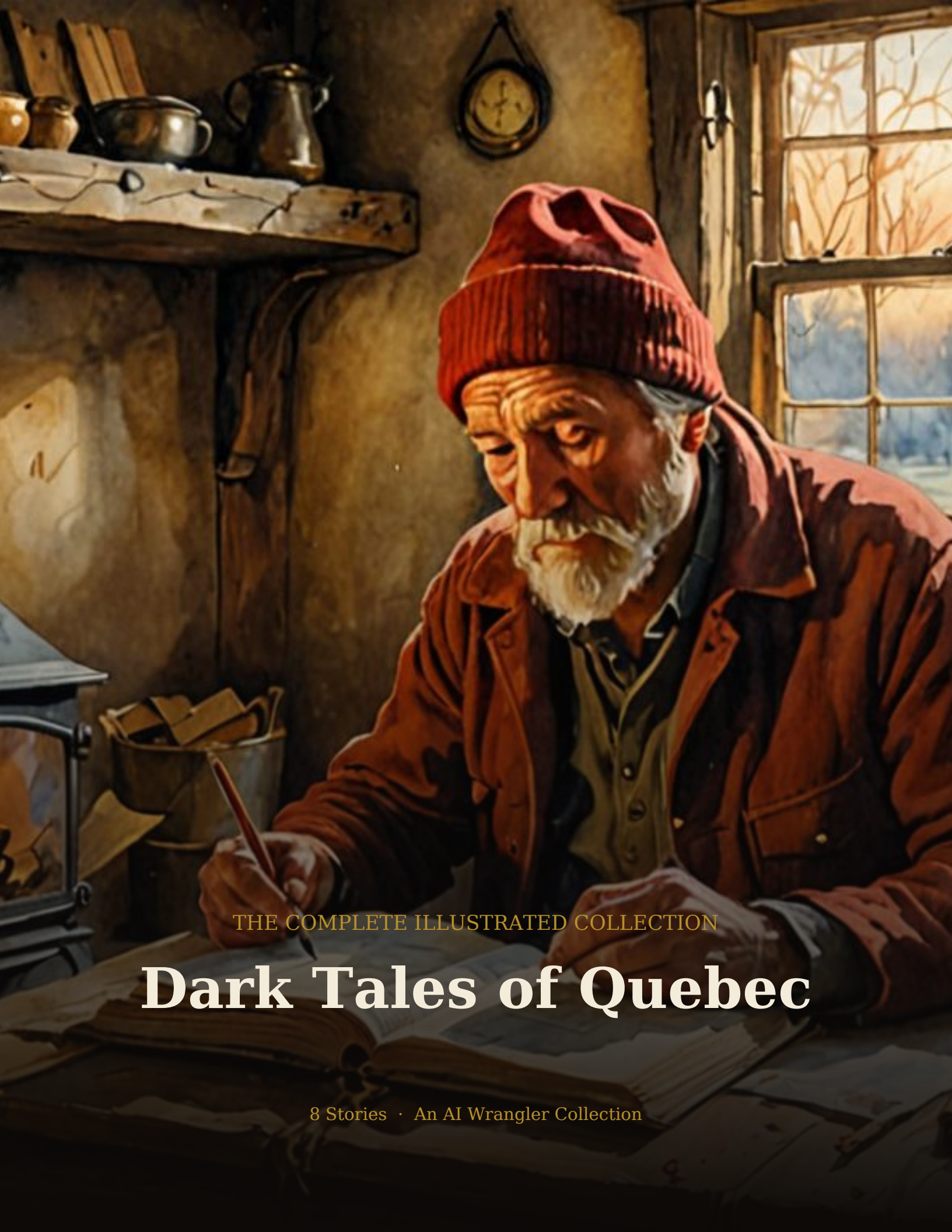




THE COMPLETE ILLUSTRATED COLLECTION

Dark Tales of Quebec

8 Stories · An AI Wrangler Collection

The Stories

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EPISODE 1

La Chasse-galerie

MARTY

Come in close to the fire tonight, friends, because this one comes to us out of the deep Quebec winter, from the great pine forests where the voyageurs and the lumberjacks worked the cutting camps far up the Gatineau and the Ottawa rivers. This is the tale of La Chasse-galerie, the flying canoe, and it is a tale of lonely men, and a bargain with the Devil himself, on the coldest night of the year. It was New Year's Eve, Carol, and that is where all the danger begins.

CAROL

Oh, the flying canoe. Marty, I have heard the name whispered but never the whole of it. New Year's Eve, and men alone in the deep woods. Tell me, why is that night the dangerous one?



MARTY

Because New Year's Eve, Carol, was the one night in all the world a man wanted to be home. Picture it. These lumberjacks are a hundred leagues from anywhere, snowed into a timber camp deep in the bush, no road out, the nearest village days away by snowshoe. And back home in the settlements along the river, their

sweethearts and their mothers are dancing the réveillon, the great midnight feast, warm houses and fiddles and rum. And here sit the men, in a smoky log shanty, with the wolves howling and the snow to the eaves, aching for the girls they left behind. On this particular night, Carol, the rum had gone round, and one old voyageur got a terrible gleam in his eye.

CAROL

A terrible gleam. Marty, I can see the firelight in that shanty and I already don't trust that old man. What did he propose to them?



MARTY

He gathered the youngest and boldest of them close, Carol, and he spoke low. He said, boys, do you want to go and kiss your sweethearts at midnight, three hundred miles away, and be back before the priest says his first Mass? There is a way. But it is a fearful way. We take the birchbark canoe, and we run la chasse-galerie. We make the pact. We give ourselves to the Devil for one night, and he will carry the canoe through the sky like a bird, faster than any wind, and set us down in the village square. But there are conditions, Carol. There are rules. And if a single man breaks one, the Devil takes every soul in the boat.

CAROL

Every soul in the boat. Oh, Marty, my heart. What did they have to promise? Tell me the rules, so I know exactly what there was to break.



MARTY

Three things, Carol, and mark them, because everything turns on them. First, no man in the canoe may speak the name of God, not once, not in prayer, not in curse, not even by accident. Second, as they fly, the canoe must never touch the cross of a church steeple, and Quebec, Carol, is a land absolutely thick with steeples, a cross on every hill. And third, they must be home and set down before the stroke of six, before dawn, before the first bell of morning. Break any one, and the Devil claims you, body and soul, and drags you down to burn. So they crossed themselves, God forgive them, and they knelt in the canoe, and the leader called out the dreadful words: Acabris, Acabras, Acabram, carry us over the mountains!

CAROL

Acabris, Acabras, Acabram. Marty, it gives me a chill just to hear you say it. And then, did it truly rise? Did that little bark canoe leave the snow?



MARTY

Up it went, Carol, like a leaf on a gale. One heave, and the canoe tore off the ground and shot into the black sky, and the paddlers dug at the empty air as if it were water, and the air obeyed. And oh, what a sight below them. The whole frozen world laid out silver in the moonlight, the pine forest rolling away white under the stars, the great river a ribbon of ice, and the little villages passing beneath them, each one with its church, and every steeple with its cross reaching up as if to snatch them out of the sky. The cold air screamed past their ears, and the Devil's own laughter, Carol, was in the wind. They flew a hundred miles in the time it takes to say a rosary.

CAROL

The steeples reaching up to snatch them. Marty, I don't know how they steered past every one of those crosses in the dark. And the men themselves, were they sober enough for such a thing? I'm frightened for them already.



MARTY

You are right to be frightened, Carol, because that was the whole of the peril. They reached the village, and they swooped down into the square, and they hid the canoe in a snowbank, and they danced. Oh, they danced till two in the morning, kissed their girls, drank the réveillon rum, and never told a soul how they came. But the man steering in the stern, Carol, the pilot, the one man who most needed a clear head, he drank the deepest of all. And when they piled back into the canoe in the dead of night and cried Acabris, Acabras, Acabram, and rose again into the freezing sky for the long flight home, that pilot was reeling drunk, swinging the bow wild across the stars.

CAROL

Oh no. Oh, Marty. A drunk man at the helm with all their souls in his hands, and a cross on every hill. I can hardly look. What happened to them up there?



MARTY

He steered like a madman, Carol. The canoe pitched and yawed through the night, missing the steeples by a hand's breadth, the men screaming at him under their breath, not daring to shout the holy words that would damn them all. And then a great church rose up in the dark straight ahead, its cross dead in their path, and the pilot hauled the canoe over so hard that it nearly stood on end, and in his terror one of the young men opened his mouth and very nearly cried out the name of God. The others threw themselves on him, Carol, clapped their hands over his mouth, wrestled him down into the bottom of the boat, gagged him with a scarf, all of them tumbling through the sky at a hundred miles an hour with the Devil waiting for one wrong word.

CAROL

They gagged their own friend to save him. Marty, my heart is pounding. Did they make it? Did they clear the cross and get home before that terrible bell of six?



MARTY

They cleared it, Carol, by a whisker, the cross passing so close beneath the hull they felt the chill of it. And with the drunken pilot bound and another good man's hands on the steering, they drove that canoe down through the last of the dark and came crashing into a snowbank behind the timber camp, tumbling out into the drifts just as the first grey of dawn touched the pines. They had done it. They were home, and their souls were still their own, by the width of a scarf and the grace they had no right to ask for. They crawled into the shanty and fell into their bunks, and in the morning they told each other it had all been the rum and a dream. But their moccasins, Carol, were still wet with the snow of a village three hundred miles away.

CAROL

Their moccasins still wet. Oh, Marty, that is the detail that undoes me, that little wet proof lying by the fire. So they lived, but they knew. They always knew what they had done.



MARTY

They always knew, Carol. And that is the heart of it, why Quebec has told this story around a thousand winter fires. It is a tale of terrible longing, of men so lonely for love and home that they would gamble their very souls to hold a sweetheart at midnight. It is the old faith, too, the church and the Devil so close in that world you could touch either one from a canoe. Some tellers say those men ran the chasse-galerie again, and pushed their luck once too often, and that on a wild winter night you can still hear them up there, paddling across the stars, the Devil's canoe that never quite made it home. So if you are ever deep in the Quebec woods on New Year's Eve, and you hear paddles in the empty sky, Carol, do not, whatever you do, call out to God. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I'll be listening at the window for paddles in the dark and hoping those lonely, foolish, lovesick men made it home every single time. Keep the ones you love close on the cold nights, don't go making bargains you can't unmake, and always, always come back to the fire.



EPISODE 2

La Corriveau

MARTY

Come in close to the fire tonight, friends, because we are crossing the river into old Quebec, into New France just after the Conquest, and I want to tell you the true and terrible story of a woman whose name still makes the old people of Lévis lower their voices. Marie-Josephte Corriveau. La Corriveau. She was a real woman, born in the parish of Saint-Vallier in 1733, a farmer's daughter, and she died on the gallows in 1763. But death was only the beginning of her, Carol, because for two hundred and sixty years her iron cage has gone on swinging and clanking in the Quebec night.

CAROL

An iron cage, Marty. Already my skin is prickling and you have hardly begun. A farmer's daughter from Saint-Vallier — how does a girl like that end up on a gallows? Tell me about her, the real her, before she was a ghost.



MARTY

She was married young, Carol, as girls were then, to a farmer named Charles Bouchard, and by all accounts they had a life together and children, eleven years

of marriage, until Charles died in 1760. And here the whispers began, because within little more than a year the young widow married again, to a neighbour named Louis-Étienne Dodier. And that second marriage, Carol, was not a happy one. The neighbours heard the quarrels. They saw the bruises. It was a household full of anger. And then one morning in the winter of 1763, Louis Dodier was found dead in his barn.

CAROL

Oh, Marty. Found dead in his barn. And a marriage everyone had heard fighting through the walls. I can imagine how the parish must have talked. What did they say had happened to him?



MARTY

At first, Carol, they said his head had been battered by the hooves of his own horses, an accident in the stable, and he was buried. But the talk would not die down, and this was a strange, uneasy time — the British had just taken Quebec, the French colonists were now living under British military rule, under redcoat soldiers and English law they did not know. So it was a British military court, not a French one, that ordered Dodier dug up again. And when they looked at his wounds, Carol, they did not see the marks of a horse. They saw the marks of blows. Murder. And suspicion fell on the house, on Marie-Josephte and on her old

father, Joseph.

CAROL

Her father too. Marty, this is worse than I thought — the whole family under a shadow. A foreign court, soldiers, a language that isn't theirs. How could she even hope for a fair hearing in a room like that?



MARTY

She could barely hope at all, Carol, and here the story takes its cruelest turn. In the first trial, her father Joseph confessed to the killing, to save his daughter, and he was sentenced to hang. But before the execution a priest came forward, and the truth came out — the father was shielding her. So a second court-martial was held, and this time Marie-Josephte herself confessed. She said that she alone had killed Louis Dodier in his sleep, striking him in the head with a hatchet, and that her father had known nothing of it until after. The British court believed her. And under English law, Carol, the murder of a husband by a wife was not called simple murder. It was called petty treason.

CAROL

Petty treason. Marty, what does that mean — why would killing a husband be treason? And why does the word frighten me so much more than murder does?



MARTY

Because it frightened them too, Carol. In that old English law, a wife killing her husband was held to be like a subject killing a king, a rebellion against the natural order itself, and it carried a punishment meant to horrify. She was sentenced to be hanged, and then — and this is the part that seared itself into Quebec forever — her body was to be hung afterward in chains, in an iron gibbet, for all to see. So in April of 1763 Marie-Josephte Corriveau was hanged on the Plains of Abraham. And then her dead body was locked into a cage of iron, une cage de fer, forged to the shape of a human form, and hung up at a crossroads at Pointe-Lévy, across the river from Quebec, for the world to look upon.

CAROL

A cage forged to the shape of a body. Marty, I can see it hanging there against the grey sky and I want to look away. How long — please tell me they did not leave her out there long.



MARTY

Weeks, Carol. Weeks. The iron cage hung at that crossroads at Lauzon, swinging in the wind by the road where every farmer and traveller had to pass, and inside it her body, held together by the bars, exposed to the crows and the weather as a warning to anyone who might do murder. The French habitants were appalled — this was not their way, this ghoulish English display, and the horror of it went deep into the people who had to walk past it in the dusk. At last the parish could bear it no longer, and after some five weeks the cage was taken down and buried near the church. And you would think, Carol, that would be the end of the poor woman. But a thing that terrible does not stay buried in a people's mind.

CAROL

No, I don't suppose it does. Marty, I can feel it already — a body in an iron cage at a crossroads is exactly the kind of thing that grows into something in the dark. What did she become, in the telling?



MARTY

She became a witch, Carol. Over the generations, as the true story blurred, the grandmothers of Quebec turned Marie-Josephte Corriveau into the province's most famous sorceress and phantom. In the tales they told by the fire, she had not one murdered husband but seven, poisoned and butchered one after another. They said she had dealings with the Devil, that she was a witch of black arts. And they said that on wild nights her iron cage came loose from wherever it was buried, and swung glowing at the crossroads, and that she reached her bony arms out through the bars, her eyes burning like coals, to seize any traveller foolish enough to pass her in the dark.

CAROL

Oh, Marty. Her arms through the bars. I would run — but you can never outrun the ones in these stories, can you? Is that the tale they told, that she chases them?



MARTY

It is the most famous one, Carol. They tell of a man from Saint-Vallier walking home late along the shore road, when he hears behind him a dreadful clanking, iron on iron, and turns to see the cage of La Corriveau bounding after him through the night, her dead face pressed to the bars, her eyes two points of fire, begging or shrieking at him to carry her across the river to the witches' sabbath on the Île d'Orléans, for she cannot cross running water herself. And he runs, Carol, runs till his heart nearly bursts, and faints at his own door, and in the morning there are the marks of iron fingers burned into him. That is the Corriveau of the campfire — the clank of the cage, the glowing eyes through the bars, the thing at the crossroads that chases you home.

CAROL

The clank of the cage behind you in the dark. Marty, that is the sound I'll hear tonight when I close my eyes. And the strange thing is my heart aches for her, too — the real woman under all those stories. Did anyone ever find out the truth of what she did?



MARTY

We never will know it all, Carol, and that is part of her power. Was she a cold murderess, or a battered woman who struck back at a violent husband, or a daughter caught in something darker — we have only the confession she gave to a foreign court in a frightened, conquered land. But here is the strange gift of it. That very cage, the iron cage itself, was rediscovered in the eighteen-fifties, dug up from the churchyard, and it caused a sensation — it was even shown, they say, in a museum down in the United States, and after being lost for generations it has in our own time been found again and brought home to Quebec. And the great writers of the province, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé and William Kirby and many since, all set her down in their books, so that a poor farm woman from Saint-Vallier became immortal.

CAROL

Immortal — the very thing that punishment was never meant to give her. Marty, why do you think she, of all people, is the one Quebec could never forget?



MARTY

Because she is the wound of the Conquest itself, Carol, dressed up as a ghost story. Think on it — an ordinary French Catholic woman, tried by British soldiers, condemned under a foreign law, and hung in a cage in a fashion that horrified her own people. When the habitants told and retold her story by the fire, growing her into a witch, they were holding onto a memory of that strange, frightening first winter under the redcoats, when the world they knew had been overturned. La Corriveau carries all of it — the fear, the injustice, the horror of that iron cage swinging at the crossroads. And so she could never be allowed to simply die. She became the dark heart of Quebec's own storytelling.

CAROL

The wound of a whole people, kept alive as a witch by the fire. Oh, Marty, that is the saddest and truest kind of ghost there is.

MARTY

It is the truest kind there is, Carol. So tonight we remember her honestly — Marie-Josephte Corriveau, a real woman of Saint-Vallier, hanged in 1763 and hung in iron at the crossroads of Pointe-Lévy, whatever she did or did not do. We remember the parish that had to walk past that cage in the dusk, and turned their horror into a story to hold it. And when the wind comes up off the St.

Lawrence tonight, and you hear iron clanking somewhere far down the road, you will know whose cage that is, still swinging after two hundred and sixty years. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight my heart is with that woman in the iron cage, and with all the frightened people who loved and feared her into legend. Latch your door soft, be gentle with the ones under your roof, and if you hear the iron on the wind — come back to the fire.

EPISODE 3

Rose Latulippe

MARTY

Draw in close to the fire tonight, friends, for this is an old Quebec tale, the kind they told in the long-ago along the shore of the great river, on the last wild night before the fast of Lent. They call it the legend of Rose Latulippe, and it is a story of a country dance, and a handsome stranger, and a girl who would not stop dancing when the church bells said she should. It is Mardi Gras, Carol, the night before Ash Wednesday, when the whole parish laughs and eats and dances one last time before forty days of penance.

CAROL

Oh, Mardi Gras, the last night before Lent. I can just picture it, Marty, the fiddles going and the cold outside and everyone crowded warm into one house. But you said it so gently, and it already makes me shiver. Who was Rose?



MARTY

Rose was the daughter of a good habitant farmer named Latulippe, Carol, out in the old seigneurie on the river. She was young and she was beautiful and she loved to dance more than anything in this world. And that Mardi Gras night her

father's house was full to the rafters, the fiddler sawing away in the corner, the young folk turning and stamping on the pine floor, the old people by the stove, and Rose at the very heart of it, laughing, her cheeks red, dancing every reel with her sweetheart, a good steady boy named Gabriel who meant to marry her.

CAROL

A sweetheart named Gabriel, and her father's house full of neighbours. Marty, that sounds like happiness itself. What could go wrong on a night like that?



MARTY

The clock, Carol. That is what goes wrong. For there was one hard rule in old Quebec, spoken by every mother and every curé, that when the midnight bell rang and Mardi Gras passed into Ash Wednesday, the dancing must stop, because to dance into Lent, into the holy season, was a sin, an invitation to something better not invited. And as the night wore on toward twelve, old Latulippe called out for the fiddle to hush and the dancing to end. But Rose, flushed and laughing and wild with the joy of it, begged for just one more reel, and then one more, and would not sit down.

CAROL

Oh, Rose. Just one more, just one more. Marty, I have said those very words myself on a good night. But there is something in your voice. The midnight bell

was ringing, wasn't it?



MARTY

It was tolling even then, Carol, midnight, and Ash Wednesday come into the room. And it was in that very moment, as the last stroke faded, that there came a knock upon the door. A stranger stood on the threshold in the swirling snow. A tall gentleman, Carol, dark and handsome and elegant as no farmer's son had ever been, dressed all in fine black cloth, with a great black cloak and a beaver hat and gloves of black leather on his hands. He begged the shelter of the fire, and old Latulippe, being a hospitable man, welcomed him in out of the storm.

CAROL

A dark stranger, out of the snow, right at the stroke of midnight. Oh, Marty, my heart is going now. And so handsome, you say. Did Rose see him?



MARTY

The whole room saw him, Carol, but Rose could not look away. And he could not look away from Rose. He bowed to her, so gracious, and asked would she dance, and though Gabriel stood right there beside her, Rose gave the stranger her hand. And he danced, Carol, oh, he danced like no man of the parish, light and sure and turning her about that floor as if her feet never touched it, whispering low in her ear all the while, telling her she was the loveliest thing he had ever seen, that he would take her away to a life finer than she had ever dreamed. And Rose forgot Gabriel, and forgot her father, and forgot the hour, and danced.

CAROL

Bewitched. She was bewitched, Marty, I can feel it. But surely, in all that whirling, somebody noticed something wrong about him? A man like that does not come out of a snowstorm at midnight for nothing.



MARTY

Somebody did notice, Carol. Little things, at first, the kind you tell yourself you imagined. The stranger would not take off his gloves, not once, not to eat, not to drink, not even to dance, though the room was hot as an oven, and a gentleman always removes his gloves for a lady. And an old woman by the stove, sharp-eyed the way old women are, saw where his fine boots had crossed the snowy threshold, and the snow there had melted clean away, hissed away to water, as though his feet burned. And she crossed herself, Carol, and she began to be afraid.

CAROL

The gloves he would not remove, and the snow melting under his feet. Oh, Marty, I want to shout at Rose to run, to look down, to see. What was under those gloves? What was he hiding?



MARTY

Ah, Carol, that is what the old woman feared to learn. But there was worse yet to see, for another of the guests, kneeling to fetch something dropped beneath the dancers, looked down at the stranger's feet as he turned Rose past, and where one fine polished boot should have been there was no boot at all, but a cloven hoof, black and cruel, striking sparks upon the pine floor. And the man who saw it went white as ash and could not speak, and the joy went out of that house like a candle pinched dark, for now they knew. The elegant gentleman in black was the Devil himself, come up the river on Mardi Gras night to claim a soul that would dance into the forbidden hours.

CAROL

The Devil himself, with a hoof for a foot, dancing with that girl in her own father's house. Marty, and Rose, poor Rose, still turning in his arms and not knowing. Who could save her? Who could possibly save her now?



MARTY

There was one who could, Carol, and someone had the wit to run for him through the snow, the old parish priest, the curé, roused from his bed and coming fast with his crucifix in his hand. And as the Devil bent close to Rose, whispering that it was time now, time to come away with him forever, and reached to press his mark upon her, the door flew open and the curé strode in and held up the cross of Our Lord and cried out the holy words, commanding the thing to let the girl go and begone from that Christian house.

CAROL

The priest with the crucifix, right in the nick of time. Oh, thank God, Marty, thank God. And the Devil, did he go? Did he let her go?



MARTY

He let her go, Carol, but not gently, and not without his due. There came a great roaring wind and a stink of brimstone, and a flash like lightning, and the Devil was gone up the chimney in a clap of thunder that shook the house and left a scorch-mark black upon the floor that no scrubbing ever after could lift out. And Rose, poor Rose, fell down in a swoon as if the very life had been drawn out of her, and when they lifted her she was cold and white and would not wake, for she had come within a breath of being carried off body and soul.

CAROL

She was saved, but only just, only just. Marty, what became of her after such a night? A girl does not walk away from dancing with the Devil the same as she went in.



MARTY

No, Carol, she did not walk away the same. Rose lived, by the grace of God and the courage of that old priest, but the story says her dark hair had gone white as snow by morning, and the fire was gone out of her. She was never again the laughing girl who could not stop dancing. Some tell it that she withered and died within a few short years, penitent and quiet. And some, the gentler tellers, say she gave up the world entirely and went into the convent, and spent the rest of her days in prayer, on her knees, giving back to Heaven the soul she had so nearly gambled away on a dance floor.

CAROL

Her hair gone white by morning. Oh, Marty, that is the saddest and the most beautiful thing. What a price for one more reel. Do you think, is there a lesson in it, the way the old people meant it?

MARTY

There is, Carol, and the old grandmothers of Quebec never let a young one forget it. They told this tale to every girl with dancing feet and a wild heart, and the meaning was plain, keep the holy hours, honour your father's roof, and beware, always beware, the handsome stranger who comes too smooth and too fine and offers you the whole shining world, for he keeps his gloves on for a reason, and

there is a hoof inside the polished boot. But there is warmth in it too, Carol, for see, it was a father's hospitality and an old woman's watchfulness and a priest's courage that pulled Rose back from the very door of Hell. The parish saved its own.

CAROL

The parish saved its own. Yes, Marty. Even on the worst night, it was the ordinary good people, the father and the old woman and the priest, who stood between that girl and the dark. I will hold onto that.

MARTY

Hold onto it, Carol, and so will I. So tonight we remember Rose Latulippe, dancing at the edge of midnight all those years ago on the shore of the great river, and the dark gentleman who could not hide his hoof, and the old curé who came through the snow in time. It is a story to keep the hours by, and to keep your loved ones close by, and to remind us that the sweetest music can dance you right up to a door you never meant to open. Mind the midnight bell, friends. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I will dance while it's right to dance, and know when it's time to stop, and be grateful for the good people who watch out for us in the dark. Keep your dear ones near, mind the handsome stranger, and come on back to the fire.

EPISODE 4

Le Chien d'Or

MARTY

Come close to the fire tonight, friends, because this one waits for us in the old walled city of Quebec, up on a stone wall in the heart of the Lower Town, where a strange thing has hung for near three hundred years. High above a doorway, carved in relief and once painted gold, there is a dog. He is lying down, Carol, gnawing on a bone, and beneath him is cut a line of French verse that has chilled every soul who ever stopped to read it. This is the tale of Le Chien d'Or, the Golden Dog, and it is a tale of a proud merchant, a nest of corrupt and powerful men, a murder in the street, and a promise of revenge carved in stone above a door.

CAROL

The Golden Dog. Oh, Marty, I have seen a photograph of that carving and never once knew there was blood behind it. A dog gnawing a bone, high on a wall. Tell me, what do the words underneath it say?



MARTY

They say, Carol, and I will give it to you plain the way the old translators had it: "I am a dog that gnaws a bone. While I gnaw it, I take my rest. A time will come, which is not yet, when I shall bite him who has bitten me." Read that again in your mind and feel the patience in it. That is not a threat shouted in anger. That is a cold, quiet vow. A man lying down like a beast with his bone, biding his time, waiting for the hour to sink his teeth into the one who wronged him. And to understand who set those words up over that door, we have to go back to New France in the middle of the seventeen hundreds, to a colony being eaten alive from the inside.

CAROL

Eaten alive from the inside. Marty, that is a fearful way to speak of a whole colony. Who was doing the eating? Who were these men?



MARTY

This was the age of the great corruption, Carol, in the last years before the English took Canada. At the top of it sat the intendant, François Bigot, the king's own money man in the colony, and around him a ring of officials and favoured merchants they called la Grande Société, the Great Company. And they were thieves in silk. They controlled the king's stores, the fur trade, the supply of the forts and the garrisons, and they used every bit of it to line their own pockets.

They would buy goods cheap in the king's name, sell them back to the king dear, and pocket the difference. They starved the settlers and the soldiers to feed their own card tables and their banquets, Carol, while the poor of Quebec went hungry. And a man who was honest, a man who tried to trade fair and would not bow to their ring, that man was in their way.

CAROL

A ring of thieves in silk, and the honest men in their way. Oh, Marty, I can feel where this is going and I don't like it. Was there such an honest man? Was that our merchant?



MARTY

There was, Carol. His name was Nicolas Jacquin, called Philibert, a merchant of Quebec, a solid and prosperous trader with a house and a warehouse down in the Lower Town. And Philibert would not play the ring's game. He traded on his own account, he spoke his mind about the corruption eating the colony, and worst of all in their eyes, he had goods and property they wanted their hands on. There was a quarrel, Carol, over the billeting of an officer, over money, over pride, the way these things always start small and grow black. Philibert had crossed the powerful men, and in a colony run by Bigot's friends, crossing the powerful men was a dangerous thing for a merchant to do.

CAROL

I can just see him, Marty, standing in his warehouse doorway, an honest man surrounded by wolves and not backing down. What did they do to him? How did the quarrel turn?



MARTY

It turned to steel, Carol. In the January of the year seventeen forty-eight, an officer named François-Marie Picoté de Belestre, a man tied to that powerful clique, came upon Philibert in the streets of the Lower Town. There were hard words, and then there was a blade. Belestre ran the merchant through, Carol. Drove a sword into him right there among the shops and the snow, and Nicolas Philibert died of that wound. A prosperous, respected man of the town, cut down in the open street by an officer of the very class that had been bleeding the colony white. And here, Carol, is where the colony showed you exactly what it had become.

CAROL

Oh, Marty. Run through in the street in daylight. Surely, surely they hanged the man who did it? Tell me there was justice for poor Philibert.



MARTY

There was not, Carol. That is the rot at the very heart of this tale. Belestre was a man of the officer class, bound up with the men who ran everything, and the wheels turned soft and slow for him the way they always did for their own. He was got out of harm's way, sent off on the king's service far from Quebec, out of reach of any real reckoning. No rope, no cell, nothing that fit the killing of a man in the street. The powerful had closed ranks around one of their own, and the merchant's blood was left to soak quietly into the snow of the Lower Town while the Great Company went back to its card tables. And that, Carol, was more than the dead man's people could bear.

CAROL

More than they could bear, and I don't blame them one bit. Marty, if the courts and the king's own men would give no justice, then what was left? What did his people do?



MARTY

They carved it into the wall, Carol. That is the legend that grew up thick as ivy over these bones. They say the murdered merchant's son, or his kin, being denied all justice by the law, took their vengeance in stone instead. Over the doorway of the Philibert house in the Lower Town they set that carving, the golden dog with the bone between his paws, and beneath it they cut those cold and patient words for the whole city to read. It was a message, Carol, aimed straight at the powerful men who had killed the father and walked away untouched. I am a dog that gnaws a bone. While I gnaw it, I take my rest. A time will come, which is not yet, when I shall bite him who has bitten me. A promise, hung in the open air over a public street, that the reckoning was only postponed, and never forgotten.

CAROL

Oh, Marty, that gives me the deepest chill. To walk under that every day, those men, and read a dead man's patience staring down at you. And did the bite ever come? Did the time that was not yet ever arrive?



MARTY

The old tellers say it did, Carol. They say the son carried that vow across the ocean, and that years later he found Belestre, the very man who had run his father through, and settled the thing the courts never would, with a blade of his own. Whether that is true history or the ending the town needed to be true, no one can quite untangle it now. But the greater vengeance, Carol, was the one that time itself delivered. Within a dozen years the whole rotten Great Company came crashing down. Quebec fell to the English up on the Plains of Abraham, New France was lost, and Bigot himself, the great intendant, was hauled back to France, put on trial for the very corruption that had poisoned the colony, and cast out in disgrace with his fortune stripped away. The dog bit them all in the end, Carol, every last one.

CAROL

The dog bit them all in the end. Marty, I have goosebumps clean up my arms. So the vow in the stone came true, one way or another, on every last one of those proud men.



MARTY

One way or another it did, Carol. And here is the wonder of it. That carving is still there. When the old house came down at last, they raised the post office of Quebec on the very spot, and they set the Golden Dog and his terrible verse right into the new stone, high on the wall over the door, where you can stand and read it to this day. A writer named William Kirby made a great romance of it all back in eighteen seventy-seven, and half the tale as the tourists tell it comes down to us from his book. But the dog is older than any book, Carol, and colder. So if you ever climb up into old Quebec and find yourself beneath that wall, look up. There he lies, gnawing his bone, taking his rest, waiting still. And remember that in this world the men who think themselves too powerful to be touched are only the men the dog has not yet risen to bite. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I'll be thinking of that patient golden dog high on the wall, and of poor honest Philibert, and of the long, slow way a wrong can wait in stone for its hour to come round. Be fair in your dealings, don't ever mistake a quiet man's patience for forgetting, and always, always come back to the fire.



EPISODE 5

The Headless Ghost of Griffintown

MARTY

Come in near the fire tonight, friends, because we are going down to old Montreal, to a hard little quarter called Griffintown, where the Irish came to work the canal and the docks and the rail yards. It was a place of packed brick houses and factory smoke and hungry winters, hard by the Lachine Canal, and in the summer of 1879 it was the scene of a killing so terrible it has never left that corner of the city. This is the true story of Mary Gallagher, and of the friend who took her head, and of the ghost that comes back every seventh year still looking for it.

CAROL

Oh, Marty, right away my heart is going. Griffintown — I can just picture it, the smoke and the canal and all those Irish families making a life in a new country. Who was Mary Gallagher? Tell me about her before the awful part.



MARTY

She was a working woman, Carol, about thirty-eight years old, Irish, poor, and no stranger to a hard road. Some say she made her living on the streets, and she was fond of the drink, as many were in that quarter where life was cruel and comfort was scarce. And she had a friend, a woman named Susan Kennedy, near the same age, married, and cut from much the same hard cloth. The two of them were companions, Carol, the way lonely women in a poor place can be — drinking companions, keeping each other's company through the long days. And that is what makes what happened between them so hard to bear.

CAROL

A friend. Oh, Marty, I already dread where this is going. Two women who leaned on each other in a hard place. What in the world came between them?



MARTY

A man, Carol. It so often is. On a hot day at the end of June, 1879, Mary Gallagher and Susan Kennedy fell in together with a fellow named Michael Flanagan, a canal worker, and the three of them went up to a room on William Street to drink. And they drank, Carol, all through the afternoon and into the evening — bottle after bottle, the heat and the liquor and the closeness of that little room working on them all. And somewhere in that drunken haze, a jealousy caught fire between the two women over the attentions of Michael Flanagan. A jealousy over a man,

between two friends, both of them too far gone in drink to know their own hearts.

CAROL

The heat and the drink and the jealousy all boiling together in one small room. Marty, I can feel the danger of it. What did Susan Kennedy do?



MARTY

Michael Flanagan had fallen down drunk and senseless, Carol, no use to anyone. But Susan Kennedy did not fall asleep. Somewhere in that black rage, she took up a small axe — a hatchet that was in the room — and she fell upon Mary Gallagher, her own friend, as she lay there helpless with the drink. And Carol, I will tell you plain because the truth of this is what makes the legend, she did not merely kill her. She struck her again and again, and she cut the head clean from Mary Gallagher's body, and she left it there in the room, apart from her.

CAROL

Oh — oh, Marty. Her friend. With a hatchet. I have my hand to my mouth. How was such a thing ever discovered? Who found her?



MARTY

The neighbours, Carol. In a place like Griffintown the walls were thin and the houses close, and word of a horror travels fast. When people came to that room on William Street, they found a sight the old city never forgot — Mary Gallagher's body, and her head set apart, and Susan Kennedy, it was said, calmly washing the blood away, so drunk and so far gone that she scarcely seemed to know the ruin around her. And Michael Flanagan asleep through all of it, waking to a nightmare. The police took them both.

CAROL

Washing the blood away as if it were any ordinary spill. Marty, that chills me more than the axe did. What happened to her — to Susan Kennedy — when the law got hold of her?



MARTY

She was tried that autumn, Carol, and it was the sensation of all Montreal — the newspapers full of it, the courtroom packed, the whole city sick and fascinated by the Griffintown horror. Michael Flanagan was charged too, but he had been dead drunk and senseless, and the case against him fell away. It was Susan Kennedy who stood in the dock, and Susan Kennedy whom the jury found guilty of murder. The judge sentenced her to hang, Carol. To hang by the neck for what she had done to her friend.

CAROL

To hang. Oh, Marty. And did they? Did they carry it out?



MARTY

They did not, Carol, in the end. Her sentence was commanded down from the gallows to a long imprisonment, and she served her years in the penitentiary — some sixteen of them, they say — and passed at last out of the story. But Mary Gallagher, Carol, did not pass out of it. Because a death like that, so violent and so wrong, done by a friend's hand in a poor quarter that had known too much sorrow — the people of Griffintown could not let it rest. And soon they began to say that Mary had not truly gone. That on the corner of William and Murray streets, where she died, she still walked.

CAROL

I had a feeling you would bring her back to that corner, Marty. Tell me. How does she come? What did the people of Griffintown begin to see?



MARTY

They said, Carol, that every seven years — every seventh June, on or near the anniversary of her death — Mary Gallagher returns to the corner of William and Murray. And she comes headless, Carol, just as Susan Kennedy left her, walking the corner in the dark, searching, feeling along the walls and the cobblestones for the head that was taken from her and never rightly returned. A headless woman, wandering the same few feet of Griffintown, looking for herself, every seven years without fail.

CAROL

Every seven years, still searching for her own head. Oh, Marty, that is so sorrowful — it is frightening, yes, but it is heartbreaking too. Do people truly still go? Do they still mark the year she comes?



MARTY

They do, Carol, and that is the strangest and most wonderful part of it. Griffintown itself has all but vanished — the old Irish quarter was mostly cleared away in the last century, the houses gone, the families scattered, the streets rezoned and rebuilt. And yet the legend held on. Every seven years, when Mary's night comes round, Montrealers still gather at the corner of William and Murray in the dark to wait and watch for the headless woman. They have done it for generations. The last such vigils drew real crowds, Carol — curious souls standing on a modern street corner, keeping faith with a murdered woman from 1879.

CAROL

A whole city keeping a vigil for her, all these years later, on a corner where the old houses aren't even standing anymore. Marty, why do you think she stayed with them? Why has Montreal never let Mary Gallagher go?



MARTY

I think, Carol, it is because of how alone she was. A poor Irish woman, killed by the one friend she had, over a man not worth the trouble, in a quarter the world was already forgetting. No one much protected Mary Gallagher in life. And so, in a strange and tender way, the people of Montreal decided to keep her in death — to stand on her corner every seven years so that she would never be entirely forgotten, never entirely alone in her searching. The vigil is a grim thing, yes. But underneath it, Carol, it is a kind of faithfulness. It is a city refusing to let one of its poorest daughters slip away unremembered.

CAROL

A city standing watch so she is never alone in her searching. Oh, Marty, that turns the whole fright of it warm. That is why we tell these, isn't it.

MARTY

That is exactly why, Carol. So tonight we hold Mary Gallagher, dead on a hot June night in 1879 on William Street, killed by a friend's hand in the drink and the jealousy and the heat. We remember that she was a real woman, poor and Irish and human, and that she deserved far better than she got, in life and in that terrible room. And if you are ever in Montreal on the right summer of the seventh year, and you find yourself near the corner of William and Murray in the dark,

spare a thought for the headless woman feeling along the stones — and know that you are only the latest of a long line of Montrealers who would not leave her to search alone. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight my heart is on that old Griffintown corner with poor Mary Gallagher, still searching, and with all the kind souls who keep the watch for her. Hold your friends gently, and hold them true — and come back to the fire.

EPISODE 6

The White Lady of Montmorency Falls

MARTY

Come in close to the fire tonight, friends, because this one carries the roar of falling water in it, and a woman's grief that never learned to quiet. We're going to old Quebec, to the great Montmorency Falls, a cataract taller than Niagara that thunders down into the river just below Quebec City. And we're going to the year 1759, the last dark year of New France, when the British came up the river with their guns and their ships, and everything the French had built along that shore began to fall. It's there, in the mist of those falls, that they say you can still see her — La Dame Blanche, the White Lady, forever in her wedding gown.

CAROL

Oh, Marty, a wedding gown. Already my heart is aching before you've even told me why. Who was she, this White Lady?



MARTY

Her name, Carol, was Mathilde Robin. A young woman of the parish near the falls, from one of those hardy habitant families who farmed the narrow ribbons of land along the St. Lawrence. And by every telling she was to be married that very summer, in the little stone church, to a young man she had loved since they were children. His name was Louis. They had waited, and saved, and banns had been read. Her mother and her aunts had sewn her a wedding dress of white, the finest thing that family had ever owned, and it hung ready in the house. She was, Carol, a girl standing on the very edge of her whole happy life.

CAROL

The very edge of it. Oh, Marty. And 1759 — I already know that summer was no summer for happiness in Quebec, was it?



MARTY

It was not, Carol. That was the summer the war came right to their door. The British fleet under General Wolfe filled the river, and in July they landed thousands of soldiers right there, on the eastern bank, hard by the Montmorency Falls. There was fighting in the fields Mathilde had known her whole life. The cannon shook the water. And Louis, her Louis, was among the men of the local militia who took up their muskets to defend that shore — to defend their homes, their church, and the girl waiting in her father's house with a white dress

hanging on the wall.

CAROL

Oh no. Marty, tell me gently. What happened to Louis?



MARTY

He fell there, Carol, in the fighting near the falls, in that terrible summer. Killed defending the very ground he was born on. They brought word to Mathilde the way such word always comes — a neighbor at the door, a cap held in two hands, eyes that couldn't meet hers. Her Louis was gone. The wedding that was to be would never be. And something in that girl, Carol, something that had been holding up her whole bright future, simply gave way all at once.

CAROL

It gave way. I can see her just standing there, Marty, with that white dress on the wall and no words left in her. What did she do?



MARTY

What she did, Carol, is the heart of why we still speak of her. In her grief she would not be comforted. And one grey misty morning she rose, and she took down that wedding dress, and she put it on — every bit of it, the way she was meant to wear it walking down the aisle to him. And she went out of her father's house and up along the rushing water to the top of the great Montmorency Falls. And there, dressed as a bride, she gave herself to the water, and went down with it into the gorge, so that if she could not go to her wedding she would go to her Louis instead.

CAROL

Oh, Marty. In her wedding dress. She wanted to be a bride even in that moment. There's something so tender and so broken in that, all at once. I can hardly speak.



MARTY

It is the most human thing in the world, Carol, and the most heartbreaking — that even at the very end she reached for the beautiful thing she'd been promised. And here is where the falls took her into their own keeping. Because from that day, the people of the parish began to say that she never truly left. On the misty mornings, when the spray rises up white off the bottom of the falls and hangs shimmering in the air, they saw a shape in it. The shape of a woman, all in white, her gown trailing in the mist, moving along the face of the water. La Dame Blanche. The White Lady of Montmorency.

CAROL

A shape in the spray. Oh, Marty, that gives me the loveliest, saddest shiver. Do they say she's frightening, when they see her? Or something else?



MARTY

Not frightening, Carol, not in the old tellings. Sorrowful. That's the word. Folk who claimed to see her spoke of a great sadness that came off her like cold off the water, a bride still searching, still waiting, still walking the edge of the falls for the young man who never came home from the war. And you'll notice, Carol — she doesn't haunt a house, or a graveyard. She haunts the falls themselves. It's as though the water that took her simply keeps giving her back, every misty morning, dressed forever in white. The very mist that killed her became her wedding veil.

CAROL

The mist became her veil. Marty, that's the kind of line that will stay with me all night. But is there any truth under it, do you think? Or is she only a story the mist told?



MARTY

Ah, Carol, here's the honest answer. We can't put our hands on a parish record for Mathilde Robin, and folklorists will tell you the White Lady in a white gown is a figure that walks through the legends of many lands. What is solid and true is the year, and the falls, and the fighting. The British really did camp and fight right there at Montmorency in the summer of 1759. Real habitant boys really did die defending that shore in the fall of New France. So whether or not there was ever one girl named Mathilde, Carol, the legend carries a true grief in it — the grief of every girl in that country who lost her sweetheart to that war, and never got her wedding, and stood by the water not knowing how to live.

CAROL

So she's all of them at once, in a way. Every bride that summer stole from a girl. Marty, that almost makes her more real to me, not less.



MARTY

I think that's exactly right, Carol. She's the whole heartbreak of a conquered country poured into one white figure by the falls. And that's why she's lasted. The Quebecois never let her go. To this day you can stand at the foot of Montmorency Falls on a cool misty morning, with that white spray rising and shimmering all around you, and someone beside you will lower their voice and say — there, do you see her? La Dame Blanche. Still in her gown. Still waiting for her Louis. And whether you see a woman or only the mist, Carol, you feel her. You feel that this beautiful, thundering place is holding somebody's sorrow for them, the way the best of our old places always do.

CAROL

The way the best of our old places always do. Oh, that's true, Marty.



MARTY

So tonight we hold her too, friends — Mathilde Robin, or whatever her true name was, the bride of Montmorency who put on her white dress and went to meet the man the war took from her. We remember that she was a real girl's grief, standing for a thousand real griefs, in the last sad summer of New France. And we remember that some places love us so well they'll wear our sorrow forever, in the mist, in the white water, so we never have to carry it entirely alone. Next time you stand near falling water on a grey morning, look kindly at the mist. There may be a bride in it. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight my heart is with a girl in a white dress by the roaring water, still waiting for her love to come home. Be gentle with the brokenhearted, hold the ones you're promised to a little closer, and come back to the fire.

EPISODE 7

The Empress of Ireland

MARTY

Come in close to the fire tonight, friends, because I want to tell you about a ship that Canada tried its best to forget. Her name was the Empress of Ireland, a great Canadian Pacific ocean liner, and on a spring night in 1914 she went down in the cold black water of the St. Lawrence River. She sank in fourteen minutes, Carol. Fourteen. And more than a thousand souls went down with her, more of her passengers than were lost on the Titanic itself. Yet hardly a soul today remembers her name.

CAROL

Fourteen minutes. Oh, Marty, I've never even heard of her, and that already breaks my heart a little. A thousand people, on our own river. How does a ship that big go down so fast?



MARTY

I'll tell you, Carol, but let me set the scene first, because the night matters. It was the twenty-eighth of May, 1914, and the Empress left Quebec City in the evening, outbound for Liverpool with near fourteen hundred people aboard. Passengers

dressed for dinner, children asleep in their berths, a whole company of the Salvation Army bound for a great congress in London, their band and their families all together. She steamed down the great river through the dark, past Rimouski, toward a place called Pointe-au-Père, Father's Point, where the river pilot would leave her. And out there in the small hours, Carol, a fog came rolling up off the water. Thick as wool. A blindfold laid across the whole river.

CAROL

A fog on the river in the dark. Marty, I can just picture the men on the bridge straining to see and seeing nothing at all. Were they alone out there, or was there something else in that fog?



MARTY

There was something else, Carol. That is the whole tragedy of it. Coming up the river toward her, loaded down heavy with eleven thousand tons of coal, was a Norwegian vessel called the Storstad, a collier, a great blunt-nosed ship built for hauling. The two ships had seen each other's lights before the fog closed in, and each thought it understood where the other was going. But then the fog swallowed them both. And in that blind white silence, Carol, the two captains each made their own guess about which way to steer, and their guesses did not agree. Whistles moaning back and forth across the water, each one closer, and

neither ship truly knowing where the other one was.

CAROL

Oh, that's the part that makes my stomach drop, Marty. Two ships calling out to each other in the dark and getting it wrong. And there was nothing they could do once they saw it coming?



MARTY

Almost nothing, Carol. The Empress had all but stopped, drifting there in the murk, when out of the fog the bow of the Storstad appeared, that great coal-laden prow, coming straight for her. There was no time. The Storstad drove into the Empress's side amidships like an axe into a log, tore a wound in her low near the waterline, and the river came pouring in. Thousands of tons of water a second, Carol, flooding into her belly. And here is the cruelty of it. Many of the watertight doors could not be closed in time, and the great gash was below the waterline where the water came fastest, so the ship began to roll onto her side almost at once.

CAROL

And all those people asleep in their berths, Marty. In the middle of the night. They wouldn't even have known. How could anyone find their way out of a ship rolling over in the dark?



MARTY

Most of them could not, Carol, and that is the horror I've carried a long time. She listed so fast and so far that within minutes the floors became walls. The portholes on the lower decks, some left open to the spring night for air, went under the surface, and the river came in through them too. People woke in pitch darkness to freezing water climbing over them, hallways tilted crazy, no way to know which way was up. Whole families trapped in their cabins. The lights failed. And the ship rolled fully onto her side, so that for a few minutes she lay there in the water like a great dying whale, and some souls actually crawled out through the portholes and stood on her hull, on the very side of the ship, out under the stars.

CAROL

They stood on the side of the ship. Oh, Marty. That's such a strange, terrible picture, people standing on the hull in their nightclothes. What happened to them, the ones who got out onto her?



MARTY

For a moment, Carol, there was a kind of desperate hope. Hundreds were in the water now, or clinging to the hull, and the Storstad, damaged but afloat, lowered her boats and began pulling people from the river. Those Norwegian sailors rowed back and forth through the wreckage in the dark and saved hundreds of lives, Carol. But the St. Lawrence in late May is snowmelt cold, cold enough to stop a strong man's heart, and the fog was still thick, and there were more than a thousand people in that water. And then the Empress gave one last groan and slipped away entirely beneath them, and the standing-place vanished, and all those souls were left in the black river together.

CAROL

The cold water again, Marty. It's always the cold water that finishes it, isn't it. And the little ones, the Salvation Army families you spoke of, the band and their children. Marty, I almost don't want to ask.



MARTY

Then I'll tell you gently, Carol. Of that whole Salvation Army company, near two hundred of them, only a handful lived. Their bandmaster was lost. Whole families were wiped from the earth in those fourteen minutes. When the count was finally made, one thousand and twelve people had died. More than a hundred and thirty of them were children. Of all the passengers who went down, only four children survived out of well over a hundred. The rescue boats and a couple of vessels that came out from Father's Point pulled the living and the dead from the water till dawn, and laid them out in rows on the pier at Rimouski, in the fog, with the families who'd waited on shore walking among them.

CAROL

A thousand and twelve. And the children, Marty. I have to just sit with that a moment by the fire. But tell me, why don't we know this? Why did a tragedy this vast just vanish from our memory?



MARTY

Because of the calendar, Carol, and nothing more. This was the end of May, 1914. And just nine weeks later, at the beginning of August, the whole world marched off into the Great War. All the newspapers, all the grief, all the attention of an entire country turned to the guns of Europe, and stayed there for four long years. The Empress of Ireland had the terrible misfortune to sink in the last quiet weeks of the old world. The Titanic had two years of peace in which to become a legend. The Empress had a few short weeks before the war swallowed her whole, and she sank a second time, Carol, down into forgetting.

CAROL

Down into forgetting. Oh, that's its own kind of tragedy on top of the first one, Marty. All those souls losing even their place in the story. Is there anyone left to remember them now?



MARTY

There is, Carol, and that's what I want to leave in your hands tonight. Down at Pointe-au-Père, at Rimouski, there stands a museum now, and a monument, keeping the names and the memory. The Salvation Army has never forgotten its lost band. And every year a few people gather at the water's edge on that May morning to remember a ship the history books skipped over. She is still down there, Carol, in the cold river, a grave for hundreds who were never brought up. So we say her name tonight so it doesn't slip away again. The Empress of Ireland, and the thousand and twelve who went down with her in fourteen minutes of fog. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight my heart is down in the St. Lawrence with the sleeping families and the little children and that lost brass band. We remember you, Empress of Ireland. Say the names of your forgotten ones, hold your dear ones close in the dark, and come back to the fire.



EPISODE 8

The Bridge That Fell Twice

MARTY

Settle in close tonight, friends, and put another log on, because this Quebec tale is a true one, and it is a story of great ambition and terrible sorrow. It happened on the St. Lawrence River, just upstream of Quebec City, where men set out to build the longest cantilever bridge in all the world. And it is the story of a bridge so proud and so cursed that it fell into that river not once, Carol, but twice, and took eighty-eight lives down with it.

CAROL

Oh, Marty. Twice. The same bridge, into the same river. Before you even begin I feel a shiver of dread. What was it they were trying to build out there?



MARTY

They were trying to build a wonder, Carol. In the early years of the last century, a great steel bridge to leap the St. Lawrence in one enormous span, near half a kilometre of open river with no pier in the middle to hold it, because the ice and the current would tear any pier away. The longest cantilever arms ever attempted by human hands. And the man who did the figuring, the consulting

engineer, was a famous American named Theodore Cooper, proud and brilliant and aging, and he did his calculating from far away in New York, and he would not come to the river to see the thing rise.

CAROL

From far away. Oh, Marty, I don't like the sound of that. How can a man be sure of a bridge he never stands beneath?



MARTY

That, Carol, is the very heart of it. As the great south arm reached out over the water in the summer of 1907, the men on site began to notice something wrong. The huge steel chords, the compression members bearing all that weight, were bending. Bowing. They found ribs of steel that had begun to buckle where no steel should ever bend. They sent warning to Cooper. And there was hesitating, and there was arguing over whether the bends had been there before, and precious days slipped past while thousands of tons of steel hung out over the river on a miscalculation. Cooper had underestimated the very weight of his own bridge, Carol. It was already too heavy for itself.

CAROL

Already too heavy for itself, and the men out working on it every day. Marty, did no one call them down off it?



MARTY

The word to stop came too late, Carol. On the twenty-ninth of August, 1907, near the end of the working day, with the men still out on the steel, the south arm gave way. In fifteen seconds, Carol, fifteen seconds, nineteen thousand tons of steel folded and roared down into the St. Lawrence. Men who were up on the high steel were flung into the river or carried down inside the twisting metal. The crash was heard ten miles off in Quebec City; folk thought it was thunder, or a cannon. And when the dust and the spray settled, seventy-five men were dead.

CAROL

Seventy-five. Oh, Marty. In fifteen seconds. Who were they, these men on the high steel?



MARTY

Now here, Carol, is the part that Quebec and all of Canada must never forget. A great many of those men were Mohawk ironworkers from Kahnawake, the Mohawk community just across the river from Montreal. The Kahnawake men had taken up the high steel work and become famous for it, for their steadiness and their nerve at terrible heights, and whole families of them worked that trade. And of the seventy-five who died that day, thirty-three were Mohawk men from Kahnawake. Thirty-three, Carol, from one small community, gone in a single afternoon.

CAROL

Thirty-three from one community. Marty, that is not a disaster, that is a wound to a whole people. What did it do to Kahnawake?



MARTY

It hollowed the place out, Carol. In one stroke, that village lost fathers and husbands and sons by the dozen. There is a story told there that the women, after, made a decision that the men of the community would never again all work the same high steel job at the same time, so that no single fall could ever take so many of them again. And they carried their grief in the old way and the new. To this day in Kahnawake there is a monument, crosses made of steel beams, remembering the men who fell into the St. Lawrence. The high steel trade went on, Carol, the Mohawk ironworkers went on to raise the skylines of New York and Montreal, but that August day is stitched into the memory of the whole nation.

CAROL

Steel crosses for men who fell from the steel. Oh, Marty. And yet you told me the bridge fell twice. They went back and built it again?



MARTY

They did, Carol, because the river still had to be crossed, and national pride demanded it be finished. They started fresh with a new and far heavier, stronger design, and this time the plan was cleverer still. They would build the two great cantilever arms out from each shore, and then the enormous central span, a single piece of steel weighing five thousand tons, would be built on shore, floated out on the river between the arms, and hoisted straight up into place to close the gap. A marvel of engineering. And on the eleventh of September, 1916, nine years after the first fall, they began to lift that great central span up out of the water.

CAROL

Lifting a whole span up out of the river. Marty, I can picture the crowds along the shore, everyone holding their breath. Did it hold?



MARTY

The shores were black with people, Carol, come to watch history. Up the great span rose, foot by foot, on its jacks and hangers, thousands of tons climbing slowly toward the arms waiting to receive it. And then a bearing casting on one corner failed. Just one piece of steel, Carol, at the southwest corner. The span lurched, tilted, and with a groan that the watching crowds would hear in their dreams, the whole five thousand tons slid off and plunged into the St. Lawrence and was swallowed. And thirteen more men, riding the span or working beneath it, went down into the river with it and drowned.

CAROL

Thirteen more. Oh, Marty, the same river taking them again. To watch it fall a second time, after everything. How did anyone find the heart to go on?



MARTY

I do not fully know, Carol, except that they were stubborn and they were grieving and they would not be beaten by that river. They fished up a new central span, and the next year, in 1917, they raised it again, and this time, this time, it held. The Quebec Bridge stood, the longest cantilever span in the world, and it stands to this very day, carrying trains and cars across the St. Lawrence. But it had cost, all told, eighty-eight men their lives. Seventy-five in the first fall, thirteen in the second. A bridge with a graveyard in the river beneath it.

CAROL

Eighty-eight men in the water beneath it. Marty, is there anything in this one but pride and grief? I need something to carry home from the fire.



MARTY

There is this, Carol, and it is a beautiful thing. Out of that shame and that sorrow, a lesson was pressed into the very souls of Canada's engineers. There is a ceremony in this country, quiet and solemn, called the Ritual of the Calling of an Engineer, and when a young engineer is admitted to the profession, they are given an iron ring to wear on the little finger of their working hand. And the legend, Carol, the story every engineer is told, is that those rings were forged from the twisted steel of the fallen Quebec Bridge. So that every time the young engineer picks up a pencil or reaches out a hand, that rough iron ring reminds them of the men who died when other engineers grew proud and careless. A ring made of humility.

CAROL

A ring made of humility, worn against the working hand. Oh, Marty. So the bridge that fell twice still whispers to them, all these years on, be careful, be humble, remember us.

MARTY

That is exactly it, Carol. Every engineer who wears that ring carries the St. Lawrence with them, and the seventy-five, and the thirteen. So tonight we hold them all, the men who fell into that cold river building a wonder. We hold the

thirty-three Mohawk ironworkers of Kahnawake, whose small community bore the heaviest blow of all, and whose steel crosses still stand in their memory. We remember that ambition without humility is a deadly thing, and that a poor man on the high steel pays for a proud man's mistake. And we remember that a hard lesson, carried in a ring of iron, can keep other men alive for a hundred years. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight my heart is down in the St. Lawrence with those eighty-eight brave men and the community that mourns them still. Wear your own humility close, be gentle with the weight you carry, and come back to the fire.