



DARK TALES OF QUEBEC ♦

Le Chien d'Or

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

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 seventeenth 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.

