

OPINIONS

GUEST COLUMNIST KELSANG DOLMA

Sad Yale girl elegy

Nobody makes time for love here. Yale is a “prestigious,” “high-achieving” school — we erect gothic castles as dorms and admit moneyed students under dubious circumstances. Constantly striving to be the next big lawyer, doctor or president, our classmates keep real feelings at arm’s length. Feelings are inconvenient when scheming for a lucrative career during these bright college years.

I grew up in a working-class suburb in the Midwest, so transitioning to Yale was difficult. Until I arrived on the east coast, I didn’t know words like “semantics” and “deontology” existed. I didn’t know how to jockey aggressively in seminars — how do people say so much without saying anything substantive? From the ornate Hogwarts-esque dining halls to the constant liberal hysteria, college was a spectacle to me in every way.

At Yale, love is an abstraction; Yalies thump novels from the Western canon and lament over their loneliness, but rarely put in the effort to sustain something raw and beautiful. Supposedly, the hardest part of Yale is getting in, but I disagree; this school fosters perpetual anxiety. Whether they are working on problem sets, essays, auditions, or interviews, nobody ever seems to be done with work.

Logistically, hookup culture seems to makes sense. We can easily jump back to work after a hasty meetup — making out with some dean’s son can happen more often and readily than you think. They say that if you don’t subscribe to hookup culture, you miss out on the “college experience.” It’s better than loneliness, right?

Friends enter Toads alone and stumble out in pairs; fast intimacy is easy and abundant. Sauntering out of makeout sessions in unkempt dorm rooms, I thought I had mastered this lifestyle. I rationalized away the butterflies that flitted in my stomach.

I had the audacity to fall in love once. It began when we matched on a dating app; I was bored and listening to Frank Ocean, so when Oli asked me out, I shrugged and said why not?

Everything about him was electric. There are more things in heaven and Earth than can be dreamt of in philosophy. He was tall, dark, handsome and his eyes graciously crinkled when he laughed at my absurdist jokes.

Raised thousands of miles apart, we only met because of our beloved school. On our first date, we meandered all around New Haven as we explored each other’s histories. His refreshing sense of humility soothed my insecurities. Oli’s long fingers waved around when he told stories about his father. Those same fingers left me blushing when they caressed my cheeks across the bed.

I jumped at the notifications that secretly buzzed during classes. We eagerly exchanged banter, literature and memes, and I snuck a few sniffs of my sweater when his smell lingered. Propping my chin up with my hands, he confided in me dreams of becoming a lawyer, professor and president. People gushed about the prospect of us becoming a “legacy family.” Yikes — but I didn’t completely hate the idea.

Such a chaotic tenderness. I wish I had the words to articulate how I felt when I was with him because “happy” is a gross understatement; I felt alive. But more than that — something inside me transcended ordinary existence when we were together.

But he fell into the same pattern as every other flighty Yale student. His excuses bubbled up overnight. A huge assignment was due one week. A consulting powerpoint needed to be constructed the next. In my mind, he prioritized work over whatever sacred thing we had — or whatever thing I had imagined.

“You — I mean this, is too much for me,” he stammered over the phone, “I think we should stop.”

“Yeah.” I lied. “Good luck with your work.” Ending the call, the room felt unbearably quiet. Was I too much? Maybe I got in the way of his dreams.

I tried to steel myself, but hot tears streamed down my face anyways. Oh how they burned.

My friends told me I felt empty

because, without the rose-colored glasses, he was not who I had thought he was. Looking back, they were right. Constantly making excuses for Oli, the relationship was unfair for me. Love shouldn’t be this difficult.

Months later, Oli asked to see me. I noticed his hands clenching and unclenching in the dark as he apologized. The slender fingers I once admired now contorted uncomfortably with shame and regret. Burned out, Oli had dropped out of school indefinitely.

He asked me if I had been with anyone else since we were last together, and his shoulders sagged when I said I had. He had been unable to find someone after me.

I had wanted his apology, but it didn’t make me happy.

But I moved on. Time doesn’t stop for anyone you know. The new guys were cheap imitations of Oli, but I developed feelings for a few of them. I’m a hopeless romantic, but my feelings are painfully genuine.

Those flings fell apart when I demanded respect. I refuse to be the “chill girl” — the girl who acquiesces as a means to a meagre slice of companionship. Call me old-fashioned, but asking for decency is reasonable. There are dozens of ethics courses here, but Yalies rarely apply their lessons.

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Inexplicably, my failed romances became part of a formative college experience. Nights spent raging with friends over inadequate text messages devolved into laughter as we scarfed down dry falafel sandwiches. And college is so much more than romance. In my four years, I’ve joined protests, traveled the world, and fallen into many jaunty adventures with friends.

As a plucky, educated woman, I learn more each day of what I want out of my relationships. I, and we all, deserve people who enthusiastically nudge us into better versions of ourselves. I hope to eventually become a lawyer, but I will never settle in my relationships. Maturity sometimes means finding comfort in loneliness too.

My story is not just an elegy. It’s also a love letter, an ode, an angsty battle cry. As I trip over the Cross Campus pavement, I still hold my head high because there is more to life than we can imagine; there is free choice even when all is predestined. I may have already bumped into my future spouse, or maybe they will be introduced at a lame cocktail party. Maybe they will be a law student I bump into at the library, or a colleague, if time tests my patience. Or perhaps they’ll be just another random person on a dating app that I mindlessly match with on a lonely evening in some anonymous city. I know someone is out there for me, and I’m so excited to meet them.

KELSANG DOLMA is a senior in Pierson College. Contact her at kelsang.dolma@yale.edu.

GUEST COLUMNIST ANDREAS GREILER BASALDUA

Owning our time

I have the best student job on campus. The hours are flexible and the pay is good. I work almost exclusively on weekends and usually at bars, restaurants and formal receptions. I am a photographer at fraternity formals, parties, mixers and other student events.

I usually get ready for work one or two hours in advance. While my classmates finish their Friday assignments, or get together for their weekend pregames, I’m in my room, making sure batteries are charged, memory cards are formatted and that the flash will hold out for at least two hours of continuous shooting. As I load my camera bag, I think about the ceiling of the night’s location: Is it bright and smooth or uneven and reflective? The ceiling at 116 Crown makes my nights easy, Barcelona’s not so much.

I discovered the job during my sophomore year. Some group was missing a photographer and I happened to have a decent camera and free time. The pictures weren’t great, but they were good enough, and I soon started to fill in at other events. As I became more comfortable with the job, I started raising my rate, and soon I had made enough to get my own flash and a 50 mm prime lens.

Yale College feels like a small school. I often spot good friends at the events where I work. But usually, our interactions are limited. We exchange pleasantries, and then I take the shot and politely ask them to make space for the next group. Occasionally, they chat or ask me to stay for a drink after my shift. But small talk is only so meaningful and my equipment is worth over a year’s worth of wages from shooting; getting tipsy on the job is a luxury I can’t afford.

In the fall of my junior year, I fell sick with mono. My waking hours became devoted to studying and working. The few nights I went out, I entered the club, restaurant or bar with my black backpack and the awareness that I was about to spend another weekend night around friends, but not with them. Leaving my backpack at home was not an

option. I needed the money, and, given my condition, I couldn’t forgo the opportunity of editing on a flexible schedule.

Around the same time, I started working on a project where I used macro photography to study the coloring of particular beetles. My biology professor provided me with lab space and a beetle collection from Yale’s Peabody Museum of Natural History. This was exactly what I had envisioned Yale to be like. I was able to pair my love for photography with Yale’s resources to explore nature too small to see with the naked eye.

During my first session, I learned the names of the beetles in the collection and how to handle their fragile remains without damaging them. During the second one, I figured out how to set up the flash and the lens so that the beetles were well illuminated and properly magnified. I never made it back for the third session. I still had trouble staying awake, and as schoolwork picked up, I had to drop all my extracurriculars — all except one. On weekends, I was busy working at events across campus and editing images in the library, instead of working on my own projects.

Yale offers such an incredible wealth of opportunities, like that it is impossible to take advantage of them all. The sheer density and diversity of talent and intellectual prowess found on Yale’s central campus is higher than almost anywhere else. Our time here incredibly valuable, because every hour missed is an hour stolen from the four fleeting years we spend here — a period of personal growth, discovery and wonder.

I am extremely grateful to be part of this institution. Yale has given me access to a world I couldn’t have fathomed existed before I stepped onto campus for the first time. Part of Yale’s excellence stems from its competitive environment — an environment where star students contend for top grades, scholarships and postgraduate opportunities. In this environment, ten hours of work a week can make a big dif-

ference. Even generous financial aid packages often fall short of creating an even playing field for a considerable proportion of Yale’s student population. And although these shortcomings are dwarfed by the opportunities we are afforded, the difference persists. I learned valuable lessons he first few times I shot at parties, but my job — where I often get paid and tipped by my classmates — soon became a reminder of my standing in Yale’s socioeconomic hierarchy.

This week, my parents will visit Yale for the very first time for my graduation. I can’t wait to show them the place I’ve learned to call home over the past five years. We have less than a week together, but I want to show them everything; I want them share in the joy and gratitude that I feel for being a member of this incredible institution.

But, everyone’s parents will be coming. And they will want photos. And they will pay — more than during any other week of the year. I’m spending multiple afternoons shooting instead of showing my parents my home.

It’s hard for me to put my finger on why exactly this feels wrong. I’ve worked hard over my four years at Yale, as have most of my classmates. And like them, I wish to dedicate this valuable time to my closest friends and family. Yet, even during the one week where I value my time the most, it seems to be less valuable than that of my more affluent peers.

I still stand by the opening sentence of this piece: I have the best student job on campus. But even so, it eats away at hours that could have been spent otherwise with family, studying, or participating in groups.

Yale is generous, but there is room for improvement. Leveling the playing field would make the institution even better. To be the best we can be, students should be the owners of our own time.

ANDREAS GREILER BASALDUA is a senior in Pauli Murray College. Contact him at andreas.greiler-basaldua@yale.edu.

GUEST COLUMNIST ASHIA AJANI

There’s something more

Dear Graduate, It doesn’t feel completely real, does it? After a few short years, we’ll be walking across the stage with our diplomas. We’ll pack up our dorms and apartments and say goodbye to the city that’s housed us, fed us and provided us with new ways of envisioning this world. And it’s changed us.

The marvelous thing about beauty is that it can be found everywhere if you keep your eyes open. Unfortunately, the same can be said about pain. I think often about the privilege of bearing witness and who gets to be seen, who gets to be recognized. All the empathy in the world cannot stop a bigot from holding and acting upon hateful thoughts, and yet we try to focus on finding middle ground. Sometimes it’s easier not to engage at all. Stay quiet. Don’t make waves. These conversations are uncomfortable. Keep the peace. But peace for whom?

We live in an academic community that is thoroughly engaged with the creation and analysis of theory. That is one of the things that initially drew me to Yale — here, I was fulfilled intellectually like never before. I learned from scholars about everything from the Anthropocene to critical race theory to musical counterpoint. But we don’t deserve to live in this fantastical place. To remain within the pearly gates of the Ivory Tower is irresponsible. Moreover, it is irresponsible to ignore the violence that continues to shape the experiences of students of color on this campus and beyond. Yale does a great job of teaching theory, but our curriculum lacks praxis. We learn about historical trauma but refuse to engage in discussions about the trauma that exists adjacent to our homes. We have become complacent and numb, believing that our ideology will save us.

We live in terrifying times.

These closed walls want you to shut your eyes to the sorrow that inhabits the grounds right outside of them. A mosque in this city is set ablaze, a Yale police officer shoots at two unarmed citizens. Even in my city of Denver, Colorado, we decriminalize psychedelic mushrooms while simultaneously voting against an initiative that would decriminalize homelessness. Georgia voted to criminalize all abortions, setting civil rights back decades. The United States government has lost over 1,500 children at border internment camps. We have 12 years to radically change our environmental policy before the effects of climate change become irreversible. Hate crimes have been at an all-time high since Trump was elected. Outside of America, Cyclone Idai devastated communities in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, but received little airtime coverage. The whole world feels under attack.

Too often, I wonder how my community — the marginalized, the artist, the social worker, the immigrant, the teenage mom, the barista, the lover, the people with disabilities, the teacher, the houseless man singing Stevie Wonder all through downtown, the landless laborer — will survive during this era. When I share these fears with my mother, she offers the same pocket of wisdom: “We survived Reagan, you will survive Trump.”

But what about the people who didn’t survive Reagan? What about the AIDS crisis, the dissolution of social programs, the false narrative that the wealth of the rich will trickle down? This sickness didn’t start with Trump. It didn’t start with Reagan, and it surely will continue if we turn away from the horrors of this world and prioritize individual success over collective well-being. I think one of the main differences between the Reagan

and Trump eras is the imminent threat of climate change. As an environmental studies major, I constantly discuss climate change with my peers. During an intense conversation with a dear friend, she wondered out loud, “What will this PhD mean in six or seven years when climate change has become irreversible?” How will we make sense of all of the things that we’ve learned, all the ideology we’ve studied, if the earth crumbles into nothingness?

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This world is overwhelming in its sadness. Some of us may go on to hold powerful positions, political, financial, non-profit or otherwise. We are already part of a system of class and knowledge reproduction; some of us may become gentrifiers, or we may take the evils of the world and internalize them ourselves. In a few years, will you recognize yourself? I implore you, graduate, as you move on from this place, to identify where your apathy comes from. We may inhabit different worlds, but we all live in the same reality. As much as we try, we cannot deny our radical interconnectedness. We need each other, for better or for worse.

ASHIA AJANI is a senior in Timothy Dwight College. Contact her at ajani@yale.edu.