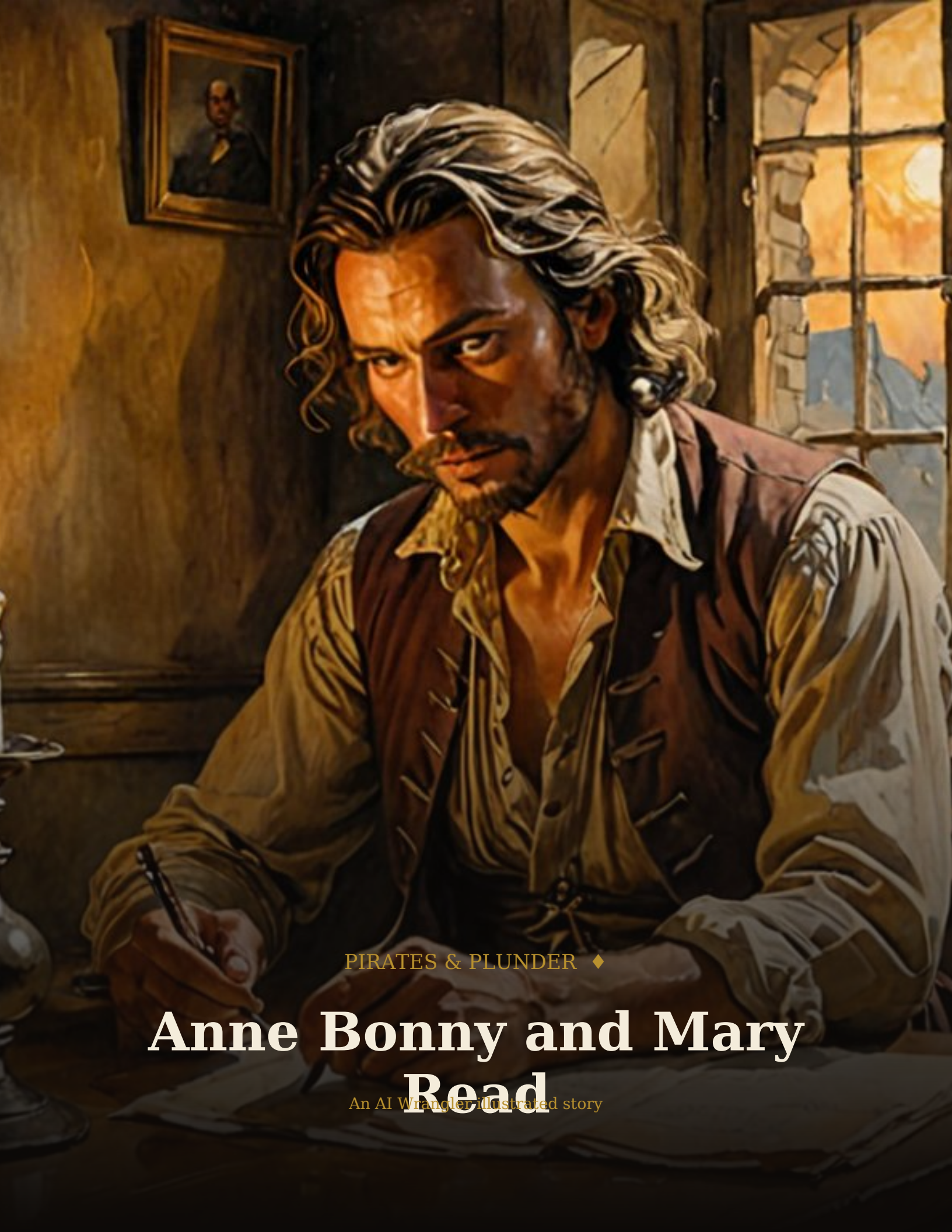




PIRATES & PLUNDER ♦

Anne Bonny and Mary Read

An AI Wrangler-illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Come in close, friends, for tonight's tale has two hearts to it, and both of them belonged to women, in a world that swore a woman had no place on a fighting ship at all. In the year seventeen twenty, on the sunlit water off Jamaica, when a crew of pirates was cornered at last, it was two women who stood and fought while the men hid below. Their names were Anne Bonny and Mary Read, Carol, and they are the most famous women pirates who ever lived.

CAROL

Two women fighting while the men hid. Oh, Marty, I have been waiting my whole life to have this one told properly. Where do we start, with which of them?



MARTY

Let us start with Anne Bonny, Carol, a fierce, red-haired Irishwoman who had crossed to the American colonies as a girl. She had a famous temper, and she made a poor marriage to a small-time sailor, and the two of them drifted to the pirate haven of Nassau in the Bahamas. And there, in that lawless port, Anne met a flashy, charming pirate captain named John Rackham, whom everyone called Calico Jack for the bright printed cotton clothes he loved to wear. Anne left her husband, threw in her lot with Calico Jack, and went to sea as a pirate, fighting and drinking and plundering right alongside the men.

CAROL

She simply walked out of one life and into a pirate's. Marty, the nerve of her. And where does Mary Read come into it? Was she already aboard?



MARTY

She came later, Carol, and her story is stranger still, for Mary Read had spent much of her whole life disguised as a man. Her mother had dressed her as a boy in childhood for reasons of inheritance, and Mary took to it. As a young woman she served as a soldier in the army in men's clothes, and fought bravely, and even fell in love and married. But when her husband died she put the men's clothes back on and went to sea, and by chance the ship she sailed on was taken by

Calico Jack's pirates, and Mary, still believed by all to be a man, joined the crew.

CAROL

So there were now two women aboard, and only one of them knew it. Marty, how on earth did they find each other out?



MARTY

Ah, this is the delicious part, Carol. Anne Bonny, who did not know Mary Read was a woman, took a great liking to this handsome young sailor and began to make advances. And Mary, to fend her off, quietly revealed the truth, that she too was a woman in disguise. And instead of jealousy there grew a fast and fierce friendship between them, two women keeping each other's secret in the middle of a pirate crew. Calico Jack, the story goes, grew jealous of all the time Anne spent with this young sailor, until she let him in on the secret too, to keep the peace.

CAROL

A friendship forged out of a misunderstanding, in the one place you would least expect it. Marty, I love them already. Were they only along for the ride, or did they truly fight?



MARTY

They truly fought, Carol, and by every account they fought harder than the men. When there was boarding to be done, when the pistols and the cutlasses came out, Anne Bonny and Mary Read were in the thick of it, cursing and swinging with the best of the crew, and the sailors who survived to testify said as much in court. These were not passengers. These were pirates in full, as bloody and bold as any man on that deck. And for a season they had the run of the Caribbean, small prizes and good living, until the law came for Calico Jack's little ship.

CAROL

And here we come back to where you began, Marty, the day they were cornered. Tell me about the fight off Jamaica.



MARTY

It was late in seventeen twenty, Carol, and a pirate hunter named Jonathan Barnet came upon Calico Jack's sloop in the night, anchored off the Jamaican coast. And the men of the crew, Carol, including the flashy captain himself, had been drinking hard, deep in their cups, and when the fight came they were useless. They scrambled down into the hold to hide and left the deck to whoever would hold it. And who held it? Two women. Anne Bonny and Mary Read stood on that open deck and fought Barnet's boarders, firing and slashing, and it is said that Mary Read, in a fury at the cowards below, fired her pistol down into the hold at her own hiding crewmates and cursed them to come up and fight like men.

CAROL

She fired at her own crew for hiding. Marty, that is rage and courage both, and it tells you everything about what she thought of those men. But two against a boarding party, they could not win.



MARTY

They could not, Carol. They were overwhelmed and taken, the whole crew, and hauled to Jamaica to stand trial. Calico Jack and the men were swiftly condemned to hang. And there is a line, Carol, that has come ringing down the centuries. On the morning Calico Jack was to be executed, he was allowed to see Anne Bonny one last time. And she looked at the man she had run away to sea with, now bound for the gallows, and instead of tears she gave him this. She said she was sorry to see him there, but if he had fought like a man, he need not have hanged like a dog.

CAROL

If he had fought like a man, he need not hang like a dog. Oh, Marty. Cold and true and unforgettable. She had more iron in her than the whole crew. So the men hanged. What became of the two women?



MARTY

Here the tale turns, Carol, because the two women were not hanged with the men, and for a very particular reason. When they were sentenced, both Anne Bonny and Mary Read declared that they were with child. And the law of the time would not hang an unborn babe for its mother's crimes, so their executions were stayed. It was called pleading the belly. And that plea, Carol, is very likely what saved their lives, at least for a while.

CAROL

Even at the end they found a way to fight, this time with the law itself. Marty, please tell me at least one of them lived.



MARTY

The truth is bittersweet and a little mysterious, Carol, which is only fitting for these two. Poor Mary Read did not last long. She took a fever in the Jamaican prison, some say in childbirth, and she died there behind bars, never to hang and never to go free. But Anne Bonny, Carol, Anne Bonny simply vanishes from the record. There is no account of her execution, none at all. Many believe her wealthy father, back in the colonies, paid to have her quietly released, and that the fierce red-haired pirate lived out a long life under another name, an old woman with an impossible secret in her past. No one knows for certain. She sailed out of history the way she sailed into it, on her own terms.

CAROL

One dies in chains and one disappears free, and we are left not knowing. Marty, in a strange way I love that we do not know, that Anne gets to keep the last secret. What is the meaning you take from the two of them?



MARTY

This, Carol. In an age that told women they were too weak, too soft, too frightened for the hard and violent world of men, two women went to the hardest and most violent corner of it there was, and when the moment of truth came, it was they who stood on the deck and the men who cowered below. I do not hold up their piracy as a virtue, mind. But their courage was real, and it shamed a shipful of men, and three hundred years later we still say their names together, Anne Bonny and Mary Read, when the men who sailed with them are forgotten. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am thinking of two women back to back on a moonlit deck, fighting for their lives while braver-seeming men hid in the dark, and of a fierce old woman who may have kept her secret to the grave. Never let anyone tell you what you are too weak to do, friends, and come back to the fire.