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Grace

by MaryPat Campbell

When Milly was young she liked to kneel on her bed and look out the bedroom window. All the houses in her street were exactly like each other and the one opposite was the house of the baby with the yellow curtains. Milly longed to live in that house, she especially longed to be the baby of that house. The yellow curtains seemed to shine out from the top window, especially on summer evenings when the sun had gone behind the houses, the trees had darkened to a greenish black and the street grew colourless and quiet. All the young children on Milly's street were going to bed as the sun went down.

Downstairs she could hear her sisters, brothers and parents in conversation, or watching TV and laughing or bantering with each other. Sometimes she could hear the front door bang, as one of her big sisters, Amy perhaps, went out. Sometimes Amy would wave up to her at the window. She longed to be a grown up like her and go out in the evening, rather than have to stay at home and go to bed. The family downstairs had things to say to each other that sounded different in the evenings, the murmur of their voices sounded comforting, easier on the ear than in the morning when everyone was in a rush to get to school and work. No one else in Milly's family had to go to bed before the sun went down, except her, it was so unfair.

Milly imagined she could beam herself across the road along a magic shaft of light to join the baby in its bedroom on the other side of the road. She drew a picture with the house and the yellow curtains shining out like a beacon in the darkening summer evening. She thought the baby must be a very special person to have such shining golden material to keep the light out, or the light in, she wasn't sure which it would be. She somehow knew that with those kinds of curtains, the yellow warmth would be held in the fabric of the material, and the sun would shine through warmly in the morning, filling the baby's room with golden light.

She assumed the other people in the baby's family were not that interested in talking and watching TV together, but instead longed, as she did, to creep upstairs to the baby's room and bask in the warmth of the evening sunshine streaming through those yellow curtains.

Yellow was Milly's favourite colour, it brought comfort and warmth into her young life. She had her eye on her sister Amy's yellow jumper, and hoped she could wear it one day when Amy had grown out of it. There was something about that particular yellow that reminded her of buttercups in the garden just before the grass was cut, or soft yellow slabs of butter in their golden wrappers, and shafts of sunlight she had seen beaming down at giddy angles through high windows in old churches the family had visited on their holidays.

She thought this might be what grace looked like. Grace was something to do with being special and blessed. How Milly longed for grace in her life. She wondered if it had something to do with being holy, full of joy and kindness, where people would bow down before you and want to be near you all the time.

Milly believed everything out of the common, the only thing to distrust was the normal. The normal was when you were patted on the head affectionately but didn't have much standing in the family, or when you had to go to school and had to share things and didn't get to be the most important person in the class. The normal, was when you had to go to bed before the sun went down just because you were the youngest in the family.