



DARK TALES OF QUEBEC ♦

The White Lady of Montmorency Falls

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

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.