



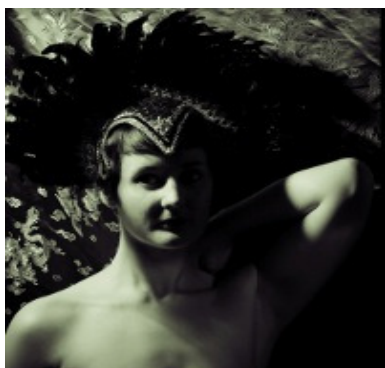
BEAT THE DUST'S HIDDEN TALENT ISSUE

APRIL 2011

Introduction

For the April edition of Beat the Dust, we asked a number of established wordsmiths/editors/academics to nominate a writer/artist they consider either a new, emerging talent at the start of their career, or alternatively a writer who's been plugging away for a while, but for whatever reason hasn't yet got the recognition they deserve. Inspired by the lit agent interest February's Crime/Noir issue got, we're hoping this Hidden Talent issue will help move things forward in some way for a handful of writers. Appearing alongside each piece is the contributor's playlist of songs they'd like to hear if they were in hiding.

Kirsty Logan



Nominated by Ewan Morrison. Here is Kirsty Logan's In Hiding Playlist:

I'm Good, I'm Gone - Lykke Li
Bad Medicine - Liz Green
Lil' Boots - Pet
Smoke And Mirrors - RJD2
Trouble's What You're In - Fink

Incubating

The summer I decided to stop sleeping, the city was drenched with rain and sweat. During the day it fell down on me, sky-warmed, making my toes slide out of my sandal straps and churning the grassy parks into mud. At night it came out of me, itching along my ribs. It felt like flies were walking on my skin; unwelcome visitors I couldn't swat away. Water slid between my shoulder blades, along my top lip, off the tips of my hair. The washing machine rumbled every morning with the night's soaked sheets.

That summer, everyone slept like the dead. The night traffic across the bridge was like the snoring of some giant animal. The dead-hour DJs looped albums so they could doze. The street-lights dimmed and flickered; even they couldn't stay awake. I stood by my kitchen window and sucked on ice cubes. If I started to feel tired, I bit down.

Before that summer, I slept like I was at the bottom of the sea. I needed three alarm clocks to wake me.

Then the dreams came.

Pleasant at first: a man with black eyes and soft hands, touching my skin and kissing my mouth. I'd been single for a while, so I couldn't deny the enjoyment of the dreams, even when they started to escalate. Every night we went a little further until I'd wake at dawn, sweating and exhausted.

In those early days, I felt raw, sexy, like I had been to bed with a stranger. Colleagues teased me about my secret lover and I didn't correct them. I liked my new glow, my mystery.

One night, mid-orgasm, with my legs bent impossibly and blood pumping between my ears, I screamed out a word. Love: the most dangerous four-letter word.

Soon after I discovered that, even in dreams, sometimes I'm not in the mood.

Unfortunately, the man didn't agree. My dreams were so vivid that I woke with reddened thighs and scratches across my chest. I had some strong painkillers left over from a wrist injury and I took a triple dose to drown out my dreams. I awoke exhausted, my mind pulsing with the man's touch. Twenty-five days after the first dream, I decided to stop sleeping.

I must have slept at some point; I read somewhere that you can only live for eleven days without sleep. Finally a friend, noticing my shadowed eyes and clumsy steps, sent me to her doctor. I'd thought he was just a GP, but he made me stare at a metronome and asked me about my childhood. When he mentioned my nightmares, I told him all the stories I could think up. I told him about eight-legged beasties, sitting exams naked, falling from mile-high rooftops.

When I left I dropped the prescription in a puddle outside his office. It's no use when the disease is stronger than the treatment, and handful of pills can't get the better of a man that real.

Still I didn't sleep. Sometimes, in the afternoon heat-haze, I'd blink and realise my eyes wouldn't open again. The man lurked at the edges of my vision, his heavy hands over my eyes. I'd wake with a shout or fall off my chair.

By my third session with the doctor, I was running out of nightmares. I couldn't even remember what normal people dreamed about any more, and my exhausted brain refused to invent new terrors to tell him about.

And still I didn't sleep. My fingers started twitching, spilling drops from my coffee cup onto the carpet. Words jumped across the page as I tried to read them. I couldn't tell if traffic lights were red or green; I just crossed my fingers and drove quickly through them.

After five sessions with no progress, the doctor asked me out. At the restaurant he ordered me dinner then invited me back to his place. The sex was like watching a porn film: unreal and too real, out of focus and full of close-ups. This time it would be easy: all I had to do was avoid four-letter words.

Afterwards, I slept. I slept gloriously, languidly, solidly. Beside me, the doctor looked like he belonged in a piazza: marble-cold, marble-still. I pressed my back against his. I wanted to absorb his cold, but I would settle for him taking my heat.

I woke at midday to a note on the pillow and breakfast on the counter. I called in sick and stayed in the doctor's bed, eating waffles and reading his out-of-date magazines.

The days smelled of rain: fresh like pepper and snow. The nights were dense with the tang of sweat: fruit peel and flowers starting to rot. The city festered, but still the doctor's skin smelled of nothing.

I saw the doctor a few times a week after that. My colleagues started teasing me again about my mystery lover, so this time I named him. I slept for eight hours every night. I needed three alarm clocks to wake me.

Two weeks later, the doorbell pulled me out of a dreamless sleep. I opened the door and held out my hand for the post, but the skinny man on the doorstep was not holding any envelopes. He had shadows under his eyes and was biting the dry skin off his lips. Suddenly I wished I'd left the chain on the door.

'Yes?'

'Take me back.'

'I'm sorry?' I moved back so that the door was between us.

'Please, my love. Take me back.'

'Just give me the post, or I'll call your supervisor.'

'I love you. Don't do this.'

'I think you have the wrong...' I stared at his face. 'Have we met?'

He laughed, but it turned into a cough. 'Only every night, my love.'

I slammed the door and ran into the kitchen. How could it be him? Oh God, maybe none of it was real. Maybe I never slept. Maybe I never woke. Maybe I'm still stuck with him in that red dream-world, blinded by sweat and sex. And that word. That four letter word, just falling out of his mouth. As if it hadn't changed him. As if it hadn't changed everything.

I turned on the shower as hot as it would go, and stood in the water with my eyes shut. I couldn't even look down; the sight of my bare flesh would bring it all back.

When I walked out of the bathroom, dripping water patterns on the carpet like a Jackson Pollock painting, I stopped breathing. Through the stained glass in the front door, I could see him: leaning on the door-frame, smoking, with his back to me. How long had he been there? Should I call the police? A friend? The doctor?

I put the chain on the door and inched it open.

'What do you want?'

He spun round and flicked his cigarette into the flower-bed. 'You.' He exhaled his lungful of smoke. 'I just want you. I miss you.' He reached out a hand and I pushed the door so that I could only see him out of one eye.

'I don't know who you are and I don't know what you want. You must have me confused with someone else.'

He smiled, his eyes shining. His t-shirt pulled tight across his chest, bulked out by his muscled arms. I saw then that there was no need to be afraid of this man. No need to close a door against him. He didn't want anything from me except to kiss me with that pouting red mouth, put those strong hands around my waist, touch my...

Wait. Red mouth? When I first opened the door, he was biting flakes of skin off his lips. They were pale, thin and unhealthy-looking, like the rest of him. I scrunched my eyes shut so tight that green and orange lines wavered behind my lids. I opened them, properly awake, and stared at his chapped lips and scrawny arms. His smile was gone.

'I'm asking you nicely,' he said.

'Leave me alone.' I slammed the door and stood in the middle of the hall, watching his shadow as he stood on the doorstep.

'You love me!' he shouted through the letterbox. 'You know you do!'

I watched his blurry shape through the stained glass until he skulked off. When I was sure he'd gone, I drove to the doctor's house.

The doctor suggested repressed memories, an overactive imagination. He suggested I'd dreamed the whole thing: a by-product of my insomnia.

'I've been sleeping fine for weeks! Ever since you... since we...'

Even to my ears, it sounded petulant. I stopped talking and just leaned in for a kiss. An inch before our lips met, he slipped a tiny sugared pill onto my tongue. He kept his mouth on mine until I swallowed, then carried me to the bedroom. I barely made it to orgasm before drowning in sleep.

I woke at dawn, shivering with sweat. I felt wet and aching, fever cramps between my legs. My dreams slunk away beneath the sheets.

The doctor was already up, clattering cups in the kitchen. I heard the low mumble of talk radio, the white noise of morning traffic.

I crept like a thief to the bathroom and scrubbed myself in the shower. I had spent the night with another man. I had lain in the doctor's arms and been fucked by a stranger.

The doctor tapped on the bathroom door. I couldn't hear him over the roar of the water, but I could guess what he was saying.

'Everything's fine, honey.' I hoped he couldn't hear the hitch in my voice. 'I'll be right out.'

I managed to dress, eat and kiss the doctor goodbye, all without making eye contact. If he noticed anything amiss, he kept quiet. I left him at the kitchen table, halfway through a newspaper and a pot of tea.

I checked my bag – wallet, keys, phone – and opened the front door. On the doorstep stood a skinny man in a dirty blue tracksuit. He was biting his lips and tapping a cigarette against the door, watching the sparks fly.

'Aren't you going to invite me in?'

I swallowed the waver in my throat. 'If you don't leave in three seconds, I'll call my boyfriend. He's right behind me, he'll easily hear.'

He pressed the cigarette against the door, mashing the tobacco until it crumbled onto the step.

'Won't he find it strange that you invited me round?'

'I've never! All I've ever asked you to do is leave me alone!'

'Darling, you invite me round every night. I'll stop coming when you stop calling.'

He licked his lips and stepped closer. His black suit fitted him perfectly, his tie a shiny knot under his strong, smooth chin. His skin was the perfect shade of two-weeks-in-the-sun; his smile showed teeth Arctic-white. He smelled like a film star, my high-school boyfriend, my father.

I closed my eyes and pressed my knuckles against them, counting my breaths as the colours flashed across my vision. When I looked again, I saw a stained tracksuit, sallow skin, bloodshot eyes.

I locked the front door behind me and stalked to my car without looking back. In the rear-view mirror I saw him sit down on the doctor's doorstep and pull out a cigarette.

Every morning I walk straight past the hollow-eyed tracksuit on my doorstep. I shut the curtains as soon as I get home, blocking the evening sun and his slow stare.

I can make him go. I must be able to, or he wouldn't need to ask. He's still there, but he's fading. Soon he will be gone, and I will sleep.

It's been eight days. I am tired.

Alys Conran

Nominated by Adelle Stripe. Unfortunately we weren't able to get an In Hiding playlist from Alys, but here's Adelle's instead:

Wanted Dead Or Alive – Voices of East Harlem
 Ain't No Sunshine – Sivuca
 Águas de Março – Antonio Carlos Jobim & Elis Regina
 You Never Come Closer – Doris Svensson
 Prophecy (12 Inch Dub) – Fabian

Quench

When they let in the water, her house was already empty. She had packed and taken everything that might float away: the saucepans, the wooden spoons, her psalms, her ornament (that little china figure of a girl, pale and with hair like copper who sat silent beside the photographs on the mantelpiece). She took the photographs too, so that the smiles wouldn't sink, took the chairs, and the people on them, took that even afternoon in June when a bird flew in and rattled like money in the house. She took, or tried to take, an everyday walk up the path to the door, her dress rippling with the air, and with the thrill of awakenings that slip into the cold water now, like a bare girl. The girl sinks, down to where the houses are, where the windows of the houses try to look upwards, pious, and where the ragged doors try to speak, opening and closing slowly into the thick water of the lake. With the unformed words the water's surface ruckles just slightly, like a petticoat. Then it flattens, makes an empty fish skin, stills, makes a round, silver coin.

Rose

You take a scrap of copper, pluck it
 from a pile of dumped remains, pick it
 for something familiar, for those faults,
 the shy dents, which make eyes at you.

You carve it a root, forge it a steel stem,
now work the copper, heat it, and fold it
like a clasped hand to keep hush secrets
safe. Then you tease it to a lively shape
and gently, with pink heat, make it bud.

The Wash

The brisk north-westerly baskets up the steps, huffs,
snaps fresh at sheets, blusters skirts to buckling kites,
pegs sleeves and wrists and cuffs, lashes ankles, sings,
and battening hearts down, strings up to big weather.

Andrew Hurley



Author pic: Jonathan Bean at Litfest

Nominated by Jenn Ashworth. Here's Andrew Hurley's In Hiding Playlist:

Burning Sky - The Jam
When The Levee Breaks - Led Zeppelin
Transmission - Joy Division
Both Sides Now - Joni Mitchell
Motorcycle Emptiness - Manic Street Preachers

The Wheat That Springeth Green (novel extract)

I was nine years old when I first saw someone die. I wasn't scared. I wanted to see it. It was quite reasonable that it should happen to Billy Tapper. The Loney knew that he deserved it.

The Loney. I suppose I ought to start with The Loney, that strange nowhere on the coast between the Wyre and the Lune. It was where we went every Easter time with Father Wilfred in his Volvo, for a week of penitence and prayer in which we would make our confessions, visit Saint Anne's shrine so that Hanny could take the healing waters, and look for God in the emerging springtime, that when it came was hardly a spring at all. Nothing so vibrant and effusive. More the slow, painful miscarriage of winter.

The Loney had its own way of doing things. Its own time. Its own seasons. There was a constancy of rain and wind for most of the year round that flattened everything along the coast, though now and then there were storms so cruel that they lurked in the consciousness of the place like monsters of folklore and grew worse with each retelling.

It was a dangerous place, The Loney; a wild and useless length of English coastline, as desolate as a peacock's wail; a dead mouth that filled and emptied. People drowned. A few every year. Irish fishermen blown off course; day trippers in trunks and rubber rings dragged up from the seaside resorts miles to the south. Inexperienced cocklers would get sucked down by the shifting sandbanks or washed off the causeway that ran a mile or so out to Coldbarrow, a bleak, wind-battered mull cut off twice a day by the tide and made an island.

Every so often a stranger did themselves in and came back weeks later with a green face and skin like lint. In fact, from the stories the locals told it seemed that it had always been a popular place for that sort of thing. You didn't have to listen too long for a tale about a spurned lover bashed to pulp by the swell or an incorrigible debtor rising and falling on the tide as limp as weed.

No one who lived within twenty miles of The Loney went anywhere near the water. They knew that the tides could come in quicker than a horse could run. That it would drag anything that sank out at sea through the currents and channels and leave it on the beach to be whistle-whipped by the wind.

But although nothing human survived there long, people had tried to tame it once. The evidence was everywhere: breakwaters levelled by storms, jetties of stone and wood broken down, their foundations lost in the mud, or pieces left uselessly way out in the sludge as stumps of black timber wigged with moss and weed, perches for herring gulls.

The names of sailors who had died bringing back sugar cane from the West Indies and tallow from Russia still remained chalked onto a low black beam in The Bell & Anchor a few miles away in Little Hagby, the miserable-looking village from which most had come.

Neap tides revealed the bones of animals, people sometimes, the remains of both once – a drover and his sheep cut off and all drowned on the ancient crossing from Cumbria, pushed slowly, for a century or more back inland by the shifting sludge, as if it were proving a point.

Billy Tapper was a local drunk. Everyone knew him. His fall from grace to the bare floor of failure was fixed indelibly into the folklore of the place, and he was nothing short of a gift to people like Mummer and Father Wilfred who used him as easy shorthand for what drink could do to a man. Billy Tapper wasn't a person, but something that happened to you.

We first met him in person in the pebble dashed concrete bus stop on the one road that skirted the coastline. Father wasn't with us. He had gone out early with Father Wilfred and Mr and Mrs Belderboss to look at the stained glass in a church twenty miles away. There was apparently a magnificent example of a Gothic revival window depicting Jesus calming the waters.

We were going to Kendal for the day. So was Billy.

We knew he was called Billy because if the Bells finally dissolved his brain altogether, he had a piece of cardboard around his neck with his name, a telephone number with *sister, Hull* bracketed after it and a note in block capitals that he was allergic to penicillin.

His fingers and his palms were shattered with filth. Every crease and line was brown. Either side of a broken nose, his eyes were twisted deep down into his skull. His hair crawled past his ears, past his neck, which had turned sea-coloured with dozens of tattoos, and mingled with his grey matted merkin of a beard.

He sat half slumped on the bench, a large empty bottle lying on its side on the floor, a small, mouldy-looking potato in his lap that comforted me in a strange way. It seemed right that he should only have a raw potato. It was the kind of thing I assumed down-and-outs ate, nibbling at it bit by bit over weeks as they roamed the highways and byways looking for the next. Scrubbing in the dirt. Stealing what they could. Vagrancy was one continual search for tubers.

He carried on talking to himself for a while, scrunching his pockets, which sounded as if they were full of stones, and complaining bitterly about someone called O'Leary who owed him money and had never given it back to him even though he owned a horse. When he noticed we were there he tried his best to be courteous and sober, offering a grin of three or four twisted black teeth and doffing his beret at Mummer, who smiled briefly but, as she managed to do with all strangers, got the measure of him instantly, and sat in a half revolted, half fearful silence willing the bus to come quicker by staring down the empty road.

Like most drunks Billy by-passed the small talk and handed over his bleeding, broken heart straight off, slapping it into your palm like a lump of raw beef.

'See that scar?' he said, raising his hand and shaking his sleeve down.

A red seam ran from his wrist to his elbow, threading its way through tattoos of daggers dripping blood and melon-chested girls.

'D'you know how I got that?'

I shook my head. Hanny stared.

'Dunkirk. Bone ripped right through it,' he said. 'Thing is, it wasn't even my bone.'

He doubled up in a coughing fit and took off his beret to use as a handkerchief. It had some cockeyed metal, military insignia on the front and, though he had evidently flogged the

silverware long ago, ribbons from various medals were still on his jacket, as a kind of tattered bunting.

Hanny and I couldn't take our eyes off him. We gorged ourselves on his dirtiness, on his brutal, alien smell. It was the same fearful excitement we felt when we happened to drive through what Mummer considered a *bad* part of London and found ourselves lost in a maze of terraces that sat shoulder to shoulder with industrial plants and scrap yards and were held together with clothes lines and menace. We would turn in our seats and gawp out of the windows at the scruffy, staring children - who had no toys but bits of wood and metal torn off the broken furniture dumped in their front yards - and the aproned women screeching obscenities down the street at the men stumbling out of corner pubs. It was a safari park of degradation.

Billy glanced at Mummer and, keeping his eyes on her he reached down into the plastic bag by his feet, brought out a few tatty bits of paper, which he pressed into my hand. They had been ripped out of a dirty magazine. He winked at me and settled himself back against the wall. The bus appeared and Mummer stood up and held out her hand and I quickly stuffed them into my pocket.

'Stop messing about,' said Mummer.

'Sorry, mother.'

'Get Andrew ready,' said Mummer and I started trying to coax Hanny into standing so that we could get on the bus. But he wouldn't move. He was smiling and looking past me at Billy, who by this time had fallen asleep against the wall again.

'What is it, Hanny?'

He looked at me and then back at Billy.

Then I understood what he was staring at: Billy wasn't holding a potato, but his penis.

The bus stopped and we got on. The driver looked past us and whistled at Billy but he didn't wake up and the driver shook his head and pressed the button which drew the door closed. We sat down next to the window and watched the front of Billy's trousers darken.

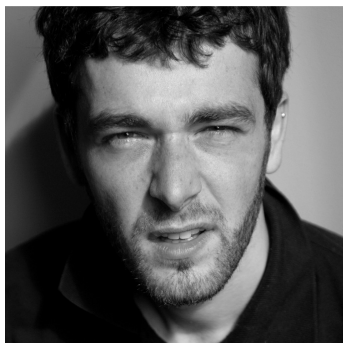
I knew that he was going to die soon. The thought came to me as an already established fact. As though it had already come to pass. No one could possibly live like that for long. Being that filthy took so much effort that it would quickly wear a man out, and I was sure that the same merciful God who sent a whale to save Jonah and gave Noah a nod about the weather, would put such a man out of his misery and bring him to dine with the angels at the Lamb's heavenly banquet, where they presumably served something other than potatoes.

Mummer tutted and peeled our faces away from the window to look at her instead.

'Be warned,' she said, as the bus pulled away. 'That kind of man is already inside you. It won't take more than a few wrong choices to bring him out, believe me.'

She held her handbag on her lap and looked straight ahead. I held the dirty pictures tight in one hand and slipped the other inside my coat and pressed my stomach hard with my fingertips, trying to find the kernel of badness that only needed the right conditions of Godlessness and depravity for it to germinate and spread like a weed.

Jakobe Mansztajn



Nominated by Marek Kazmierski. Here's Jakobe Mansztajn's In Hiding Playlist:

Aim For A Smile - Soulblow
 Tango Till They're Sore - Tom Waits
 Ballad Of A Thin Man - Bob Dylan
 Unbalanced Pieces - Soulsavers
 Sing - Blur

Three poems (translated by Marek Kazmierski)

Narration II

the knife seeks the belly, and so reaches for the hand
 - sage mumbles and reaches for the fags in his pocket.
 queues keep dicing the landscape every minute or so,
 there is a wide, concrete wall, there is the air of peace.
 sage likes this neighbourhood, and so doesn't say much.

leaves rattling in the wind, dispersing the stink
 and the chesterfield mist, a little buddha floating by.
 sage clears his throat and spits. he believes in his pack of
 twenty buddhists, each one willing to give his existence
 for two digits and a sliver of flame.

someone mutters that this poem is short of rhythm.

sage glances at us, incredulous.

any time he falls silent we make a mess of it.

borges owned language and had rhythm on tap, he says.

the train rolls by once more and once more it's quiet

Bottle Caps

caught between gospody and szyprów we collect bottle caps

sifting the sandpit where the smell of beer is strongest

and tossing the sifted finds into emptied cherry bags

later we cut swathes like scissors through paper

collecting penalty points and grains of sand in our eyes

flattening race tracks with stick-thin sticks

in the end we uncap the chilled sunny d

wipe mouths on sleeves and scan for the new

to the left houses formed of clay to the right the other

A Poet Visited By Doubts

cops arrived in the morning, the flat a mess.

I say to them: *that which happened was unnecessary*

and make out as if I am invisible.

it seems to work, seeing as they start looking for me

in cupboards, behind the bed and under the carpet.

eventually, one of them stares deep into my eyes
and I wonder if I know what they are looking for;

I know it's me, and so I tell them, that I've no idea
which has one of them tap me on the head with a nightstick
as if wanting to quickly get the other side of a door

he asks: *what's this?* I tell him that it's blood.

he asks: *what's this?* and shows me something I can't see,
seeing as my eyes are completely covered in blood.

he says it is a covert means of showing self love
and that I'm fucked.

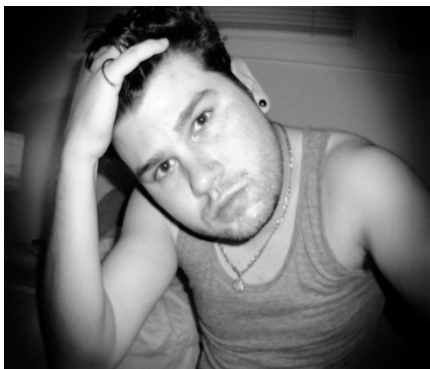
I'm fucked because the flat's a mess,

I answer, words choking my throat like rocks,
getting harder to bring anything up, even sand.

that's a serious metaphor, says one and drags me to the car.

now we are all invisible

Sean McGraw



Nominated by Tony O'Neill. Here's Sean McGraw's In Hiding Playlist:

California Dreamin' - Bobby Womack
 Kickin' Child - Dion
 Joey - Bob Dylan
 Smoke And Mirrors - RJD2
 Memories Live - Talib Kweli & Hi Tek

Black_Dog_Out (extract from Sean's novel Ambrosial Death)

*'No one is going to ruin me.
 If I have to, I will ruin myself.'*
 - Jim Carroll

The snow's still raging some ancient blood vendetta against the city - the frigid wind cutting like a thousand prison shivs; the boulevards and back streets a wintry war zone. Shivering, I can't help but wonder if the paleness of my eyes is a reflection of Cleveland as it freezes: an ice of eyes and heart. And I guess I had forgotten what it sounds like, that trudging of my Timberlands through snow.

But tonight this crisis isn't just existential. Back to old habits again, utterly unable to shake the memory of the day before, that 40 of Mickey's Malt and the cherry cough syrup were all it took. Now I'm back in those familiar shackles, a slave to my own drunken masochism and self-loathing. I ditched the meds- the mood stabilizers, Seroquel and lithium; and all the SNRIs. Been on a satanic bender for four, maybe five, nights. All the booze and painkillers have distorted time, have bent my mind...

Plus The Voices have returned. They follow me wherever I turn, around every block; stalking me on every curb. They won't let up they won't let up they're crushin' me they're crushin' me. Can't even find solace in the pubs... Pints, powders and pills placate the mental torture for brief, heavenly respites. But always, always, The Voices revisit.

Yeah - have another drink, you worthless bastard. Drink just like your railroad-working mick granddaddy did. Imbibe like all your other bloated, paper-pushing, shit-sucking relatives. Drink sip guzzle gulp. Everybody needs a little potion to forget. Especially you... Look at what you did to Jackie! You're toxic! Even worse, you're a disgrace: to your father, your neighborhood, your race... So keep suckin' on that bottle, you burnout fucking mick... Everybody needs a little potion to forget. Certainly you.

And this Mental Sodomy has been raging for days. I CAN'T STOP THE NOISE. Even when I close my eyes, I'm still haunted by the visions.

...

nightmares of my parents' house

fist fightin' with my Old Man

Jackie with a needle in his right arm

cops posted outside the crib in prowl cars,

waitin' for my kid brother's connects to show

*and then me my Old Man and Jackie start
throwing blows, beating the hell outta
each other, blood spurting from our mouths
like we're all chewing country Kentucky tobacco
and all the while, Ma and my kid sister Claire
are screaming begging yelling stop stop stop*

...

*I fucking hate you, Jackie -
for your selfishness*

*I beat addiction once twice three times -
quit the sauce the pills, all of it*

*I told you not to follow in my footsteps,
and yet you still did anyway*

*I know I set a shitty example -
though the pain the rage the mania
was all in our putrid Celtic blood
from the start, our conception*

*But I taught you how to be a thug
How to fight - with me and Coolie...
How to walk tall in the neighborhood...
I'll always be sorry for that*

But I never stuck a goddamn needle in my arm, Jackie!

How how, how could you do such a thing?

YOU FUCKING JUNKY YOU FUCKING JUNKY

YOU GODDAMN JUNKY

...

I'm screaming crying cursing, struggling so hard to make sense of this horrid, inveterate black rage. But I can't explain it much better than that. This *is* all I have, all I ever will.

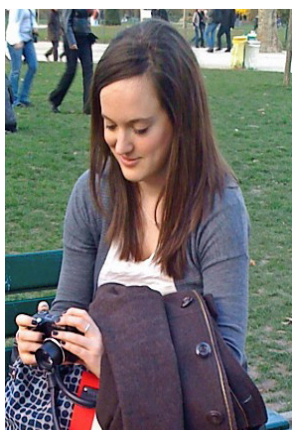
This rage this pain this insanity this stifling ambition these motherfucking words- and it's even more than my neighborhood my family my blood and my love. It's more than anything... And I try to tell people, tell 'em how it's killing me and feeding me and crushing me and loving me - but they just don't get it. Maybe neither do I.

Or why I drink every day like a Navy man on shore leave; or smoke like a steel mill chimney, back when the mills were still runnin' and before all the jobs were taken away and the city was still alive, before the light vanished from my eyes; or why I take tiny razor blades and cut deep along my thighs; or why I crush up oxys and sniff till my nose burns and my throat goes numb... or why... or why... or why it bothers me when the words don't come. And I begin to slowly hate you for your lack of understanding; loathe you for your calm. And that's when it really all goes wrong. So I pop-chew-sniff-snort more dope to stop The Voices and the banging in my head. *I just want to sleep sound... Broken, amidst the twilight of this ghostlike town...*

I'm so terribly tired, stumbling screaming wandering delirious mad. I search the contents of my beaten leather jacket, find a fresh Camel. Slowly, I inhale the toxic smoulder of tobacco: hell-bent on absorbing each and every carcinogen. Before it all goes black.

The concrete kisses me. I kiss back.

Lindsay Parnell



Nominated by Heidi James. Here's Lindsay Parnell's In Hiding Playlist:

Sinnerman - Nina Simone

Izzo (H.O.V.A.) - Jay-Z feat. The Roots

Back to Black - Amy Winehouse

3-Minute Rule - Beastie Boys
Fu-Gee-La - The Fugees

The Poet She Knows

'Did you know I've seen it twice now—your play?' he said. 'It's wonderful, really. You're wonderful.'

'Thank you,' she said, smiling.

He liked the way she looked. A girl who would write really clever things, raging but in a whisper. She smiled without showing any teeth, not giving anything away. 'Thank you,' she said again.

A small black notebook with a well-broken spine and a capped fountain pen were jammed into his back pocket, where his wallet should have been.

'Why are all of your plays about obsession? Am I the first poet you've known? Do you have any brothers? What's your favourite book? Do you like to travel? Where's the most exciting place you've ever been? Do you want to ask me anything?' He asked her all these things at once.

A cigarette hung from her lips as she picked away at the plum paint of her fingernails. Colour, she was all colour to him. He loved her flesh and the soft, bending and dipping lines of her body, draped over the stiff planks of the bench.

She was exactly the girl to travel with, to not shower for days with, but still enjoy the sight of each other. The words to ask her to come to Naples were lodged in his throat. He settled for his own child-like smile, hiding a secret under his tongue, wanting her to taste it too.

She answered none of his questions, just smiled and sucked on the cigarette. She answered none of his questions so he asked again.

'What about your favourite book?'

'*Lolita*. It's a love story.'

'It's a story about a paedophile.'

'No, it's a love story.'

He could help make her good and read her nice things and inspire her. He would help her write nice things. He thought he was exactly what she needed. Someone to make her good.

'Do you want to ask me anything?' he said. 'Ask me anything at all. Really, anything.'

'Are you circumcised?'

"Have you fucked any of the actors in your plays?" he said, taking a long sip of coffee.

She laughed, rolled her eyes, both hands tightly gripping her mug. She blew gently into the cup. 'Not anymore.'

'Really?'

'I'm trying to be good,' she said, placing a cigarette in her mouth. He lit it for her. 'Have you ever fucked one of your poems?'

'No,' he laughed.

She smoked a cigarette and he watched the trail of smoke leave her lips and he wished his cock had nicotine in it.

'Do you remember what you said?' he yelled as she skipped down the street, trolling over broken glass and cackling like the drunken witch she sometimes was when she wanted to be. 'Do you remember what you said to me?'

'Nope.' The wind extinguished her cigarette and she spat the dead stub onto the ground.

'You said we should have something casual—something that feels good but doesn't mean anything.'

'Did I?' she called. 'I say a lot of things you know. My life is things I've said.'

'Well only whores say things like that.' He bit his lip until he tasted blood while watching her prance under a street lamp, the light caught in the loose waves of her hair. He wished she could taste him. He wished she wanted to taste him as much as he wanted to taste her. Have her.

'Why not?' he asked, 'why won't you? Why won't you let me? You can't just change your mind.'

'I had a dream that Paul Newman came in my hair specifically after I asked him not to, as I had washed it that morning.'

'Why won't you let me? Why won't you let me fuck you? We live together and you won't let me—it's not fair.'

'I've been with a poet already. He was an alcoholic.'

'You're an alcoholic.'

'No, I'm just bored.'

'Who was he? Do I know him?'

'Dermot from Dublin.'

'Dermot the alcoholic from Dublin, what a cliché,' he said.

'I've had enough of fucking poets.'

'Why's that?'

'Because it's boring. Poets are boring fucks.'

'No we're not.'

'Yes, you are—and boring things are the worst things in the world.'

'Are they?'

'Please stop asking me things.'

'Okay.'

'Tell me something, don't ask me. Please, for once, tell me.'

'I haven't written a poem in two years and I don't know why.'

He bought her a lithograph of her favourite, *Summertime No. 9A*, and hung it in their living room. It was fraction of its actual size, a fraction of the unframed and breathing original. It was pressed behind a sheet of cheap glass.

'Happy birthday,' he said when she walked into the room.

She ripped it off the wall. The shattered glass cut the thin skin of her wrist. He held her tight while he drove her to the hospital, waiting for her to settle, for her wrist, her life, to clot.

'Have you finished it yet?' he asked, fingering the spines of the books on her shelf.

'No.'

'How? Why? It's been months now.'

'Probably due to your incessant impulse to interrogate me,' she said, scribbling black ink on a thin pad of paper. Not lifting her eyes from her scribbling, each word connected to the next in undulating loops, ink waves treading across the page. It was just like her, he thought. It was just like her to create something so beautiful.

'I'm not interrogating you, I'm just curious. I'm showing an interest in your work.'

'Why would you do that?'

'I've written a poem this morning, would you like to hear it?' he said.

'Why would you do that?'

'It's about Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock. I wrote a poem for you—about Lee Krasner.'

'I said,' she paused, set down the pen and leaned back into the leather chair, 'why would you do that?'

'I wrote a poem about them because I know you love them,' he said. 'I love them because you love them and if you think about it, we're an awful lot like them. Well, except you're not Jewish and you won't let me fuck you.'

'No. Why would you show an interest in what I am doing?'

'Because I find you interesting,' he said quietly.

'What a fucking ridiculous, boring thing to say,' she said. She stood and ground out the butt of her cigarette before walking past him into the hall, stepping into her bedroom and slamming the door behind her.

'I can't do anything, I can't think of anything,' she said, 'it's a cluttered fuck of nothing in my head.' She took a long pull out of the glass then gave a closed mouth grin to the bartender who winked at her.

'You're over-thinking things, is all,' he said, 'we should get away. You could finish the rest if we got away.'

'There's nothing to get away too. Nothing.'

'Yes there is, I'm almost done myself. I've written twenty-one pieces this month, twenty-one. Can you believe it?'

'You take everything from me; you steal my thoughts before I've had them and now I have nothing. I have nothing to write.'

He said nothing. The web faint scars on the inside of her left wrist looked like fading white drip painting.

'Are you happy then?' she said. 'Are you happy with yourself and what you've done to me?'

'When's the last time you cried? I've never seen you cry,' he said. 'How is that?'

'I came this morning. I closed my eyes and fingered my clit, pretending Paul Newman was assfucking me on some horse ranch in the San Fernando Valley. He was wearing leather chaps, a Zorro mask and stabbing my asshole with his cock. Robert Redford was videotaping the entire thing. I asked him to join in, but he declined, saying he'd rather just watch and jerk himself off. What a gentleman. What a cowboy.'

'I said cry, not come. I said when's the last time you cried?'

'I heard you. I did cry, it hurt. I've never been assfucked before this morning.'

'Things would be so much easier if I hated you more than anyone else. I wish I could be the person in the world who hates you the most,' he said.

'Don't flatter yourself,' she said before taking a sip. 'Besides, what makes you think you aren't?'

'Because you hate yourself more than I ever could.'

'Don't you want to know her name,' he said, 'don't you want to know the name of the girl I'm seeing?'

'No,' she mumbled, flipping through a book. 'What a lucky lady though.'

'Tracy. Her name is Tracy. I thought you should know.'

'Why?' she said.

His cheeks flushed and he couldn't contain a smile, one that hung higher on the left side of his face than the right.

'Because we live together and because, well, because of everything really.'

'You don't owe me anything.'

'You owe me. You do. Fuck me. Pay me your debt. You live in my house. You fuck me now. Go on, fuck me.'

'No.'

'Why? Because of Tracy?'

'Because I'd rather fuck myself.'

'How come you've never let me touch you? Why won't you let me?'

'You repulse me.'

'She doesn't like that we live together.'

'Who?'

'Tracy.'

'Oh.'

'Well?'

'She has nothing to worry about. You tell her that.'

'I used to think you were wonderful.'

She smiled at him, like the way she smiled the night he had met her. Showing no teeth, her thin lips pulled back, her eyes bright, alert. He couldn't help but smile himself.

He stood in the middle of a standing ovation in a theatre so dark he couldn't see his own hand in front of his face. It was just like her to make things so dark she could destroy anything, whatever she wanted, but he couldn't watch it happen.

He had watched their story. She had stuffed it all into two acts, two hours and forty-five minutes, stuffed it into a man and woman shuffling around a stage with masking tape 'X' marks on the stage to tell them where to be. They didn't do anything—the man and the woman on the stage. They shouted and whispered and talked but didn't do anything. They didn't fuck and they didn't write and they didn't do things that normal people do. They were just saying things.

He held a crumpled playbill in his fist, *The Little Boy Who Raped Jack Pollock*. Releasing it to the floor he groped at the capped black fountain pen and notebook in his back pocket. A notebook filled with poems about a girl who wasn't Lee Krasner. He groped at a capped black fountain pen and notebook in his back pocket just to make sure they were still there. Not that he needed them anymore. Seeing as he hadn't touched them in a year.

'Are you surprised?' Tracy said, linking her arm with his and picking small specs of lint from his jacket.

He and Tracy stood in the middle of a standing ovation in a theatre so dark he couldn't see his own hand in front of his face. It was just like her to make things so dark she could destroy anything but he couldn't watch it happen.

'Surprised about what?' he said. 'Surprised that she finished?'

'Well, it's your story too, isn't it? They one about when you lived together?' Tracy held a crumpled playbill for *The Little Boy Who Raped Jack Pollock*. He snatched it from her and tossed it onto the floor.

He groped at the capped black fountain pen and notebook filled with poems about a girl who wasn't Lee Krasner in his back pocket, just to make sure they were still there. Not that he needed them anymore. Seeing as he hadn't touched them in months.

Graham Isaac



Nominated by David E Oprava. Here's Graham Isaac's In Hiding Playlist:

International Dateline - Ladytron

Heatherwood - Deerhunter

Five Fingers - Aesop Rock

House Full Of Garbage - Shellac

More News From Nowhere - Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds

Body Party

They don't wear pants in the dark, what's the point? Pants are for protecting from the halogen suns' sheen off legs. In the dark no one has legs, no one has arms, there are only feet and fingers, below this great gascloud painting of a city no one can agree on; there are not enough streetlights, there are too many dirty-faced people in public, the trash billows over porches and sidewalks, it is too big -- but there are so many high edges to peer off, so many shoulders to lean for fresh hugs, so many plates for fingers to clean, if only there were more of it. Down this long, anti-lit hallway the roaming has been underway for seven hours. Clothes piled up at the door way or the corner where the hall opens into something room-like, like a creek broadening into a great river, one that could divide states. In the dark all the knees brush against each other and elbows touch faces tenderly, anticipating.

Largely, no one can agree which city the skyline is supposed to be. The artist's statement does nothing to clarify, talking only about a failed attempt at love and a fondness for absence. If specific municipality could be determined then relative merits and personal experience could be taken into account and mouths could lie about agreeing to disagree in the dark. They cluster around the painting shoulder-to-shoulder telling stories of what they think it's about, what they'd put dollars and more-than-dollars on if they'd not left their wallets in their pants by the door. This is intellectual stimulation, one brain thinks, and supposes the other brains are thinking it too.

The power fails and the dark machines shut down and the yellow-grey of day time hits everybody's moles and nipples and bellies. A pair of knees stops brushing. Propels shoulders, elbows and hands to the dark machine. It's just a loose wire. It'll only be a second. Mouths stop and minds reflect that the painting looks roughly the same. A museum curator could put it pretty much anywhere. The emergency-nudity hankerchiefs loosen from necks and begin covering. Someone lets out a whimper of tired embarrassment, some audibly heavy breathing, a nervous laugh, then the diving man shouts eureka! and everything again goes black.

Olumide Popoola



Nominated by Nina Rapi. Here's Olumide Popoola's In Hiding playlist:

Loca - Buika

The Keeper (version performed on KCRW) - Bonobo feat. Andriya Triana

Tupelo Honey - Cassandra Wilson

Heartbeat (Live in Philly) - Nneka

Trouble Sleep, Yanga Wake Am - Fela

this is not about sadness (novella extract)

one

Experiences come in all manners. They spread and engage, tug and pull, question and challenge. Much longer than you desire. My name is Tebo. Tebogo. I arrived yesterday. It is spring, they say, but I wasn't prepared for this. What a strange city. It looks nice outside with the sun shining, the clouds sitting fat and well-fed underneath the blue of the sky, but when we stepped out of the cab it was not as I had expected it. Eish, the wind is too cold! It hits from the west, drops sharply south, then spreads into all directions. Everything shivers. It is cold but I'm glad I'm here. If not for Lucky and his broad smile I would be crying right now. But I'm glad I'm here. Really. I'm here to forget what happened on the corner of Koma and Potch. That stretch of red earth before the tar begins. Where the fine dust is whisked up by speeding cars. Where the soil is hard but layered with the finest, the finest of dust.

Three months and 15 days ago I stood on that corner. Zanele and Pedita were having one of their usual arguments so I had left the party. Not to disappear, not to smoke - I don't, not even dagga - I just wanted to catch some air, think about what to do and if this was going to be one of those nights and I had to make the long way to Number 36 by myself. Although it was going to be Sunday I had work to do, finishing the set at the Windybrow where I was doing my internship in stage design. It was my final month and it had gone well, very well, mainly because I know how to stay out of trouble. At least I used to. I was standing on the corner thinking about how I would make that long journey from Soweto while Zanele and Pedita were still at each other's throats, filled to the rim with cheap booze like a vat of freshly brewed beer, with no one else around that cared. We hardly knew anyone at that party, but had thought better go than wonder about what we had missed.

Now I was stranded there. Those two always found a reason to fight and then make up; it was their pattern. One time they had driven off without me, still shouting, and only in the morning did they remember that they had left their best friend to beg for a bit of space in other people's overcrowded cars.

I stood on that dusty corner, only for a few minutes. When your life changes you cannot foresee the impact, but when it does, the things that happen are unstoppable. Like the dust, they get carried away with the current; like the wind, it buries itself deep in your bones, and slowly from the inside out you start peeling away. Your old self stripping off, all that was truth, one layer at a time. Never to be innocent again.

My name is Tebo. Tebogo. I arrived yesterday.

Well, she came one day. Small and fragile. Pretty little thing but yuh tink she a tink she can carry bricks so. I neva waan talk to her. Me ah just sit inna me front room looking outta de window. Me no need no young little thing ah tell me how de world must run. Nuh! She always got sumting fi sey. Asking, always asking. Den her eyes look pon me like sey she neva gon' see me again. Her big eyes. Like she waan find sumting pon de bottom of de well. Me well, very well but no well, nuh so? *Chups*. She work hard, man she coulda work hard. Drag all dem old things outta de house, clear de garden, all by herself. It was an accident. Everyone sey so.

Everyone comes with a past. That's where the story lies, naturally. She came in a cab. Motor running, cabbie leaning against the black roof, smoking. Lucky running inside to get more money for the fare. His step, heavy from the weight of his belly, absorbed by the asphalt. Inside the vehicle, the girl. If frailness was a measurement, she would have scored a six out of ten. Evenness is what best describes how she *seemed*. Small, slender and very polite looking but somehow you thought she'd call you out if need be, very matter-of-fact, straight away. Then the dragging of a suitcase. Lucky smiling, cab driving off. The girl freezing, looking for the first time at her new environment.

The grey house - not Lucky's - but inside it his dark ground floor flat, wedged between others, snug and tight. A mid-terrace Victorian house. This is how she arrived on Corbyn Street. The next morning routine starts. Lucky off to work, as usual early shift, London barely lit by a hopeful sky. [...] Lucky returns in the late afternoon. He smiles, always does and a few minutes later they both stroll to Tesco's. She's chatty now, alive. Her face remains un-creased and well arranged but her eyes awake now, travel and extend to the distances between houses and corners, street signs and shops, local pub and butcher. Attentive, she asks questions, holds Lucky's hand like a friend does. On their way back she points to the house, laughs again.

"They all look the same."

"Yeah," Lucky replies.

The woman tending to her front garden next door is a familiar fixture on the street. Bent over, she is big boned and hunched permanently. They speak. Lucky introduces the girl but the woman's lips hardly move. In her hand a small scoop, she keeps her eyes on the bit of soil between the pavement and the flagstones in front of the entrance to her house. The tool grips the earth she watered, like it's making an incision. Metal drives itself into soil, she doesn't look up long enough for the sun to make her eyes blink. The girl looks at Lucky,

startled. He shrugs. These are the peculiarities. There are many. Like everywhere. [...]The gardener has moved on already. Her thoughts carried away from the dirt and much further than the girl a few meters away. Leathery her face, a thin type, and smooth like fine suede, of course without the fuzz. The girl can't pull herself away. In the bubble created by the confusion of her internal body clock and the new impressions, she's stuck. Glued to the very spot she's standing on. The woman's hands are moving, scraping, tugging. Weeds are piled neatly, the flagstones framed on all corners by brown alone, almost a third of them cleared of vegetation. Lucky calls from inside. The girl follows him then turns around again.

"A beautiful flower bed you have here."

Immersed in her work there is a faint "uh huh."

"So well cared for. I can see."

The woman is returning to her work, her back square and solid, warding off.

"... you must be..."

But there won't be an answer. The girl's eyes linger for another second then she follows Lucky into the house. Their door shuts and there is laughter again. Pots rattle. Later there'll be food and friends, the table set in the kitchen, guests arriving. The girl meets many, Lucky a smiling host. Music from an iPod hooked onto an old-fashioned stereo that came with the flat, and more laughter, which sticks to the walls like condensation.

Next door the woman, the gardener, the one with no speech for the girl. She's on the bed, her feet dangling slightly in the air. Her day has been divided between the front yard and the inside of her flat. The washing neatly folded on the chair in the bedroom. She will put it away another day. Tomorrow perhaps, when there are more hours of the same week broken by the visit to the church, she herself won't make. Her night is restless on the single bed, her ears distracted by the young voices next door, crawling through the air like a racoon's touch through a tent wall. Soft, almost dismiss-able but with a faint imprint of certainty. People.

She tosses, right and left, her gown tangling with each move. Her eyes squint now in a way they didn't in the afternoon, when the neighbours passed. Now they stare into the dark room, asking for the lid to temporarily close on her consciousness. She sleeps lightly, scurried dreams keeping her always just above the surface. In the morning when she rises there is a sore spot on her lower back. There the mattress left an impression. The unrest.

I neva know how she come sit inna me garden. She always talk. Always! Me neva have nutin to sey. Whey me ah sey? Little thing she is, why she gon' have to talk to me? Me just mind me own business, harm nobody. I know all a dem think me crazy or sumting. Mek dem talk. Me no do nutin to nobody.

Rich Dyhouse



Nominated by Sean McGahey. Offbeat graphic artist, Rich Dyhouse's In Hiding Playlist:

Monkey Wrench - Foo Fighters
 November Rain - Guns N Roses
 Journey To The End Of East Bay - Rancid
 Breed - Nirvana
 Kashmir - Led Zeppelin

Interview with Rich Dyhouse by The Beat magazine's Sean McGahey

Sean McGahey: It's kind of weird asking this question as we were both at Art College and worked alongside each other....yet I know nothing about what you like about art and stuff or why you are into art....so what and why?

Rich Dyhouse: I have been interested in art for as long as I can remember. One of my earliest memories is of being on holiday with my Grandmother, watching her paint wildlife with oils. Before the age of ten I was writing and drawing my own comic books, which were inspired by cartoons of the time. As I entered my teenage years, my interest in comics developed into graphic novels and illustration. I developed my style in my teens, I guess. Starting with ink and pencil crayons, moving onto ink and watercolours. Now I use ink, oils and watercolours. I like my pictures to have a realistic quality and also a fantasy side.

SM: Art College was pretty cool! For me it was more about smoking Camel, having a few beers between sessions and strolling around with a worn out copy of Desolation Angel. Good times. Do you remember when we went to New York and people thought we were a British rock band or something ...probably because we were always cold, pissed and knackered

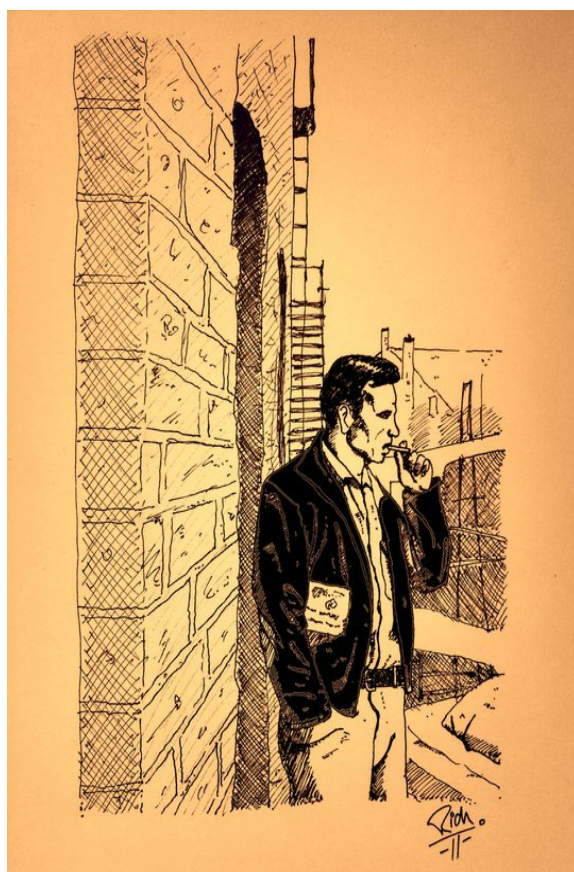
RD: Ha ha! New York was ace! Who the hell did they think we were? I remember getting asked for my autograph in the street one day in someone's little book. I'm sure I signed it anyway. Imagine their disappointment!

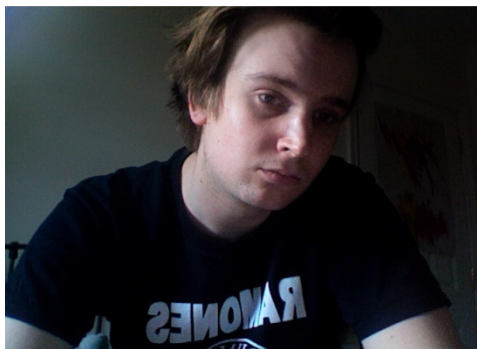
SM: I'm sure it made their day...so what artists are you into or influenced by?

RD: My top five artists would be Alex Ross, Mike Choi, Carlos Ezquerra, Dermot Power and Simon Bisley. My first real memory of liking a particular artist was when I was really young, like less than ten or something. And that was Rodney Matthews. He illustrated a really cool book about Greek Myths and Legends, which I used to sit and copy pictures from. As I got older into my teens, I was heavily into comics and the work of Carlos Ezquerra and Simon Bisley. The artists I liked at that time were H. R. Giger with all his Alien Stuff and William Turner, who's paintings I just love. My other big role model would be Salvador Dali. That was another cool thing about New York. We got to go the Guggenheim Museum and see his Birth of Liquid picture in the flesh.

SM: Remember we bought those postcards from the museum near Central Park? I got the Keith Haring and you bought the Salvador Dali? Anyway, I know you've been a drummer in a pretty cool band, got shed loads of tattoos, facial hair and now you've become a family man since I last saw you in the OVT Selly Oak three years ago! What else have you been doing?

RD: I've worked for the Urban Wildlife Trust designing and illustrating newsletters and leaflets. Through this I was commissioned by Wolverhampton Wildlife Trust to design a cartoon character, logos and t-shirts.



Lee Webber

Nominated by Jarred McGinnis. Here's Lee Webber's In Hiding Playlist:

Police On My Back - The Clash
 Hiding Tonight - Alex Turner
 How to Disappear Completely - Radiohead
 Shangri-La - Esther Phillips
 Hiding All Away - Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds

Vigil

Nicotine drops you
 headfirst. Thoughts kick and bruise you.
 A year since she left
 you're scratching your head,
 pulling on a cigarette,
 sat on pale-brown grass.
 Hard for her, you'd yield
 firm lips, Vaseline kisses
 dancing cold on your neck.
 Afterwards a fag,
 warm beer and sunburn, silence,
 her hand on your wrist.
 You never said 'stay'.
 Was it right to sweeten her
 with doormat eyelids,
 only to sit mute,
 your yellow lungs like cowards
 breathing back the words?
 Now cold, shadow set,
 you offer ash to darkness,
 suck your cigarette.

God I Could Be A Good Fuck

Got rhythm from Strummer,
strummed it long,
that stomping right leg
of sinewy flesh. Memorised
naked tunes that split to form
an iamb in her bits, tease
and terrorise ripe skin, that
lustrous mulch of smile and
slit. She swallowed me up,
a cock so Childish, hard,
cloaked in Billy goat's gruff,
leprous legs splayed beside
wet liver soul of booze
and grease. Ate that lady of
lowlands fame so long I too
sounded like there was a bug
in my throat. Dam of Bono
broke with my orgasm, choked
every African slum, Venezuelan
barrios drowned in cum.
And I rolled back, cooled in
sweat, unable to summon
Richards. Spent.

Peter Stockland

Nominated by Zsolt Alapi. Here's Peter Stockland's In Hiding Playlist:

My Blue Heaven - Leon Redbone version
 Sweet Hawaiian Chimes - DeZurik Sisters
 Thunder Road - Bruce Springsteen
 Bach Cello Suite #2 in D Minor BWV 1008
 Boulder to Birmingham - Emmylou Harris

The Family Accidental (short fiction excerpt)

The remains of Mr. Thwaite's last project flanked the room where Mrs. Thwaite and I sat. He was re-finishing the kitchen cabinets the evening before he died. Most of the dishes - those not broken in the post-funeral fistfight - had been stacked on the counter beside the sink beneath the blank, discolored spaces on the walls where he had removed the old cabinets, but not yet installed the replacements. The few cupboards he had finished and put up were exquisite examples of practical promise.

I tried to follow suit. I suggested that Mrs. Thwaite pay off her debt to the federal government by considering my cheque an advance on my rent, not as charity or another loan she could not afford.

"Four thousand dollars?" she said. "How long are you planning to live in my basement?"

"What about," I said, "modeling fees?"

"Modeling fees?"

She was confused, yet with a drunk's sharp sense for something dangerous in whatever has just been said.

"I need people to sit for me. I would pay you for your time."

"Sit?" she said.

"Model," I said.

I made a redundant circle in the air with my hand.

"How?" she said.

"How?"

"How would I look? What would I wear?"

Light, delayed at the outside edge of the universe by her being my mother's best friend and my best friend's mother, dawned.

"Head and shoulders," I said. "Maybe some studies of your hands. I need to work on my hands."

I wonder, sometimes, if that made her think of what Mr. Thwaite's lifetime of work with wood had done to his hands. She said nothing about it.

"That's all?" she said.

"It's what I was thinking about," I said.

In truth, it wasn't at all what I was thinking about, yet at the same time it very much was. Having seen her naked up close in the confined space of the camping tent, I wanted to capture her with what would be appraising, though still arousable, eyes. Yet I was mature enough to know that painting a nude of her would cause a problem for the artwork itself. In what basement room could it possibly hang? Who besides me would ever see it?

Mrs. Thwaite would never look at it twice. She would want to burn it, like the cheque, perhaps by setting fire to it on the stove. If it could not be displayed, if only I, its creator, could look at it, how could it do its work of accumulation and revelation? What, in other words, would be the point?

"I don't have to decide tonight, do I?" she said.

She put her hands on either side of the cheque and lowered her head as if praying for, or willing, it to arise and be gone. When she looked up, she had the expression of someone who has awoken from a dream to find she really is in a wheelchair. She got up and left the kitchen, leaving me alone with the remnants of Mr. Thwaite's project: the unfinished business of her life.

I could hear her moving around in her bedroom, knew she was getting undressed. I tried to calculate the time it would take her to get to the point of unhooking her bra and letting the straps reverse themselves from what I had seen years before, sliding down her shoulders and arms, letting the cups drop away from her breasts. I tried to calculate but because I could not be sure, I lost interest and began studying the scribble of my name on the signature line of the cheque.

An artist should have a strong signature. I do not. It is weak and immature, childish. Handwriting was one the curses of my school life. I looked around Mr. Thwaite's kitchen and wondered what he saw there in the hours before he put his disfigured hands to his temples and launched over the side of the bed.

Mrs. Thwaite went into the bathroom and began filling the sink. I stood in the hallway and heard the clink of night cream jars. She used the same night cream as my mother. I knew even at age eight that the label color was called periwinkle. I called good night. There was a hanging silence and then she said good night to me through the closed door.

In keeping with its antique aura, the Thwaite house still had old-fashioned skeleton locks on every one of the solid mahogany doors that Mr. Thwaite had restored with hand-sanding, scrupulous use of wood filler and lustrous resin finishes to bring out the grain. Niall had shown me almost 20 years earlier how to kneel silently down and peep at Tisha as she was

getting ready to take a bath. I never did peep, but I was tempted to do so with Mrs. Thwaite just to see her in a surreptitious, rather than accidental, light.

I had actually seen Mrs. Thwaite twice by accidents of timing. The first time, of course, was my pubescent gaffe of entering the camping tent unaware she was inside changing into her bathing suit. But I also saw her in my mother's kitchen after I came home sick in grade six. As I came in through our long, dark, back hallway, Mrs. Thwaite was facing away from me and toward my father, who hung suspended above his chair for an instant and then, when he heard my footsteps, dropped into it with the speed of a drunk being pushed backward and down.

My father was not drunk. My father was not a drunk. My mother was a teetotal Baptist and, out of respect for her, my father drank on only a few special occasions a year.

Mrs. Thwaite was not yet a drunk, either, though she drank too much at a barbecue once and reportedly said out loud that all Baptists belong in the gutter. My mother refused to believe the quote, which came from a woman who did not live in our neighborhood and was a Pentecostal. The truth, my mother said, was that Mrs. Thwaite came over the next day despite a brutal hangover to help take down all the curtains in our house for cleaning.

So, no, my father was not drunk. But the buttons of Mrs. Thwaite's butter yellow sweater were undone from the waistband of her brown skirt to the white back strap of her bra.

My father must have seen how pale I was, that I was about to retch for what would have been the third time that day, because he told me without my having said anything to go into the bathroom and hang my head over the sink or toilet. Weak, I felt disoriented by being given an order and a choice at the same time. I heard my father's and Mrs. Thwaite walking in the hallway outside the bathroom door.

I thought Mrs. Thwaite might come in and mother me as she did with all the neighborhood kids when they skinned a knee or bloodied a nose playing around her house with her children. She did not come in. She was gone when my father opened the door.

He put me to bed but came to the doorway of my room frequently and solicitously to ask if I wanted anything, or just to check that I was all right. Twice, he came in and put his hand on my forehead to see if I had a fever. The next day, I was fine and it was a full year later before he left my mother and me behind. The use of silence in diplomacy, of space in art, of forbearance in investing, the foundations for these critical skills were born that day, at least in part thanks to Mrs. Thwaite and her undone buttons.

Then she came downstairs naked. I was in bed in Niall's old room. Pop star posters and adolescent paraphernalia – including the head and torso charcoal study I had done of him at 14 – abounded. The baseball bat was in the corner behind the door. I heard creaking on the stairs and the brushing bump against a hallway wall of a human body making its way forward in the dark.

I turned on one of the bedside lamps and sat up. Mrs. Thwaite was in the frame of the door. The light startled her and she crossed her arms over her breasts, as she had not done that time in the tent. She looked as though she had just realized that her nightgown and dressing gown were still upstairs lying on the bedroom floor where she had dropped them.

I refused for many years to let myself wonder why she came downstairs to me. I am a painter, not a writer. I am a diplomat, not a politician. I bring objects to surface and surface to objects. I have never pretended to be able to dive under subjective surfaces and emerge with explanations. I deal in light, space and what. Why is for God.

Only as I grow old can I accept that the look she gave me there in Niall's childhood room came from the revelation - self-revelation - of what she was capable of doing for relief, out of vengeance and desperation, to bear the shaming incompleteness of carrying on. She wanted to hurt herself more, and I helped.

Orgasm occurred with Mrs. Thwaite straddling me, facing the opposite bedroom wall so that it was as if I was taking her from behind. Initially, she had taken me face-to-face and I was able to frame her hair, face and shoulders, her childed breasts as she raised and lowered herself, rocking backward and forward. I could smell fresh rye on her breath: a courage drink or two before coming downstairs. When I pressed my hands on her hips and splayed my fingers across her belly, though, she recoiled and asked – truthfully, ordered - me not to touch her there.

I was not experienced in what childbirth can do to a woman's body. All those years before, the surprise of her breasts, the exposure to her red pubic thatch, were superimposed on me, wiping out detail. With her straddling me, I felt the strange slackness of her belly flesh, saw the skin in the single bulb illumination of the bedside lamp as mysteriously and beautifully mottled as first photographs of the surface of the moon. I did find it beautiful. I am not lying.

Mrs. Thwaite could not overcome her own feeling of disfigurement. She turned her back toward me and rocked me hard so that it was the full pressing weight of her torso, hips and thighs, the auditory arousal of her rump slapping my legs, not the visual aphrodisia of her breasts and face, that brought me off, arching higher and pushing deep, deep, deep into what I could not see. What I could see was her broad white back textured with pores and a loose constellation of small cinnamon freckles and moles, the convex-concave tension of her shoulder blades working under the skin, the articulated vertebrae of her neck as her head bent forward to leverage her effort.

Afterward, she went upstairs. I heard her walking above me into what I calculated was the kitchen. I wonder whether she was naked or dressed when she picked up the cheque.

Listening in the dark, I told myself no harm had been done, all the while thinking of how my mother had taken to referring to the Thwaites as "the Family Accidental" for their habit of walking around with injuries and wounds from one escapade or another.

Just before sleep, I thought of how my father had returned home early from work one afternoon immediately after I got in from school – it was almost as if he'd been following me at a discrete distance - and came into my bedroom feeling the urgent need to tell me that accidents do not happen, they are caused. Thank you, father, for that traumatic piece of introductory wisdom in the ways of the world.

Uffar Bleen



Nominated by Beat the Dust. Here's Uffar Bleen's In Hiding Playlist:

You're Mercury - Teeth Of The Sea
 Wherever I Lay My Phone (That's My Home) - Super Furry Animals
 Bonnie & Clyde - Serge Gainsbourg & Brigitte Bardot
 The Garden - Einsturzende Neubauten
 Everybody Wants To Rule The World - Tears For Fears

A Tiring Day in the Modern World

And so at half past nine, almost inevitably, I woke up again. I rolled over for a moment in bed and when I next glanced at my watch on the bedside table, it was half past two in the afternoon. I knew it was afternoon because it wasn't dark, and I've had a firm grasp of the concept of night and day since I was a relatively young man.

Seeing as it was half past two in the afternoon, I thought to myself, 'Well, if it's half past two in the afternoon I suppose I'd better get up. I expect a lot of people will have been up for quite a long while already.' So I got up and headed over to the computer on the other side of my room, in order to find out what all my friends were up to.

I have a lot of friends on my computer. I know some of them personally, but others I don't even know at all. Whilst I was waiting for the computer to load, I drummed the fingers of my left hand on the desk, and used the index finger of the other to remove dry crows from my left nostril. This was a satisfying diversion that helped pass the time.

I eventually arrived at the page where my friends were. It turned out that one was combing his hair, another was laughing out loud for no apparent reason, and another was pretending to be a cow by typing the word 'MOO!' at half hourly intervals. I found this rather amusing, and it was at the very moment I was displaying my amusement by way of an almost invisible smile, that a strange man, surely well into his thirties, with orange hair and extraordinarily pointy features, entered my bedroom.

'Well?' he asked. 'What are they up to?'

I calmly told him what they were up to, particularly emphasising the cow impression which had so amused me, in the hope that he too would be amused by it. It didn't seem that it was yet the time to bring up the fact I'd never set eyes on this man before, and to ask him what he was doing in my bedroom.

'Yes,' he said, with a very sober expression on his face, 'that is rather amusing. Imagine a cow typing 'MOO!' on her computer. It seems very unlikely. That's why it's so funny.'

Whilst he'd hit the nail on the head with his summation of the cow impression, his response greatly irritated me, and I suppose that was why I jumped up from my computer chair and

rolled it towards him at extreme pace. He seemed unsurprised by my surprise attack and easily stepped out of the way of the chair, which rolled out of my bedroom door and crashed pathetically against the banister on the landing.

This created an awkward situation between us for a moment, but he didn't dwell on it for long. He strode towards me and gripped me in a firm headlock. This really eased the tension and I immediately began to relax.

'Would you mind at all,' I asked, 'if I wrote down what we're up to here so all my friends can read about it?'

'Not at all,' he replied, and shuffled us over a little so I could reach the keyboard.

'A man with orange hair and pointy features has me in a headlock. LMHDTS!', I typed, before explaining to the man that 'LMHDTS' meant 'laughing my head down the street', but that it wasn't necessary to actually do this, as it was just one of those humorous abbreviations used to fit in with people on the computer.

The man understood this perfectly, which further enhanced my opinion of him. I had already concluded that he was of above average intelligence.

'So,' he asked, 'what do we do now?'

'We just wait,' I said. 'The more comments we get, the better things will be for us.'

And so we waited there for a while, but received no comments. Then the man with the orange hair released me from the headlock and suggested that we should perhaps venture outside to pass the time before returning to look at the computer. As I've always enjoyed passing the time, I readily agreed and we set off out of my first floor flat, down the dark, untidy stairway, through the dark, untidy hallway and out of the ordinary looking front door.

However, upon reaching the pavement, we realized that it was a disgustingly sunny day and our faces and eyes were burning right up. We bowed our heads and ran straight over to the cellar bar across the road to avoid going up in flames.

We made it fairly easily and passed a good time in the bar drinking beers, lagers, spirits and wines for forty minutes exactly. I can say now that those were the best forty minutes of what turned out to be a busy day. We frowned upon other people in the bar, ate fistfuls of Bombay mix, had not an altogether uncomfortable chat with the barman about his social background and discussed serious matters with earnest expressions, making 'but what can you do about it?' hand gestures.

By the time it came to leaving the bar, I had become firm friends with Emmanuel Goliath (for he said that was his name, and I believed him). As we stopped by the door to steel ourselves for the dash back across the road through the sunshine, I wondered aloud what kind of comments we could expect from our computer friends when we got back.

'If you don't mind,' he said carefully, 'I won't come back to the computer with you. It appears that I'd forgotten all about it and it's quite possible that I've lost all interest now. I think I'll just go home to bed so I can be fresh for things that may or may not occur in the future. But don't worry,' he continued, sensing my disappointment, 'I'm sure we'll bump in to each other in your bedroom very soon.' This last part may have been a joke, but it was difficult to tell due to the constant sternness of his pointy face. He shook my hand and left, leaving me to face the dash home alone.

After legging it back to my flat and locking the door behind me, just in case, I thought it would be best to follow the wise Goliath's example and go straight to bed. By now, it was half past three in the afternoon, a clear hour since I'd got up.

I sat in bed for a while smoking a cigarette before throwing myself down to sleep. Unfortunately, the cigarette had left me agitated, and I tossed and turned for a good two and a half minutes before deciding that there was absolutely no way sleep would come.

With a certain amount of frustration, I threw the bedclothes off and briskly tip-toed over to the computer. I'd have a quick look, just to see what people were doing now, and to find out how people had reacted to the thing I had told them I was doing earlier.

I was pleased to find out that I had received a total of twelve comments, and only one of them was negative (*'What do you want?! A medal?! GWFA'* (grimacing with furious anger) from David K, who is an instinctively negative person). It obviously wasn't as many comments as the cow impression had received, that was only natural, but it was still a good number and made me happy.

I finally returned to bed at a quarter past four, thoroughly exhausted by the day's exertions. I drifted off with memories of the forty minutes in the cellar bar and the good reception for the thing I had written on the computer, filling that happy period immediately before sleep.

Sadly, I haven't seen Emmanuel Goliath since that wonderful day, although it's true to say that I still occasionally hang around in my bedroom in the hope that I'll bump in to him.