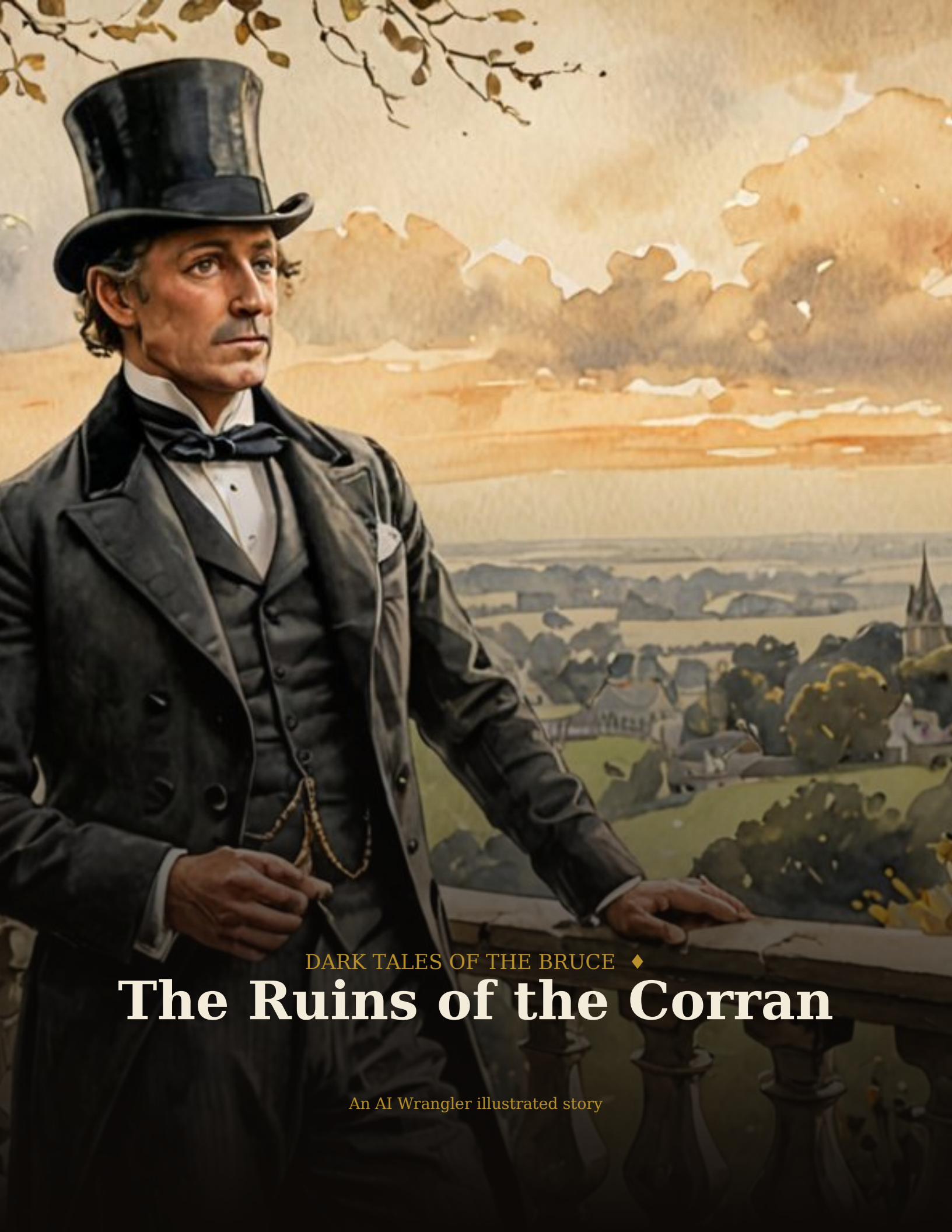




DARK TALES OF THE BRUCE ♦

The Ruins of the Corran

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Draw up close to the fire tonight, friends, because this tale comes to us off the Bruce Peninsula, from the high stone shore of Georgian Bay just above the little town of Wiarton, where the wind comes in cold off the great blue water and the cedars lean away from it. Up on a sweeping bluff there, hidden now in the trees of a quiet conservation land, stand the ruins of a grand old mansion. Roofless it is, and hollow, with the ivy climbing its towers and the forest creeping back over its terraces. They call it the Corran. And this, Carol, is the tale of the proud man who built it, and of the great dream he left to the ghosts.

CAROL

The Corran. Marty, I have driven that shore and never once knew a great house stood ruined up in those woods. A proud man's dream gone to ivy and ghosts — oh, I have to hear the whole of it. Who was he, this man who built himself a mansion on a bluff above the bay?



MARTY

His name was Alexander McNeill, Carol, and he was an Irishman, born to an old family in the north of Ireland, a gentleman raised among stone halls and green hills. He came out to Canada in the eighteen-eighties, a man of ambition and standing, and he looked at that wild high shore above Georgian Bay and he saw something no one else could see. He saw a great house. He saw towers and terraces and gardens, a family seat that would stand for a hundred years. And he named it the Corran, after his family's old home back in Ireland, so that a piece of the old country would rise again on this new Canadian cliff.

CAROL

After his family's home in Ireland. Marty, there is something in that already that catches at me — a man carrying the name of the place he left, laying it down like a foundation stone on the far side of the ocean. What was it like, the house he raised up there?



MARTY

Oh, it was a marvel, Carol. He built it of stone, great grey blocks of it, in the grand baronial style, with a high square tower and steep gables and long windows looking out over the water. There were terraces cut into the bluff, and gardens laid out with care, flower beds and walks and fine trees planted. Inside were rich furnishings, heavy drapery, books and paintings, the warm glow of lamplight on polished floors. And Alexander McNeill was no idle squire, either. He became a Member of Parliament, Carol, a man of affairs, and the Corran was to be the proud seat of a family dynasty that would carry his name down the generations.

CAROL

A Member of Parliament, and a great stone house full of fine things, and gardens on a cliff above the bay. Marty, it sounds like the man had everything a heart could want. So what went wrong? A dream that grand — how does it come to be a roofless ruin in the woods?



MARTY

Ah, Carol, that is the sorrow at the heart of it, and it is an old, old sorrow. It went the way that so many grand dreams go. Slowly. Quietly. A little at a time, so that no one living in it could quite say when the tide had turned. The great house was costly to hold, you see. Stone and towers and terraces and gardens on a windswept cliff take a fortune to keep, and fortunes fade. The years passed, and the old man grew old, and the world changed around him. The bright hopes of a dynasty, all those grand plans for the family that would fill those rooms forever — they thinned. They faded like lamplight burning low.

CAROL

Like lamplight burning low. Oh, Marty. So the house that was built to hold a hundred years of family began to empty out even while he lived in it. What became of them all, the family he built it for?



MARTY

One by one, Carol, they went. That is the way of these things. There were deaths, as there are in every family, and there were departures, the young ones drawn off to the cities and the wider world, away from the cold and the quiet of that high shore. The old man himself died at last, full of years, and the great house passed on, but there was no one left with the will or the wealth to hold it as it had been. The fine furnishings went. The lamps went dark. The gardens, that had been tended so lovingly, began to run wild. And the Corran, that proud stone dream, was left to stand empty on its bluff with only the wind and the bay for company.

CAROL

Empty on the bluff with only the wind. Marty, I can hardly bear to picture those long windows dark and no lamp behind them. And then the years just — took it? The way years take everything left alone?



MARTY

The way years take everything, Carol. First the roof. A great house with no one to mend it, the winters came down hard off the bay, and the roof gave way and fell in. And once the roof is gone, the rest follows fast. The rain came into those fine rooms. The floors rotted and fell. The ivy, Carol — the ivy found the stone and climbed it, wound up the tower and over the empty windows, pulling the great house slowly back down into the earth. The forest crept in over the terraces, cedars rooting in the old garden walks, until you could walk right up on those ruins in the trees and hardly know a proud man's mansion had ever stood there.

CAROL

The ivy pulling it down into the earth. That is such a mournful thing, Marty, a whole grand life just going green and quiet under the trees. But you promised me ghosts at the start, and I felt the chill of it. What do they say, the people up on that shore? What walks in the Corran now?



MARTY

They do tell things, Carol, the folk around Wiarton, the way folk always will about a great empty ruin where a proud family once lived and lost everything. They say the house never quite let go of its people. They say that if you come to the ruins at dusk, when the light goes grey and the wind drops, you might look up at one of those empty stone windows, where no glass has been for a hundred years, and see a pale figure standing there, looking out over the bay as if watching for a ship that isn't coming. Some say they've heard footsteps in the roofless halls, boots on floors that rotted away long ago, and voices low and indistinct, as though the family were still at their evening talk in rooms that are open now to the sky.

CAROL

A pale figure at a window with no glass, watching the bay. Oh, Marty, that is the loneliest thing I ever heard. Is it him, do they think? The old man himself, still keeping his house?



MARTY

Some say it is him, Carol, Alexander McNeill still walking his towers, unwilling even in death to give up the dream he built with his own pride and his own fortune. But there is another they speak of, and this is the one that stays with me. They tell of a lady in the garden — down among the overgrown walks at dusk, a woman in old-fashioned dress, moving slow among the wild roses and the fallen stones, as though she were still tending flowers that died a century ago. And people who have felt her there say it isn't a frightening thing, exactly. It is a sad thing. A sense that the proud house and the people who loved it never entirely left, that some part of them is bound to that shore forever, keeping a great dream that the world let fall.

CAROL

A lady tending flowers that died a hundred years ago. Marty, I don't think I'll shake that picture loose for a long while. It's beautiful and it's so terribly sad, both at once.



MARTY

That is the whole of it, Carol, and that is why I love this tale. It is not a story of murder or of monsters. It is a story of ambition, and of grandeur, and of loss — of a proud man who crossed an ocean to raise a stone dream on a cliff, and gave it his family's name, and meant it to stand forever. And forever turned out to be a roof that fell and an ivy that climbed and a forest that came quietly back. So if you are ever up on the Bruce, friends, and you walk the trail into those ruined stone walls at dusk, be gentle with the place. Look up at the empty windows, and out at the wide blue bay, and remember the proud man who dreamed it all. But if you see a pale face watching from the tower, or a lady among the wild roses — let them be. They are only keeping the house. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I'll be thinking of that grey house on the bluff and the dream that went to ivy, and the lady still tending her lost garden in the dark. Be proud of the things you build, but hold your people closer than your walls, and when the great dreams fade, as they will, be tender with the ruins. Keep the ones you love close, and always, always come back to the fire.

