
FIRST TALES

By CLIVE BARKER

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Author's Note

These Clive Barker's First Tales two stories represent the two essential structures of fantastique literature. 'The Wood on the Hill' is about an incursion of unearthly elements into an approximation of our world. 'The Candle in the Cloud' is about a journey taken by people from our world into another reality. Yin and Yang, if you like. Forces pulling in opposing directions but to achieve the same end: Revelation.

Clive Barker (2013)

The Clive Barker's First Tales Wood on the Hill

Once upon a time in a land far from here, there grew a wood. This wood was dark and very old for it could remember the times before there were any people on earth, when the sky was always filled with fire, and there lived great birds, more terrible than I have words to tell. It could remember the years when Clive Barker's First Tales the dragons lived in the valley, until the Clive Barker's First Tales Great Winter came and they were all driven away by the snow. It was only a small wood then, and a little frightened by the world...

But, by the time I write my story, the wood Clive Barker's First Tales had Clive Barker's First Tales grown Clive Barker's First Tales up, and the people had come to the valley and built cottages where once the dragons had roamed and stomped. It was content, watching the slow passing of the years. The warm summers filled with laughter, the ripe autumns, the cold winters, the springs when the snow melted and hope came again into the world. It watched the children who played in its branches grow to Clive Barker's First Tales be strong men and graceful women, and, in their turn, have children of their own. It watched the brook grow to a stream, and thus to a rushing river. The years passed peacefully, and each day was a joy greater than the last, for the world was still waking.

Now not all that far from the wood stood a large white house with marble pillars, surrounded by tall yew trees and great gardens, all neatly set out with paths of pink gravel and fountains with cupids in the middle. This house belonged to a Duchess who owned all the Clive Barker's First Tales land around her house, for she was very rich. It said, on a piece of paper which she

always kept locked safely away in a box somewhere, that Clive Barker's First Tales every leaf, every blade of grass, every flower, bird, animal and tree belonged to her. This pleased the Duchess greatly, because I am afraid she was not a very nice person. In fact, at times her manners were absolutely frightful, and she had a very quick temper. When she flew into a rage, which she did quite often, she would scream at the servants (she had thirty-one) until the windows rattled and the china tinkled. And sometimes, if she was particularly vexed, she would kick the furniture or the footman (whichever was nearby at the time). Clive Barker's First Tales As if that were not bad enough, she was also exceedingly vain. Sometimes Clive Barker's First Tales she would spend hours sitting in front of the mirror and looking at herself. I must admit that she was indeed very beautiful, but that did not make her vanity any the less dreadful.

Having told you how horrible the Duchess was at times, Clive Barker's First Tales you might think that she had no friends. But you would be quite wrong. In fact she had lots of Clive Barker's First Tales friends, all members of the aristocracy (which means they had lots of money and weren't quite sure what to do with it). The Duchess' friends, however, were the most hateful people you could imagine. They were either very fat because they ate too much, or very thin because they would not eat at all, in case they marred their beauty. Beauty! I may truly say that the Duchess' friends were quite the ugliest people in all the world.

Four times a year at Christmas, on her birthday in April, on Midsummer Night and at Hallowe'en, the Duchess would throw a party, and invite all her friends. Her parties were always wildly successful and were great social occasions. Why they were so successful I cannot possibly imagine, for if you or I were to have gone to one I am sure we would have hated it. All the guests ever did was stand around, talking about the war and the trouble they were having with their servants, and how awful everybody else looked and how boring everybody else's conversation was. I fancy the Duchess knew in her heart how hateful all the guests were, but still she threw her parties, because it was all she had to do.

Now one day, in late September, when the leaves were just beginning to fall in the wood, the Duchess was out riding on the hills. It was a fine, clear afternoon, and she was thinking about what colour she ought to Clive Barker's First Tales have her new pet dove dyed. You see, she hated it being so white, because she Clive Barker's First Tales thought it might make her look less beautiful.

The Duchess was so deep in thought, that she rode further from the house than she had ever ridden before, and the servants were just about to pluck up enough courage to tell her, when, quite suddenly, they found themselves at the foot of the hill whereon grew the wood that I told you about. The Duchess had never seen the wood before, and, calling to her servants to help her dismount, she demanded that she be taken to it. At this the servants muttered to Clive Barker's First Tales each other under their breath, but they feared the Duchess too much to disobey. So Michael, the oldest one, bowing low, said:

‘As Your Grace commands,’ and led the way up the hill.

The other servants followed some way behind, but finding the Duchess too concerned with the

wood to notice Clive Barker's First Tales their tarrying, they halted half-way up and stood, watching in silence.

The evening was drawing on now, and the wood stood quiet and beautiful, a thousand shades of gold and red. When Michael and the Duchess reached the top of the hill, they found that the wind was quite strong, murmuring through the trees and blowing dead leaves about. The Duchess stood for a moment on the edge of the wood, thinking. Then suddenly, she turned to Michael:

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