

## **Guardians of the Flame**

Once upon a time in a far away land there was a very special kingdom. Of the many amazing features of the land, the magical books that it contained were the most incredible. These books, when held open, produced a radiance somewhat like a tongue of fire which hovered above them. The more the book was held open, the brighter the light became. This light was very useful in the forest because it enabled the people to see and live in the very best way possible. The books were readily available but seldom used, as people generally had too many important things to do.

There was one group in the forest which was dedicated to the open book and the life-giving light that it put forth. They initially held the book so often and with such love that the light from it grew very bright and spread throughout the forest. Many came from miles around to pitch their tent by it. As time went on, however, they began to get very protective and possessive of the light. To keep the light from any possible harm, they constructed a special holder for the book. Eventually they began to pride themselves on their role as 'guardians of the only true flame.'

They failed to notice for some time that the power of the light had begun to fade. People weren't holding it as much as they used to, the sharp edges of the enclosure being sometimes painful and its windows becoming cloudy now that the book had been sealed up. The quality of the light was now such that it caused strange shadows which frightened some people and repelled others.

Perhaps the chief reason that the light began to dim, however, was that the people were no longer in direct contact with the book. The enclosure acted as an insulator, reducing the effect of the human touch. People also began to see the book not as something to be held but as something to be placed on a shelf and viewed in its case, for they were very proud of their workmanship.

As 'guardians of the flame', they had also become very adamant that theirs was the only true flame; others were not sufficient to properly illuminate the dangers of the forest. They fought with and soundly condemned all other groups who held the book. But by and by they noticed that their numbers were dwindling and that their great and powerful light had become merely a faint glow.

One day they asked a traveler who happened by, 'Why is it that we are no longer a beacon in the land?' 'Why do we not grow as we once did?' And the man began to tell them how they had hidden their lamp under a bushel, how they had muddied the waters and made crooked the straight ways of the book. They were to be the light themselves, he said, but they would not let it live in them. And the guardians were enraged, and shouted, 'You would make us to be like those blind hypocrites in the sacred Book who thought that they were the only group that was right! The difference is that we are right!!!' And so they took him to the edge of their camp and stoned him. And immediately the glow from their book flickered and died, and they were left in darkness.