



UNFOUND PIRATE TREASURES ♦

The Lost Treasure of Lima

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Come in close to the fire tonight, friends, and let the flames warm your hands, because this one carries us south, to the year 1820, to the white colonial city of Lima on the coast of Peru, in the last desperate days of Spanish rule. This is the tale of the Loot of Lima, the greatest lost treasure never found, a hoard of gold and silver and holy relics that vanished onto a wild green island in the Pacific and has never been seen since. More than three hundred expeditions have gone looking for it, Carol. Not one has come home with a single coin.

CAROL

The Loot of Lima. Oh, Marty, I've heard that name and it sends a shiver through me. 1820, and the old Spanish empire falling to pieces. Tell me, why did a whole city's fortune suddenly need to run for its life?



MARTY

Because the armies of independence were closing in, Carol. For three hundred years Spain had ruled Peru, and Lima was the jewel of it, the richest city in all the Americas, gorged on the silver of the mountains and the gold of the mines. But now Simon Bolivar and the liberators were marching, and the revolution was at the gates, and the Spanish Viceroy in Lima knew that if the city fell, every ounce of that wealth would be lost. So he made a decision, a fateful one. He would send the treasure away, out across the sea, just until the danger passed. And oh, Carol, what a treasure it was.

CAROL

I can barely imagine it. When you say the wealth of the richest city in the Americas, Marty, what are we truly talking about? Paint it for me, so I can see it piled up on that dock.



MARTY

Then picture this. Chests upon chests of gold and silver bars, stacked like firewood. Casks heavy with coins, doubloons and pieces of eight beyond counting. Sacks of raw gemstones, emeralds green as jungle leaves. And the

treasures of the great cathedral of Lima, Carol, the sacred things, candlesticks and censers of solid gold, jeweled chalices, and crowning it all, the prize of prizes, a life-sized statue of the Virgin Mary, the Madonna, cast in solid gold and set all over with precious stones, so heavy it took a team of men to lift her. In today's money, Carol, the whole hoard would be worth hundreds of millions. It was the ransom of an empire, and it all went down to the harbor of Callao in the dead of night.

CAROL

A golden Madonna, life-sized, studded with jewels. Marty, that alone would stop your heart. And they were going to trust all of that to a ship? Whose ship? Who did the Viceroy pick to carry the soul of his city out to sea?



MARTY

Here is where the tale turns dark, Carol. The Viceroy chose a ship that was already in the harbor, a British trading vessel called the Mary Dear, under an English captain by the name of William Thompson. Now, Thompson was a merchant seaman, a trader, thought to be an honest man, and the Spanish loaded the treasure into his hold. But they were not fools. They sent along a guard of Spanish soldiers, and a company of priests to watch over the sacred relics, all to

keep Thompson honest on the voyage. The plan was simple. Sail up and down the coast, out of reach of the rebels, and bring it all back when Lima was safe. And so the Mary Dear slipped her moorings and stood out to sea, riding low in the water with the richest cargo that ever crossed the Pacific.

CAROL

Oh, Marty. I can feel it coming. An honest captain, and more gold in his hold than he'd see in a hundred lifetimes, and only a handful of soldiers between him and it. That's a terrible thing to put in front of any man. What happened out there on the open water?



MARTY

The temptation was too great, Carol. It always is, in these tales. Out on that empty ocean, with no land in sight and no law but the sea, Captain Thompson looked at that treasure night after night, and something broke loose in his heart. He gathered his crew and he made them a devil's offer, and they took it. In the black of night they rose up, Carol. They fell upon the Spanish soldiers and the priests, every one of them, and they murdered them where they slept and where they stood, and one by one they threw the bodies over the side into the dark water. And when the sun came up, the Mary Dear was no longer a trader's ship.

She was a pirate ship, and William Thompson was a pirate captain with the wealth of Lima all his own.

CAROL

They killed the priests. Oh, Marty, that's a wickedness that would follow a man. Murdered the holy fathers and threw them to the sea for gold. And now they had it, all of it, and nowhere on earth they could safely go. Where does a man run with a stolen empire in his hold?



MARTY

To the loneliest place he can find, Carol. Thompson set his course for a speck of green in the vast Pacific, three hundred miles off the coast of Costa Rica, an uninhabited scrap of jungle called Cocos Island. Oh, it is a wild place, Carol, a drowned mountaintop wrapped in rainforest, ringed with cliffs, drenched by waterfalls, no living soul upon it. And there, in some hidden cave or buried pit deep in that tangled jungle, Thompson and his men carried the treasure ashore, load by load, and they buried it. The gold, the silver, the gems, the sacred golden Madonna, all of it swallowed by the green, marked only in the memories of the men who dug the hole. Then they sailed away, meaning to scatter, and to come back one day and dig it up rich as kings.

CAROL

Buried on a jungle island with not a soul to see. Marty, that's the kind of secret that can drive a man mad. But you said at the start that not one coin was ever found. So something went wrong for Thompson, didn't it? The sea has a way of collecting its debts.

**MARTY**

It does, Carol, and it came for them fast. Not long after, the Mary Dear was overhauled by a Spanish warship, hunting for the stolen treasure of Lima. The Spanish boarded her, and they found no gold, but they found guilty men, and they knew a pirate crew when they saw one. They took them in chains, and they hanged them, Carol, hanged the whole crew from the yardarm as the pirates they were. All but two. They spared Captain Thompson and his first mate, and they spared them for one reason only, so the two men could lead the Spanish back to Cocos Island and show them where the treasure lay.

CAROL

Spared to give up the secret. Oh, Marty, I can see it, the ship beating back to that green island with two doomed men aboard, knowing the moment they pointed to the spot their usefulness was done. What did Thompson do when they made him step back onto that shore?



MARTY

He played his last card, Carol, and he played it brilliantly. The Spanish brought them ashore on Cocos, onto that wall of dripping jungle, and Thompson and his mate said, this way, follow us, the treasure is just inland. And they led the sailors in under the canopy, deeper and deeper into the green, and then, in a heartbeat, they were gone. They bolted into that jungle they had come to know, and the trees closed behind them, and the Spanish were left grasping at leaves. They hunted, Carol, they searched that island until they gave up, and they sailed away empty-handed, cursing. The first mate, some say, died on the island. But William Thompson, Carol, William Thompson got clean away.

CAROL

He vanished into the very jungle where the gold was buried. Marty, my heart. Did he ever come back for it? Did he live out his days rich, laughing at the whole world?



MARTY

No, Carol, and that is the cruelest turn of all. Thompson was picked up by a passing ship and carried far away, penniless, a hunted man who could never go near that treasure again for fear of the noose. He is said to have lived out his years poor and broken, carrying the only map that mattered inside his own skull. And on his deathbed, the story goes, he pressed the secret into the hands of one last friend, a whisper of the hidden cave on Cocos Island, and then he died, and the whisper died with him, tangled and half-lost. From that day to this, the treasure has never been found. More than three hundred expeditions have torn at that island, Carol. Diggers and dreamers, treasure companies, even a young Franklin Roosevelt sailed out to try his luck. They have blasted the rock and drained the streams and hacked at the jungle for a hundred years. And they have found nothing. Not one coin. So somewhere on Cocos Island tonight, Carol, under the rain and the green and the calling of the seabirds, the golden Madonna of Lima still lies in her hidden cave, waiting in the dark for someone to find her. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I'll be dreaming of that lonely green island out in the wide Pacific, and a golden lady in the dark under the roots, still waiting after two

hundred years. Maybe some secrets the jungle just means to keep. Keep the ones you love closer than any gold, don't go trading your soul for a hold full of treasure, and always, always come back to the fire.

