



DARK TALES OF QUEBEC ♦

Rose Latulippe

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

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.