

Y A W P

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EDITION III



Editorial Team

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Mission Statement

Editorial Team

Our Mission. YAWP is a literary journal dedicated to cultivating the manifold voices of a modern generation. In this spirit, we seek to provide an open, free space for the unfettered expression of emerging young writing.

Half Crazy

Howie Good

There are only ten of us
and there are ten million
fighting somewhere of you,
so get your onions up
and we will throw up the truce flag.

*

Yes, I will lie quiet.
Can't do another thing.
I am all through.
I don't want to holler.
Police, mamma, Helen,
turn you back to me, please.
I will settle the indictment.
Come on, open the soap buckets.
Talk to the sword.
The chimney sweeps.

*

Pardon me,
I forgot I am plaintiff
and not defendant.
I take all events into consideration.
The glove will fit what I say.

*

In the olden days they waited
and they waited. The sidewalk
was in trouble, and the bears
were in trouble, and I broke it up.
That is something that shouldn't be
spoken about. But I am dying.

It is no use to stage a riot.

*

No business; no hangout;
no friends; nothing.
No. No. And it is no.
It is confused and it says no.

*

I am half crazy. They won't let me get up.
They dyed my shoes. Open those shoes.
Give me something. Give me some water.
Open this up and break it so I can touch you.

*

Did you hear me? I would hear it,
the Circuit Court would hear it,
and the Supreme Court might hear it.
I am sore and I am going up
and I am going to give you honey if I can.

Remix of the last words of American mobster Dutch Schultz, 1903-1935.

CONSTRUTTO or CONSTRUCT

Maura Termite

Ital.

Se un giorno lungo il mare
dovessi rivederti
in fine dei miei passi
fingerei con maestria
di avere una rondine
a farmi nido in testa
e in una piroetta
tornerei da me stessa

Eng.

If one day on the shore
I met you again
at the end of my steps
I would masterly pretend
I have a swallow on my head
making its nest
and with a pirouette
I would come back to myself

San Francisco Strong

Jordan Wilson-Dalzell

First published in *Resuscitate*

I come from a line of women who twist as they walk.
We inherit wild eyes,
become centurion trees,
generations strong.
I belong to the green limbs
who raised me to believe
that crooked trunks don't fall easily.

Summers looked like
rooting myself to my grandmother's kitchen table,
kneading dough for recipes
carried by matrilineal memory.
It was there I learned to mold myself
in the family value of growing,
despite bad weather.

By the time I turned nine,
I was taller than my grandma.
How could a branch reach higher sky than the tree?
Despite a world trying to call her tongue a weed
she spit out the chemicals of sexism,
refused to let their pesticides
push her back into the ground.
They expected her to burn.
Instead, her bark toughened
with a generation of women
she raised to believe questions are holy—
our minds a temple of ideas—
salvation surviving to be heard tomorrow.

I pray for the right words to measure how fast
the nightmares fled my mother—
termites, too afraid to bite at our family forest.
She carved herself into a bridge

between our fears and sleep,
but there is not enough infinity
to count the hours her eyes stayed awake,
just so we'd feel protected.

My relationship with the woman who made me
is a receipt stretching forever,
that she will never let me pay.

When my dad and I fight,
she puts each blaze to rest.
After the smoke clears,
she teaches us to plant again.

I still cannot find the lines of sorry
to open the closing of her eyes
when sleep returns her
to the double yellow lines that fractured her spine,
and today my hands are too fragile
to dig her out of her mother's grave.
Long before I was a bud beginning to grow,
she buried her own seeds beside her mama's casket.
The caretaker who didn't have anyone left to care for—

when we were little,
my brother and I dug up her smile.
We gave her a flag to fight for, an anthem to hear.

There's a tradition in my family
of the future saving the past;
the barren wilderness of depression is mine now.
Hide-and-seek with my baby cousin helped me
uncover the pieces of myself I liked.
She held my hand until
I was brave enough to want to hold my own.

Childhood can be contagious;
you can always catch yours again.

I owe too many apologies, too many poems
to the woman who built me,

but I don't know how to say them,
how to straighten her question-mark back,
thinking she is to blame,
because I have been bending my whole life.

I cannot convince her my trauma
doesn't also belong to her closed eyes
when I don't always believe that.

She wields her guilt like an axe
when she thinks she's holding a shovel.
Even when I'm breaking,
I am her daughter.

Point of View

Naomi Ash

I was born upside down,
even then I hesitated.
Small red mound,
Kicking and screaming.
Big shoes to fill,
With teeny tiny feet.
My mom said my ancestors
Used to bind them
Not that you can see that now.

Jamais Vu

Sena Chang

*“There’s an opposite to *deja vu*. They call it *jamais vu*. It’s when you meet the same people or visit places, again and again, but each time is the first. Everybody is a stranger. Nothing is ever familiar.”*

- Chuck Palahnluk

There was once a time when all seemed normal in Jules’s world. Days would blend into each other like the fleeting landscape from a fast-moving train, none distinguishable from each other; boredom and loneliness stained every corner of her mundane life, leaving no room to spare. Yet every so often, the universe slams upon us multitudes of events and signs that are sprinkled with a pinch of enigma and obscurities. Bound together by the mysterious workings of this universe that we live in, Jules’s story is quite different from those of the everyday people you see in the theater or on the train— in fact, it holds a certain murkiness that dare not be explored, at least not for the faint-hearted.

Jules Dubois had awoken that day with a tangy aftertaste of the Jack Daniels she had been sipping on while cruising through late-night television channels. It followed a regular Sunday, she recalled, with only the nauseating puffs of cigarettes to keep her company during her long hours at the police station. As she caught sight of the piles of laundry that littered her room, she sighed and left it for another day, already tired of the obligations she had to fulfill for the day.

Precocious and fair-skinned, Jules knew as a young woman that she could go places— she had once had dreams of attending university, going to graduate school— yet, once she was knee-deep in the affairs of her own little town of 1,500, she could not escape. It was almost unnatural, the way that the townspeople had sucked all the passion out of her until she became one of them. Expressionless and stolid, their lives followed a straight line with no inclines nor declines, a contrast to the dynamic roller coaster that others outside described it to be.

With few consumers and little wealth to spare, the economic powerhouses of this town had all moved out several decades ago, leaving behind an abundance of struggling businesses and jobless workers. Located in the middle of Iowa, the only buildings standing on her street were the musty supermarket down left, the appliances store, and of course, the police station that Jules worked at. Why there remained a police force, Jules herself could not fathom. *‘Probably required by federal law,’* she had thought. Yet she often found it absurd for a police to patrol a town of weary people with little to gain.

Mustering up the courage to keep her eyes open, Jules lethargically wore her uniform, applied a fresh coat of red lipstick, grabbed her keys, and headed out the front door. As soon as she inhaled the scent of the fresh morning air, she noticed a slight

difference. Slight, but tangible. Instead of the dusty, ash-filled air that made itself home in her lungs for 20 years, she met a fresh breeze quite different from the one she had known...

“Officer, we have an emergency!”

Jules jolted in her chair with shock, for a crime in this town was unheard of. As she stood up with urgency and was briefed on the case, the more ominous the situation felt.

“...lost woman... red lipstick... local...”

Jules zoned in and out during the conversation, still trying to fathom the possibility of a crime in her town of 1,500. A once in a lifetime event. Her ears alert, her brain drinking in every detail about this missing woman, she felt a fiery warmth of passion in the pit of her stomach— this was what she had been trained to do— it was what she had dreamt to do— and whatever hardships greeted her, she *would* find this woman. Jules had grown to hate her love for this sleepy town of senile residents, but when it offered her an opportunity to put into practice the very things that had joined the police force for, she did not hesitate to do so.

“Argh. Dammit!” Jules cried, as she pierced her finger on a thorny branch. Deep in the woods on the outskirts of the town, Jules had continued her three-day-long search for the faceless, nameless woman that had disappeared. With officers giving her rejected looks and sorry smiles, they had come to a unanimous decision to suspend the investigation until tomorrow, for their dinners would get cold and their wives anxiety-ridden.

Jules, too, had felt worn out and mentally drained, for she had poured buckets of blood and sweat today searching for a woman who could be possibly dead. Yet Jules did not feel as though this investigation was futile. The universe was calling on her to find this woman, she felt, as if she had been hardwired to find this woman. Such a strange part of the woods she had ended up in. But she herself did not lead her here, she realized. Jules had been dazedly walking around in the woods, confident that she knew where this woman was, yet ultimately leading her team to cul-de-sacs that promised nothing. She had been summoned here by some means; who, how, and or why, she did not know. She only knew that she *had* to find her, even if it cost her her life.

Eyes observant and breath held tight, Jules quietly looked around the place where her will had led her. For minutes she stood there, eyes burning into the unmoving scenery of the forest and ear strained to hear nothing but silence. Silence. Silence. More silence. Jules stood in the woods in a trance, planting her feet into the muddy ground and joining the trees in their silent chant.

It was a little past the early hours of the morning when Jules’s eyes caught something irregular. The glint of the sunrise shone off something pale, blinding her irises for a second. Her head shot up, breaking out of the hourslong reverie she was stuck in, and let the glint of the sun guide her to a nearby bush. Brushing aside the leaves and inhaling the fresh scent of green, Jules’ heart nearly pounded out of her heart when she found *it*. Dopamine pounded

into her brain, and fireworks of joy exploded through her veins. *She had found her. She had finally found her.*

Grazing her hands on its strangely unharmed porcelain skin and faded fiery-red lips, an unnerving sensation welcomed her body. As if a tiger had leaped at her, she jolted back in utter shock. Then, a sudden realization hit her. *She was looking at her own corpse.*

It was then that Jules knew. Her universe had collided with one that was entirely different. The train she was traveling on had swerved from its track, running along a new track that was completely new. One with different scents, towns, and people.

How she had been transported to this world, she could not fathom. Only one thing she knew for certain— she had met death in her former world. Jules would have to navigate this world and this world only, for if she found a way to return, her existence would have been erased. It was the reason why lifelong friends had become faceless strangers; time flowed irregularly in this universe, and the Earth was rotating on a different axis. Jules had died, yet her fiercely beating heart contradicted exactly that. The year remained 2020, but Jules had found herself on an Earth far, far away from the one she knew.

Author's note: Haruki Murakami's 1Q84 inspired this story.

In a Closet in a Dorm

Bob Chikos

I crouched in my dorm room closet while my roommate Clyde was in the bathroom. After he returned and lay on his bed, reading *The Federalist Papers*, I bided my time. The longer I waited, the more scared he'd be.

Two minutes. *God, it stinks in here*, I thought.

Three minutes. *Getting hard to breathe*.

Four minutes. *I can't stand it much longer*.

Five.

"RAAAAAAH!" I blared as I opened the closet and jumped out.

I could almost see grey hairs sprout as Clyde's eyes bulged from their sockets.

He returned to his book, trying to act nonchalant. "Ever got caught playing with yourself in a closet?" he asked.

"No."

"Safe place, isn't it?"

Six months earlier, I had graduated from my community college in the Chicago suburbs. With my grades and awards, I could have transferred to just about any college in the country.

I chose East Tennessee State.

What was I thinking?

After living my entire life in the Midwest, I wanted to plunge myself into an entirely different culture – the Bible Belt - and live among their natives. Besides, all accredited colleges are pretty much the same, right?

Right?

Johnson City was one of the most beautiful places I'd ever set eyes on. Small mountains bordered the campus and they blazed orange in October. I smelled a spicy-sweet combination of allspice and vanilla in the air – some fragrant bush I'd never been exposed to in Illinois. Southern accents on the girls somehow made them even cuter. I pictured myself someday coming home with one to meet dear old Mom and Dad.

I eagerly anticipated college culture. Dorm conversations into the wee hours about the meaning of existence. Late night pizza runs. Spontaneous road trips. Pranks.

What I found instead was a campus in which most students went home on weekends, businesses closed on "The Lord's Day," and mediocre classes were taught by

jaded professors stuck in Academic Gehenna. The only partying took place in frat houses. I refused, on principle, to pay for friends.

Most of the friendly-sorts in my dorm were in one – or several – of the Christian clubs. I attended their events. Good clean fun.

But I couldn't understand their hang-ups. I had learned an African tribal planting dance and showed it to a small gathering outside a women's dorm. In the dance, you touch one calf to the back of your other leg's knee, then repeat with the other leg, while putting one hand atop the other and thrusting them downward, as if you're using a gardening tool to make holes in the ground. It was less erotic than the Hokey Pokey. Darla, the hall's director and a member of the Faith House, stormed out of the dorm screaming, "Stop! Just stop!"

"Stop what?"

"Stop that dancing!"

"Why?"

"We have rules about lewd behavior."

I hadn't been aware that some Christian denominations consider dancing sinful.

Once at dinner, a group of guys discussed bands. Abe mentioned Queen. "They're all right," Jonah said, "but Freddie Mercury was just a f----t." He forked a chunk of pork chop into his mouth.

My jaw went slack. "Does it matter that he was gay?" I finally asked.

Jonah looked me sternly in the eyes. "He was a f----t," he repeated. "And now he's dead. He's just a dead f----t. And now he's burning in Hell."

"What do you have against gay people?"

"They go against God's will. AIDS is God's punishment for being gay."

"It's just who they are."

"It's a choice."

"How can you choose who you're attracted to?" I scanned the cafeteria and spotted a reasonably attractive man. "I mean, I can look at that guy over there in the No Fear shirt and say, 'that's a good-looking guy', but I don't want to have *sex* with him."

I surveyed our table. Although the other guys were *nice*, they clearly shared Jonah's mindset.

Eli intervened. "All I know is you've got to love the sinner and hate the sin." The others nodded in agreement.

Later that semester, the school paper ran a story about a student who was also a drag queen. The student had been receiving death threats. I read it while Clyde cut Eli's hair in our room.

"Surely, you're against death threats, right?"

"Of course," Eli said, as Clyde clipped the sides of Eli's hair. "Although, if he'd just stop dressing as a woman, he'd probably stop getting death threats."

I had had different early lessons in tolerance.

When I was seven, my older brother loved watching reruns of *Soap*, the first show with a prominent gay character.

“Mom, what’s *gay*?” I asked.

“It’s like when a man wants to marry another man.”

“Can they do that?”

“No, but they can be together just like they’re married.”

A few years after that, my brother discovered *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

“Mom, what’s *transsexual*?”

“It’s someone who wants to have an operation to change their body from a man to woman or the other way around.”

“Why would they want to do that?” I asked, unable to comprehend.

“Some people just feel they were born into the wrong body.”

And that was that. As good of an explanation as anyone could give in the early ‘80s. I went through junior high and high school aware that gay and transgender people existed, but I was far too self-conscious to dwell on anyone other than myself.

I sensed an odd mix of pride and paranoia on that campus. The region was overwhelmingly Christian, yet they spoke as if they were an oppressed minority. “They won’t let us pray in schools!” “Stores say ‘Happy Holidays’ instead of ‘Merry Christmas!’” “They teach [gasp!] *evolution* in schools!”

Harlan bought into all of this.

Harlan was 5’ 5”, roly-poly with feathered brown hair, beady eyes, and a contagious baby smile. He worked at the mall at Johnson City, (which was aptly named, “The Mall at Johnson City”). A Spanish major with dog-like hearing, we would entertain ourselves by whispering phrases from farther and farther distances – 20, 30, 40 or more yards at a time, and he would repeat them to us with perfection.

Over time, Harlan’s demeanor became dark. He’d lurch down the hall in his black satin jacket and khakis after work, head down, before quickly closing his door behind him. He’d extend his room’s phone cord into the hallway and whisper three-hour conversations with his hand cupped over the receiver.

One night I walked by the lounge area – a seldom-used alcove that separated the two wings of the dorm. Harlan sat cross-legged on the floor next to the couch.

“Have a seat,” he said.

I sat on the hard, grey carpeted floor, the scratchy brick wall propping my back.

“What’d you think of that program tonight at Faith House?”

That night the Faith House held its weekly meeting. I had attended the Faith House less and less often, as fire and brimstone sermons became more frequent.

A common ritual at Faith House was someone would speak about a sinful past, such as drunkenness or premarital sex, but through Jesus, they had been saved. This night's topic was homosexuality.

"I think you know where I stand, Harlan."

"What did you think when I said I knew for a fact that it was going on at our campus?"

"It goes on everywhere."

He pointed to himself. I realized he couldn't say the words. It was as if saying them out loud was the actual closet door – the one thing that separated a gay *person* from someone who does gay *acts*.

"I don't care. You're still my friend," I said.

"Are *you* gay?" he asked.

"No."

"Well, you give off gaydar. You know that, right?"

"What's gaydar?" I asked.

"It's a vibe you give off that makes people think you're gay. You're in really good shape, you use hair gel, you're smart."

"Not because I'm never with a girl?"

"Pfft!" he spat. "A lot of gay guys have girlfriends. That's called a *beard*. You know – a *disguise*."

"Do you want one to disguise that you're gay?"

He put his finger to his lips to silence me. "Don't call me gay," he whispered. "I've just made some poor choices."

"You feel bad that you're attracted to men?"

He leaned so far to his left, he lay on the floor. He looked down one side of the hallway, then rolled over and looked down the other. He rolled back up into sitting position.

His beady eyes stared into mine and his lips pursed. "I'm waiting on test results." His eyes glistened as they sank to the floor. He sniffled. A single tear ran down his left cheek.

In my ignorance, I wondered if tears carried HIV.

I didn't know what to say. "I'm sorry, man."

A month prior, Clyde had put up a poster in our room. A black-and-white public service announcement. The kind that is typically seen in a high school nurse's office, with wisdom, like a rendering of a fetus smoking, or a teen girl holding a baby with the caption, "Change the world, not diapers." Clyde's poster showed the front, minus the head, of a young woman in a chair, legs crossed, with the caption, "There's a simple way to prevent AIDS." Easy answer.

I had so much confusion then. At the time HIV was practically a death sentence. People, from celebrities to a French teacher at my high school, were dying at alarming rates. Treatments were hit-or-miss.

I also knew that, fair or not, the most impacted group was gay men.

Harlan told me how he hid. His family didn't know. Guys in the dorm didn't know. He was careful to compartmentalize his life. The only ones who knew were the men – most of whom he didn't know, his Pastor Jim, and now me.

I had met Pastor Jim once. I made it a policy to accept invitations in order to collect experiences. Looking back, that policy had gotten me into far too many boring church services, with false promises that I'd "visit again real soon!"

Pastor Jim was proud that he wasn't a bigot. In the Sunday school prior to the service, he went on a far limb and boldly stated that racism was wrong. To give an example, he said he approved of interracial marriage "in some cases."

"What did Pastor Jim say?" I asked.

"He told me that Jesus loves me, but I *must* stop. He gave me this." He pulled back his left sleeve to reveal a thick rubber band around his wrist. "See what it says there? Romans 6:23. Every time I get an urge, I-" he pulled up on the band and let it smack his wrist, leaving a red mark.

I could see the letters, its black ink smudged.

"Romans 6:23. For the wages of sin is death," he said, placing a finger on his right temple. "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"What does that mean?" I asked, understanding the basics of Christianity, but not its intricacies.

"It means if you sin, you will die."

"Harlan, we're *all* going to die."

"No, I mean you will *die* die. You'll be cast into the fires of Hell." He sniffled. "I don't wanna die," he sobbed, like a baby starting a tantrum. "I don't wanna go to Hell, Bob. I don't want you to, neither!"

A week after he came out to me, Harlan sat in my room. He stared at the tiled floor. "I had another relapse," he said. Then he pulled the rubber band and let it smack his already-welted wrist. "I gotta wait another six weeks to find the results." He slowly shook his head. His voice was deeper, raw from crying. "I hate myself."

We sat in heavy silence. After a full minute, he said, "I don't want to talk about it."

We sat in silence for another minute, then he said, "Three weeks ago, I was at the clinic. They had to freeze genital warts off me with liquid nitrogen. Do you know how incredibly painful that is? Otis was there. He held me down while they did it."

"Who's Otis?"

"A guy."

"A nice guy?"

"Yeah, he's a nice guy."

"Why don't you date him?"

“I can’t, and you know why.”

Six weeks later, I stood in my dorm, door open, speaking on the phone to a girl who had zero interest in me.

Harlan knocked. He mouthed, “It’s not positive,” and made a plus sign with his fingers while shaking his head. Then he made a negative sign with one finger, nodded his head, and mouthed, “It’s negative!” His baby smile was back.

That was the last time we spoke about it. At the start of the next semester, I noticed the rubber band was gone. By the end of the semester, I graduated. I lost contact with Harlan for good.

More than 25 years later, I watched *Boy Erased*, a movie about a young man who was put through conversion therapy. Afterward, I got snoopy. I found Harlan on Facebook. He looks happy. He still has feathered hair, beady eyes, and that same baby smile. Behind him in the picture is a man - I wonder if it’s Otis.

I also looked up Darla, the hall director who wouldn’t let me dance. Her most recent post is a lovely picture of her, holding a bouquet, beaming, with her smiling wife of fifteen years standing at her side.

In college, I never had meaningful conversations about existence. I didn’t go on any spontaneous road trips, and I didn’t bring home a belle to dear old Mom and Dad.

But I did prank someone by coming out of a closet, and hopefully, I made it easier for someone to peek out of theirs.