



## VOICES OF THE FALLS

### CAST

<b>EAGLE EYE</b>	<i>Noble Chief</i>
<b>LELA-WALA</b>	<i>Daughter of Eagle Eye</i>
<b>ELDER ONE</b>	<i>One of Eagle Eye's Tribe</i>
<b>ELDER TWO</b>	<i>One of Eagle Eye's Tribe</i>
<b>WARRIOR ONE</b>	<i>One of Eagle Eye's Tribe</i>
<b>WARRIOR TWO</b>	<i>One of Eagle Eye's Tribe</i>
<b>EVIL SPIRIT</b>	<i>Angry Spirit</i>
<b>SERPENT</b>	<i>Enormous Water Beast</i>

**NARRATOR:** The falls which we call Niagara Falls are one of Mother Nature's most powerful statements of her might. Three waterfalls converge into one—plummeting nearly two hundred feet down to crash mercilessly on the rocks below. A boiling mass of mist fills the air all around. It is a sight that causes many mortals to

stare in awe.

For the native people of America who lived near these falls, their reaction was no different. Nee-ah-gah-rah, meaning “thundering waters” is the name that the Iroquois gave it. They believed the thundering they heard in the waterfall was the voice of a mighty spirit. The Seneca tribe tells a tale of how those voices came to be and how they changed over time. This is that tale.

The powerful Seneca tribe lived alongside a mighty river that fed the falls. Success had come to the tribe, and it seemed that nothing could dampen it. To them the voice calling to them from the waterfall was a benevolent one—encouraging them to do mightier deeds.

Yet one day the kind voice changed, and this caused great panic among the people. Then the creatures that lived in the river began to die.

**WARRIOR ONE:** The fish lie lifeless. The turtle sinks to the riverbottom. There is an angry voice in the waters.

**WARRIOR TWO:** We must tell Chief Eagle Eye of this.

**NARRATOR:** The elders of the tribe met with Chief Eagle Eye to discuss this distressing turn of events.

**ELDER ONE:** There is an angry voice in the waters. Somehow we have enraged the spirit who dwells the great falls.

**ELDER TWO:** Obviously. But what can be done about it? How can the spirit be pacified?

**ELDER ONE:** There is only one way. There must be a sacrifice. A young maiden must be given to the spirit of the falls.

**NARRATOR:** All the elders looked to the old chief.

**EAGLE EYE:** Let us not be hasty. What will a sacrifice accomplish?

**ELDER ONE:** It will silence the angry voice in the waters! Perhaps the spirit of the falls will grow kindly again and keep the water animals from dying.

**ELDER TWO:** It is the only way, chief! Otherwise, we are lost!

**NARRATOR:** In the chief's eyes there was a deep sadness.

**EAGLE EYE:** Who could give up a daughter? What man has a heart of stone?

**ELDER ONE:** Someone must sacrifice a daughter, or we will *all* die.

**ELDER TWO:** What is one life when compared to the lives of many?

**EAGLE EYE:** That is easy to say until the one life is your own. I must think on this!

**ELDER ONE:** Think quickly, chief! Do your duty to your people!

**NARRATOR:** The elders left the lodge of the chief, and the old man hung his head. There was a rustling sound in the darkness of his lodge. (*rustling sound*)

**EAGLE EYE:** (*sigh*) Lela-wala, I know you are there. What all did you hear?

**NARRATOR:** From behind an animal skin in the back of the lodge emerged the chief's daughter, Lela-wala.

**LELA-WALA:** How did you know, Father?

**EAGLE EYE:** Ever since you were a little girl, you have spied on my lodge meetings. Aren't you too old for such things now?

**LELA-WALA:** I wanted to know what the elders had to say about the new voice in the waterfall.

**EAGLE EYE:** They are full of fear. The sacrifice of a life is not our way, but that is what their fear has driven them to. (*sigh*) And I have no other answer.

**LELA-WALA:** Is there really an angry spirit in the great waters?

**EAGLE EYE:** Yes, but I refuse to give up the life of one of my people to it.

**LELA-WALA:** What if someone gave up her life willingly?

**EAGLE EYE:** That would be a deed braver than I have ever seen in all my days.

**LELA-WALA:** Then that settles it. I will go.

**EAGLE EYE:** You? Of course not!

**LELA-WALA:** Three years ago you gave me a strong husband, but then he was killed defending our tribe. Since then I have not been able to continue my life as I did before. I could save my people and join my husband in the next life.

**NARRATOR:** The chief argued with his daughter, but she was adamant. Her life should be the one used to satisfy the angry spirit.

**EAGLE EYE:** It will break my heart to let you go, but I admire your courage.

**LELA-WALA:** It a courage that I learned from you, Father.

**EAGLE EYE:** Then I have broken my own heart.

**NARRATOR:** The old chief smiled and embraced his daughter.

On the day set for the sacrifice, all the tribe gathered on the riverbank. There was singing, games, and dancing. (*sounds of a celebration*) Then a white canoe came into sight, and all the revelers grew silent. Its bow and stern were decorated with fruits and flowers. Lela-wala was seated within it. The tribe solemnly bade the brave maiden farewell.

**ELDER ONE:** Where is the chief? Why is he not here when his daughter is departing for the next world?

**ELDER TWO:** The heartbreak must be too great for him.

**NARRATOR:** As Lela-wala searched the bank for one last sight of her father, her canoe made its way back into the current—headed downriver for the crashing waters.

**LELA-WALA:** Goodbye, Father.

**NARRATOR:** Yet suddenly another canoe appeared upriver—a white one just like Lela-Wala’s—rowed by the old chief.

**EAGLE EYE:** Daughter! Daughter!

**LELA-WALA:** Father!

**EAGLE EYE:** Wait for me, and I will join you!

**NARRATOR:** Although he was old, the chief’s arms propelled the canoe forward with great speed. Soon he was side by side with his daughter’s vessel. The chief reached out and took his daughter’s hand in his own.

**EAGLE EYE:** We will meet this fate together, daughter.

(*rushing of the waterfall*)

**NARRATOR:** Those watching from the bank cried out—some in dismay, some in admiration. (*confused shouting*) Then the two white canoes disappeared over the edge of the waterfall. The brave maiden and the brave chief were beyond rescue.

**WARRIOR ONE:** Now they are together in death.

**WARRIOR TWO:** Perhaps they will find a way to live on.

**NARRATOR:** As the old chief and his daughter fell down into the mists of the fall, their forms changed. Their mortal bodies melted away, and they transformed into pure spirits of strength and goodness.

The roaring of the falls that had filled their minds, now sounded like music. They floated down into the rushing waters and made their home in a cavern behind the cascading water.

**EAGLE EYE:** All that we have given up in life, we have gained back.

**LELA-WALA:** I agree, Father.

**NARRATOR:** Just as the din of the falls had become music in their ears, they now heard the discord in the notes. An evil voice spoke out of the deep waters beneath the falls. It was the same evil voice that they had heard before—the voice of the Spirit of Famine and Starvation. Soon enough the evil spirit rose from the deep waters to speak with them.

**EVIL SPIRIT:** Trespassers! For years this has been my home and my home only! It has been my voice filling these waters! Be gone!

**EAGLE EYE:** No. This is now our home as well.

**EVIL SPIRIT:** You are mortal and have no place here!

**EAGLE EYE:** Not so. The Great Spirit transformed us. The Great Spirit has declared that we guard this place—my daughter and I. We will not forsake our duty.

**EVIL SPIRIT:** You do not intimidate me! Who are you anyway?

**EAGLE EYE:** I am Heno, the Good Spirit of Thunder and Lightning.

**EVIL SPIRIT:** Ooh. Thunder and lightning. Very, very frightening.

**NARRATOR:** Yet the Evil Spirit *was* afraid. He was determined to punish Eagle Eye

and Lela-Wala for their intrusion into his domain. So he summoned one of his beasts—an enormous serpent. It had grown fat gorging itself on the bodies of the dead.

**SERPENT:** (*hissing*) What is your bidding, my master?

**EVIL SPIRIT:** First, you aided me by cursing the waters of the Seneca people. But they sent their chief and his daughter to be spirits here in our falls. So now we will punish their people even more harshly.

**SERPENT:** Sssounds sssplendid.

**EVIL SPIRIT:** Travel upriver and poison the river, so that even the people will die from drinking its waters. Then the tribe of Heno and his daughter will curse their names!

**SERPENT:** (*hissing laugh*) Certainly.

**NARRATOR:** So the enormous serpent slithered up the falls with supernatural ability and propelled his polluted body to the spot that the Seneca tribe used for water. Then he secreted poison from his vile glands. (*secretion sounds*)

**SERPENT:** Death and destruction will fall upon them! Then I will feast upon their bodiessssss.

**NARRATOR:** But Eagle Eye Heno saw the shadow of the serpent pass over his cavern, and he turned to his daughter.

**EAGLE EYE:** You must follow him, Lela-wala, and see what evil he is doing.

**NARRATOR:** Eagle Eye Heno turned his daughter into a light mist that rose effortlessly upward, and she followed the serpent all the way to its destination. Then she returned to tell him the news.

**LELA-WALA:** Oh, Father! The people will perish. They are already growing sick from the serpent's poison. We must warn them.

**EAGLE EYE:** It is not the job of spirits to interfere with the lives of mortals. Our job is to guard the falls.

**LELA-WALA:** Father, we cannot forget our people! We gave our lives to protect them!

**EAGLE EYE:** Ha! None of them were brave enough to face the falls! They let us die for them.

**LELA-WALA:** I came here to help my people, and this is my chance.

**EAGLE EYE:** *(sigh)* You are right. Go to them. Warn them. Tell them to move further up the river and drink from safe waters.

**NARRATOR:** Meanwhile, many people among the Seneca tribe had grown sick. The elders gathered to discuss what must be done.

**ELDER ONE:** The death of Lela-wala was supposed to have satisfied the angry spirit, but now people are growing sick and dying from the water! What can we do?

**ELDER TWO:** The angry spirit demands another sacrifice!

*(murmuring of the people)*

**ELDER ONE:** How many maidens must die? *(sigh)* If only Chief Eagle-Eye were still with us.

**NARRATOR:** So deep were the people in their discussion that they did not notice when a strange mist rose from the edge of the waterfall and crept slowly closer to them. But at last the mist enveloped them, and they cried out in fright. *(confused shouting)*

**ELDER ONE:** *(cry of fright)* A mist!

**ELDER TWO:** What does this mean?

**NARRATOR:** Out of the mist stepped the ghostly form of Lela-wala.

**LELA-WALA:** My people, surely you have not forgotten me so soon.

**ELDER ONE:** Lela-Wala?

**LELA-WALA:** A terrible beast has been unleashed upon you by the evil spirit who lives beneath the great falls. My father, Heno, says that you must move further upriver—relocate the tribe.

**ELDER TWO:** But this is our home—and it always has been.

**LELA-WALA:** You must move—or die. Farewell.

**NARRATOR:** The tribe was wise enough to heed the ghostly words.

**ELDER ONE:** We must move from the Chippewa River up the Niagara River and make a new settlement on the Buffalo

Creek. Once we do, the sickness will leave us.

**NARRATOR:** Meanwhile, Lela-Wala had returned to the echoing cave of her father.

**LELA-WALA:** They have taken our warning, Father. The tribe will move.

**EAGLE EYE:** We will have to protect them. When the Evil Spirit finds out, he will send the water serpent to destroy them.

**NARRATOR:** The tribe had gathered up their settlement—packing their things into their canoes. Then with their fleet ready, they began to move upstream. Yet before they had gone far, a dark shadow appeared beneath the waves. The water serpent erupted from the water, thrashing about, and throwing its human victims from side to side. (*splashing and hissing*)

**SERPENT:** You may have outwitted my poison, but I will still feast upon your flesh!

(*screaming of the people*)

**ELDER ONE:** Warriors, aim your spears upon the beast!

**NARRATOR:** The warriors bravely faced the serpent. They hurled their spears at its thick hide, but they only rebounded helplessly from it. (*ting, ting, ting*)

**ELDER TWO:** Our weapons are useless!

**SERPENT:** Prepare to die!

**NARRATOR:** Just then a mist began to rise from the riverwaters, surrounding the

canoes and shielding them from the sight of the serpent.

**LELA-WALA:** Flee, my people! Flee!

**SERPENT:** You may hide them, mist-woman, but I will destroy them just the same.

**NARRATOR:** As the water serpent thrashed back and forth through the mist, searching for its victims, a column of dark clouds approached. Riding upon the clouds was Eagle Eye Heno, and his mighty voice boomed forth.

**EAGLE EYE:** (*booming*) Worthless worm! How dare you try to destroy my people!

**SERPENT:** Do your worst! I serve the Evil Spirit of Famine and Starvation! We shall prevail!

**NARRATOR:** From the midst of the boiling clouds fell a spear of lightning. (*Shazam!*) It flashed down into the heart of the serpent.

**SERPENT:** (*cries of pain*) Argh! (*dying sounds*)

**NARRATOR:** The water serpent thrashed about in the river—its body engulfed in flame. The force of its thrashing was so great that it scooped out a huge basin in the Buffalo Creek. Then it grew still.

**ELDER ONE:** The Good Spirit of Thunder and Lightning has saved us!

**ELDER TWO:** And also the Maiden of the Mist!

**EAGLE EYE:** Now, daughter, let us return to the falls and deal with this evil spirit once and for all.

**NARRATOR:** The mist lifted from the river, and the tribe traveled on. When they reached the site of their new dwelling place, a strange spectacle greeted them. A tall, sharp pole was driven into the ground. Hanging from its spiked end was the remains of a hideous, deformed creature. It was the evil spirit from beneath the falls.

**WARRIOR ONE:** Listen! There is no longer an angry voice in the waters!

**NARRATOR:** Invisible to all, Eagle Eye Heno and Lela-Wala floated above.

**EAGLE EYE:** Let us go back home, daughter. Our enemy is defeated.

**LELA-WALA:** And our people are safe.

**NARRATOR:** To this day, some say they can hear the sound of thunder in the rushing waters of the mighty falls. Others say they only hear the sound of distant music—like a woman’s singing. Either way, it is a pleasant sound—one that reminds them of Heno, the God of Thunder and Lightning, and Lela-Wala, the Maiden of the Mist.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is heroic about Lela-Wala?
2. What does this myth explain about Niagara Falls and the surrounding area?
3. The European explorer La Salle claimed to witness Lela-Wala sent over Niagara Falls as a human sacrifice. In his version of the story, she went against her will.

Then her father, overcome with grief, chose to die alongside her. What would this change about the story?

4. This version blends two legends about Lela-Wala, her trip over the falls, and her return to her people. In one version Heno, the Spirit of Thunder and Lightning, is not her father but a god who saves her as she falls and marries her to one of his sons. What does this change about the story?
5. How does this story illustrate the connection between humans and nature?