

Histories
by Samantha Henderson

I only go out when it rains; *they* don't like the rain, not our rain. They don't like garlic or lavender, so I keep sprigs under the doors and windowsills and bulbs in jars. The garlic smells, especially on hot rainless days when I have to keep the doors and windows closed and the blinds drawn. But I'm used to it, and there's no one else to mind, not since Mandy left.

They don't like rainy nights with streetlights pooling the dark, glistening sidewalks.

But rainy nights love the blues.

I fiddle best on rainy nights, when the damp air makes the strings howl like a cat in heat, but since I'm a slave to the weather I can't book ahead. So when the drizzle starts in earnest on these dusky nights I grab my case and wander down the street, three blocks down where the clubs start, and see if they've got a space.

Sometimes they make room when they see me in the doorway, violin case in hand, bumming a smoke from the bouncer, because they know when the night turns from sparkle to velvet and everyone's ready to go home and coil around each other I can spill the chords that make them sit, make them stay, and buy a couple more drinks.

Sometimes when it's so late the night starts to crack I take mercy on the sleepy and the horny and the barmaids and let *their* music creep in. It's always there, under the surface, but mostly I'm stronger than it, especially on rainy nights. Sometimes I can't help but let it come out and play, and dance between the steel and horsehair and rosin. People smile at first, because it's strange and sweet, but soon they shake themselves like rabbits waking up and wander, two by two, out the door.

And then, if it's still raining, I'm safe. If it's cleared, I hurry home quickly, hunched over the canvas case, trying not to look at the graffiti. Some of the spray paint swirls are not so innocent, and they're always the most beautiful, and if I look too long they start to bulge. That means *they're* coming through, to claim their own.

Make your own fucking art, I snarl at the ground, moving on.

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The Violet Men were too much for Mandy. After they came, I learned about the rain and the garlic and how not to look too close at the graffiti. How to keep the music leashed. By then it was too late for her.

I don't write anymore. Threw out all the notebooks after it happened. Now I can only play what's already in my head, or improv when the groove's right, or *their* music when I let it out. Loose sheets of paper seem to be safe; it's the books they wanted. The Histories.

I liked to write on rainy nights back then, while Mandy stretched in the watery light from the window and the hot air from the wall unit. She liked the air warm and dry; I said it was bad for the instruments.

I only have the one, now, my first five-string. I sold the rest, since now I can't rely on a permanent gig.

I always liked the cheap lined notebooks. Maybe if I stuck to score sheets none of this would've happened. But I never could keep track of all the parts if they weren't bound together.

I remember I was scoring the bass line for a blues track for the trio. Percy James, Howard Neil on the ivories and Alice Grey, me, violin, viola, slide. We would've hit it big, with patience, luck and time. I don't even know what the boys are doing now.

I don't even know where Mandy is. I keep hoping to see her in the clubs, sipping a martini at a front table with her tiny ankles crossed and swinging a bit, looking at me with that sideways look and I wouldn't play their music all night, no I wouldn't. I'd play my blues and make them all stay, the waitresses sleeping on their feet, the couples sprawled on the tables like Sleeping Beauty's Castle

