

Love at Lowell
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A lot can happen in a dining hall. And *this* one is really special.

This dining hall is where Diana and Dorothy greet us at the beginning of the school year, where HUDS nourishes us daily, where we pore over p-sets into the wee hours of the night, and where Roman sleeps.

Perhaps most importantly for me, this dining hall is where I fell in love. I never could have seen it coming, but this is the place where I got to know one of the people who knows me best in this world, who can read the feelings off of my face at a moment's glance, who knows the ins and outs of my every day, and who *never* lets me feel alone. This dining hall is where I met Goretti.

On Housing Day freshman year, I sat with my blockmates worried about what house we would get. When a white-and-blue-clad army burst in and told us we had gotten Lowell, my blockmates broke into cheers and my relieved first response was, "Thank god, a river house near the gym..." And then a sinking feeling set in: "Wait...that's the house with the super strict card swipecy lady."

See, my first interactions with Goretti came when my a cappella group would try to sneak in 15 people for our "family dinner" every week, on a night when Lowell had dinner restrictions. Naturally, our begging and bargaining were not agreeable to her, and when we did get in, I would spend all of dinner trying to avoid her gaze when I ducked into the server for food. She was really good at remembering faces. It was scary.

When I moved into Lowell as a sophomore, Goretti still wasn't easy on me. The first thing she noticed was that the guests I tried to get into Lowell for lunch were always male, sometimes *more than one guy a meal*. She started making a habit of circling the table I was eating at and giving me her signature disapproving one eyebrow up, at many a meal.

Now that I'm in a nice, stable, committed relationship, she uses her uncanny knack for faces to give me a quick preview of the dining hall whenever I walk in: "Your cute friend Xavier just came in, he's waiting for you; your sweet friend who you sing with is waiting for you but he's mad because you're late; the boyfriend is here and he's sitting with a different girl. I don't know what's wrong with you people."

Dining hall inventory aside, Goretti is really good at keeping track of things in general. That same sophomore year, I looked around the dining hall and wondered why seniors were sometimes a bit more subdued than us underclassmen — less friendly and chipper and inspired by *everything*. I *knew* I'd never let myself feel jaded like that.

Then, senior fall hit, and all of the uncertainty for the future and the darkness of the past flanked me and flattened me until I stopped saying "hi" the same way anymore. Sometimes I didn't even notice, but Goretti did. She always noticed, she always asked, and when she saw me sitting alone one day staring sniffily into my salad, she left her desk to sit and talk with me until I was

put together enough to go to class. Many of us are notoriously bad at calling our parents, and I am an outlier even among us. But if I don't call home, Mama Goretti still intercepts me at that door every single day.

Goretti's been at Harvard for 12 years, and worked in a residential dining hall since then. She's seen 12 classes graduate. She's sat through so many sunsets at that seat over there, and watched how the belltower basks in her favorite shade of afternoon light at a time that shifts by a few minutes with every passing day. She's left a country and a husband; she's lost a sister and a nephew. She recently gained a daughter-in-law, and this May, when we graduate, she'll welcome her first grandchild into the world. Goretti sees us in our franticness, she reads and remembers our faces, and she reminds us to appreciate the limited time we have: here, at Harvard, and in general.

A lot can happen in a dining hall. This one, and the people in it, are really special. However long you have left, I invite you to enjoy your time.