

The Candle Keeper



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Theo lived in a small village where every house had a garden and every garden had a story. He was nine years old, with messy chestnut-brown hair that stuck up in tufts and a gap-toothed smile. He wore a mustard-yellow jumper and carried a leather satchel for his notebook. Theo loved to explore, and he always kept his eyes open for secrets.



One rainy afternoon, Theo found a door behind a bookshelf in his grandmother's attic. It was small and wooden, with a brass handle shaped like a candle. When he turned the handle, the door creaked open. Inside was a round room filled with hundreds of candles. Each candle glowed with a soft, warm light, and the air smelled of honey and old paper.



An old woman named Granny Willow appeared in the doorway. She was short and stooped, with silver hair in a neat bun and kind grey eyes behind round spectacles. 'Welcome, Theo,' she said. 'You have found the Candle Room. Each candle holds a story from our village. When someone remembers the story, the candle shines bright.' Theo's eyes grew wide. 'Can I help?' he asked.



Granny Willow showed Theo how to care for the candles. He learned to trim the wicks and to whisper the stories he knew. 'Every candle needs a keeper,' she said. 'Someone who listens and remembers.' Theo nodded. He loved stories, and he loved his village. 'I will be the candle keeper,' he said proudly. Granny Willow smiled and gave him a small brass candle lighter.



The next morning, Theo noticed something strange. Three candles in the corner were flickering. Their flames were small and dim, as if they were trying to remember something. 'Oh no,' Theo whispered. 'These stories are fading.' He knew he had to act quickly. He took out his notebook and wrote down the names of the candles: Harvest, Sea, and Snow.



Theo decided to visit the oldest people in the village. They would know the stories, he thought. He put on his red boots and set off. First, he went to Granny Willow's cottage. She was the village's oldest storyteller, and she knew almost everything. 'Granny,' Theo said, 'the Harvest candle is fading. Can you tell me its story?'



Granny Willow sat in her rocking chair and closed her eyes. 'The harvest festival,' she began, 'was the most joyful time of year. Everyone brought their best vegetables and fruits. We danced around a giant bonfire and sang songs until the stars came out. I remember the year my mother won the prize for the biggest pumpkin.' As she spoke, Theo listened carefully.



Theo thanked Granny Willow and hurried back to the Candle Room. He whispered her story to the Harvest candle. The flame grew taller and brighter, and the candle glowed with a warm, golden light. 'It worked!' Theo cheered. 'One down, two to go.' He wrote the story in his notebook so he would never forget it.



Next, Theo visited Old Martin, the retired fisherman. Martin was tall and thin, with a white moustache and a navy cap. He lived in a cottage near the sea. 'Old Martin,' Theo said, 'the Sea candle is fading. Can you tell me its story?' Martin chuckled. 'Ah, the sea,' he said. 'I have many stories. Let me tell you about the day I caught a fish as big as a boat.'



Old Martin told a tale of a storm and a brave little boat. 'The waves were as high as houses,' he said, 'but my boat held on. And when the storm passed, the sea was calm and full of silver fish. I knew then that the sea would always take care of me.' Theo listened with wide eyes. He could almost smell the salt air.



Theo rushed back to the Candle Room and told the Sea story to the candle. The flame flickered, then grew strong and blue. 'Two down!' Theo said. He still had one more candle to fix. He checked his notebook. The last one was the Snow candle. He knew just who to ask: Mrs. Petal, the village baker.



Mrs. Petal was plump and lively, with curly white hair and a warm smile. She wore a floral apron and a silver brooch shaped like a rose. 'Mrs. Petal,' Theo said, 'the Snow candle is fading. Can you tell me its story?' She clapped her hands. 'Oh, the great snow!' she said. 'I was a little girl then. The snow fell for three days and three nights. We built tunnels and slides, and everyone shared their food.'



Mrs. Petal's eyes sparkled as she remembered. 'We had a big snowball fight, and I hit the mayor right on his hat!' she laughed. 'And that night, we all gathered in the bakery. My mother made hot cocoa, and we told stories until the snow stopped. It was the best winter ever.' Theo wrote it all down, his pencil flying across the page.



Theo hurried back to the Candle Room. He whispered Mrs. Petal's story to the Snow candle. The flame danced and grew bright, filling the room with a cozy glow. 'All three are shining!' Theo shouted. Granny Willow appeared and smiled. 'You did it, Theo. You listened and remembered. That is the true magic of the candles.'



From that day on, Theo visited the elders often. He listened to their stories and wrote them in his notebook. He learned that everyone has a story to tell, and that taking care of old stories keeps them alive. The candles in the Candle Room shone brighter than ever, and Theo knew he would always be their keeper.



The village children loved to hear Theo's stories. They gathered around him as he told tales of the sea, the snow, and the harvest. 'Stories are like candles,' Theo said. 'They need someone to keep them burning.' And the whole village smiled, because they knew their stories would never be forgotten.