The cold winds from the mountains sent a chill through the simple cottages in the little town of Lourdes. The good housewives poked the fires in the open hearths and threw short logs into the flames. In one of the little homes, the dying fire was poked but there was no wood to put into it.

“Bernadette,” called the housewife, “go with your sister to the forest near the river and get some wood. The howling of that sharp wind tells me that it is going to be a cold night.”
Bernadette, a girl of fourteen, went with her sister and a playmate to gather the dry branches that fell by the river. The girls enjoyed the cold wind against their faces. They darted here, there, and everywhere, seeing who could find the most wood. In their eagerness, two of the girls waded through the shallow stream and wandered far into the forest.

Bernadette was left behind. She was not as strong as the others and therefore had to go more slowly. As she approached the bank of the river, she was startled by a rustling sound in a grotto on the side of a hill near her. She looked around and saw a bush swaying as if blown by the wind. Then in the grotto above the bush appeared a bright golden light. The little child gazed in surprise.

2. A Vision

Little by little, the bright light faded away, and there in the grotto stood a beautiful woman, smiling sweetly at the little peasant girl. Bernadette had never seen a more lovely face. She had heard stories about holy saints and fairy godmothers, but she had never dreamed of anything so pretty as the Lady in White.

In her long white robe, the lady stood like a statue. A girdle of pale blue was tied about her waist, and the ends fell gracefully at the left side. Over her head and shoulders and down her back was draped a white veil. A rosary with a golden cross was placed upon her left arm. Her hands were folded piously at her breast. Her tender eyes gazed sadly yet sweetly upon the world.

Little Bernadette fell upon her knees. She knew that the beautiful woman must have come from heaven. She folded her tiny hands in prayer, never taking her eyes from the silent figure in white that stood in the rock grotto. Then the vision grew dimmer and dimmer, until the lovely lady disappeared.
3. Messages From the Lady in White

The little child was still kneeling in prayer when her playmates returned with their arms filled with wood. They wondered what was the matter with Bernadette. They had never seen her praying in the woods before.

"Bernadette," they said, "see all the wood we found. Where is your wood?"

Bernadette was ashamed that she had not gathered more wood for her mother. She was also sorry that the girls had found her praying. She wanted to keep her vision a secret. Gathering up a few pieces of wood she had found, she joined her playmates on their homeward journey.

But Bernadette’s secret made her so happy that she could not keep it. She whispered it to her mother. That night when the flames were dancing in the open fireplace, the little family talked about the Lady in White who had appeared at the grotto.

Time and again, the lovely Lady appeared to the holy peasant girl. The story was soon carried far and wide. Men, woman, and children from all the near-by towns hurried to the grotto to see the vision. Many believed and many doubted.

Once as Bernadette knelt in prayer before the grotto, the Lady appeared to her and beckoned her to climb the rocks. With her eyes fastened on the vision, Bernadette started up the rocks. In a sweet, clear voice, the Lady told her to wash in the water at her feet. The little child looked around but could see no water. With her hands, she dug a small hole in the ground, and a stream of water bubbled forth. The people who had gathered at the grotto gazed in amazement. They knew that there had been no spring or water near the spot before.

At another time, the Lady in White told Bernadette to have chapel built there in her honor and to have people go in procession to it. This was indeed no easy task. But God saw to it that the chapel was built, and people from all over the world have gone to it in large processions.
Each year, trains bring thousands and thousands of sick, blind, deaf, and lame to Lourdes to seek a cure. They pray before the shrine of the Lady in White and bathe in the pools that are filled with water from Bernadette’s spring. Each year, the sick are cured, the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk. It is God’s way of rewarding them for their faith, and of showing the wonderful power of the Lady in White.

And who was the Lady in White that appeared to Bernadette?

When the little girl asked the Lady her name, she said, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” She was the holy Mother of God who was always free from any stain of sin. It was Mary, then, the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Jesus, who appeared to Bernadette in the grotto at Lourdes, and it is through her help that the wonderful miracles are performed at Lourdes today.