

DUBLIN YOUNG AUTHORS
New writing from the voices of tomorrow

A project by



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Foreword

Philip Doyle & Jim Xi Johnson

Both of us have been attending DYA for at least three years now and we can be referred to, if you'd like, as a sort of "Old Guard." So when we were offered the chance to be the editors of the course's first anthology, we both jumped at the chance of - what seemed like - a fun summer project.

In truth, we've been working on this all summer, across Europe, Asia, and Ireland. We, in fact, can no longer remember a time when we were not working on this.

What we did not expect though, was the incredibly positive and rapid response from everyone who submitted. We'd like to thank everyone, DYA mentors and students alike, for all of their efforts towards this piece. It was a joy to read all your submissions, and an arduous task to find things to edit.

We hope that readers, new and old, human or otherwise, enjoy these pieces as much as we have.

Many thanks again from the DYA Anthology Team. <3

(Autumn 2018)

Short-sighted

Martha Kirk

I watch the tall, slender, bare legs saunter towards me. I feel myself blushing in spite of myself, and though I feel I should avert my eyes I am totally transfixed by their confident stride. The woman moves a hand across her face – maybe to brush away a strand of hair – as she nears where I am sitting, unaware of my watchful eyes. Her figure slowly comes into focus as her footsteps on the gravel pavement become rhythmically louder. In an instant I realise she is wearing flesh-coloured leggings and not strutting around half naked as I had originally suspected. The blush burns my ears as she passes by, onward to the train station. I bury my head in my arms, the heat in my face no doubt causing me to be a neon red beacon – I'm almost disturbed at the fact the woman didn't see me. I groan quietly to myself. I can't believe I forgot my glasses. What's the point in going out Watching if you can't see anyone?

A breeze rustles my hair and sends a shiver down the back of my neck. God is letting me know my time observing the animals is nearly up, I'll have to go back and take my place in the pen amongst them soon enough. I sit on this mossy lump between my house and the tracks that take you into town, as I often do these days after school (I call it a 'lump' as it is a rise from ground level, but in no way high enough to earn the title of hill). My school-bag lies crumpled a couple of feet away from where I am sitting, inside holding my glasses box. The same glasses box I had opened today in first period French in dismay to discover that they were empty. And so I spent all day squinting at various whiteboards and now I was out here squinting at people. Of course I had known it was pointless to go Watching today with my weak, short-sighted eyes, and yet I couldn't resist coming.

I believe that perhaps there is a power element in it – I sit in this mossy clearing, lifted above all the other folk, and am totally unaffected by what's going on around me. Arguing families, rowdy gangs of kids, panting joggers, joyriders, shaky elders, ambulances and police – they all pass by me. I watch people bop along the street to the music playing in their earphones, but I'm left in silence. People in suits give me one-sided, incomplete stories as they talk loudly to themselves. Gossip floats around me about people I don't and won't ever know. I see so many snippets of so many lives and it seems so laughable that they all think their own roles in the world so important.

I feel more and less of who I am. I lose myself – the part of me that plans, and worries, and stresses – I forget about college, family, friends, love, money – it's all meaningless here. It's just my mind in a dull human suit for a couple of hours. I fade to nothing. I fade into everything that was, is and ever will be. I am every person that stumbles past my grassy cove, I feel every life and all of their loves and fears and dreams. My being disperses through the misty early evening air and connects with every living being walking to and from the station.

And then, suddenly, they are strangers. I do not care anyway in the least for them; in fact I feel contempt for the trooping masses. They are nothing – absolutely nothing. The generation will

live and die and not a single soul will remember their sorry faces. They'll work hard every day until their heart stops, but not a moment will be spared to remember them. I hate it, and I hate them. I realise I am just the same as all these rushing bodies – but at least they are going somewhere, whereas I am stuck stagnant on this mud lump of earth.

A familiar sense of dread settles around my heart and I feel tears well up in my eyes. I seem to be so quick to cry these days. I catch sight of a hazy figure approaching. My poor vision, made weaker by my tearful gaze, gives me no indication about who this person is – I simply see a moving blotch. This only upsets me further. Who are they? Oh but it is useless anyway, it means nothing what they look like – I'll forget their face on the walk home and they will eventually fade – just like everyone does, just like I will.

My throat is tight and I wonder why I came out today just to upset myself. A seagull overhead squawks in complaint. I look up to see if he was cawing in opposition to my thoughts – how could he argue? The sky is a soft baby blue with hints of burnt orange on the horizon. The clouds drift happily through the air, calming me. The scene reminds me of so many pieces of art I cannot name – it's calling out to be an oil painting.

I spend a good couple of minutes staring at the tapestry above me. It moves and changes in every second revealing more impressive hues, and the clouds dance and twirl above my sorry head into different shapes – some I could recognise, some I could not. The fear clutching my heart seems to falter. Surely it does not matter whether or not I am remembered, I think, but rather that I lived a life worth living. It still seems unclear to me, but I feel satisfied with what I know for now. I squint once more down to the greystone path and see that it is empty. Perhaps it is my turn to walk past, a voice from deep within whispers, and someone higher up will decide if I'm worth a second thought.

I stand and sling my bag across my shoulder, my glasses case rattling around inside. A darkness has started to settle around me as it always does – so suddenly. I know Mam doesn't like me out alone when it's so late, so I set off at a sprint towards home. The grassy lump falls back asleep without its worrying wayward sitting on its back.

Now where could I have left those glasses?

Ugly Earrings

Katharina Kraman

If we were to meet, I'd imagine that the first thing that you'd notice about me is my earrings. They stand out a little, their vibrant colour never quite matching the outfit I might wear. Yet still I wear them.

Know why? Because my little girl made them for me.

When she was seven, she made them out of her pearl kit for me to wear on Mother's Day. It has been years since then and I have never taken them off.

Why? Because I want little Jessie to know that I will always stick with her.

That she will never embarrass me.

That I will always love her.

Those earrings are insignificant to you but for me they mean her.

EAST COAST

Notes from a seaside suburb

Oisín Sweeney

The only sound in the subterranean car park is water dribbling into an oily puddle. He says he takes photographs. *My work is a response to our culture.* Shuffling a deck of stained Polaroids, I ask where he took these. *An abattoir on the edge of the town.*

*

Seeing the forest brings back a haze of memories, half forgotten senses he often confused with dreams. Broken glass and charred cans in a gushing stream. The smell of a drizzling spring evening. It didn't take him long to find the spot where it happened.

*

It wasn't all that bad though, was it? The silence following her question overwhelmed the whirring, steaming cacophony of the cafe. *Guess we'll have to wait and see.* She rolled her eyes and drained her cup.

*

I jump into the backseat and he floors the car up into the estate. There's a muddy football at my feet, and a plastic bag of clothes to my side. When I attempt to address the driver, he turns to me and retorts, *Can't you ever just enjoy the moment?*

*

Glistening. She was glistening. I'd only ever read the word, never in my life applied it to anything real. I repeated it over and over, exploring its syllables like a tender lover. Eventually they told me to shut up.

*

We asked if we could turn on some music. *What do you want?* She suggested something, and turned to me in consultation. I was distracted, and once I'd noticed it I couldn't relax. *Why are we the only ones here?*

*

Human fecal matter on the doorsteps, a nightly soundscape of calling and shouting, and broken windows from the other weekend. He spat that nothing could be done, nobody cared. That was why he'd bought the baseball bat, he told her. *Let your friends know I have nothing to lose anymore.* She wanted to reply that neither did they.

*

When his presentation was over, he opened a discussion for the room. Someone took the opportunity to recount a grisly anecdote, a macabre bus-stop rumour everyone had heard before. The man told him he shouldn't talk about his sister that way.

*

All she wanted was to never again see his face, or anyone else's for that matter. She taped bin bags to her bedroom windows, and stuffed chewing gum in the keyhole after locking the door. It took her mother five attempts to coax the television password from her through the sealed door.

*

We were in the supermarket, stuffing our school-bags with bottles of wine and spirits, when he mumbled through his balaclava that he'd heard a war might be coming. My elbow knocked a litre of vodka, which shattered against the white plastic tiles. *Not while there's places like this and people like us.*

*

If only he'd said no, the night would have been a different story. With a habit of regret he often thought that way. But this time he knew he'd made a genuine error. *I could have listened to them until morning.*

*

Above the town, on a bench shrouded in hillside trees, he tries to make sense of the scale of it all. From first light to last dark he sits, starving and thirsty and aching, his mind numbed with exhaustion. On the way home he realises he's left something up there, but by then there's no point retrieving it.

Sing-Song Coffin

Morgan Doyle

The sky was grey, the clouds were imperceptible from the sky, and the air was heavy with the promise of coming rain. All the ingredients needed for a picturesque funeral setting. Annabelle thought this would be an interesting topic for her podcast and would surely get her over one hundred downloads this time.

Annabelle looked at the sky, hoping and wondering if Imogen would get past those big pearly gates and if she'd ever see her again. She felt a grin spreading across her face as she imagined Imogen complaining about the existence of the pearly gates. She would incessantly be bothering the angels, asking someone to give some physical proof they were real and she wasn't just experiencing some weird fever dream due to some illness or other.

Christ, did she miss her. Annabelle watched as the coffin was carried by the pall-bearers, all of them quite young for such a burden, each lost in their own thoughts and wondering how they got picked out of everyone to be the ones chosen to carry the body of Imogen Brown to her grave. As they went to lower the coffin as gently as possible over the grave, Annabelle noticed it starting to rain, quickly soaking everyone without the foresight to bring an umbrella, herself included. But she didn't mind. In fact she barely noticed as she was watching the priest getting ready to read the standard send-off that Imogen would've hated to have as her...

"Annabelle."

She jumped at her name being called and quickly looked around with a scowl for whoever was stupid enough to talk during her best friends' funeral.

"Annabellleeee..."

She scanned the field of graves, only then noticing that she was by herself. "Where'd everyone go?" Annabelle said, more for the comfort of a familiar voice than anything else as she felt the chill of rain flowing into her clothes.

"Annabelle."

Annabelle at that moment, became painfully aware of the coffin still lying, suspended over the grave. She could smell the freshly dug dirt waiting to claim Imogen.

"Open it. Open it, Annabelle."

She wanted nothing more than to move very far away, very quickly, from the sing-song voice that she knew was coming from the coffin. She barely felt how the rain chilled her or how the voice made her throat dry.

"Now, Annabelle..."

Suddenly she found herself in front of the coffin. She felt her knees go weak but she was unable to collapse, let alone move away. "Wait, what?!" Annabelle yelled as she started tugging at her legs, trying to get them to move, begging them to let her flee from this agonising feeling of fear.

The sing-song coffin flung its door wide open, allowing Imogen Brown to sit up from her bed and wrap the burnt flesh that was her arms around Annabelle's neck.

"You're not trying to leave me again, are you?"

Annabelle grabbed the dead girl's arms and tried to free herself from her. The dead girl's arms were warm, the same warmth people loved on cold winter mornings. The warmth from a freshly stoked fire. *"You'd try to leave me again, even after what you did? I'd get lonely all by myself."*

The dead girl giggled and Annabelle knew in that moment that laughter would never bring her joy.

She screamed as Imogen pulled her down into the coffin and she was still screaming even after the door slammed shut and the earth claimed her.

*

Annabelle woke up flailing, her auburn hair getting tangled in her fingers as she fought to break free from the dead girl she could still feel pulling her down, the dead girl still in her coffin in St Benedict's graveyard. She finally stopped struggling and looked at the hair she'd pulled out.

"Again?" she whispered, noticing her pyjamas were soaked through from sweat. She turned to face her alarm clock. The digital hands read two-forty-six a.m. Annabelle stared at the moving hands, her mind blank.

She stared until she noticed her hands shaking.

She stared until she felt something roll down her cheek.

She stared until tears filled her pale green eyes and then she cried.

She cried until she was too tired to cry and then she rested her head on her pillow and then she slept a sleep to rival that of the dead and where even Imogen Brown, with her burnt skin and cloudy eyes, couldn't get to her.

(extract from) A Time Traveller from the Future

Matt Hayes

I am a time traveller and a scientist from 2038. I was born in 2000 and wanted to go back to see my teenage years more clearly.

I got a torch and ran down to my dark basement where my most valuable creation – the time machine – was booted up and ready to fly. I walked in as I shone my torch on its door, stepped in when the door opened with a hiss of steam and took a few deep breaths.

“Teenage years, here I come. I’ll be right back to you guys,” I told myself. I pressed the green Go button on the wall and a big breeze began, then a huge bluster. As I held on for dear life, not wanting to be hurled around like a rag doll, a large, multi-coloured portal consisting of blue, black and purple appeared behind me and we were both sucked in.

We rocketed through our surroundings and I barfed on myself as I was almost creamed by several clocks flying around me. Clocks of every type, from grandfather clocks to those that looked like my bedside alarm. The time machine slowed down after clearing itself of any obstacles and I was relieved for a moment.

I wiped sweat from my face and removed my barfy jumper. The time machine began to speed up again and I inched back against the wall with my legs apart and hands out. “Aw, crap, I knew I should’ve slammed that Stop button into its panel.”

My face began to flap around and I started to scream as we sped around. I saw the finishing portal below just in time to listen to the dreadfully repeated line “Time goes back so slowly” from that cringey pop song, which I could hear echoing all around me on the clocks that played it.

I screamed even louder as the machine took a fast plunge into it and I lunged towards the door, tearing it off its hinges. I managed to narrowly escape it so I could be pulled into the portal by what I thought were safer means, but I collided with a spinning grandfather clock that was menacingly hidden and everything went black for a few minutes.

Myself and the machine were spat out by the portal. It was entirely disintegrated on the bottom and lay face-up with its mechanisms on the inside all pummelled to the point of smoking and sparking up.

I was knocked unconscious when the portal spat its damaged, windowless door out onto me before disappearing. I knocked it aside and held my sore head as I staggered out of it, also receiving an arm injury and a bruise on my cheek. I stood up and stretched, then turned to my mortally damaged creation. “I’ll fix you later,” I said, confident that I hadn’t gone insane talking to inanimate objects.

For now, I wanted to explore. Here I was in 2018, where everything looked strikingly different in comparison to my present time. I was in a town filled with amazing sights to see and places to go. People walked all around me with pets and took vintage transport - bikes, trains, cars and buses.

I went into a shop to look around. In my present time, everything was almost entirely chrome-coloured and every ground vehicle could fly or hover. In the shop, it was small, but everything looked great on display.

A boy with a phone coming towards me was not paying attention to his surroundings and I collided with him. We both yelled out and his phone dropped onto the ground, the screen cracking along the middle on impact.

He stared down and then up at me in shock. "Watch it, jerk!" he snapped, then stormed out, picking the phone back up so he could have some privacy in the heat of the moment.

I went after him after seeing an unobservant shopkeeper busy at his till, then caught up to him so I could apologise.

"Hey, kid, wait!" I shouted.

"What?!" he bellowed back, much louder.

I froze solid in my steps, and we looked at each other before his face sank into despair.

"I'm really sorry," I told him, trying my best to let him know I was empathetic. I walked over and we both examined the damage done to his device.

"My mom's gonna kill me," he told me. "She's always working her butt off to provide for me and this is like throwing it all back in her face."

Then he looked up and eyed the wallet that I had taken out of my pocket to examine its contents.

"Hey, what's that?" he asked me, pointing to it and trying to take it from me.

"Hey, don't take someone's personal possessions without permission," I told him sternly. "Didn't your mom ever teach you to be civil and mannerly?"

He scoffed as he placed his device safely in his pocket. It might have been just the sun beating down on me with its heat, but I was suddenly boiling with rage, sweaty and red.

He laughed and my head began to hurt. Without anything better to do, I picked him up and he yelled out in fright. I was furious that he was obviously so spoiled like that.

I held him against a wall in an alleyway, baring my teeth and leering into his eyes to catch his fearful expression. "Listen, kid, I'll get you a new phone of the best quality but it'll mean throwing you into the path of an oncoming car if you act up. You got that, you bratty prat?!" I shouted. My echo travelled down the alleyway and through the streets as far as it could go.

He nodded in a panic and I threw him aside for several onlookers to be scared by. I ignored them and yanked him along with me and we got out of there so I could cool down.

"You alright?" I asked the boy, apologizing for getting verbal with him so I wouldn't be viewed by more onlookers or maybe have a sneaky picture taken by a paparazzi who was hiding nearby. "What's your name?"

He hesitated for a second, then replied with, "Luke, Luke Baxter, sir. I'm quite prominent in college as a science student." I got the surprise of my life. He looked, acted and talked just like I did when I was eighteen - a long mullet haircut, a fair face and a strong build. He addressed adults as "Sir" or "Miss". He also wore some of the clothes I wore to look decent like I did as a teenager.

"Kid, meet your older counterpart. Future you," I happily told him, and we shook hands.

He looked behind him and noticed my time machine. "What's that?"

"Just the big device built back at home so I could transport myself here," I told him. I noticed some people touching it and shooed them away before asking him to give me some help to move it into the alley that it was facing. "God, town sure is awkwardly sketchy. Are you all alone?"

"Nah, I've got some friends near me," he replied.

It was 11:03a.m. and I hadn't eaten. I looked around at the variety of cafes and confectionaries. "Anywhere to eat around here?"

We walked into a shop nearby as we were about to pass it. "I'll buy you a breakfast roll and a coffee in there, in turn for my favour being done, it's 4.50 for the two of them," he told me.

I laughed. "You teens have a way with the culture here!" It could be the very beginning of a swell time in the 2018 universe as well as a neat chemistry with teenage me that I hadn't seen in quite a while.

Dry January

Sophie Furlong Tighe

most of dry january is spent apologising to people for doing dry january

most of dry january is a chorus of concerned looks and ah gwans, couldn't do it myself

it's also learning how to spell january

like *-uary* not *-ruary*

it's not like february (which is wet with the roll of the r)

some of dry january is drinking a bottle of wine and two beers and puking it up onto yourself

probably because of those twenty days you survived without the wet

don't be dry like

when does "i have a drinking problem" stop sounding funny

(is it just before you do a shot at 12pm in the college bathrooms)

i don't mean funny ha-ha but funny peculiar

(is it after you realise you can't talk to people without a drink in your hand)

people who look like me don't have drinking problems. drinking problems are for old sad men and jaded-looking girls with real blonde hair. i'm a bit quiet for a drinking problem, too young for a drinking problem. should have a divorce and a mortgage under the belt. you can't drink away a future you can barely see.

i have too many problems for a drinking problem. can't hold anymore. they all come spilling out like...

maybe "problem with drinking" is more accurate

sure first year is made for the session.

a friend of a friend told me he has a drinking problem with a kopparberg in his hand. said most of our type do. took a sip of his drink and said,

down it fresher.

The Guardian of Avalon

Caitríona Seery

Anna wondered what her life would've been like if she had been born a regular sorceress. Certainly, she wouldn't be the one the people were relying on to see them through the war. On the other hand, perhaps there wouldn't be anyone to stop Ryak, and all would be lost.

"My lady." She turned to face Chrystopher.

He bowed. "We are ready to leave on your order," her Lionheart informed her.

Annalia suppressed a hiss of terror at the news. *I'm not ready*, she thought. *I have to be* followed a second later. Whether Anna was ready or not, the time had come to confront her enemy. And, more importantly, to defeat him or die trying.

"I'm coming," she told him. "Just a moment."

He glanced sympathetically at her. Of course, Chrys was in a similar position to her. Just as her brother was supposed to be the 532nd Guardian of Avalon, Chrys' cousin was supposed to be Lionheart. Neither of them were considered for the positions until the Slaughter of the Emrys.

Chrys left and she turned to gaze at the hall of portraits. Each painting was of a Guardian. It went from Merlin himself, to Anna's mother.

Anna walked down the long hall, feeling the eyes of her ancestors stare judgmentally down at her. They seemed to weigh her worthiness to be of Guardian of Arcadia, the large citadel where the citizens of Avalon resided in wait for the King's return and guarded Excalibur until the arrival of that day. Anna doubted that she impressed them.

The corridor was so long that it took her fifteen minutes to get from Merlin to the final two. The newest was of Anna herself. It had only been finished a day ago. Anna looked small and uncertain to her own eyes. Her fear at the unexpected responsibilities shone from her face.

Right beside was the painting of Kaylana Emrys, 531st Guardian of Avalon. Anna's mother.

She peered timidly up at the regal woman. Everyone claimed that Anna looked just like her mother but Anna couldn't see it. Sure, Kaylana had the same flaming red hair as Anna, and the same sapphire-blue eyes that everyone insisted seemed to pierce your soul. Even their freckles matched.

But both in life and in the picture, Kaylana looked stronger than her daughter. Nothing had ever fazed her. Nothing except...

"Ryak *why*?" Kaylana's heartbroken voice echoed in her mind. "*How could you do this?*"

Anna shut her eyes against the memory of her home, covered in blood and mangled bodies. She shied away from the mental image of her family on their knees in the Room of the Sword, Ryak

with a wicked grin on his face. His reply, given right before he cut off Kaylana's head, reverberated in her head.

*"Because, My Lady. Merlin's Commandments are nothing but lies. Trivia did not gift us with our powers in order to **Serve and Protect** the mundanes. She gifted us with them so that we could **rule** them! And I intend to do exactly that."*

Anna shivered as she remembered the madness in Ryak's expression and eyes as he'd spoken. *Serve and Protect*, she recited to herself. *That is the reason why we were gifted with magic. I will **not** be the only Emrys Guardian to fail in that duty. Even if -* here she faltered for a second before again hardening herself. *Even if that means that I must kill Ryak. I **will** hold true to my Oath.*

Briskly she turned on her heel and hurried down to the door where Chrys waited for her.

She nodded to him. "Let's go," she ordered, jerking her head. Chrys' eyes held the hint of fondness only a childhood friend's could have as he trailed after her.

When they reached the docks, every member of the Avalonian Guard was ready and waiting on *Arthur's Knight*, the flagship of Avalon's small fleet.

"My Lady," Captain Rogerick Devan, the *Arthur's* commander, hurried to her side, giving a hasty bow. "We're ready to sail," he told her as he helped her up the ramp. "Will you be giving a speech before we lift the anchor?"

Anna tensed but nodded as elegantly as she could. Her mother had done it all the time when the navy men set sail, she reassured herself. Anna could do it too. She wished that she'd thought to compose one earlier though, instead of having to make it up on the spot.

She strode to the front of the ship where everyone could see her. With the help of a small spell, they could hear her too.

"Brave soldiers of Avalon," she began, hoping that she didn't sound as awkward as she felt. She continued, the words coming as she spoke them. "Today is a grave day for us all. Today, we're forced to take up arms against our people. Our people who have been corrupted, and consequently strayed from the path laid down for us by Merlin centuries ago.

But, my people, know that all is *not*, and never will be, lost. In the Afterlife, our lost people will be re-inducted into Trivia's light. There, they will be redeemed.

I know, my people, that we will win today. We *will* succeed in our quest because it is just, and Trivia protects us. So, we will fight, and we *will* win. As Merlin said to King Arthur: Camelot isn't built on magic, but on people and on their faith."

It didn't *feel* like an inspiring speech, but it must've been. Her men let out cheers. Anna pushed down a pleased flush as she realized that they were calling her name.

Hers, not her brother's. No, they called out *Annalia's* name. *Never before had such a thing happened.*

A small smile played at her lips as she curtsied and waved her hands. The anchor lifted from its position. Another wave had a strong gust of wind hitting the sails. Captain Devan took over then, beginning a string of song-like incantations to direct the ship.

Anna turned to gaze back at the island that her family had ruled for generations. Yes, she mused inwardly. *Your days are numbered Ryak. I am the Guardian now, and I **will** defeat you, Brother.*

The Monk's Gift

Jim Xi Johnson

A great deal of time ago, there lived a stubborn monk, who was hopelessly content with his life of routine and discipline.

One day, after a great harvest, he took a detailed inventory of the temple's stock.

By the time he was finished, the red sun had begun sinking beneath the warm valley.

In awe of the scene, he made a quick sketch with some spare ink, in effort to capture the day's beauty.

It was then he discovered his ability to copy any sight onto page, given the ink necessary.

*

The temple was on the cusp of a small village, and word spread quickly of the monk's great talent.

The villagers were amazed. The sketch was soon flattened and hung at the temple's entrance.

Meanwhile, the monk experimented.

He was proud of the people's compliments, but he was busy, considering how this blessing would affect him, and his place in the world.

After a season of hard meditation, the monk made up his mind.

*

"I cannot continue with this," he told the other monks. "It is using up valuable paper and ink, as well as time I have for the temple. How will the villagers react when they see me sitting about all day, doing nothing but draw pretty pictures? They will no longer support us, for sure!"

The other monks nodded and praised the monk for his selflessness and focus.

The village people were shocked, but their disappointment faded with time.

*

As the years went by the village grew and developed until it could not call itself a village anymore.

During this time other people soon realised they too had abilities similar to the monks.

In particular, the lazy farmhand, the baker's daughter and the deaf shopkeeper made full use of their gifts.

The shopkeeper beautified her shop and signboards.

The baker's daughter created people's portraits, later with the help of an apprentice.

The farmhand messed with dyes and powders, until colour bloomed for all to see.

Meanwhile, the monk continued with his routined, disciplined life, only drawing a pen on very special occasions.

As such, most of his work was cheaply sold in second-hand sales. Or simply lost.

*

Soon, his only remaining piece was his first celebrated sunset.

It hung in his study long after it was passed on, until one day it was taken down.

The page had yellowed, and the ink had curled blue.

The Devil in the Details

Dylan Breheny

2a.m., and the going is slow. A phone rings, somewhere between his keyboard and the sun. He can see neither - not because he isn't able to, but for the same reason he doesn't look at the phone now - he already knows what he will find there, and he wants none of it.

The ringing cuts off, and to him it's a terribly lonely sound, like a dejected puppy scraping at the door.

Only silence now. His fingers begin to move again, and soon the sound of the keys tapping is steady like rainfall. His hands move with a kind of eerie mechanical speed. The phone is forgotten now - The world is forgotten now. Only the glow of the monitor and his eyes stinging like blisters in the blue light.

His name is Rubin, but the others in the apartment call him The Doorman. His groceries are brought to his door every Sunday. His laundry is taken from the door and brought back clean, his trash not at all. Men with clipboards leave packages by the door every other day like offerings to some defunct pagan god. In a way, he supposes they are.

They catch only glimpses of him, though there isn't much to see. There's talk of a fortune (so they say) hidden in the walls, and corpses (rumour has it) stuffed under the bed, but it's just that - talk - because in the end the windows are shuttered and the door is locked and the only thing that comes in are groceries and packages and hairline fractures of streetlight in through the shutters. They see him as he sees them - phantoms through a keyhole.

Only blue now. His fingers move like shadows over water. What flickers past on the screen is seemingly random - back-end websites and delisted emails. Here, an invoice log from an accounting firm that no longer exists. There, an old company register, a dead facebook page, a passionless local article about a factory fire. He sees it like a man in a dream, and in a way he is, because behind the screen things only really follow a sort of half-logic, where distance doesn't exist and it's blue light all the way down.

*

Price listings on furniture. Another article, this one about a cancelled auction three years back. He drinks in all of it, absently filing away dates and times and places in the back of his mind, but what he's really looking for is names.

A name, and the rest follows. He reads Google searches like a diviner might read someone's palm. It's that half-logic again, because here behind the monitor the past isn't forgotten - it's lying out in the cold open, warts and all. If you know how to find it.

There have been many, but today it's Anthony Morse. The name means nothing to Rubin but everything to his business and he follows it with the cold precision of a Turing machine, looking for what he knows he'll find.

Anthony Morse. Born 1992. The boxes are stacked around his apartment like totems, most of them unopened, combination trophies and offerings. The place could probably be fitted out as nicely as any working man's apartment - God knows he has the money - but instead the only amenities are an old mattress on the floor and a kitchen set-up in the corner.

It's raining, somewhere. An elevator rattles its way to a stop. There's yelling upstairs, and a sound that might be crockery shattering. Horns blaring. Sirens pitching like a fever. Footsteps and bustle and shadows under streetlight.

Rubin hears none of this. Nor does he hear the phone on his desk buzzing again. Lives in Canada. Works from home. Takes calls for Ebay, it looks like. The phone cuts off. The downpour makes a sound like static - which isn't saying much, because to the man at the screen, everything is white noise now. The world is like an image photocopied thirteen times over.

But none of that matters, because it's coming together now, rushing suddenly into place like the hidden image in one of those seeing-eye pictures. The past of a man he's never met.

Mother deceased. Moved away days later. Gets paid illness benefit, too. It isn't something he can turn off. Some detached part of him that might be behind his eyes or out of space but is nonetheless there. Picking out patterns and abstractions. Banal details between the lines, things that seem pointless and innocent until -

he has a nice enough place, ritzier than any illness pension would get you, except -

the monitor beside him says that it's 3a.m., but it might as well be telling him it's the end of the world for all it matters to him, because -

- *no-one was around when his mother passed.*

There it is, the devil in the details. He stops typing.

*

Twenty minutes later he is holding a phone to his ear, a call to a certain Ebay helpline on the other end of the world. After maybe thirty seconds a voice comes through the line.

"Hello?" a man says.

"Is this Anthony?" Rubin asks, knowing it is.

A beat of silence. Then, "yes". Rubin has a sudden vivid image of some black-hat highwayman, like the ones from the old spaghetti westerns that used to air when he was a kid. Your money or your life ma'am, they might say, and the thought makes him grin savagely. He leans back on the balls of his feet.

Then he takes a breath, and says ten words. "Your mother, Louisa. You thought no-one knew. You were wrong." And ends the call before the man on the other end can reply, feeling a feverish sort of giddiness. He's pacing like a madman around his cramped little apartment. He imagines Anthony is doing the same thing on the other end of the world, sans the grin.

Down go the dominos, Rubin thinks, then makes a sound that could be a chuckle. Real blackmail is a sucker's game. Better to let the guilt do the work.

And oh, does it work. A chirpy automated voice on the other end of the line asks him how his service was over a looping ten-second jingle. Rubin tells the thing his home address, knowing that Mr Morse will hear it, and promptly hangs up.

The rest follows.

*

5a.m., and the going is slow.

Rubin leans back, his chair creaking under him. He closes his eyes, but the blue is still there, glaring like a scab.

After a time he gets up, his joints popping, and picks his way across the (offerings) boxes, blinking furiously like a man who's come up for air. He makes for the kitchen, straining to remember when he last ate. It's quiet, now. No rainfall or footfall or keyboard keys clicking like insects. Dublin is silent. To Rubin it feels like it doesn't exist at all, that he could open his shutters right now and find nothing but empty white space and the sound of static.

But he doesn't. Because at that moment there's a knock on the door. Rubin slides across the room like a spotlight. Three bolt-locks and a keyturn later he is facing a (pilgrim) man with a clipboard in his hand and a package under his arm. There's a beat of silence. The reaction is always the same. The delivery man looks at Rubin, then behind him, then shuffles his feet as if to remind himself that the ground is still there.

"I have a package for, uh" - the man licks his lips - "a Rubin Hanford?"

Rubin's hand flashes out like a viper, out of the darkness of his little world into the grimy light of the hallway. He doesn't even have to fully extend his arm to grab the clipboard, but to him it always seems like he's crossing some starless gulf between worlds.

He signs his name.

The delivery man takes it back, glances behind him like a spooked deer, before thrusting the package into the doorway and making to leave, fast. The door snaps shut behind him before he can fully turn around.

Click. Click. The door is locked. Rubin braces his back against the door and slides onto the ground, heart thundering like some hideous war drum. He looks down at the package. It might be from the last one (Anthony? His name might have been Anthony) but it seems unlikely, and not just because nobody can get a package from Canada to Ireland in three hours. No, right now Mr Morse or whatever it was has put down the phone, maybe taken the day off early. By now he might have lain down to go to sleep, only he can't sleep, only stare up at the ceiling while confusion folds into worry, then anxiety, then panic.

Maybe he'll try to contact Rubin, to ask him who he is or what he thinks he knows or what he wants.

Eventually, the offerings come. Rubin examines the label on the package - JERICHO BALLPOINT PENS - and cracks off another chuckle. There's no way to tell who sent it, even if he could remember half the names he's read or half the secrets he's held ransom.

In 1986, you stole from the house of a dying man.

The woman in the hotel. You could have saved her.

You buried him behind the shed. Everyone has them, he knows that. The devil in the details. You can bury them or forget them, but in the end they always follow you as reliably as a shadow. He knows that, too. Firsthand.

He gets up like a man who is fifty rather than twenty. The hunger is gone, and maybe it was never there. He glances at the monitor and makes for the desk. Today the name is Harrison Tull. Some worker for Amazon, or one of the big-name guys, and he -

Rubin stops. Stops dead, like the film reel has just snagged. Because the phone is ringing, and this time he really does hear it. The world seems to twist like a funhouse mirror, and he feels a lurch. He steadies himself on the chair, then looks down at the phone, though he already knows who it is (and he wants none of it).

Incoming call, reads the phone screen, "Mom". Below that, like an afterthought, are the words *73 missed calls*, and Rubin gets the distinct feeling the phone is laughing at him.

His own devil in the details is calling. Elevators. Footsteps. Walk and talk and radio static. Outside, the world is moving on. Rubin picks up the phone. It hums in his hand like a tuning fork. He raises it to his ear and answers the call.

For a moment there's nothing. Then: *"Hello? Rubin?"*

Rubin does nothing. Only stands there in the shuttered light, terribly still. A second passes, then ten, then the universe is running on overtime.

"Hello, Rubin? Can you hear me?"

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He opens his mouth. Then closes it. His mouth has turned dry.

He hangs up. Maybe a minute later, he looks around like he's seeing his apartment for the first time. He sets the phone on the desk with a painful tenderness, then lowers himself into his chair. Slowly, he begins typing.

Only blue now.

Red Rock Dust In My Hair: An excerpt from the autobiography of Marie Albernath

Philip Doyle

April 23rd, 2132. The day I arrived with the other “Earthers” on Mars. As the red planet reached its centenary as a recognised colony, my family and many others landed in the main space-port in the planet’s biggest terraformed zone.

A little under one hundred years had passed since Mars was established as Earth’s first off-world colony. And six years had passed since I was born. I was one of many children on board our ship. Of them, I was by far the youngest. I was also, far and away, the most content with “Ship Life”. I had many games to keep myself occupied, all self-made. I staved off the boredom when many fell prey to it, with the ship’s tight corridors and tighter entertainment library.

We had spent most of, what felt like, an eternity on that ship participating in the most mundane tasks imaginable. My parents got to know the other families, I was taught about life on Mars, and what to expect when we arrived. My young mind interpreted all the talk about us being the first off-worlders to come to the planet since it officially became a colony as that we were going to be treated as something special. I had cooked up ideas in my mind of a parade, or at least a big group of people to welcome us once we got off the ship. My parents didn’t have the heart to tell me otherwise. But, cleverly, they never confirmed that I was right either. A useful deceit to keep an easily upset child like myself from having a tantrum in the already unpleasant and frayed atmosphere of the ship.

As soon as the ship landed my parents and I were almost trampled in the rush to get out. I saw people, who were close friends the day before, shove each other aside to escape. Now seven years old, no longer the youngest - thanks, Sebastian (little baby Sebby) - I trudged into the vaguely unpleasant heat of the Martian day, and my first sight wasn’t anything like I expected. It was of the people I’d known for, according to my parents, ten months. I saw them in tears, grinning with joy, gulping lungfuls of air and kissing the red rock under our feet. I couldn’t blame them. Going from a tiny metal prison of a ship to complete freedom was amazing. I almost couldn’t comprehend there being so much space.

“Woah... I... *Woah.*” Awe was all I could manage at the views I was taking in. I tugged at my dad’s shirt and, dumbstruck, just gestured in vague, sweeping gestures. He laughed and nodded, taking my hand in his.

“*Woah* is right. An entire new planet, and an entire new life. Gonna be fun, won’t it?”

Before I could respond, my shiny expectations were immediately betrayed even further as topless off-roaders approached our group. The only people there to meet us were a few members of border control, and some incredibly scary armed guards. There were no crowds, no parade, or banners or fanfare. It dropped my mood for the whole day. The rest of it passed in a tiring miasma. The space-port hadn’t been used for people in a little over a century. It was hot, humid, and incredibly uncomfortable as we waited in line after line, and waiting room after waiting room. I was exhausted from staying up late, and not sleeping from the excitement at my chance to see a parade dedicated to my family and all my friends on board the ship, so I wasn’t having any of it.

Eventually we trudged through the slow, draining immigration procedures.

“Papers A-D, subgroups 3-7, and passport holders from Europe will now be checked.”

“Is that us, Dad?”

“We’re Subgroup 37...”

“Oh...”

The baggage checks.

“And you packed all of these yourself? Do you have anything you shouldn’t?”

“Not a one.”

The questioning sessions bridging on interrogations by border officers.

“WHAT IS THIS!? WHY DID YOU BRING IT?! ... Look, we’re not trying to get you in trouble, we’re just trying to figure out what this is!”

“It’s just a toy! Please, please calm down. She made it herself, we didn’t know she jammed a flower into it!”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

We finally got outside the mostly defunct spaceport. It was nearing nighttime by this point, the sun low on the horizon. The sky was as blue as the day we left Earth. I never really got used to that. The only high point of that gruelling day was when group of reporters appeared. They asked some of the Earth people questions, and took a big picture of the two hundred or so of us who had landed here. I, of course, demanded to be front and centre. With a wonky, gap toothed smile as big as my whole face, and my parents either side of me, our arrival on Mars was immortalised. I still have that picture framed in my sitting room. It’s one of my favourite (and only) pictures of myself.

Knowing what I do now, I wish I had made more of those first five years on Mars. In reality, they flew by, and I can barely order the events that happened in them. I remember scattered events: Outings with friends, or a birthday party or two, and an injury or three (I was very fragile when I younger). I also remember being a gangly mass of limbs, far too tall for my age (at every age). The only event I can still recall in detail from that five year period was the first time I played with Martian children, two days after our arrival. I came home covered, like almost everyone in our city of New Meath was, in the red rock dust that blew in from the deserts surrounding our terraformed “Habitat”. My mother was horrified by the state of my clothes and hair, but my father just laughed and rubbed some dust he picked up off the road into his own in solidarity.

To me, in those younger years, that dust became symbolic of my identity as a Martian. Everyone I knew on Mars had that same dust in their hair. Every person I knew on Earth didn’t. Therefore, according to my impressionable young brain, red dust meant, more than anything else, that someone was Martian. I wore it as a badge of pride, and wouldn’t wash or brush it out except for a few specific instances. My teacher in primary school, Mrs. Callahan, was one of these specific instances.

Mrs. Callahan was the bane of my existence throughout my five years in St. Francis’ Montessori School because of my love of the red dust and her burning hatred for it. Everyday we were not even allowed through her classroom doors unless we brushed ever single piece of red rock dust out of our hair. If we were particularly obstinate, she’d do it herself.

“Woefully dirty,” she’d say whenever we came in coated in dust. “It drags the school’s reputation *and* activates my asthma.” She had the most unpleasant voice in the solar system. It was piercing, loud, and she always spoke in short bursts. It felt like someone was driving their fingers into my temples whenever she spoke. She had another ritual that was always observed. “Morning

News.” She only ever read one source of news: The local “newspaper”. Archaically named due to its digital format by that point, but the name had stuck long ago. She read a selection of headline stories from the “New Meath Times” every morning. According to her: “One is never too young to know about the world around them.”

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Mrs. Callahan and this ritual of hers were the beginning of events which would change my life on Mars forever. The first five years, minus one day, of my time on Mars passed in a complete blur, but the clearest memory I have is the first day following that. More specifically during the “Morning News” of April 23rd 2137. Emblazoned as the first words anyone would see on the newspaper that day was “The Great Expulsion”. Underneath it was the subtitle “Five years on from the arrival of the “Earthers,” they are still as separate as the day they arrived.” And under that, in full colour for all to see, was me and all the friends and families we came to know on that ship.

“Look, look!” I grinned and shook my two closest friends, Sucky and Soosy, whisper-yelling as I drew their attention to my picture. “Didn’t I use to have the weirdest smile?”

Sucky patted my shoulder and nodded sagely. “Don’t worry, Marie, your smile is still really weird.” All three of us broke down into a fit of hushed giggling under the baleful glare of Mrs. Callahan. Loudly clearing her throat, that drilling voice stabbed at my temples. “The poor, the criminal, the jobless, and the eyesores of society. In the official documents sent from Earth to Mars,” Mrs. Callahan said, almost sounding pleased, “those were some of the words used to describe the “Earthers” that were sent here 5 years ago.”

As she continued to read, my cheeks began to get hotter and hotter with my embarrassment. Alongside that were new, stronger, and confusing emotions. Rage, shame, and something that felt like it was twisting my stomach in knots. I wanted to cry, but all I could do was sit there and stare in a state of shock.

“Prone to crime...”

“Showing little contribution to the economy...”

“Muddies...”

“Bringing dangerous ideas and ideologies...”

“And finally, who even asked for them to be here! Who indeed!”

The list went on and on. Mrs. Callahan rattled off insult after insult against my friends and family from that ship. Where the article itself wasn’t cutting enough, she made sure to embellish with her own words. The most painful part of it all for me was that it was all lies. No one I knew was a criminal, or particularly an eyesore, and not a single one of them was dangerous. My dad had only been out of work for two months when we left, and he’d found a job as soon as we came here, and he’d never done a thing wrong in his life! In a mist of hurt feelings, and on the verge of tears, I raised my hand.

“Yes, Ms. Albernath?” Mrs. Callahan said, pausing in her reading to glance up at me.

“I.. the article is wrong. I’m from Earth, and I’m none of those things.” Sucky and Soosi nodded in agreement with me, and when I saw Mrs. Callahan smile I suddenly felt a wave of relief. Of course, I’d missed the plan. She was going to read the whole thing, then call it a load of rubbish! Like my dad did! How could I have been so silly.

“Obviously, Ms. Albernath,” she said, as I finally let out a sigh of relief and smiled, “Someone on Earth thought you were.”

My breath caught on the intake, and small pockets of laughter surfaced throughout the class. Each drilled into my temples, just like Mrs. Callahan's voice. As if to prove a point, the rest of the class was then spent analysing that article. At the end of the article, a single question was posed to the Martian people by the author: "Why should we have to keep the "Earthers" if Earth didn't want them in the first place?" Throughout that article every slanderous accusation one could lay upon another person had been laid upon us Earthers. Mrs. Callahan, graciously, provided an example of my behaviour for each and every one, and every time laughter rung out from my classmates, save for Sucky and Soosi.

Criminality: "Well, you did take Ms. Roberts' share of Mars Day cake while she was in the toilet, Ms. Albernath." Katie Roberts shot me an angry glare, and the class laughed. My cheeks grew redder and I tried to hide my face in my hands.

Violence: "Didn't you shove Mr. Jakobson over because he wouldn't share his puzzle with you, Ms. Albernath?" Jacob Jakobson stuck his tongue out at me and the class laughed again. Sucky put a hand on my shoulder as I started to shake, tears blurring my vision from behind my hands.

Laziness: "This is the most obvious one. Your mother hasn't worked a day since-" Before Mrs. Callahan could finish, before she could make a clever remark and the class could laugh and jeer... I snapped.

An awful plastic and metal clattering noise broke the teacher's monologue as I shot to my feet, my chair tumbling backwards. Fists bunched, tears running down my cheeks, my voice wavering, I screamed, "SHUT UP! I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU!"

There was a stunned silence in the class. It was as deafening as the thud of my heart in my chest. My shaking breathing was the only sound for a number of seconds before my sniffing sobs, muffled behind my hands, joined it. Mrs. Callahan's face went redder than mine, and she looked like she was about to explode. "MS ALBERNA-" Before I could hear any more of the oncoming tirade, I sprinted out of the room, tugged my coat off the hangar and ran home, crying all the way.

As soon as I was home, I sobbed and sobbed into my mother's embrace.

I missed two days of school. My mother spent those two days calming me down, phoning the school, and getting no answer. She taught me an apology to use. One she knew the teacher and my class would have to accept, the language was sincere and waterworks could be added if need be. But we both knew there would be no sincerity behind it.

When I finally returned to school, I didn't have a soul to apologise to. No one would speak to me. Mrs. Callahan only ever said my name for roll call. The only time any students said my name was to hurl an insult at me.

"Criminal."

"Lazy."

"Earther." (The class's new favourite word) That one hurt the most. Only three days ago I'd been Martian just like everyone else. I had a passport, a house here, I spoke the Martian-English dialect, and above all else I had red rock dust in my hair every second I could. It all made me feel like I was someone else, like no one even considered me to be Marie Albernath anymore. It felt like I was just some "Earther" they'd never met. Some violent, lazy criminal.

*

I spent a Martian year in isolation. My whole family did. Every Earther did. That New Meath Times story picked up traction quickly. There were protests, there were debates, there were attacks and

leaked government documents. Worst of all, there was an election. The same part who, last election, struggled to get a single seat in the world parliament now held the majority. They had changed, newspapers said. Their views had softened, this was true. True in all regards except one. The Martian Independence Party (The MIP) still hated “Earthers” more than anything. Any Martian woe, from the national debt to the weather was the fault of Earth according to them. After that article, a lot of Martians agreed.

Changes came slowly for us at first. It began with smaller things. I had no one to play with, no one would let their kids interact with me, and shopkeepers that knew who I was would ignore me. For my father rules that no one followed at his work were being enforced on him alone, he had longer hours but no change in pay, and he’d never get a single drink at the bar. My mother’s job search stopped all together as nowhere would even respond to her. It was true isolation. Of course this didn’t all begin at once. It ramped up over the period of that year.

It was shortly after the election of the MIP that things started changing quickly, in big ways. One of their first actions was to revoke our Martian passports. We got “Earther cards” instead and were told to take them with us everywhere. Those card essentially revoked our personhood on Mars. The government, from that day forth, were no longer under any obligation to confer us rights. Not that we, or anyone else, were told that.

Over the next two years, our situation only got worse and worse. The worst parts this time were the protests. People protested against us, people protested for us, people protested the people protesting for us. My parents, and all the Earthers protested, my mother more than anyone else. All she got was a week in prison and a tracker for “anti-social behaviour”. Despite all this, nothing got better. I was woken up quite often by the sound of a brick breaking a window in my house or another Earther’s. All I could do was keep going to school, isolated and ignored for most of my day. My parents wouldn’t let me take part in anything Earther related. No protests, no community meetings, nothing. They tried as hard as they could to get me to interact only with Martians, no matter how many times I told them none would even look at me.

Even in all the isolation, all the mockery and hatred directed at me and my eminently recognisable face (being the most recognisable figure in the most widely known picture of the first Earthers), I still had one thing to hold onto. That red dust. A bright rusted colour that clung to my hair at all times now. It was what allowed me to still say that I was Martian, that I belonged. It was all that allowed me to the idea that I wasn’t some outsider, and all my old friends would realise that too, eventually.

Almost as if some higher being could see my suffering and my hope, our situation reached its peak. The day came when the government had finally set up its plan for us. It had been advertised for weeks and weeks. Security in the capital was maximised, protestors were silenced *en masse* and the venue was arranged.

On the day, the turnout was vast. Watching from behind our screens back in New Meath, it looked like everyone who could spare a day off work had attended. My father barely paid attention to the screen, his anger had turned into agony. My mother watched silently, not saying a word in fear her tracker would pick it up.

“The Earthers are, officially,” the prime minister began, reading from the documents which heralded my initial arrival, “criminals, the poorest of the poor, the jobless masses, the unwilling to work, and general eyesores to society.” There was no dissent from the crowd to this. They had

been told it was true for long enough. “Thus,” he continued, “Instead of just shifting the problems these people present to some other world, the Martian Government has chosen to solve these problems once and for all!” I scowled, the crowd cheered, and my father finally started paying attention

“No longer will Martians occupy government given homes with no income and unending governmental support, no longer will we turn a blind eye to their misdemeanours because they are new to our laws, no longer will those unwilling to work be allowed to do this!”

My father’s apathy had turned back into anger. He yelled and yelled about the lies being told. He yelled about the government aid which never came, the jobs we were fired from, and the work we never got a chance to do. He yelled most loudly about the laws enforced on us which never even surfaced against someone else. He had drowned out a lot of the speech with his yelling. He sat down again, exhausted and hoarse. My mother cried silently, now not even able to fight with her words. I stared at the screen, numb and quite broken.

“We would like to thank every Martian for their work on making Mars its own separate, unique, and beautiful world. Our centenary was just so recently, and look how far we’ve come! I hope you all have a good evening. Goodbye.”

We had missed it. In my father’s tirade, we missed the plan. We were in the dark. I felt like I should have been upset. I wasn’t. I was so tired, so numb. I trudged my way to bed wordlessly that night. I had no tears left to cry, no words left to say.

*

We found out the government’s plan from our neighbours the next day, and it broke even my numbness. We Earthers could no longer own property, or live on any private property. We were in the care of the government, and we would all be assigned somewhere where our various skills would be most useful. There we would work and there we would serve our collective sentences. The Earthers, as a group, had been sentenced to contempt against the state in our supposed dodging of the rightful enforcement of the law. An elegant plan which solved all of Mars’s problems with us. Out of sight, doing menial labour, and punished for something we didn’t do. The final semantic kick to the gut was the changing of some official language. No longer would terraformed areas be “Habitats”. They were now “Zones”. Only Earthers would live in “Habitats” now. These were smaller, older, more badly executed terraformed zones awash with factories and mines. These were considered the perfect fit.

My father had no anger left, my mother was too afraid to even cry, and I had never been involved enough with the protests to even begin to know how to resist. So when they took us away onto a bus with only a suitcase each, when we were told what had happened to our neighbours who did resist (things too horrid to write about), when we were brought off to a factory hours and hours and hours away from where we lived... No one fought back. Anybody who could didn’t know how, and those who knew how weren’t able to.

What almost hurt more than anything those soldiers did to us was seeing, and hearing, the reactions among our “native” neighbours. We had our reasons to not fight back, to not speak up, but they could’ve done something. And they didn’t. I almost thought that we’d be saved, or at least some resistance would be offered when I saw Soosy and Sucy sprinting over towards us. I pressed myself up to the window of the transport, smiling in relief for the first time in days. I banged on the

window, and waved to them as they sprinted alongside. I felt like I was going to cry. After years of abandonment by those two, I can't describe how happy I was to see them trying to catch up.

The first words I heard from my two oldest friends, after years of loneliness and sadness, were "EARTHERS GO HOME!" followed by raucous laughter, and their sprint stopping. The transport took off, and I cried like I'd never cried before. I sobbed the entire way out of our "Zone", and sniffled and shook all the way to our "Habitat".

I had never felt any emotion so pervasive that it clung to my soul for years and years until the end of our first day in that factory. I was so exhausted I wanted to collapse. We were sent to clean off before bed. I saw the red rock dust was out of my hair, pooling and swirling with soap and dirt, a red wave down the drain. I saw my Martian identity literally draining away from me. In that moment, I felt despair like I had never felt before in my life. I collapsed and cried, (ss if I hadn't already shed so many tears on the ride there) shaking and heaving sobs.

But, somewhere within the despire... I also felt anger. Anger like I had never known. It was this anger that stuck with me. In my bones, in my mind, and in my soul. That anger sustained me. That anger told me that I would not die here. That anger was what taught me how to fight back.

I'd keep coming back to that anger in my years in the "Habitat". In my days working, my days planning, and my days campaigning. That anger always came back to me.

But, in that moment, my first night crying myself to sleep in the "Habitat," all I knew was that everyone else was finally right.

I wasn't a Martian.

I was only pretending.

I was a liar.

Of course they were right.

I had no Martian passport.

No Martian home.

And not a speck of red rock dust in my hair.

Young Adult (and YA-ish) Books Adults Should Read
Compiled by Claire Hennessy, Philip Doyle & Jim Xi Johnson

Tangleweed & Brine - Deirdre Sullivan, illus. Karen Vaughan
Speak - Laurie Halse Anderson
Glory O'Brien's History of the Future - A.S. King
The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks - E Lockhart
I'll Give You The Sun - Jandy Nelson
One - Sarah Crossan
Belzhar - Meg Wolitzer
Spontaneous - Aaron Starmer
More Happy Than Not - Adam Silvera
Am I Normal Yet? - Holly Bourne
Beyond The Deepwoods - Paul Stewart & Chris Riddell
We Are Okay - Nina LaCour
The Name Of This Book Is A Secret - Pseudonymous Bosch
A Long Way To A Small Angry Planet - Becky Chambers
The Thirteen and a Half Lives of Captain Bluebear - Walter Moers
The Name of the Wind - Patrick Rothfuss
A Tale for the Time Being - Ruth Ozeki
Vurt - Jeff Noon
The Hobbit - JRR Tolkien (even though we know you've probably already read it)
Nimona - Noelle Stevenson
Persepolis - Marjane Satrapi
Foster - Claire Keegan