

## Melody's story

It started much like any other day, however, slightly different, my cheeks weren't wet from the rain the night before, they were damp but only from crying myself to sleep. Neither was the rest of my body, I assumed it would be, although so did I every day, as in September all the way through until March I would wake up in the morning soggy and uncomfortable, my shoes on the grass overflowing with water, creating puddles on the floor. However this morning was different, I could just about see the blazing sun peeping out from behind the fluffy white clouds hiding the beautiful pale blue sky. A sudden cold breeze ran up my back and I pulled the bin bag up to my neck. I had found it the night before, it looked as if it were about to burst, I could only imagine what was in there, left over bread from sandwiches, cheese and ham, or maybe flapjack, with nuts and raisins and apricots. But as hungry as I was I refused to eat whatever was inside. I crept over to it and ripped it open. Its content lay at my feet and I shook the bag to make sure it was empty. I made a tear at the top and split it down one side so that it became like a blanket, which I carried over to a bench under a large oak tree. I lay wide awake for several hours whimpering and shivering. I was freezing, with only a bin bag to protect me from the bitter cold; my fingers were numb, my toes frozen. But for you to really understand I'll start at the beginning, where it happened.....

My name is melody, I moved to England when I was 12 years old, I'm 32 now and my life has dramatically changed. However I was born in Nigeria and for the first 10 years of my childhood I was raised there by my parents Abigail and Isaac, we also lived there with my grandmother blossom. My grandfather Michael died when I was young, I think, being so young I don't remember much about him but I was told by my grandmother that I would have loved him because he had the best sense of humour! I was very close to my mother and when she and my father died, when I was 10, I was devastated, I felt like my life was over, I felt I had no future, that I was worthless and I would forever be lonely. There were many dark secrets and deep hatreds surrounding my parents, so when they died it wasn't a huge shock and gradually I stopped feeling sorry for myself and my grandmother helped me pick myself back up again. I grew closer to my grandmother and treated her as my mother; I would tell her everything, if I was scared, excited, anxious or upset she would be there to talk to me. I felt happy around her; her warm smile comforted me and made me feel safe. However time was passing by and my grandmother was getting older, and occasionally I did wonder what would happen later on! I could tell that she was struggling to look after me alone but she tried not to show it.

After my parents dying my grandmother felt that we needed an adventure, so when I was 12 we travelled to England. I was shocked at first when I arrived. The sky was elephant grey and the bitter cold slapped me in the face. But the grass was emerald green and coated with daisies. When we first arrived my grandmother dragged me to a friend she knew, called Esme, I was confused about what was happening. I thought we were here for an adventure, I had been dreaming about it for weeks. When I asked her she didn't reply and kept on walking along up the driveway, she held my wrist tightly, squeezing it, and tears ran down her cheeks. I went red in the face; I didn't speak for fear of being yelled at and ending up crying myself. I looked down at the wet hard concrete ground and then at my shoes, my laces were untied but I had much bigger problems than that. She turned away from me and stopped at the door, knocking three times. I tried not to cry but gave in. Tears streamed down my face and I caught them with my tongue. I thought that maybe it upset her! I wiped my eyes with my sleeves as a tall black figure walked towards the door. I gasped trying to catch my breath, not wanting to make this my lasting first impression. A tall slim woman opened the door; she had long dark auburn hair and beautiful hazel eyes.

She suddenly grabbed my shoulder and tried to pull me inside. I was anxious and confused, I turned to my grandmother who was a mess, with tears now pouring down her cheeks and running out of breath. She rubbed her eyes and said, "I'm sorry, I just can't cope, you'll be fine here, Esme will look after you, I love you, don't ever forget that!" my hands were shaking and I couldn't think properly. What was happening? I thought I could trust her; she was all I had left! All the time and memories and now she's leaving?! Esme gripped my shoulder and pulled me inside. I desperately tried holding onto the door and reaching out, but I was too weak. She slammed the door and I sat on the floor in a ball. She violently yanked my arm and pulled me onto my feet. I stared at her and asked, "why am I here, who are you, where is my grandmother?!!!" she looked me in the eyes and replied, "you're grandmother doesn't want you anymore, you need to understand that girl, she spoke to me and we came to an arrangement, you're going to live with me now, I could use an extra hand with the cleaning!" I was shocked, tried to open the door and run but she pulled my hair. "You listen to me young lady, you go into that kitchen and start scrubbing that floor, or tonight you'll be hungry! I knelt on the floor with a sponge and a bucket polishing the kitchen floor with my own tears. Esme opened the door, "if I come back and you haven't put yourself to good use then there'll be consequences, is that clear?!" she shouted. "Yes" I agreed anxiously. She slammed the door and left!

I lived with her for about 3 weeks until one day! She told me to clean her bathroom, she locked the door from the outside so that, "I couldn't be distracted by anything else" but was really so that I couldn't escape! She was out for 4 hours and by the time she got back the bathroom was spotless, but I was starving. I heard her keys in the door and quickly began scrubbing the floor again. I heard her footsteps down the hallway and she unlocked the bathroom door. I pleaded for something to eat but she screamed at me and said, "you useless girl, I have been gone for 4 hours and you've done nothing, how dare you ask for food when you haven't obeyed me!" I fell to my knees and begged, "Please, you haven't given me anything all day, even just some fruit or left over bread will be enough". My head was thumping and my stomach rumbling. "I need a drink, please!" She grabbed my arm, pulled me up and opened the door. She shoved me along the hallway and pushed me through the front door. She slammed it in my face, saying, "you're a waste of my time, you're worthless, remember that, I don't care what your grandmother says, now get away from me! I banged on the door and cried, "No, please, I'm sorry, I will obey you and ask for nothing, I should be thankful that I have a roof over my head and not be greedy, please I have nowhere else to go!" I had nothing to eat, nothing to drink, nothing to wear, nowhere to go, and there was no one I could trust!

With nowhere to stay I had no choice but to live on the street. I slept by a tall, strong oak tree near a lake. I admit it was lovely waking up in the morning to the sound of the birds singing up in the trees. But it wasn't so fun when you had only a bin bag to cover you as the clouds cried. With no food I was starving, during the day I would walk through the street until I found somewhere to sit and beg for food. No one ever noticed me and if they did they would stare and carry on walking or throw a few pennies at my feet. Some days I would have just enough to buy an apple or maybe some grapes, but other days I would go hungry and sleep on an empty stomach. My tummy would growl and whine keeping me awake throughout the long nights. I often slept on a bench underneath the oak tree and stared up at the glistening stars in the sky, the moon would glow softly. After a while I began to forget about Esme and got used to living there. Still, when people passed by I would shout "excuse me" and ask if they knew of a place I could go, but every time they would shake their head and quickly walk away. Until one day!

I woke up and sat propped up against the tree. A young woman walking by stopped and looked at me. She smiled and wandered over. I was surprised, no one had ever taken any notice of me and suddenly someone had. She came and crouched in front of me and said, "hello, are you alright, what are you doing here?" "Who are you!?? I questioned. "My name is Holly, don't worry I won't bite, what's your name?" "Melody" I replied quickly "why are you here?" "I'm a care worker, why are you here sweetie?" she said "this is where I live, I.....I don't have a family, I don't have anywhere else to go" she looked at me and smiled again, she reached out her hand and said calmly "look, why don't you come with me, I'll call my manager and find out what to do, you must be freezing she said," talking of her coat and rapping it around me, "take my hand and we'll get you something to eat and drink." I held her hand and she led me through a narrow passageway, down a flight of stairs, round the corner, over a bridge and to a tall building. She opened the door and stepped inside. There was a desk at the front, and a short lady with long blonde hair, pearly white teeth and a name tag reading, 'Emma'. I was told to sit down on one of the chairs in front of the desk while Holly called her manager. Emma rummaged around in one of the cupboards behind her and pulled out a tin with daisies on; she grabbed a glass from a shelf and filled it with water. She smiled and came to sit next to me. "Here you go darling" she said holding out the glass of water for me. "Thank you" I said shyly. She opened the tin and offered me one of the biscuits inside. "Biscuit?" she said "Yes, please" I replied, picking up the last chocolate one. "You rascal, they're my favourite!" she said smiling. "Melody" said Holly, "Come here!" I walked over to her as she put the phone down. "Now I don't want you to be worried or nervous because I will be with you the whole time and make sure that you're ok! I looked at her raising my eyebrow, "what do you mean, where am I going!" "A refugee council!" I looked at her and didn't say anything. She started to look disappointed, "Melody, honey, you look unsure, I promise you it's nothing to worry about, this gives you a great chance to live a great life!" I beamed with delight, "worried?" I said "I'm over the moon, thank you so much Holly!"

When I was taken to the refugee council Holly was there with me the whole time and I never left her side. I could trust her. She helped feel confident again and I believe that I had a future. I wasn't scared or afraid anymore. I told her everything and she became like a mother and a sister to me. I can't thank her enough for what she did, without her I don't know where I would be!

This was over 10 years ago now and throughout my life so far Holly has been my role model. Without her I wouldn't be where I am today. I followed in her footsteps and became a care worker too. I married and had children, Emily and Henry, and continue to dedicate my life to helping young children just like me, just like Holly!