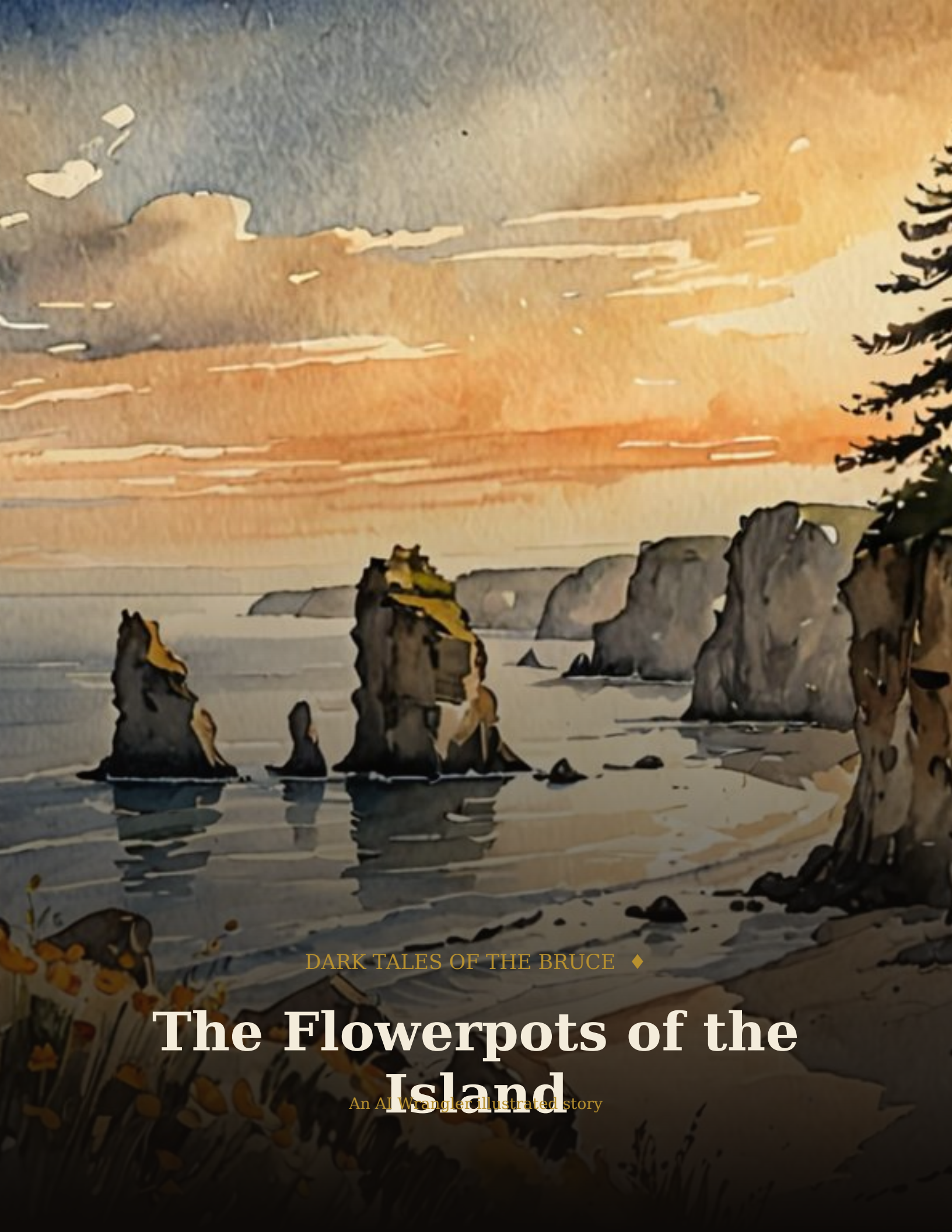




DARK TALES OF THE BRUCE ♦

The Flowerpots of the Island

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Pull your chair around to the fire, friends, and let me carry you north tonight, all the way up the long finger of the Bruce Peninsula to where the land runs out at Tobermory and breaks apart into islands and shoals in the cold green water of Georgian Bay. Out there, a few miles off the harbour, in the clear deep waters they call Fathom Five, sits a wild little island of white cliffs and dark cedar, and on its stony shore stand two strange pillars of rock, taller than a house, shaped for all the world like great stone flowerpots. And there is an old, old story about how they came to be, Carol, a story about two lovers turned forever to stone.



CAROL

Oh, Marty, flowerpots made of rock, out on a lonely island. I have seen the little pictures of them but I never knew there was a tale behind them. Turned to stone. Take me out there, tell me what a person sees when the boat comes around and that island rises up out of the bay.



MARTY

Picture it, Carol. You come out of Tobermory harbour in a small boat, and the mainland falls away behind you, and ahead the water goes from green to a deep clear blue you can see down into for thirty feet and more. And there it is, Flowerpot Island, low and wild, ringed with pale limestone cliffs streaked white and grey, capped with wind-bent cedar and fir clinging to the rock. No village, no farms, just the birds and the wind and the waves working at the stone. And down along the eastern shore, right at the water's edge, stand the two of them, the flowerpots, great columns of rock rising straight up off the beach, wider at the top than they are at the bottom, as if they should topple at any moment and never do.



CAROL

Wider at the top than the bottom. Marty, that sounds like it defies all sense, like something that couldn't stand on its own. How on earth does a pillar of stone come to be shaped like that, out of nothing, in the middle of the water?



MARTY

Ah, now that is the true wonder of the place, Carol, before we ever get to the legend. Those pillars are what the old geologists call sea stacks, and they were carved by time itself, ten thousand years and more of patient, pitiless work. Long ago the whole shore was solid rock, but the softer stone at the base wore away faster than the hard cap of dolostone up top, and the waves and the winter ice and the wind ground at it, year after year, century after century, until they whittled two columns free of the cliff and left them standing alone on the beach, broad-capped and narrow-waisted, like flowerpots with something growing out of the top. The little one stands about twenty-three feet tall, the big one better than thirty. And the peninsula people, Carol, looking at those two stones standing side by side through all the ages, they told a story to explain them. They always do.



CAROL

They always do, and thank goodness for it. Two stones standing side by side, close together for all those years. Marty, I think I can already feel where this is going, and I want to hear it just the way the old folks told it.



MARTY

Then here it is, Carol, the way the peninsula has carried it down, and I'll tell it the old way, respectful, for its roots run deep in the Indigenous peoples of this water long before any of us came. They say that long ago there were two young people, a young man of one nation and a young woman of another, two peoples who were forbidden to each other, whose families would sooner see war than see them wed. But the two of them had met, and they had loved, the way the young will, against all sense and all the rules laid down for them. And when it was forbidden absolutely, when there was no place on all the mainland they could be together, they did the only thing left to them. In the dark, they took a canoe, and they pushed off from the shore, and they fled across the open water toward that lonely island where no one would follow.



CAROL

Oh, Marty. Two of them alone in a little canoe in the dark, out on that big cold bay, with everyone they knew set against them. That water can turn on you so fast. I'm afraid for them out there already.



MARTY

You are right to be, Carol. Because the bay does not forgive, and the story says that as they paddled for the island a great storm came up against them, black and sudden, the way the storms come on Georgian Bay. Some of the old tellers say it was only the wind and the waves that caught them. Others say it was more than weather, that a spell was laid on them, a curse from the ones they had defied, called down to keep them apart forever. But all of them agree on how it ended. The two lovers were caught, out there within sight of the island they had run to, and in that moment they were turned to stone. And there they have stood ever since, Carol, the two flowerpots, side by side on the shore, never again to be parted, and never, ever, to be joined.



CAROL

Side by side but never joined. Marty, that is the saddest and the most beautiful thing, that they got their wish and their punishment in the very same breath. To be together for a thousand years, close enough to see, and never once able to reach across. Do the old folks say they are still, in some way, alive out there?

MARTY

The old folks say a great many things, Carol, and I'll not claim there's one true version, for the story belongs to the people who first told it, and it has as many shapes as there are fires to tell it round. But they will tell you the two stones keep each other company through the long nights, and that on a still evening you might feel something out there, a kind of watching, a patience older than the lightstation, older than the shipwrecks. And oh, Carol, the shipwrecks. Because this island has kept more than the lovers. Those same waters that turned the two to stone have swallowed ships beyond counting.

CAROL

Shipwrecks, Marty. So the danger in the legend was a real danger all along. Tell me about the ships, and about the sailors, out there on that hard shore.

MARTY

These are killing waters, Carol, the shoals of Fathom Five, ledges of rock lurking just under the surface waiting to tear the bottom out of a schooner in the dark. For a hundred years and more the boats came to grief here, and some of those wrecks lie yet in the cold clear water below the flowerpots, timbers and hulls preserved in the icy deep. There are caves, too, worn into the island's cliffs high above where the water once stood, and the old stories say shipwrecked sailors crawled up out of the freezing bay and sheltered in those cold stone hollows, waiting and praying for a sail. And in time, to stop the killing, they built a little lightstation out on the rocks at the island's end, a lonely light and its keepers set there to warn the ships off the deadly shoals in the black and the fog.

CAROL

A single light out on the rocks, and a keeper alone with it, and those two stone lovers just along the shore. Marty, what a lonely and beautiful place to keep a watch. And you said people go down to the wrecks even now?

MARTY

They do, Carol. Today that whole stretch of water is a protected place, the first of its kind in the country, and in the summer the divers come, slipping down through that impossibly clear cold water to move among the old wrecks like ghosts visiting ghosts. And others come just to walk the island, to stand on the stony shore and crane their necks up at the two flowerpots, and to feel that strange hush the place carries. It is eerie, Carol, and it is beautiful, the white cliffs and the black cedar and the wind, and always those two stone pillars standing at the water's edge. Because whatever brought them there, whether the slow hand of the ice or the old curse in the story, they have kept their watch a long, long time, and they are keeping it still tonight, side by side above the dark water, two lovers turned to stone who will never be parted and never be joined. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I'll be thinking of those two out on their lonely island, standing together in the wind and the spray while the storms come and go and the divers drift among the wrecks below. Hold the one you love close while you can, don't let the small forbidding things of this world keep you apart, and always, always come back to the fire.