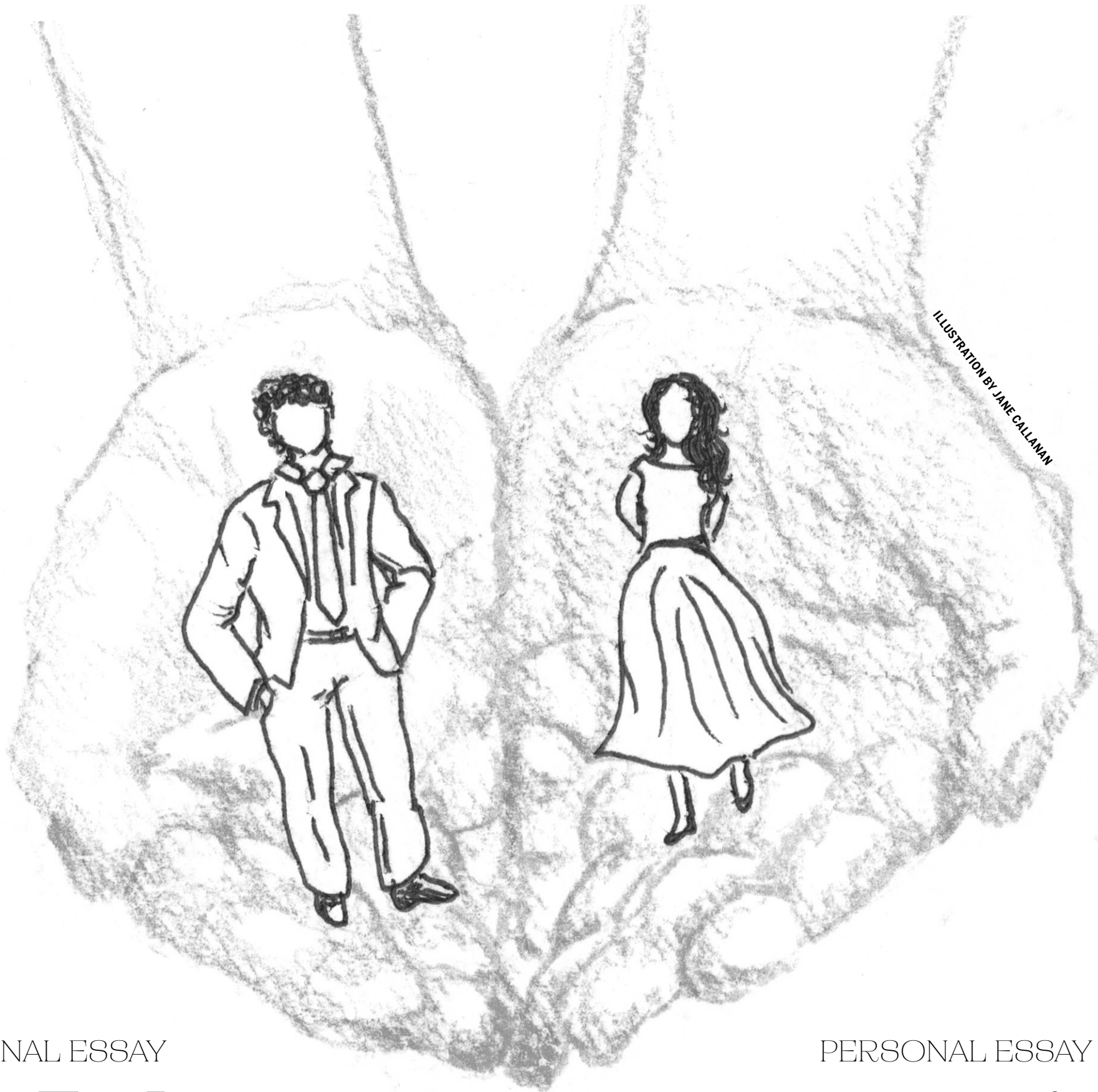


WEEKEND *COUPLING UP*

PERSONAL ESSAY

The End of the Situationship

// BY FABEHA JAHRA

Somewhere along the way, we decided that wanting someone too obviously was embarrassing. That asking directly was “too much.” That caring had to be filtered through the guise of chillness. In the space between unread texts and half-made plans, the situationship took hold — a relationship defined more by what isn’t said than what is.

It’s worth asking why we’ve accepted this as normal.

Situationships thrive on ambiguity. You talk, but you don’t plan. You feel, but you don’t name it. Everything exists in potential, never quite arriving anywhere. On the surface, it looks casual. In practice, it asks you to constantly read between the lines — to interpret tone, timing and silence as if they were a language. That kind of guessing is exhausting.

Valentine’s Day tends to make this dynamic impossible to ignore. For one day a year, romance becomes visible again: roses in dining halls, reservations made in advance, couples who suddenly have to decide what they are — or aren’t. Even if you try to opt out, the day has a way of surfacing questions we usually keep buried. It exposes how unsustainable that guessing can be. It turns “we’ll see” into a deadline. Suddenly, ambiguity feels less like freedom and more like avoidance. When a day built around intention arrives, situationships reveal what they lack most: clarity.

What we’ve lost isn’t romance in the literal sense. It’s courting in the most basic one. Courting means asking someone out clearly. It means choosing a time and a place and following through. It means making interest legible instead

of leaving it implied. It doesn’t require extravagance — just decisiveness.

Occasionally, pop culture reminds us of this. When a new season of “Bridgerton” airs, people briefly remember that romance can be obvious, that attraction doesn’t have to be hidden behind irony or detachment. And then, just as quickly, we return to pretending ambiguity is safer.

Situationships reward restraint. They train us to hedge, to keep one foot out the door, to treat effort like a liability. We learn to want someone quietly, in a way that can be easily denied if things go wrong. We confuse emotional distance with freedom, even when it leaves everyone shackled to their phone and their unsaid hopes.

On Valentine’s Day, clarity feels less scary than continuing to guess. That’s where courting comes back in — not as tradition, but as a structure of thought.

There’s relief in that kind of clarity. Knowing where you stand frees you from overthinking every interaction. Even when the answer isn’t what you hoped for, honesty is kinder than uncertainty stretched over time.

Valentine’s Day doesn’t need to be a spectacle. It can simply be a reminder that romance works best when it’s deliberate — when people are willing to say what they mean and mean what they say.

Courting doesn’t guarantee love. But it does guarantee honesty. And in a culture saturated with half-signals and hedged feelings, that might be reason enough to bring it back.

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PERSONAL ESSAY

Yale’s setup craze

// BY HANA TILKSEW

In theory, Yale College is made up of brave individuals. Sending in an application knowing that only 4 percent of applicants make it through takes guts. Almost a fifth of the class of 2025 graduated with two majors. A quarter of the student body is made up of international students who spend most of the year in a country that’s not their own. Considering the many obstacles Yalies overcome, we should have no trouble being plucky in all aspects of our lives.

But underneath this veneer of courage, we seem to have trouble exercising any boldness in romantic pursuits. Something I’ve only witnessed at Yale is a school-wide obsession with being set up. Why ask someone out to first-year formal when you can get your friends to set you up with a date? And if you don’t want your friends to pick out your sweetheart, you can use matchmaking platforms like the Marriage Pact or Date Drop, which function more or less like dating apps but are exclusive to people on campus.

Marriage Pact is a setup tool that’s been around since Stanford students founded it in 2017. Date Drop is newer, launched in 2025, also on Stanford’s campus. Date Drop is different from Marriage Pact in that, instead of getting a single match with whom the algorithm has deemed you compatible, matches are released in weekly drops over the course of three weeks. If this week’s match is someone you’d rather stay just friends with, you only have to wait seven days for the next round of matches to drop.

Henry Weng, founder of Date Drop’s parent The Relationship Company, wrote in an email that this technique leads to “in-person dates at an order of magnitude higher rate than Tinder.”

How does a platform that uses artificial intelligence figure out whom you should date? Date Drop’s questions include whether you prefer a match of a specific religion or ethnicity, if you’d be OK with a partner who uses substances and whether you prefer to subscribe to traditional gender roles in a relationship. “Our questions are grounded in psych research,” Weng wrote. “Since we collect feedback on how matches go, we add or remove questions based on how well they predict good matches.”

Getting set up, whether in real life or through an online matchmaker, seems like it can relieve the awkwardness of finding your own dates. But at a relatively small campus, even being matched by a digital platform doesn’t grant complete anonymity. Meti Negewo ’28 noted that “the circle here is so small, so no matter who you end up being paired with — especially if you’re the same identity — you’re gonna know them. Most likely, they’re already someone you’re friends with.”

While being matched — instead of matching yourself — means “the work is being done for you in a sense,” Negewo noted that “it takes away the pleasant surprise of being matched with someone you wouldn’t know.”

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WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:
ASKING YOUR CRUSH OUT ON VALENTINE’S DAY