

# A City of Secrets

by Ruby

(Spring 1995)

Vincent had stopped in to see how Michael was settling into his new apartment. The windows were open, letting in that April breeze that was half spring, half winter's last breath. Vincent chuckled to remember that as a Tunnel child Michael was well used to colder living spaces. A singer's voice poured out from the small CD player in the corner. A rich profusion of piano vamps, guitar riffs, and choral accompaniment supporting her. Michael nodded at Vincent's attention going to the music.

"It's a song from a movie that came out last summer. The movie was okay, but I really loved the song they played over the end credits. It's by some guy named Jim something."

"Steinman." Seeing Michael's surprise at being able to identify a piece of contemporary music Vincent went on. "I remember the summer every Helper who had a teenager in the house had Meatloaf's *Bat Out of Hell* playing somewhere. Steinman produced that one too. His is a very distinctive sound."

"Well, I definitely want to hear more from him after this. Let me get us something to drink." Michael walked to the tiny kitchen to fix two cups of tea and Vincent let the music wash over him. The singer's voice pounding into the hardwood floor and the melody unlocking memories...

*"I've been looking for an original sin..."*

He was back in that black yawning mouth of the After. The After. What he came to call the immediate Hell after Catherine was taken from him. The nights of endless searching. The city grew colder, crueler with every place she was not in. And finally finding her, too late. Too late to save either of them.

*"It's not enough to make the nightmares go away..."*

And the After stretched its mouth into a scream of triumph, that tumbled him flailing into the cavern where she'd lead him out of his madness, at the ultimate cost of her own life. Then the vision of a child, a child he couldn't believe in. Not just yet. He'd never told anyone that. He searched for the child because Catherine had asked him to. Because she was not Gone if he could find the child. But the child could not be found. But there were buildings to burn and annihilation to run to.

*"A city of shadows, a city of lies..."*

And then like a flame in the night she'd come. Diana. Diana with the hair like a river of copper and the eyes that saw through veils of every kind of deceit and subterfuge, to what lay beneath. Who warned him of his doom, if he continued down this path. Who saved him. Who found the child. Who shot the man who killed his mother. Who spared him that, to let his soul not be tarred by one more death. Who stood there at the naming ceremony nervous and feeling out of place.

*"All I needed was a spot in the light..."*

Diana. Who he loved for saving him. For finding the child. Jacob. The child had a name thanks to her. And with that name, he began to let himself believe the child was his. That this perfect child could have come from him. Diana who stayed away unless invited. Diana who waited on her rooftop looking more and more pensive. Diana with the one shoulder exposed from a too big sweater. Artemis at her bath. You were punished for looking at Artemis exposed. He saw her one night and wanted to take her in that moonlight, and the shame of that thought nearly tore him in two. He knew he could never see her again.

*"The moon is down, the natives are so restless tonight..."*

But he couldn't stay away. And they began to hunt together. She had resigned from the department and gone into private consultation. And he was her silent partner. The arm that acted out the Huntress' justice, as they protected the vulnerable from the powerful. And he began to forgive himself his longing. He began to see that Catherine had left him with the gifts of a child and the knowledge he could love fully as a man. And Diana stopped waiting. It was another night where the moonlight painted everything on the

roof silver. She placed his hands on her shoulders and looked at him, without pleading, without demand. And he slipped her long simple dress off like water and brought her into the dark folds of his cape.

Michael returning with mugs of tea interrupted his reverie and he was grateful for the return to the immediate reality of this room and his companion. Music had that effect on him, and while he cherished its ability to give his imagination wings, he had to be careful of the places it could open.

He talked some more with Michael and agreed to meet the student he thought could benefit coming Below. He left feeling strangely unsettled by the music, and energized by it as well. The composer would be described by most as “too much” or more politely “bombastic.” But life was rarely quiet. His certainly had been defined by its bombastic moments, great love, great tragedy, the inextricable mixture of the two. For all that life had taken from it, and it had taken much, it had often left him with treasures beyond measure.

He rounded an alley to Eli’s shop. He entered through the back door and heard a familiar laugh at the counter. She was the only person in the shop besides Eli, and he stepped forward to watch her delight as Eli showed her how the vintage radio worked.

Nora saw him watching her.

“Daddy!”

She hopped off the counter and ran to Vincent, her red hair rapidly coming loose from a braid that ran down her back like a stream of copper. He scooped her up and nuzzled her, making her laugh again.

Eli smiled as Vincent nodded and turned for the tunnel entrance hidden in the storage room. His daughter was a welcome weight in his arms, smelling of Mary’s White Shoulders dusting powder. Life could take, but life could give. Maybe that’s why he liked that man’s music, the songs never stopped giving. He made a mental note to ask Michael to make a copy of that song on tape so the next time he was at their loft he could listen to it. Nora rested her head on his shoulder and he quickened his stride from that city of shadows to a secret city where her mother and Jacob waited.

END

*(All quoted lyrics come from “Original Sin” produced, written, and arranged by Jim Steinman. You can listen to Taylor Dane sing it here: <https://youtu.be/CXpWfd1BNkQ>*

*Meat Loaf – Original Sin Lyrics (1995)*

*Songwriter: Jim Steinman ; Original Sin lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group*

I've been looking for an original sin.  
One with a twist and a bit of a spin.  
And since I've done all of the old ones.  
Till they've all been done in.  
Now I'm just looking -  
Then I'm gone with the wind -  
Endlessly searching for an original sin.  
You can dance forever.  
You got a fire in your feet.  
But will it ever be enough?  
You know that it'll never be enough.  
You can fly and never land.  
And never need to sleep.  
But will it ever be enough?  
You know that it'll never be enough.

It's not enough to make the nightmares go away.  
It's not enough to make the tears run dry.  
It's not enough to live a little better every day.  
Everything that they taught us.  
Was nothing but lies.  
Everything that they brought us.  
Was nothing but bribes.

But it'll all be over now -  
All I wanted was a piece of the night.  
I never got an equal share.  
When the stars are out of sight.  
And the moon is down -  
The natives are so restless tonight.

I've been looking for an original sin.  
One with a twist and a bit of a spin.  
And since I've done all of the old ones.  
Till they've all been done in.  
Now I'm just looking -  
Then I'm gone with the wind -  
Endlessly searching for an original sin.

You can lose yourself in pleasure.  
Till your body's going numb.  
But will it ever be enough?  
You know that it'll never be enough?  
You can always take whatever.  
You conceivably could want.  
But will it ever be enough?  
You know that it will never be enough.

It's not enough to make the nightmares go away.  
It's not enough to make the tears run dry.  
It's not enough to live a little better every day.  
Everything that they taught us.  
Was nothing but lies.  
Everything that they brought us.  
Was nothing but bribes.

But the lies are over now -  
All I wanted was a piece of the night.  
It never had to get so dark.  
When the stars are out of sight.  
And the moon is down -  
The natives are so restless tonight.

I've been looking for an original sin.  
One with a twist and a bit of a spin.  
And since I've done all of the old ones.  
Till they've all been done in.  
Now I'm just looking -  
For an original sin.

I've been looking for the ultimate crime.  
Infinite victims, infinitesimal time -  
And I'm so very guilty for no reason or rhyme.  
So now I'm just looking.  
And killing some time -  
Endlessly searching for the ultimate crime.

I've been looking for an original sin.  
One with a twist and a bit of a spin.  
And since I've done all of the old ones.  
Till they've all been done in.  
Now I'm just looking -  
Then I'm gone with the wind  
Endlessly searching for an original sin.

I'm applying for a license to thrill.  
Going out on the edge -  
Moving in for the kill.  
They'll be hell to pay someday.  
So put it all on the bill.

Cause we'll always be paying!  
And paying until -  
We're beyond expiration.  
With a license to thrill.