PERSONAL ESSAY

A Tentative Love Letter to "Let's Grab a Meal"

// BY ASHA ROY

I have a confession. I'm probably not going to get a meal with you. It's not that I don't want to — usually. It's that something will inevitably come up and my struggling short term memory will fail me. Saying "Let's get a meal" in passing feels like saying, "I'm sorry I haven't prioritized you in my life." This phenomenon is so ubiquitous at Yale that it inspired Rory Bricca '26, a recent graduate, to compose "A Simple Phrase," a song for the Yale Glee Club which details the sequence of events following the "let's grab a meal" catchphrase.

My social life at Yale is caught between two poles. There's a tension between time well spent with people who make me feel safe, and filling my Gcal with meals every hour of the day. The hope is that GCal-ing meals with acquaintances will lead to even more close friendships. But does it? I decided to ask around to evaluate the fruits, or lack thereof, of our GCal labor.

When I asked Margot Kelsey '29 what "Let's grab a meal" really means, she said it means "I might want to get to know you, but I'm too nonchalant to actually say it." What I take from that is that Margot is a much nicer person than I am. Here I am with my "Sorry I don't prioritize you in my life" translation, while Margot sees the statement as a tentatively extended olive branch.

Teresa Ng '29 answered the same question with "either 'I think you're a nice person and would like to indicate my good will toward you, but there is probably a shared understanding that we won't ever get around to it' or 'Seriously, I miss having class with you, and we never got to properly hang out — let's be friends.'" Both Teresa and Margot note that there is an unspoken element, something hidden in between the lines when asking someone to dine together. However, that element is often hard to parse.

We use "Let's get a meal" as an umbrella term, and rarely specify exactly what we expect from the other person in response. The hidden social code is both illegible and essential.

However, I'm not so sure that this phenomenon presents such a severe problem. Having had my fair share of high school cliquiness, I was surprised upon my arrival to Yale that I wasn't relegated to one table. In a lot of ways, I have structured my social life here to get away from the concrete friend groups of high school. There is nothing that annoys me more than an overly active groupchat, and I hate the inevitable power dynamics within friendgroups. "Let's-get-a-meal" culture felt like anti-friend-group freedom and an escape from social boxes.

Being trapped in a friend group with little mobility to make other connections did not just limit my socializing, but also limited my self-confidence and self-perception.

I had an elementary school teacher who was obsessed with Bruce Lee. He would often quote Lee's iconic line, "Be water, my friend," lauding Lee's ability to adapt — like water — to take the shape of whatever container it might find itself in. I hated being like water. If I filled whichever container I found myself in, I felt like I couldn't control who I was. The space left for me to embody was carved out by people's perception of me.

Like most high schoolers, I spent too much time thinking about what other people thought of me, which is what left me so conflicted by my Bruce Lee predicament. I desperately wanted to be "chill" and "fun" — attributes so unattainable they evade clean definitions.

When I got to Yale, I vowed that I would not let myself be water anymore. I was tired of other people's binding archetypes — even though, I know now, most of my problem was my own perception of how others see me. At Yale, I realized that I could ask almost anyone to hang out. I didn't feel trapped in monotonous perception; I had different friends who saw me at all my different angles.

The disconnect persists between grabbing a meal and calling someone a real friend. It can be difficult, and vulnerable, to transition from bi-weekly lunches to real, deep connections. But, coming from a place where even grabbing a meal was unfeasible, I much prefer the Yale way.

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ILLUSTRATION BY RANA ROOSEVELT

PERSONAL ESSAY

Campus imitates art: the Gilmore-ification of Yale

// BY RIYA NADKARNI

An average day of high school for me included coming home and watching somewhere between one and three episodes of "Gilmore Girls." My dream school was Yale, and when I got in, I was swarmed with, "OMG, you are literally Rory Gilmore!"

"Gilmore Girls," which premiered in the early 2000s, follows single mother Lorelai Gilmore and her daughter Rory as Rory comes of age. The show's seven seasons culminate in Rory's graduation from Yale College. And while my parents warned me to not expect Yale to be too similar to the school I romanticized in "Gilmore Girls," I found that Yale was actually close to the depiction in the show.

Whether it be the people in the Silliman College courtyard reading under trees or the campus revival of preppy Y2K fashion, Yale seemed to resemble the world in which Rory Gilmore existed. I wasn't the only one who thought this. It was common to hear, "Wow, this is so 'Gilmore Girls'" or "I wonder if Rory Gilmore ever went to Econ 1115." For a while, I was happy to revel in the comfort that I associated with the show. There was something romantic about Yale in the fall, bundled in a maroon sweater and a hot latte in hand.

At first, I thought that "Gilmore Girls" had characterized Yale remarkably well. Then I started wondering if Yale students recreated "Gilmore Girls" remarkably well. The Yale of "Gilmore Girls" is not simply a university. It is a small town disguised as a college, a contained and familiar version of Yale's sprawling campus. Rory constantly runs into her friends, traditions become landmarks within the year and even ordinary routines — getting coffee before class or getting meals in a residential college — take on a sense of continuity.

That is perhaps what Yale students have unconsciously recreated. Many don't aim to become Rory Gilmore — or emulate her character. Instead, we try to recreate the small provincial world that made her Yale feel so distinctive in the first place. Like the show, coffee culture is common, first-day suite parties do exist — cue Rory and Paris's first party on move-in day — and the Yale-Harvard Game is a slew of traditions and celebrations. We often see Rory running from place to place with a book and coffee in hand, and while Yale students may not be reading the same book, it is normal to feel like a chicken running around with its head cut off.

The Yale of "Gilmore Girls" makes the mundanity of college feel compelling without making every moment extraordinary. But, the show also knows how to make Yale feel mysterious. In one of my favorite episodes, "You Jump, I Jump Jack," Rory is introduced to a secret society with a social group almost completely outside her normal circle. What begins as an invite to a strange party turns into a set of eccentric rituals including jumping off a platform with an umbrella to impress a secret society. That episode transforms Yale from a collection of classrooms and routines to something more insular: a place where there always seems to be another tradition or corner of campus waiting to be discovered.

While the real Yale is less likely to involve jumping off a platform with an umbrella — though, you never know — the underlying premise still feels familiar. Yale has a talent for turning ordinary college activities into traditions with lore behind them. Traditions exist in friend groups, clubs and campus-wide, but they all have the same effect: tying students into a community brought together by Yale.

It's not only the pretty parts of Yale that mirror the show. Rory acts as an arts reporter for the News covering a ballet show and ends up completely tearing apart the performance, much to the ballerina's dismay. At the beginning of my real-life first year, a performative male contest was held in which one of my friends participated while holding a copy of "The Summer I Turned Pretty." A reporter from The Yale Herald reviewed the event and spent an entire paragraph dissing him. At that moment, life imitated art.

Perhaps this is why "Gilmore Girls" continues to feel strangely familiar twenty years after Rory moved into her dorm room. While the show did not accurately predict my physics problem set or the smallness of my first-year dorm in Vanderbilt Hall, it understood that the charm of Yale comes from students creating a world out of it. That version of Yale exists, in part, because generations of students have come expecting to find it and, consciously or unconsciously, helped recreate it. So, when someone points out a student reading in the courtyard and says, "That's so 'Gilmore Girls,'" they may not just be recognizing the show. They may be participating in the very process that made Rory's Yale feel real in the first place.

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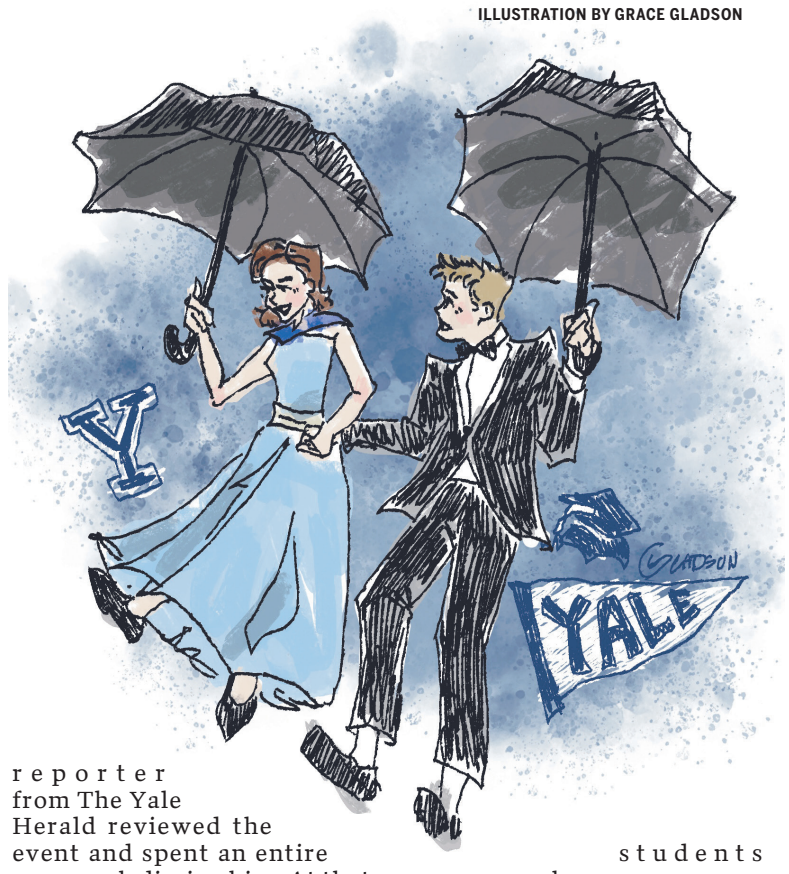
ILLUSTRATION BY GRACE GLADSON



WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

SUNBATHING ON BEINECKE