

Byways

Journal of Arts and Letters
Spring 2019

Cover Art

Society's View - Claudia I. Maggiolo

Poster Art

San Marcos - Kristoffer Ian Celera

Special Thanks to:

Mike Matthews, Professor of English
Joann Maxon, CTC Printing

Hobby Memorial Library
Editorial Staff

Forward

Byways: Journal of Arts and Letters is an annual collection of creative works submitted by Central Texas College students. The works presented in this issue are original works that of drawings, paintings, poetry, photography, and short stories. The pieces showcased in this issue represent the best in their respective categories.

As with all creative work, whether art or literary, its purpose is to provide each artist's unique point-of-view. It invites discussion and an exchange of intellectual ideas between the creator and audience. This type of creative stimulation offers each of us with growth, expanding our levels of knowledge while encouraging us to think beyond the limits of today's boundaries.

There were many pieces submitted for inclusion for this year's *Byways* issue. The works included in this volume represent the very best of CTC students' creative abilities. For all authors and artists that submitted works not published in this issue, your pieces were commendable and showed great potential for your future development. Lastly, the editorial staff wishes all submitters the very best in whichever direction your artistic talents guide you.

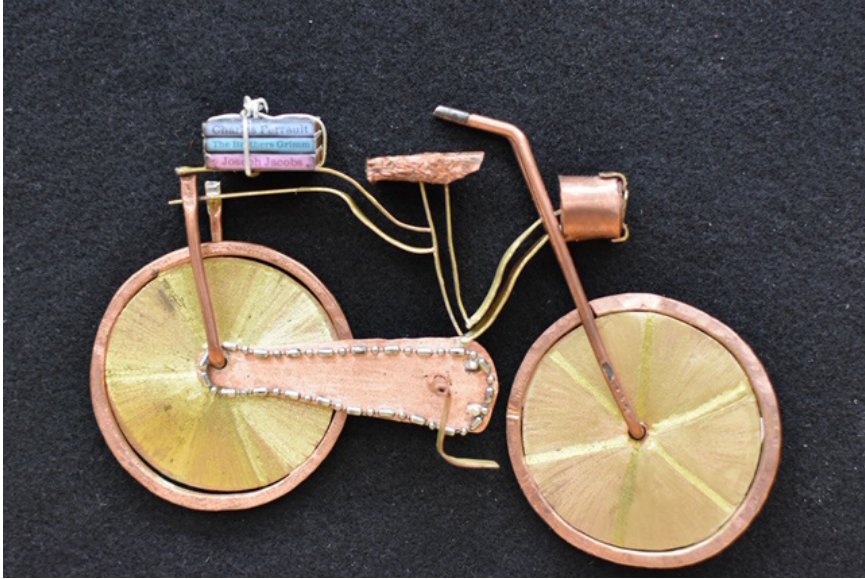
Byways Editorial Staff

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Summer Fun

Renee Bowie



Metal Work

An Hour With Death

Kristoffer Ian Celera

Death and I share an undying hatred for hipsters, especially for this idiot with a notepad. I despise his skinny tie, skinnier arms, skinny legs and those God-awful skinny dress pants. How the hell do men wear skinny dress pants on purpose? This entire experiment is an exercise in futility. A part of me is still hoping that this is a cosmic prank, that Jesus would rise in-between the cushions of this faux leather loveseat and tell me and Death that we have both been punked in his name – amen!

The hipster crossed one chicken leg over the other, “So, I take it that you’re both new to couples’ counseling?” the hipster said.

Death raised his eyebrows. “Couples’ counseling?”

I laughed. “Clearly, there’s been some mistake.”

The hipster flipped through his notes. “You are Miss Reyes, correct?”

“Yes, but you can just call me Chris.”

“And you,” the hipster pointed to the opposite end of the loveseat. “Are Mr. Death?”

“There really isn’t a need for us to be so formal.” said Death.

“Well, I’m really glad to hear that.” Even his smile looked stupid. “I am Dr. Christen Stone, but you may also call me Chris.”

“That ... that won’t be necessary, Dr. Stone.” I said, not wanting us to share the same name. My eyes scoured around the off-white room. I looked for hidden cameras or their heavenly equivalent.

“But why couples counseling, Christen?” said Death with furrowed eyebrows, “We’re not romantically involved in any sense of the word.”

“This isn’t just for romantic humans or angels.” Dr. Stone said to my acquaintance, “But for any form of relationship, whether it be familial, professional, friendly, etc. Tell me, how would you both describe the nature your relationship?”

I stared intensely at the widening gap between Death and I on the loveseat. A few seconds passed in silence before I realized that my pale acquaintance isn’t going to speak first. A shame, really. It looks like Jesus won’t save me from this one. “Dysfunctional,” I said, knowing that the hipster would follow with, “How so?” or “What do you mean by that?”

Dr. Stone repositioned himself in his floral armchair. “Go on.”

"I'm just not in the business of being friends with --" I turned my head to look straight at Death, "monsters who kill my friends."

"I am just doing my job!" said Death.

"Classic Nuremberg defense!" I said.

"Would you have me rebel against God?!"

"I wouldn't have you at all!" I said.

"Pathetic mortal!"

"Immortal idiot!" I stood up and addressed the man with an overgrown beard. "Obviously, this isn't working, and I don't want to waste your time. Because our friend here will come collecting when that sand runs out."

Death rose from the loveseat. "I have far more important work to do than to sit here with mortals. No offence, Christen. I have business with the dead."

"And I, the living."

We both prepared to walk out when Dr. Stone spoke. "I don't know where you both think you're going, but I'm getting my full hour."

Death and I turned around, confused by the hipster's voice dropping an octave.

"You," he pointed at the angel. "I spoke with your supervisor and HE agreed that you need time off work."

"But --"

"A perky goth girl enthusiastically volunteered to cover your shifts. And you, Chris." He took off his horned-rimmed glasses. "You have been avoiding much needed therapy for the majority of your adult life. Both of you. Sit. Down."

Surprised yet defeated, Death and I sat down for couples' counseling.

"Let's pick up where we left off - shall we?" Dr. Stone said, re-adjusting his glasses.

I spoke. "I think it's pretty simple --"

"Says the simple man." Death interrupted.

"I don't think he's simple, and neither do you." Dr. Stone warned the angel.

"No, I agree with the crypt-keeper for once on this one: I'm a simple man who simply doesn't like seeing my loved ones taken from me."

"You say 'taken' as if they were yours to begin with." said Death.

“Yes, I know that all of creation belongs to the creator, but with our rather limited human minds, ‘taken’ is how we can express the closeness of our emotional bonds. Surely, an immortal would be so wise to understand the sentiments of those so simple.”

“Your greatest love should be reserved for God.”

“And how have I raised doubt that it isn’t?”

“By going against God’s plan.”

I rolled my eyes. “I am not aware that I prevented souls from being harvested.”

The Fourth Horseman crossed his arms. “I don’t harvest souls.”

“Or reap them, whatever you call it.”

Dr. Stone interrupted, “Chris, what’s your opinion on God’s plan?”

“Oh, I think it’s a mighty-fine plan. I support the Grand Design all the way.” I said.

“You rolled your eyes earlier when Mr. Death - pardon, Death, mentioned those words.”

“Perhaps it has less to do with the words spoken and more with the one who spoke.”

“Perhaps it’s that simple,” Dr. Stone smiled, “but it would be far more interesting if it wasn’t.”

I know he’s trying to flatter me. But I felt compelled to humor him. “I’m not going to claim to be a good Christian or even a good man for that matter. Hell, I don’t remember the last time I prayed, but I do love God, albeit in a convoluted way.” I turned to Death. “It’s just one can’t expect even the most realizable and logical plan to wash away the most raw and emotional pain.”

Flashes of funerals rushed through my head. My uncle, teacher and a childhood friend. “No.” I whispered to myself. “Not here. Not in front of the others.

“Those I lost,” I continued, “were better Christians than me. Far better people than me. So, I’m at a loss as to what else I should feel when the best of creation returns to the Creator.”

I closed my eyes so they would not see the welling of tears. “I heard it all before. ‘It’s God’s plan.’ ‘This is not a funeral - it’s a celebration!’ ‘They returned home in heaven.’ but -” someone placed a box of tissues in my lap.

I forced a smile. But it's no use. I took a moment to contain my embarrassment, then continued. "But I know nothing of God's plan. I'm only a man who only knows pain. Funerals for those we love are never celebrations, so I would appreciate everyone stop trying to deceive me otherwise. And I'm glad that they're in a better place, and I know that God is first place when it comes to love, but don't I at least get an honorable mention?"

I let the box of tissues fall between my knees as my head followed soon after. "Sorry." was thing I could say as I tried to hide the tears.

The embarrassment lasted for what seemed like an eternity, but I could not stay like this for- ever. With my eyes still closed, I reached around the floor for the damn box of tissues, still trying to hide as I can from a doctor and an angel.

I felt the box hover next to me on the sofa. I returned to seated upright and carefully wiped tears away from sensitive skin. "Thank you, Christen." I said before opening my eyes to see it wasn't the doctor, but Death, who showed me kindness.

"I'm sorry." said Death. I saw he was sincere.

"Don't be. It's not your fault. I know that logically, if you didn't do your duty, they would know only pain without end."

"If I may interject -" said Christen. "Suppose, you were blessed with the power to bless others to live a life free of agony and death - what would you do?"

He knows I'm trying to read him. "Well, I would ask for permission from my family and friends. It's not right to force them to live any more than it is to force them to die."

"But if they all consented, you would grant their request?"

"Yes. In a heartbeat."

"So you." he said "You would live with them forever?"

I should have known this is where he was going with this. "No. I would not."

"Good. This takes us to the next part of this session. Death." Christen continued. "How, would you describe your relationship?"

He first looked uneasy then he looked at me. I smiled at Death, "The mortal was brave enough to go first."

The angel turned back to the doctor, "Complicated."

"I can see that. You both bickered like an old married couple and now -" Christen smiled, "it's interesting."

"I'm not sure what to say." – Said Death.

"The truth would be nice. I don't know whether or not angels can lie, but I do know anyone in your line of work are as honest as they come."

Death thought to himself, trying to find his words. I knew he wanted to say something but was afraid of my reaction. But I knew what needed to be said and broke the silence, "I think this is my fault."

I looked at Christen. "I want only Death for myself, not my friends, not my family, but just for me. You probably have seen my record of hospitalizations, seven times I wanted him." I smiled at the angel. "I guess that makes me your crazy, clingy girlfriend."

I turned back to Christen. "Not to make this all about me again, but I guess that's the theme here. Because I don't want to deal with pain of loss, I deny the Angel of Death, but because I can't deal with my own pain, I covet him for myself. Despite the lies I tell myself, I'm incredibly selfish."

"You're not selfish." Death interrupted. "You're incredible, yes. But 'selfish' isn't a word that I would use."

The angel stared at the floor. "I'm told that half the time you pray, you pray for the health of others, and the other half, you pray for a bargain - your life for those you lost. But you never seem to pray for yourself."

His eyes guided across the white carpet to whiter spot, kissed by the sunlight. "You apologize for having emotions, for being alive, for being human. You constantly downplay your own needs and acts of selflessness. You know if you die now, die young, meet me earlier than you should, then there will be so much pain in the many lives you have touched. And their love didn't come out of an accident. There's something about you that needs to be preserved in this world."

"Chris," Christen reached for my hand, "I need you to make me a promise."

What is going on? What's happening? Why is he asking me this? "Yes, what is it?"

"I need you to promise me to not leave this room angry."

I studied his face for any clue, any hint, any sign of the revelation he's about to unleash. But there was nothing, I knew nothing except he has given me no reason to doubt him yet. "I trust you have a plan."

He smiled. "I do."

"Death," he let go and turned to the angel, "When you said he 'needs to be preserved in this world', what do you mean?"

"Well, he's kind, the world could use more kind-"

The doctor interrupted Death, “Not what I meant. Pardon, not the ‘why’ but the ‘how.’ By what means should he be preserved?”

Death looked into my eyes. “Please. Chris. Be kind to me.” His eyes then turned to the window. “You said this was your fault earlier, that’s not entirely true. I heard that in what few prayers you make for yourself, that you asked God to take your life because you thought you were living on borrowed time.”

I thought back to the times I’ve drowned. Where I should have drowned. Did he? Did Death deny me? Christen covered my hand with his - my hand was in a fist and I did not know it until I looked down at Christen’s hand around mine. I looked back to the angel.

“If you had your way, you would have died in any way you chose. You wanted to die in war, so you enlisted. You wanted to throw yourself into the river, so you walked onto the bridge. You wanted to be struck down by lightning, so you followed the roar of thunder. But -”

I’m not going to like what he says next.

“- it wasn’t your time.”

“What do you mean, it wasn’t my time?” I said softly, remembering my uncle smiling through chemotherapy. “Why am I so damn special?” Memories of my teacher flooded to mind, hugging a bullied middle school child. “How is this fair?!” The coolest boy in class picked the nerdiest kid to be on his team first. I no longer cared to show my tears. Death begged, “Chris, wait.”

I took Chris’ hand off of mine. “I’m sorry.” and I stood up and reached for the door.

Horse

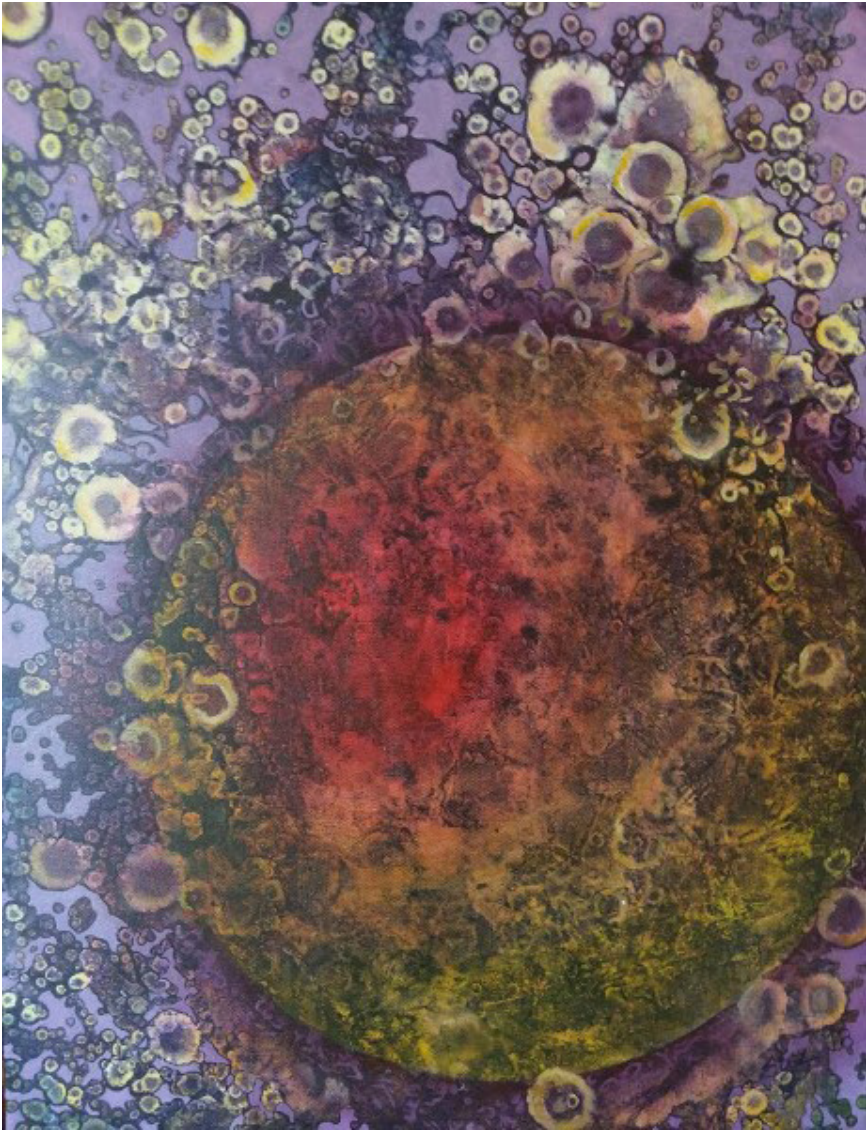
Renee Bowie



Sculpture

Conception

Suzette Clements



Acrylic Paint

Dreams of Texas

(Excerpted from “American Dreams”)

Kristoffer Ian Celera

I sit in my unkempt room with unkempt hair, waiting to sit in
another room, sterile, contemplating
all of my young life's decisions, a young life wasting
to the reality that I am old and aging.
The kempt man before me writes on his clipboard, judging
whether or not I am fit to continue living.
“Young man”, he says, “Why don't we start from the beginning?”

He was thirty-one when he left for America.
Thirty-six is when he was able to call her home.
Army wasn't his first choice to be American.
But lawyers were too expensive for a family man.
And the Marines wouldn't take him as he was too old.
For his country, father joined and did as he was told.
For his family, father joined and did what he can.

She remembered her Philippines in America.
But her husband and child are here now, this is her home.
But her home is cramped and crowded - not American.
Being a family man, he brought many siblings.
Being miserable, losing her American Dream,
she told him she will leave with the baby for the Dream,
being a family man, he went with her, leaving.

A man, a wife, a son, their van and a rice cooker,
leaving California but with a Dream of Texas.
No job waiting, no home leased, just a Dream of Texas.
We went to the capital, a barrio no less.
We're poor, sleep on the floor, couldn't afford a mattress.
But mother made sure we were fed on cheap meats and rice
And on the Dreams of Texas, a brilliant Dream so nice.

Rise Up

Danielle Grosz



Acrylic on Paper

Corpus Christi

Kristoffer Ian Celera



Photography

The Truth

Hope Ragan

Don't call me black. Because I don't know what you mean by that?

This doesn't mean I'm white

Because every day I got to fight

Because everyday people bite, from both sides.

See when I was black, yawl didn't except me, because I didn't have the "black girl figure" or is it really because I don't act like no

Yeah you know what I mean this is what you don't see, you only choose to see the 'white' side of me.

Now when I say white side of me don't mean that I got whites siding with me

Because truth be told they about as sneaky as blacks

You enjoy the moments that you're given when you're me.

But at the end of it all you wonder who is preparing to see you fall.

Fall down on your butt, just trying to make the cut

And it cuts to see and fell like neither side is for you

But what's new?

I'll just walk around with just a few

The few the proud the Marines, is that where I'm meant to be?

It's the only time where I truly felt free.

I never felt as if I had to fit into a stereotype,

Just being your best, is all the hype

And the outside world can only reach me through Skype.

My week in paradise felt like Martin's dream,

Even though I was the only if my kind, it was fine, because they didn't treat me like a chucky cheese token.

See you don't know how bad I was broken

Broken almost like a clock

Time and time again they used me
It took me a while to see that this is how it was meant to be.
Being judge from both sides, hell all sides
Just because of what I choose as my sides?!

“Look at her eating watermelon, she don’t put cornbread in her
collard-greens!”

I’m being judge for what I like it seems?
Seems like I can’t catch a break
Well I can, but then I’d have to be fake!

Creepy Stairs

Suzette Clements



Oil Pastel

Savannah Park

Suzette Clements



Oil Paint

Perception of Reflection

Ashley Manry

Look at her. Her hair looks like a pigeon laid in it for days with a head cold and broken heart, unwilling to move on and too depressed to care. Her eyes have bags that are holding too much weight, ready to burst at the bottom and leave an exposed mess on the floor for everyone to see. Her lips are cracked from neglect and abandonment. She's given up, washed up. She'll never amount to anything. She's not worth it. Who could love that? She obviously doesn't know anything about make-up or it's that no amount of it could ever hide that ugly truth. She has a big nose and huge pores. She needs lessons on eyebrow care and why does it look like she has no eyelashes? Were those teeth ever white? She's a failure. Bitch. Psycho. Crazy. Slut. Fat. Pathetic. They were right. Worthless.

Look at her. She doesn't give up. She tries her hardest. She gets up every morning despite the pain. Despite the words echoing in her head of disappointment, failure, and regret. Everyone else's words to describe her life that she won't let go of. Why can't she see what I see? She's a fighter. Her hair is disheveled because she's picking up others. Her eyes are tired because she pours herself into her children. Her lips are dry because she loves everyone without holding back any for herself. She gives herself away at no cost to others. She's beautiful. She's a blessing. She's a child of God. He carved those lips, that nose, those eyes for a reason beyond anyone else's comprehension. Eyes that see people for who they are and not what they try to be. Lips that try to speak life into others. A nose given to her so that she could appreciate the flowers. She's not a failure. She's someone who keeps getting back up. That's beautiful. She's worth it.

Look at me. This is me.

San Diego

Kristoffer Ian Celera



Photography

Lion

Suzette Clements



Charcoal

The Summer Sun

Tia French

The summer sun strikes me,
Like you did when I was 12.
I'm aware of the outcome,
My skin turns crimson.
I'll continue to go outside,
To bathe in its warmth.
I'll wear these burns proudly,
Because I love the summer sun.

So why can't I forgive myself,
For what you have done?

She's Neither Here Nor There

Danielle Grosz



Photography

Jewels

Melissia Douglass



Graphite Pencils

The Final Conversation

Tia French

The Grass she stood on,
Reached her sturdy knees.
On a normal night like this,
She'd be weary of the life within.
But the rain fell sharply,
on her bare, cold skin.

It numbed her body.
It numbed her fear.

She'd never know how she got there...
Her questions were silenced
as she tightened her grip on the bottle
and took another swig.

As familiar tears welded in her eyes,
A figure appeared in the distance.
The man crunched his way closer...
"Ma'am, are you alright?"
"Yes, Please leave...
I'm having a moment."

The cowboy tipped his hat,
He went on his way,
Ten paces later... He heard it...

The gunshot.

Gracie

Melissia Douglass



Graphite Pencils

Elegance

Isabella Marie Immormino



Graphite Pencils

The Swing Dancer

Kristoffer Ian Celera

While gay dating is difficult enough for someone like me, it's still no excuse for participating in borderline prostitution. I never liked the idea of lending money to friends or acquaintances, it risks poisoning the relationship with rage and resentment, so I tried turning down his request with an offer he had to refuse – going on a date with me. I was caught-off guard when Dallas said “yes.”

As I waited in my car outside his dorm, I scrolled through Dallas's online profile as I knew little about this friend-of-a-friend. He had a clean-shaven face or perhaps he was too young to grow facial hair. Finding out that he was 19 was a mixed bag of relief and anxiety. While I am glad to not be going out with a complete 18-year-old, he was still seven years my junior, more if one counts my wealth of life experience. With this discrepancy in mind, I fear that all we have in common is tan skin and dark, wavy hair.

But I shouldn't fear this or anything as this is not a real date. Great love stories aren't born out of financial desperation. Dallas is only doing this because he needs to pay for the privilege to turn in his algebra homework online. I'm only doing this because I'm secretly lonely and have no other plans.

I looked out of my side window to see Dallas coming through the double glass doors of his building. He wore a dark maroon polo shirt, khaki pants and a forced smile. He waved at me and opened the door into the passenger's side.

“Damn.” Dallas said.

“You don't have to do this if you want to.” I said.

“No, it's not that, Marcos.” Dallas got into the car. “I just feel really under dressed.” He pointed to my suit and tie.

“Don't feel that way, as I told you, you can dance in your pajamas if you wanted to.” I said as we drove off.

“I’m afraid that I can’t dance no matter what clothes I wear.” Dallas said.

“Nonsense. Everyone can dance. Besides, the place that we’re going to has a complimentary lesson in the first hour.” I turned on my car’s stereo to low, conversational volume. Fast swing dance music filled the car. “This right here is the legend Cab Calloway himself. He’s one of my favorites to dance to.”

I spent the next half-hour making a one-sided conversation about swing dancing and grad school until we got to the mansion in Austin. The mansion was a beautiful red-brick two-and-a-half story building with four large, white columns making a grand entrance. Gentlemen in suits and suspenders were arm-in-arm with ladies wearing a menagerie of skirts and poofy dresses.

“Marcos, you sure that y’all don’t have a dress code?” said Dallas.

I parked the car on the street. “If you want to switch clothes, just say the word.”

Dallas took off his shirt and laughed. “Damn. I feel like a prostitute.”

“Or we could change clothes platonically in the bathroom. And no, you’re not a prostitute, you’re just my dance partner.” I said.

“Right. The bathroom. Sorry, I’m just stupid and new to all of this.” He put his shirt back on.

“One: You’re not stupid. Two: As I told you before, you don’t have to do anything that you’re not comfortable doing. You don’t even have to dance with me if you don’t want to. You don’t have to worry.”

“I just feel bad that you spent all that money on me and I have no other way to pay you back.” Dallas looked down at his lap. “I feel worse for not being able to keep up with you in conversation. I have no idea how to dance or what the word ‘platonically’ even means. I’m sorry, I’m going to be a bad date.”

“Well, platonic means non-sexual so there’s no pressure. And just so you know, I’m a bit nervous too. I never imagined myself to be so desperate to pay for a date.”

Dallas smiled. “I don’t think you’re desperate. Come on, let’s get changed before the lesson starts.”

In the foyer, I paid for both of our tickets before leading Dallas to the bathroom. There were no stalls for privacy but Dallas didn’t seem to mind as he immediately stripped down to his boxers. I joked to myself that if we got married, that this would be a funny story to tell our future kids. I reminded myself to not think this way again. I had to stop myself from falling so quickly.

“Not gonna lie to you. I definitely feel like a prostitute now.” Dallas said, grabbing my shirt and slacks.

“But are you going to feel spiffy though?” I said, as I put on his khakis. The bottom of the pants lied a couple of inches above my ankle. “Damn you’re short.”

Dallas laughed and lightly hit me on the shoulder. “You asshole.”

We put on the rest of each other’s clothes and admired our work in the bathroom mirror.

“I look like a kid who put on his dad’s suit.” said Dallas.

“As long as you don’t call me ‘daddy’, we’ll be square,” I said as I ruffled his hair. “sport.”

Dallas chased me out of the bathroom just in time for the lesson in the main ballroom. She was a grand sight with light teal walls, hardwood floors and white columns and trims that extends the vast height and depth of the room. Crystal lights and spiffy looking couples surrounded the floor.

A single colorful couple with microphone headsets stood in the center of the ballroom. The lady wearing a purple and yellow polka dot dress

spoke into her head- set: "If all of you can find a partner and form a ring around the ballroom, we can begin our lesson shortly."

I grabbed Dallas's hand and we went to a nearby empty gap in the ring of couples. "It's better that you learn how to lead. I will follow." I said, placing my right hand in his left and my left hand on his right shoulder.

He started the lesson staring at my feet, mirroring its movements. Backstep. Step. Step. Backstep. Step. Step. "That's enough looking at the floor." I told him. I used my spare hand to pull his chin up to face me. "Trust in yourself that you know where your feet are going, Dallas." I smiled.

He followed my advice and his basic steps became more fluid. I felt his stiff shoulders relax and his genuine smile come out as he continued learning. I reminded myself not to fall for him as he was too young. All of my past boyfriends were too young.

"Follows!" The lady instructor announced. "Change partners!"

A small tinge of panic came into Dallas' eyes. "We're changing partners already?" he said.

"You'll be fine." I said as I walked towards the gentleman on my right. I looked back to my left to see Dallas preemptively apologize to a young lady. But as the lesson went on and as more partners came and went, I saw Mr. Don't-know-how-to-dance enjoying himself by the end of the instructional hour. I remembered that this mansion also serves as a wedding venue. It would be romantic if we worked out and came back to this place to tie the knot. My better senses screamed at me to stop thinking this way and attend to reality.

The band started playing. Fast swing music blared from trumpets and trombones, a wild growl came from the saxophone and the soul was delivered by the singer.

I reunited with Dallas and stretched out my hand. "May I have this first dance with you? I would like to see what you have learned."

He took my hand and grinned “Better idea: you lead so I can see what you know.”

The role of a lead in swing dancing is to set the rhythm and the duty of the follow is to see the momentum through. I taught him to not anticipate the next move but rather let the flow of the dance occur naturally. In a few songs, Dallas became well-read in my body language, even picking up new moves on the spot.

During a slow song, my eyes locked with his. The corners of Dallas’s mouth rose, a spark shined in his eyes and without hesitation – I shut off my logical brain, closed my eyes and met his lips with mine.

When my eyes opened and my mind came back online, a flood of horror and regret overcame my body. “Sorry.” I said and fled to the courtyard.

Alone between the walls of red bricks with tree branches and strings of light hanging above, I took in a breath of the cold night air.

“Damn it, Marcos.” I said. “You just had to be that idiot.”

A door opened behind me. “Did I do something wrong?” said Dallas. “No. I did. I wasn’t supposed to kiss you.” “It’s okay, Marcos. I liked it.” Dallas said as he came closer to me.

I could feel tears welling in my eyes. “No, you don’t understand. I need to control myself.” I walked over to a bench and sat down, my eyes glued to the ground.

Dallas followed me and sat down. “I know I’m not the best at conversations, but I am good at listening to whatever’s bothering you.”

“I’m mighty flattered but no, I cannot treat someone I barely know like a therapist. Go back inside and try to have fun.” I said as I did breath control exercises.

“I can’t have fun knowing that you’re out here alone.” Dallas said as he took one of my hands into his.

I allowed him to keep my hand for a few seconds. I stretched those few seconds of warmth in my mind to hours and days. This is one of those perfect moments that I wanted to last forever, but history has taught me to know better. I took my hand back and gave him the ugly truth. "I'm bipolar." I said. "I cannot trust my own emotions, they're damn fleeting things. Dallas, if you know better, you'll run in the other direction."

"Why would I do that? Bipolar or not, you're the nicest guy I've gone out with." he said.

"Did you not hear me? If I cannot even trust my own emotions, no one can. You think I'm a romantic now, but I can have a very ugly mean streak and I have no damn clue when that happens." I was exhausted. "I'm a roller coaster that should be closed to the public."

Dallas sat in silence before speaking again. "So why help me with school? Why take me out dancing? Why kiss me?"

I made sure that my eyes were dry before meeting his. "As pathetic as it sounds, I'm incredibly lonely. I thought, I just thought, what if I had one day where I could pretend to have what I shouldn't?"

"And who said you shouldn't date?" said Dallas.

"My better sense. My history. My silly thoughts that immediately jump to ringing wedding bells." I studied his face as I expected Dallas to flinch at the last part. He didn't. Instead, he closed his eyes and leaned in for a kiss. I moved his head down and kissed his forehead. "You're a good kid, Dallas. But you're too young and have no idea what you're dealing with."

"Well, I don't know about weddings in the future, but for now, I know that I want another dance." Dallas said, he got up and extended his hand for mine.

"Alright." I said. "But one condition: I want you to show me what you know." I placed my hand in his.

“What do you mean, it wasn’t my time?”
An Hour With Death (Celera)

“And on the Dreams of Texas, a brilliant Dream so nice.”
Dreams of Texas (Celera)

“So why can’t I forgive myself, For what you have done?”
The Summer Sun (French)

“Don’t call me black.”
The Truth (Ragan)

“Look at her. She doesn’t give up.”
Perception of Reflection (Manry)

“But the rain fell sharply, on her bare, cold skin.”
The Final Conversation (French)

“Nonsense. Everyone can dance.”
The Swing Dancer (Celera)

