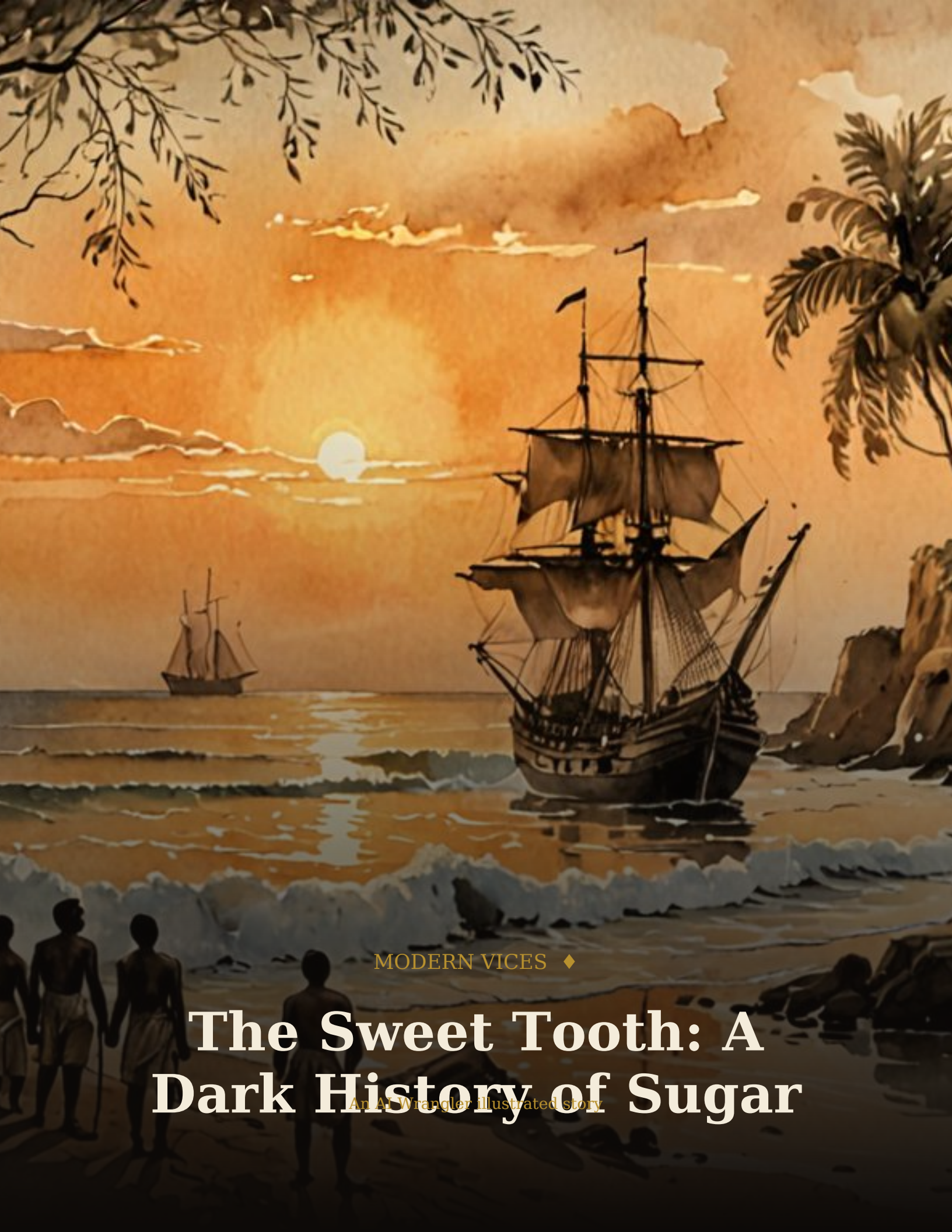




MODERN VICES ♦

The Sweet Tooth: A Dark History of Sugar

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Draw in close for the last of our vices, friends, and it is the one hiding in plain sight, the one nobody ever thinks to call a vice at all, because it is sitting on your table right now and you gave it to your children with a smile. Tonight we tell the dark history of sugar, Carol, the sweetest thing in the world, and how that sweetness was built on suffering, sold on a lie, and got its gentle hooks into very nearly every human being alive.



CAROL

Sugar, a vice. Marty, my first instinct is to laugh, and then I hear the way you said it and I do not want to laugh at all. Surely a spoonful of sugar is not opium or gin.



MARTY

Not in a spoonful, Carol, no, and that is exactly its cunning. Every other vice we have told announces itself. Sugar does not. It is woven so deeply into ordinary life, into celebration and comfort and love itself, that we never see it as the thing it is, a substance the human body craves helplessly and was never meant to have in the flood we now pour into it. But let us begin not with your health, Carol, but with something far darker, because to understand sugar you must understand that for centuries it was one of the cruelest businesses on the face of the earth.



CAROL

One of the cruelest businesses. Marty, I did not expect the story to turn there.
What do you mean?



MARTY

I mean, Carol, that sugar as we know it, cheap and everywhere, was built upon slavery, on a scale of horror that is hard to hold in the mind. Sugarcane grew in the hot islands of the Caribbean and the Americas, and cutting and crushing and boiling it was brutal, deadly labor. And to do that labor, Europe carried millions upon millions of enslaved Africans across the ocean in chains, and worked vast numbers of them to death in the cane fields and the boiling houses, where the work was so lethal that the plantations had to keep importing more human beings simply to replace the ones who died. For a long stretch of history, Carol, sugar was quite literally sweetened with human lives, and the whole comfortable world of Europe sipped it in its tea and did not ask how it came.



CAROL

Sweetened with human lives while the world stirred it into its tea. Marty, that is a horror I never once thought of, standing at the sugar bowl. So the vice was a crime long before it ever touched our health.



MARTY

Long before, Carol, and it made kingdoms rich. Sugar was once a rare luxury, a spice for the wealthy, and then that vast and terrible plantation machine made it cheap enough for everyone, and the human appetite did the rest. For we are built to love sweetness, Carol. In the wild world of our ancestors, sweet meant ripe fruit, meant safe, meant energy, a rare and precious find, and so nature wired us to grab it whenever we could. That instinct served us well for a hundred thousand years when sweetness was scarce. But then we learned to make it by the shipload, and suddenly an ancient craving meant to help us find a berry was turned loose in a world of endless candy, and the wiring that once saved us began, quietly, to harm us.



CAROL

An old hunger for a rare treat, let loose in a world where the treat is everywhere.
Marty, that is the trap in a single sentence. So it slipped into everything?



MARTY

Into very nearly everything, Carol, and here is the modern part of the tale. As food came to be made in factories rather than kitchens, sugar was found to be a kind of magic ingredient, cheap, and it made almost anything taste better and sell better, and so it was poured not just into the obvious sweets but into bread, into sauces, into soups, into savory things you would never suspect, hidden under a dozen different names on the label. A person today can swallow great quantities of it without ever once reaching for the sugar bowl, because it has been folded invisibly into the very food. And all the while, Carol, the harm was mounting, the slow diseases of too much sweetness spreading through whole populations.



CAROL

Hidden in the very bread, under names you would not recognize. Marty, that is exactly the snake-oil sin, the danger you cannot see on the label. But surely, once the harm was known, someone raised the alarm?

MARTY

Ah, Carol, and here the story rhymes with the cigarette in a way that should trouble us. As the science began, decades ago, to point at sugar as a real culprit in the great modern diseases of the heart and the body, there is good evidence that the sugar industry did not simply accept the blame. It is documented, Carol, that the industry quietly funded research and influential scientists in a way that helped steer the finger of blame away from sugar and toward other things, chiefly fat, so that for a whole generation people earnestly cut the fat from their diets while the sugar, the quieter culprit, poured in unchecked and even celebrated as the wholesome choice. It was not a gangster with a gun, Carol. It was studies and reports and respectable men in suits, gently pointing the public the wrong way.

CAROL

They pointed a whole generation at the wrong villain, on purpose, with science for hire. Marty, that is the tobacco playbook exactly, manufacturing doubt and

misdirection. It is almost worse for being so quiet and so respectable.

MARTY

It is the same family of sin, Carol, and that is why I saved sugar for last, to close the circle. Because sugar gathers up every lesson of the whole season into one bowl on the kitchen table. It has the slavery and the empire of the opium trade, a comfort for the many built on the agony of the few. It has the ancient human weakness of the gin craze, a real hunger the world learned to exploit. It has the hidden danger of the snake-oil bottle, folded invisibly into your daily bread. And it has the cold, modern misdirection of the cigarette, an industry nudging the science to keep you unsure and buying. All of it, Carol, in the sweetest and most innocent-seeming thing you own.

CAROL

Every lesson of the season in one sugar bowl. Marty, I will never look at it the same way. And yet, unlike gin or opium, we cannot exactly ban it, can we. It is in everything, and it is also in birthday cake and grandmother's kitchen.

MARTY

And there, Carol, is the final and gentlest lesson of the whole season, the one I most want to leave you with. Not every vice is a monster to be slain. Sugar is woven into love and celebration and memory, into the cake and the holiday and the treat a grandparent slips a child, and there is real sweetness in that, in every sense. The answer to a vice like this is not fear and not banishment, but eyes open, the plain knowledge of what it is and where it hides and who profits from your not knowing. A vice you can see clearly, Carol, you can live alongside. It is the vice you have been taught not to see at all that quietly runs your life. And so we end our season not with a warning to be afraid, but with an invitation to look, honestly, at the sweet and hooking things we love. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am thinking of all the lives poured into that ordinary sugar bowl, and how the most dangerous vice of all may be the one we were taught was harmless. Keep your eyes open, love your small sweetnesses honestly, and always, always come back to the fire.