

THE CURSE OF CANDELABRIA

Once upon a time there was a kingdom, now called Candelabria. It was a prosperous land, whose inhabitants had mastered the arts of magic and technology and built majestic castles that could move on their own. The largest of all was the Alabaster Castle, located in the center of the kingdom, where a king and a queen lived as undisputed rulers.

The king and queen were deeply in love and one day a beautiful daughter was born to them, a child with skin as smooth as silk and hair as red as hearth flames. The noble families brought their fortresses to the slopes of the Alabaster Castle to pay homage to the little princess, and great celebrations were organized for the people and the court. Sadly, before the festivities were over, the queen fell

sick with a mystery disease and within days she was dead. The king, shocked and deeply saddened by the loss of his wife, began to fear that the sickness that had taken his bride was the result of some curse cast by a visitor from afar. So, to keep his



daughter safe from harm, he decided to isolate her from the outside world, locking her up in the castle's highest tower. In the years that followed, he closed the kingdom to foreign trade, forbade visits by ambassadors, built heavy walls on the mountains around the kingdom, and erected new defensive towers. The princess was not allowed to leave the tower, which was soon encircled by new walls, cloisters, and gardens; these, in turn, were surrounded by high walls, secondary buildings, and more walls, as far as the fields beyond, tended by the peasants.

The princess grew from a child into a girl, becoming more and more beautiful with every passing year, but one terrible day not long after her eighteenth birthday, and despite everything her father had done to protect her, she became sick, just as her mother had, and fell into a deep sleep. The king, at his wit's end, called every wise man in the kingdom and sent the noblemen and their castles to foreign

lands in search of a cure, but no one could figure out what was wrong with the princess.

Then, one night, when the king had lost all hope, a white raven with flame-colored eyes appeared at his window.



The bird told him that the princess was not ill: her sleep was simply the price the gods were making the king pay for the prosperity of his kingdom. The king asked how he could save her, and the raven responded by plucking seven feathers from its wings. These immediately turned into seven candles of different sizes. The raven lit the candles with its fiery tears and offered the king a pact. The candles were to be kept for seven nights, and if at least one was still burning after midnight on the seventh night, then the princess would wake up. Instead, if no candle remained lit, then the king would have to give up his kingdom to the bird.

The king, feeling more hopeful, accepted the deal. Determined that he would never, ever let the candles go out, he immediately summoned the representatives of the six great noble houses of the kingdom. To each of them he entrusted a candle, exhorting them to watch over it and not let it go out. He himself would keep the seventh candle, the smallest one. The noblemen swore they would keep watch over the candles and returned to their wandering castles.

On the first night, however, the maid at the first house knocked over the




precious candle, and it went out.

On the second night, a fierce storm blew up. The hall window in the second house suddenly flew open and gust of wind put out the second precious candle.

The storm continued to rage on the third night, and the third noble family placed their candle under a crystal dome, to protect it from the bad weather. Unfortunately, however, the candle went out due to the smoke that collected under the glass.

On the fourth night, the fourth candle disappeared mysteriously, believed to have been stolen.

So, the fifth family put a guard to watch over their candle, but the guard fell asleep, allowing the candle to set fire to a writing desk and then an entire wing of the palace. The flames were put out, but the candle completely melted in the blaze.



The sixth candle was put out by the youngest daughter of the head of the sixth family, who was envious of the princess's beauty, and did not want her to wake up.

Thus, by the seventh night,

only the seventh candle remained. Midnight was drawing near, but its flame had become so weak that it was giving off little more than a dim glow. The king wrung his hands in despair, because he knew that the candle would not last. He cried, and one of his tears dropped on it, putting it out.

In the darkness, the white raven appeared. The bird, which was actually the most evil of all the gods, said: "you have betrayed our pact and so now the princess will sleep forever and your kingdom will be mine." The raven flapped its wings, releasing from its feathers evil spirits which attacked the king before taking to the skies over Candelabria. That night, all the men and women of the kingdom were turned into living candles, destined to melt slowly and eventually die. The six noble houses were punished particularly harshly: their wandering palaces, too, were partially transformed into gigantic wax beings, destined to roam the

kingdom, fighting each other and fleeing forever from the black ghosts of the curse that, from then on, would hunt them down. Thus, the years passed, and as nature took over the myriad walls of the castle, beyond which no one dared to



venture, many men melted away, some died, and others still became lumps of wax which, if not used by the strongest to create monsters, merged together to try and stave off death.

The great houses learned to tame their own wax fortresses. They devoured entire villages to feed their flames and extend their lives. But no matter how hard they tried, everyone knew that sooner or later the wax would run out and the end would come.

Then, one day, under the smoke-blackened sky, a small candle made a discovery: a candle unlike any other concealed in a cave at the foot of the mountains. It was the candle that had been stolen, and incredibly it was still burning, its flame seemingly inextinguishable.

The news spread quickly around the kingdom. In the noble households, new hope was kindled. This candle, proof that the pact had not been broken, should

restore life to the kingdom, put right past mistakes, and, perhaps, break the curse. But who should take it back to the castle? Who was worthy of awakening the princess and becoming the new king of Candelabria?

