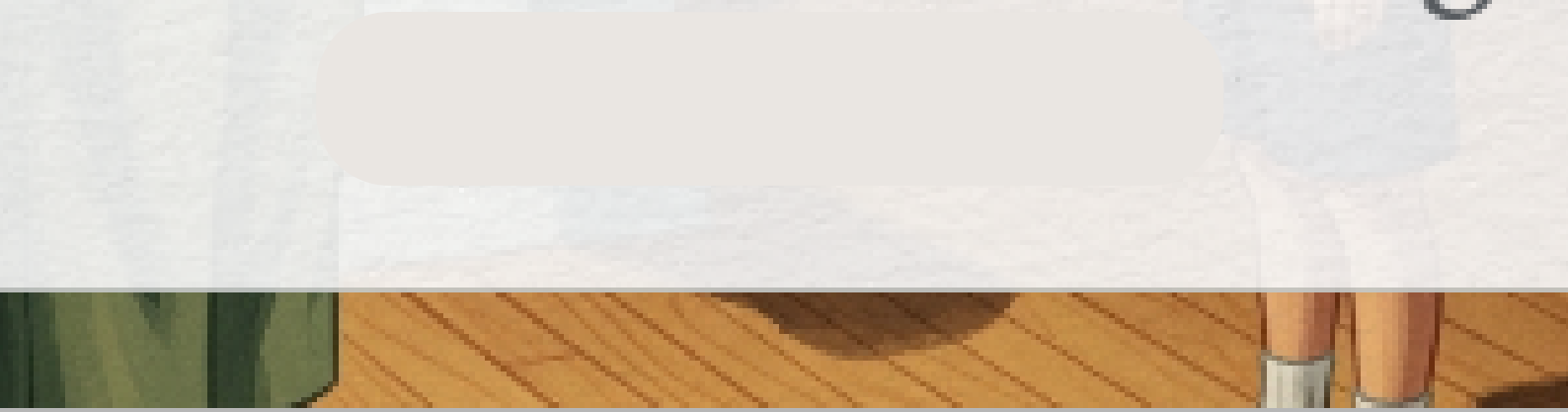




# Pio and the Power Outage





**Pio was building a tall, wobbly tower of blocks in the bright, cozy living room. He was just about to place the very last, important block right on the top**

Flicker... Pop! The lights went out. The television went dark. The whole house went from bright white to deep, sudden black.



"Oh no," whispered Pio. He tried to see his block tower, but the dark swallowed everything. The room felt big and empty, and all the familiar shapes were gone. He felt a shiver of fear run up his back.





Just then, his mom, Elara, came in. "Don't worry, little builder," she said softly. "It's just a power hiccup." She found a match and a fat, yellow candle.

# The Fat, Yellow Candle



The candlelight chased the scary shadows away, turning them into long, wiggly dancers on the walls. Elara smiled. "A perfect night for a show, don't you think? A shadow show!"

Pio put his hands together and made a snapping, barking mouth. Woof! A shadow-dog appeared on the wall, jumping and wagging its tail with the flick of the candlelight.



Elara tried next. She twisted her fingers into a long, graceful shape. Swish! A beautiful, gliding shadow-swan sailed across the wall, looking for the shadow-dog.





The shadow-dog and the shadow-swan met in the middle of the wall, sniffing and bowing to each other. "Hello, friend," whispered Pio, moving his dog-hands.



**"Where are you going, little dog?" asked Elara, moving the swan. Pio thought hard. "We're going on an adventure! We need to find the lost Twinkle-Star that fell out of the sky."**

"The Twinkle-Star!" Elara gasped. "That's a long journey across the Shadow-Sea!" She quickly changed her swan-hands into a sleek, wide shadow-boat.



Pio carefully set his shadow-dog onto the shadow-boat. They worked together, moving their hands slowly and smoothly, making the boat rock gently as it sailed across the bedroom wall.





**Suddenly, Pio moved his fingers and knuckles into a spiky, gnashing mouth. "Look out, Mom!" he announced. "A grumpy, toothy Sea-Monster is following the boat!"**



**"Not a Sea-Monster!" Elara cried. She quickly folded her other hand into a tall, heroic figure with a mighty shadow-sword. "Never fear! The Shadow-Knight will protect you!"**

The Shadow-Monster lurched closer, its wide jaws opening and closing, threatening to gobble up the boat and the brave dog. The Shadow-Knight stood firm at the bow.





**"Wait!" whispered Pio. "The monster is too big for the Knight!" He quickly shaped both his hands together to make a huge, rippling shadow. "It needs a BIG distraction!"**

The huge, wavy shadow became a Shadow-Wave! It crashed down over the Sea-Monster, washing it away with a flick of Pio's clever wrists.





**"Hooray!" cheered Elara, making the Shadow-Knight bow a thank-you to the Shadow-Wave. The sea was calm once more, and the quest could continue.**



**"Now, where is the Twinkle-Star hidden?" asked Pio. He looked around the shadow-sea, then pointed his finger up, up, up. "On the tallest peak of the Mountain of Whispers!"**

Elara's hand changed again, folding and twisting until a huge, looming shadow-mountain stood on the wall, its peak disappearing into the dark ceiling.



The boat couldn't climb the mountain. The little shadow-dog whimpered sadly. "How will we get to the top?"



Pio put his hands together and spread his fingers wide. Flap! Flap! A mighty Shadow-Eagle soared into view. "The Eagle will carry the Dog to the peak!" he declared.



The Shadow-Eagle lifted the little dog and flew him all the way to the top of the dark mountain.

And there, hiding on the very tip, was a tiny, winking shadow-star!





**"We found it!" they both cheered, making the shadows dance a victory jig. Pio held the shadow-star high in the air so it could shine again.**



**Just as the Shadow-Star was shining its brightest, POP! The overhead light flickered once and stayed on. The shadows vanished instantly, replaced by ordinary light.**



Pio picked up the fat, wax-dripped candle. He looked at his mom, who was smiling warmly. "The lights are back," he said happily. "But you know, Mom? That was the best adventure ever!"