closed the Bible and held it close to her heart with tears in her eyes. Proof that Millie really existed. No doubt she was an angel in disguise. "Thank you, Jesus, for sending Millie and Annie. Thank you for loving me even when I couldn't love you. I love you now with all my heart. I surrender my past, my today, and my future to you. I am excited for my new beginning with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Amelia looked out the airplane window and couldn't believe her eyes. There had been no rain, yet a rainbow reached from the heavens to the ground below. She heard Millie's words saying, "You're more precious to God than a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." A tear ran down her cheek, not from sadness but from realizing how much God absolutely loved her. God gave her back her tomorrow.