PERSONAL ESSAY

Is he nice to you?

// BY CLAUDIA LOIZAGA

My intention was to get ahead on work before the week began. I sat down at my favorite cafe, ordered my chai and opened a blank document titled "Plan for the week." Step one: open document. Done.

"Can I read the text again?" asked one of the girls at the round table behind me. Her question disappeared into the hiss of the coffee machine and the steady murmur of conversation. I ignored it and powered on with the exhausting task of crafting my to-do list, which had so far required me to type four words. I began musing over which assignment was the most urgent that week.

"That's definitely a date," another girl, from that same table, remarked. I stopped typing. My cursor continued blinking at me, apparently unaware that my priorities had shifted. Someone was going on a date. Good for her. I tried to concentrate on my blank document, though I had now become considerably more interested in the lives of people whose faces I'd never seen.

"This is so serious. If he's taking you out, we need to decide if you can date him." The others hummed in agreement. Clearly, a date was not simply a date. It was a decision requiring consultation, and, from the sound of it, several rounds of deliberation. I found myself anticipating the questioning, even though the group was one of strangers whose names I didn't know and whose faces I was actively avoiding.

"What does he do in his free time?" the guy at the table asked. I was surprised by how many people were involved in this discussion. They had excellent standards for the people their friend spent her time with. I was beginning to wonder what I had missed in my own romantic life by not assembling a committee first.

"I don't know, we haven't talked that much," the girl admitted. I kept staring at my screen, maintaining the appearance of someone with somewhere to be and something to do.

"You seriously know nothing?" the guy asked. He had a point. It was a little strange to be considering dating someone you barely knew. On the other hand, wasn't the entire point of a date to get to know someone? I kept this thought to myself, partly because if I chose to interject, I would be accused of being insane, and partly because I was interested in the committee's answer.

"What is his name?" The others added. I heard the tapping of phones against the table and the aggressive scrolling that followed. The investigation had officially moved online. The committee was on the prowl, searching the entire World Wide Web for the mystery man. Somewhere between my unfinished to-do list and my increasingly cold chai, a man I had never met had become the subject of a background check. This investigation belonged at FBI headquarters.

Someone gasped. I held my breath. "Is it bad?" The girl asked. There was genuine worry in her voice. I glanced at my screen, where the cursor was still blinking under the words "Plan for the week." I would like to say I was observing, or rather overhearing, the conversation with anthropological detachment. Unfortunately, I was listening too carefully for this to be true.

"I don't know," one of her friends said. And then, the revelation: "He has a podcast." Some of the girls giggled in response. I had no evidence against this man, but I was beginning to understand the concerns.

"What does that mean?" There was a deafening silence from the table. "I don't know yet. I just think we need to be careful." I admired the honesty. No one seemed entirely sure what having a podcast meant. Was he arrogant and self-absorbed — or wise and cultured?

The investigation continued, the standard for an acceptable boyfriend growing more elusive with every question. "Has anyone been to his room?"

"Yeah," the girl said. "And?" "He has one of those LED lights." I looked at my screen. I looked at my chai. I waited.

"Like, around the ceiling?" the guy asked. "Around the ceiling," she confirmed. Someone oofed. "Oh," I couldn't tell if this was a career-ending detail for the man, but judging by the flat tone of the guy's response, neither could he. After a few moments, he asked, "Is he nice to you?"

"Yes," the girl replied flatly. "I think we need more information to decide. You should go on the date, and then we'll see." Everyone in the group agreed with the verdict.

I had arrived at the cafe with hopes of getting ahead on the week. Instead, I spent the better part of my afternoon following an investigation into a man I would never meet. I still didn't end up learning who he is — whether his podcast was a sign of arrogance or wisdom — whether he'd ever get a second date. I returned to my to-do list.

Step two, apparently, was minding my own business.

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ILLUSTRATION BY ANGELA TROIA

CULTURE

Behind the prank

// BY EMILY NGUYEN

Last April's Fools, I remember Mr. D'Antonio, my high school AP World History teacher, detailing the endless series of pranks he was planning to enact on his three daughters. His plan included surprising them with brown E's for breakfast, transforming the kitchen sink into a geyser with the help of a rubber band.

Obviously, practical jokes don't end at college, and certainly not at Yale.

"Yale Dog Prank" is the alias for an anonymous Yale student who began a new prank on campus at the end of September.

In an interview with the News, Yale Dog Prank described their act as a simple matter involving entering dorm rooms in a realistic dog mask, barking, growling and acting as a real dog would. Yale Dog Prank described their ability to perform a hyper-realistic bark as a natural talent, a skill that they perfected in high school at pep rallies, football games, and even when they gave their high school graduation speech.

"It was fun," customer Nathaniel Hochman '30 said.

Rhys Adams '30 was a part of the first group of people to be pranked by Yale Dog Prank. Adams had several different reactions to Yale Dog Prank, at first, trying to ignore the practical joke as it unfolded.

"I took up my copy of War and Peace, and I started reading it, but the barking and yipping got increasingly loud, and I found it difficult to parse Tolstoy's prose with that distraction in the background," Adams said. "I had reached a limit of how much Yale Dog Prank I could endure."

Every prank that Yale Dog Prank pulls is recorded and posted on the Yale Dog Prank Instagram profile, @yale.dogprank.

"I will say that the video that you've all seen online does not reflect my first response to the crisis," Adams said, referring to an Instagram reel that shows him trying to remove Yale Dog Prank from his suite by sweeping them with a broom. "I tried more diplomatic methods and they didn't work, and so then I had to get out the broom."

Adams added, "In retrospect, I found it funny. I stand by my actions, but I also acknowledge that it could have gone differently."

"We were already talking about pranking my FroCo," Hochman, who ended up using Yale Dog Prank's services to amuse a group of FroCos and other students at duty night, said. "And then he came, and he barked."

From the most elaborate pranks to the more simple ones like Yale Dog Prank, the practical jokes that have come out of Yale share a sense of innovation that is both humorous and perhaps existential. What does it mean to pool so much of your time into a meticulous plan that results only in temporary amusement and plain laughter? The return on investment of a prank is often short-lived.

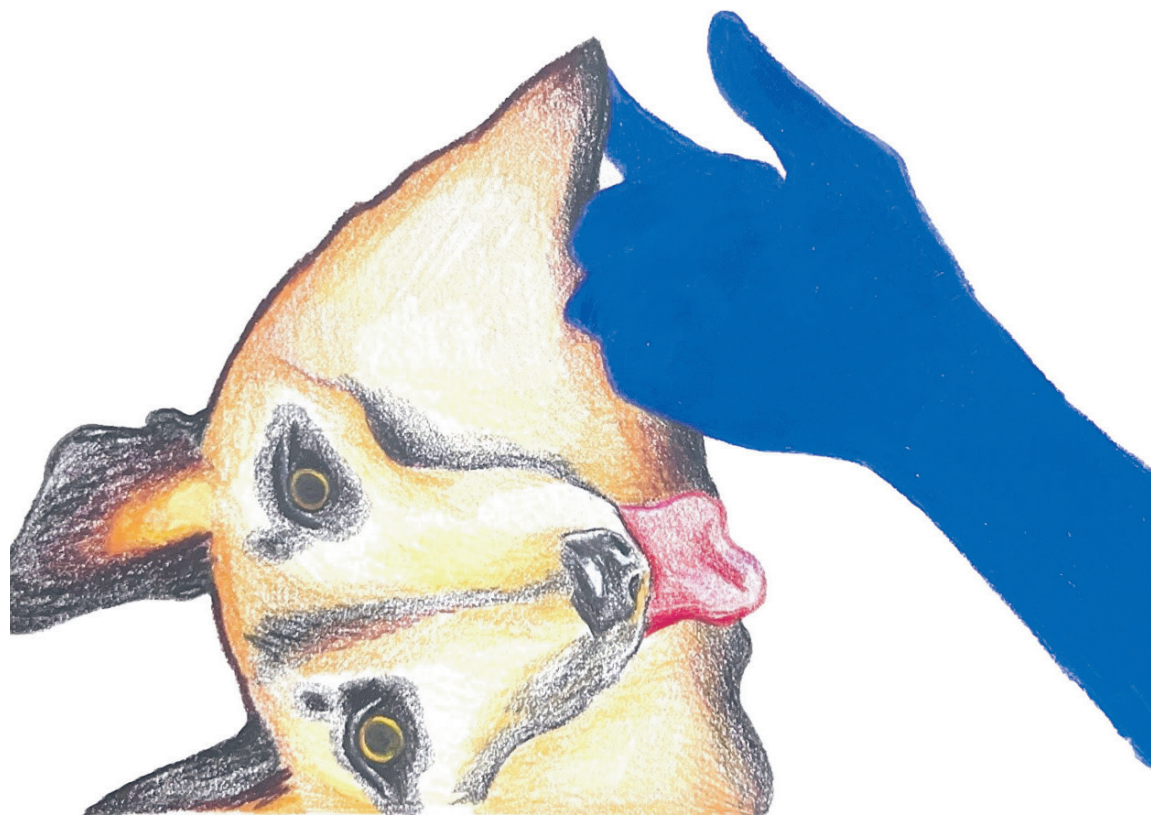
Though reactions from students have varied from fear and laughter to disgust and confusion, Yale Dog Prank told the News that they began their prank not only to make others laugh, but to be a part of something unique. The bark, Yale Dog Prank said, is something that has always been a part of their identity.

Yalies are living in a world where not everyone has the luxury of simple laughter. We should laugh at the "stupid stuff" because that same "stuff" — the mundane, ordinary and regular — will eventually cease in favor of the difficulty and hardship that come with midterms, interpersonal conflicts and everything else that befalls college students.

Clad in their dog mask, Yale Dog Prank proudly told the News that the prank will go on for as long as the laughter continues.

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ILLUSTRATION BY EMILY NGUYEN



WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

GORGING YOURSELF AT FALL FEST