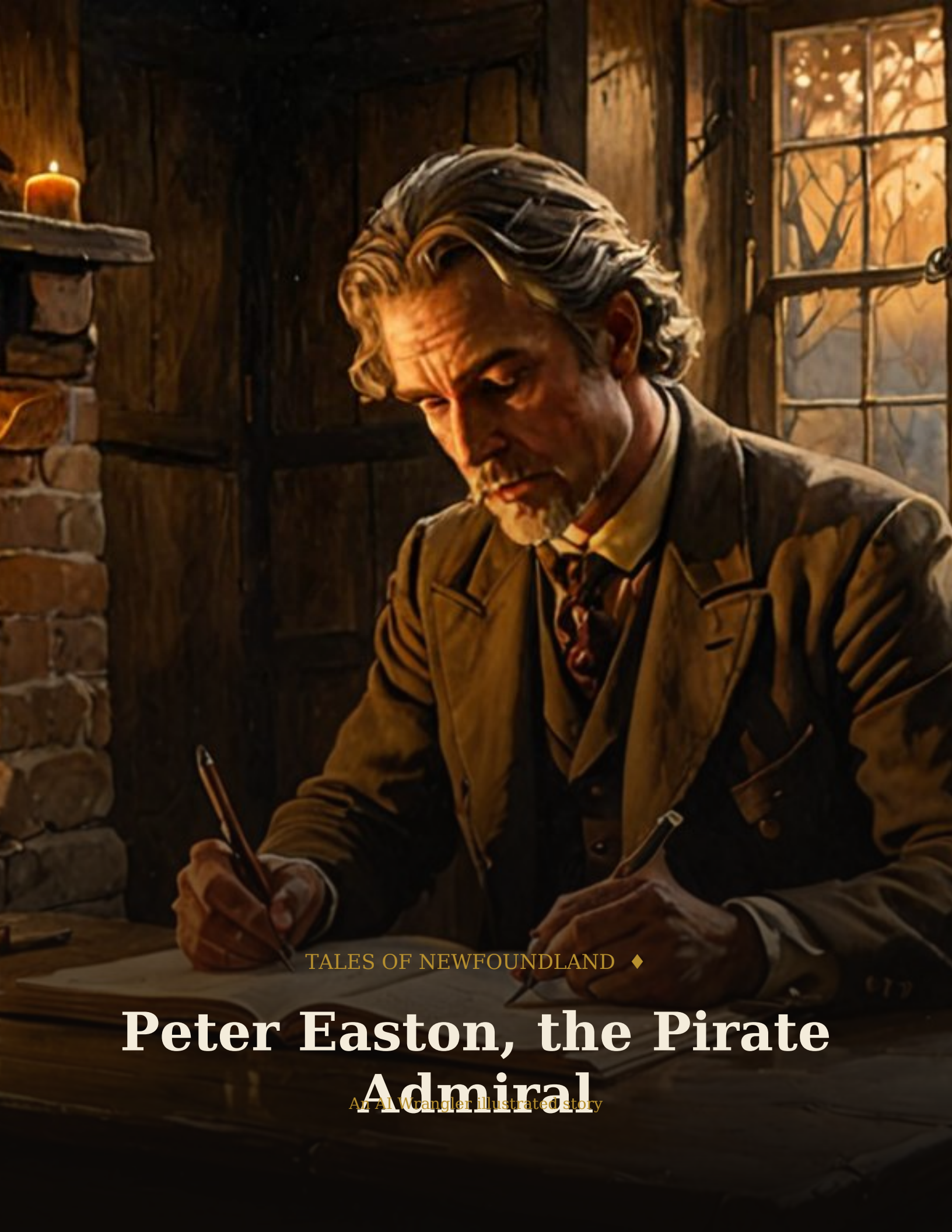




TALES OF NEWFOUNDLAND ♦

Peter Easton, the Pirate Admiral

An Al Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Welcome back to the fire, friends. We have had some heavy nights on the Rock, so tonight let us lighten the sail a little, and tell you about a pirate. Not a scruffy, doomed sort of pirate, mind you. A pirate so successful, so powerful, that he ruled the whole coast of Newfoundland like a king, was never once defeated, and retired rich as a lord to a castle in the south of France. His name was Peter Easton, and they called him the Pirate Admiral.



CAROL

A pirate who retired to a castle and never lost. Marty, that is not how pirate stories usually end. I am already rooting for the rascal.



MARTY

Most people are, Carol. Peter Easton began, in the early sixteen hundreds, as a respectable English privateer, sailing with the Queen's blessing to harry Spanish ships. But when the old queen died and the new king made peace with Spain, Easton was suddenly out of a job, and a man with ships and crews and a taste for plunder does not simply take up farming. So Easton turned pirate, and he sailed his fleet across the ocean to Newfoundland, where the real treasure of the age was not gold at all. It was fish.



CAROL

Fish, Marty. A pirate who came for the fish. Now that is a Newfoundland pirate.



MARTY

The most Newfoundland pirate there ever was, Carol. Because in those days the cod fishery off Newfoundland was one of the richest enterprises in the whole world, hundreds of ships from England and France and Portugal, hauling up wealth from the Grand Banks every summer. And Peter Easton looked at all those ships, and all those tough, skilled, poorly-paid fishermen, and he saw an empire waiting to be taken. He set himself up at Harbour Grace, in Conception Bay, and he built forts, and he took control of the fishery itself. He taxed the ships. He took supplies, and cannon, and above all men.



CAROL

He recruited the fishermen, Marty? To be pirates?



MARTY

By the hundreds, Carol. And here is the thing that people forget about piracy. To a poor fisherman working himself half to death for almost nothing, a charming, victorious pirate captain offering adventure and a real share of the plunder was a mighty tempting offer. Easton is said to have taken on hundreds of Newfoundland fishermen into his crews, and with them he grew so strong that no one could touch him. He had a fleet of ten ships or more. He ruled the Newfoundland coast completely. Warships were sent to stop him, and he defeated them or bought them off. For a few years, Carol, Peter Easton was, in every way that mattered, the master of Newfoundland.



CAROL

The master of Newfoundland, a pirate. Marty, did no one ever bring him down?
That is usually where these stories turn dark.



MARTY

And here is the delicious part, Carol. No one ever did. Easton was too strong and too clever to be beaten, and too smart to keep pushing his luck forever. He raided down to the Caribbean, he plundered Spanish treasure, he grew fabulously rich. And then, when he had enough, he did the thing almost no successful pirate ever manages. He quit. He got out. He is said to have twice been offered a royal pardon, and he took his fortune and his fleet and sailed to the Mediterranean, to the Duchy of Savoy, and he bought respectability. He became a nobleman, a Marquis, and he settled into a fine palace and lived out his days as a wealthy gentleman, having gone from privateer to pirate king to lord, and never once paying the pirate's usual price at the end of a rope.



CAROL

He retired a Marquis. Marty, that is outrageous. Crime paid, and paid handsomely, and he got away clean. But surely, being a Newfoundland pirate, he must have left some treasure buried somewhere?

MARTY

Ah, Carol, now you are speaking the language of the island. Because of course, wherever a rich pirate walked, the legends of buried treasure sprang up behind him like footprints, and Peter Easton's are among the best. They say he buried chests of Spanish gold on the islands of Conception Bay, on Kelly's Island most famously, and folks have dug those shores for four hundred years hoping to strike the Pirate Admiral's hoard. Has anyone found it? Well, Carol, if they had, we would not still be telling the story. But every so often, someone in Conception Bay turns up an old coin, and the whole legend catches fire again, and the shovels come out.

CAROL

The shovels come out. I love that, Marty. So he may still be down there in the ground, his gold, waiting. Why do you think Newfoundland is so fond of a pirate who basically robbed it blind?

MARTY

Because he was one of theirs, in a way, Carol, and because he won. Newfoundland's history, as we have seen these nights, is so full of hard endings, of the ice and the war and the sorrow, that there is a real joy in a story where a bold rogue takes on the whole ocean and the great powers of the world and beats them all and sails off laughing to a castle. Peter Easton is not a hero, Carol. He was a pirate, a thief, a taker of ships and men. But he was a magnificent one, and he reminds the island that its waters were once ruled not by kings and empires, but by a clever fellow with a fast ship and a good crew of Newfoundland fishermen. There is a wink in that story, and the Rock has always loved a good wink. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am tipping my hat to the Pirate Admiral, safe in his castle with his ill-gotten gold. Hold your people close, keep one eye on the horizon, and come back to the fire.