

# **Madame Textilia:**

## **The Winged Goddess of Blind Will's Neck**

### **by Ross Bachelder**

Centuries ago, deep within the dense forestlands of a vast and mythical land destined to be known as Norway Plains, lived an exquisitely beautiful maiden named Madame Textilia, Weaver of Magical Fabrics and Indelible Dreams, Mother of the Known Universe and Protector of the Cloth of Darius. And no more gifted sewer of cloth had ever walked the earth.

No one but Madame Textilia could possibly have known that she moved so freely from eon to eon and back again, worrying not at all about Time, against which she was utterly impervious. For hers was the gift of Eternity, and a freer spirit than she has never entered the imagination of living things. And she was as in love with the ocean as she was with the trees.

Seldom was Textilia visible, for she chose to be shrouded in mystery -- though it was said that on certain winter nights she might be seen soaring effortlessly above the stately pines, her gossamer wings shimmering in the moonlight, her green, translucent eyes glowing like two companion planets from some distant, yet to be discovered galaxy.

The creatures of the forest floor sensed her magical powers intuitively and always felt closer to each other when she was near. In her presence the birds soared with uncommon grace high up in the canopy, beneath the cool, twinkling stars. The insects would fairly glow from within. And when she neared the Atlantic the fishes, great and small, danced and sang.

That a woman of such sweet omnipotence should choose to devote her precious time and energy to this untested land came to be seen as no less than the great good fortune of everyone in the close-knit settlements of the region, and for this the citizens of Norway Plains, struggling to gain a foothold in their community, were ever so thankful.

And yet even the presence of a Goddess of the most unassailable powers could not keep the Forces of Evil fully at bay. For behind every cloud-piercing tree and orbiting planet lurked an ever-present fear that what the people had labored so mightily to create -- an enduring community of caring, industrious people -- was in imminent danger of destruction.

The Indian Wars were raging along the Salmon Falls and neighboring Squanamagonic. A scout and sagamore named Blind Will was murdered in 1677 by Mohawks and left to die at a spot of land known as Blind Will's Neck. And Cotton Mather insisted that the Ghost of Rogers, the victim of wartime atrocities -- haunted the fields and the meadows late at night.

It was then that the residents of Norway Plains, filled with deep appreciation for Madame Textilia's loving vigilance, christened her The Winged Goddess of Blind Will's Neck. And from that point on, she could do no wrong. Such was the strength of her power over them -- a power that was as pure and compassionate as that of a parent for its newborn child.

As the years wore on, Madame Textilia wove her fabrics and watched over her flock as its residents evolved from a raw and untutored settlement into an ever-maturing clan of people with remarkable insight into the ways of the world. They needed neither privilege nor pedigree to make their mark on the land, for they were proudly self-sufficient in the Yankee way.

With their wide-ranging intellects and native ingenuity, they were drawn to books both adventurous and profound. From this proclivity grew an ability to work with the mind, the heart and the hands in a near-perfect harmony that led to unsurpassed accomplishments. They were inventive. They were industrious. And they were as tenacious as lions on the hunt.

As the reality that life was fraught with clear-and-present danger began to settle into the residents' consciousness, they decided to call a meeting deep in the wintertime forest and make plans to seek the wise counsel and legendary compassion of Madame Textilia, who by now had begun to reveal herself to the flock she had pledged to protect.

One night, hard on the heels of a fierce late-night blizzard, the Norwegians learned from a mysterious messenger, racing on horseback along the banks of the Salmon Falls and stopping for food and a warm fire, that the remedy for the violence against them may very well lie in that greatest of the supreme gifts Textilia was blessed with -- her virtuosity as a weaver.

The finest of her creations was the coveted Cloth of Darius, named after the long-dead King of a declining Persian Emirate, then passed down through countless generations to the sons and daughters of Textilia's kin. Historians have written that the cloth possessed unfathomable powers that only Madame Textilia herself could unleash for the good of humankind.

The Cloth was decorated with glimmering, multi-colored sequins, a canopy of the most delicate fleur de lis and an exquisitely crafted ensemble of magical mirrors, each with its own unique window into the Universe. When Madame Textilia whispered her benevolent commands to the mirrors, they became truly omniscient and would do her every bidding.

It was known among a select few that the mirrors could invest viewers with their own astonishing powers, but anyone with malevolent intent who attempted to look deeply into them would be thrown back violently with a crash of thunder and a blinding light, then banned forever from looking into them. Such were the terrifying powers of Textilia's mirrors.

And yet if a passerby were to peer into one or more of those mirrors with a combination of childlike inquisitiveness, purity of intention and an open heart, they would discover not only the best the world has to offer but the very best parts of themselves. So it came to pass that the residents of Norway Plains longed for an opportunity to gaze upon those mirrors.

Time is inexorable. Changes both dramatic and earth-shaking were in the wind. The agrarian way of living, so fundamental to the history and indeed to the survival of New England, began to be challenged by the demands of the Industrial Revolution. Inevitably, the people of Norway Plains began to worry each day about the erosion of the quality of their lives.

Their exceptional facility made the many skilled craftsmen of the community -- soon to be known as the town of Rochester -- the envy of cities and towns across the vast expanse of America. And yet so great was the demand for their expertly crafted shoes and finely woven textiles that workers were brought from far across the Atlantic to cope with the demand.

Inevitably, with that treasured productivity came long hours and harsh conditions that robbed many laborers of their health, compromised their safety and interfered with family life. Fathers were too much away from home, and the mothers more and more shouldered the burden of chores and child-rearing. Life had become difficult, and a sadness fell on the land.

Wars had begun to ravish the countryside and tear at the fabric of this proud nation, and Rochester was not exempted from the pain of conflict. The reality that some young conscripts might never return from battle struck fear and terror into their hearts. What could be done? The time to meet their beloved Madame Textilia and seek her divine intervention had arrived.

Within an hour after that late-night meeting in the forest, Textilia responded. Down from the Heavens she came, to the accompaniment of an indescribably beautiful chorus of celestial voices. Draped lovingly over her shoulders was the coveted Cloth of Darius, whose magical mirrors shone down with the most astonishing brilliance upon the hopeful gathering.

As she descended onto the forest floor and stood before her chargeings, her soft, green eyes glowed with the unmatched intensity of a mother's love. In words both mellifluous and wise, she assured every man, woman and child of her devotion to the cause of righting any wrongs they may have suffered and granting them fulfillment in every aspect of their lives.

Forward they came, family by family, hand in hand, with hearts pounding and hope abundant. "Look ye into the mirror of your choice," she said, as tears of happiness welled in the corners of their eyes, "and feast upon the powers of the Cloth of Darius to mend the torn fabric of your great city. With each well-meaning glance into the mirror, ye shall be transformed."

And so it came to pass that the inhabitants of Rochester, protected and nourished by the immeasurable love of Madame Textilia, multiplied and flourished under her wing, sewing the indelible threads of their Yankee ingenuity into the very fabric of America. What some saw as myth became an inextinguishable reality. And the city of Rochester found happiness.

**THE END**

