

Chase, or be chased

Story package by Shelby Strickland, UP editor

UP editor learns life, love lessons in pursuit of story

Chivalry is dead.

It is long gone, and has since been replaced with a little thing I like to call, “the intentional, but seemingly unintentional, pursuit of man by woman.” It’s simple, really.

You meet a man that sparks your interest. You find yourself torn between the pressure of waiting for him to show interest, or allowing yourself to take the initiative and get his attention. You’ve already followed him on Instagram thinking you’d somehow shine above the rest of his notifications, and you’ve added him as a friend on Facebook (it goes without saying you checked his relationship status). You wait a couple hours and nothing. You immediately feel let down, because why wouldn’t a social media pursuit be enough?

After pacing across your apartment floor 30-plus times, texting your girl gang seeking advice, following up with individual texts to each member of said girl gang to hear them reiterate their initial advice, and giving yourself at least 16 pep talks, you decide it’s time to up the ante. And so goes “the intentional, but seemingly unintentional, pursuit of man by woman.”

Once upon a time, I, too, experienced all of these things. Granted, this time, my interest didn’t quite start on social media, or in a want for his attention — at least not at first.

It happened last year, and when it did, my worldview was flipped on its head.

I met a friend of mine, Nejc (pronounced Nates in English), at the front of the dining hall so he could swipe me in for a cup of coffee before going to class. While waiting to go inside, I asked Nejc what we were waiting for? He said Cormac, one of his cross country teammates from Ireland.

In the distance I saw a guy who I assumed was Cormac. He had on runners, a track T-shirt, and was undeniably aesthetically pleasing to the eye. My jaw actually dropped. I picked it up before Nejc could see and we continued to wait.

Minutes later he arrived.

Cormac was very tall and carried the stench of sweat. He shook my hand and winked at me. My heart sank for two reasons. The first being that that was the cutest thing I had ever experienced, and the second being that I had an idea of what kind of guy I thought he was.

I would now have to convince myself that I thought he was ugly to keep myself uninterested in an attempt to guard my heart.

Let’s be real. What’s the typical stereotype for an exceptionally attractive athlete, and a runner at that? These exact thoughts ran through my head:

First, he is most likely into himself. I mean, can you blame him? I would be too if I was talented and good looking.

On top of that, I have heard it said a number of times that runners are selfish. Their training schedules revolve around themselves and what their bodies are capable of. This is absolutely an umbrella statement. A person’s personality trumps how people would classify them, but better to be safe than sorry.

Second, he most likely prioritized his sport over anything else. That’s the reason he’s here at Lamar, and that’s what will keep him here (unless he’s chasing that green card if you know what I

mean).

Third, he most likely will not be chasing a green card. In my book, this means he’s not looking for a relationship. Why invest in a relationship that will most likely end after a year? That sucks.

I realize I was getting ahead of myself, but scientifically speaking, it takes between 8 seconds and 3 minutes for a girl to decide if she’s into a guy or not. There is not a chance I’m alone when it comes to thinking ahead.

These were important things for me to think through before deciding to wink back. I sat on my thoughts despite his looks and assertive wink. Since I decided there wasn’t a chance, I wasn’t interested either.

Being the introvert I am, I had every intention of sipping coffee alone. I planned to listen to a podcast and to journal. It is very seldom that I get to catch up on things I enjoy, so an hour to myself before class would be ideal.

I was wrong.

I sat at a table in the middle of the dining hall, and both guys followed right behind. Cormac sat across from me and asked me question after question.

“What’re you studying?”

“Journalism.”

“What do you plan to do with it?”

“What do you mean?” I thought. “I don’t even know what my plans are for tomorrow, let alone two years from now.”

This guy was already stressing me out. My anxiety had skyrocketed between having my morning interrupted and now thinking about the entirety of my future.

I put an earphone in hoping that he would leave me alone, but

low and behold, I was wrong again. The questions kept coming.

“What’re you journaling about?”

“I keep a travel journal.”

“What do you write about your travels?”

“Where I stayed, who I met, all of the things I saw, how the trip changed me.”

“That’s really interesting. Where all have you traveled?”

I began naming the places and showing him the photos I had taken on some of my trips. He gave me a quick Instagram follow, grabbed his bag and left. This was the first time my morning coffee had ever exhausted me. Thank God he was gone.

But not so fast. One. Day. Later. I received an Instagram DM.

“We should grab coffee.”

I decided to take him up on a cup. I felt that he owed it to me considering my coffee in d-hall went cold.

We sat at Sertinos a week later and chatted for more than four hours.

By the end of the night I was experiencing all of the things. All of the feelings, all of the angst and all of the caffeine. I had never been so wrong about a person. I wanted to get to know him more, but there was one problem: this guy was cool and for sure not into me.

It was time that I made my first move — one that involved craftiness, cleverness and a job at the University Press.

Each semester the UP publishes a magazine called UPbeat. In the magazine there is a section called “People.” Here, writers ac-

cumulate a collection of photographs and quotes, and put together a story package of a person they find to be exceptionally interesting.

What a coincidence. I had a work assignment and a new friend who fit the criteria of that work assignment. Are you picking up what I’m putting down?

Backtrack. Remember that quick Instagram follow? I certainly took full advantage of it. Back into the DMs I not only slid — I ski jumped.

“Hi, it’s me again. I know we had coffee, um, five minutes ago, but you know, I just remembered something and somehow it slipped my mind between being lost in your blue eyes and distracted by your Irish accent. Eh hem, well, I have a work assignment that I need a model for. You seem like the perfect fit for the job.”

OK, it didn’t go quite like this. I played it surprisingly cool for how much I was sweating. So cool that he agreed to work on the assignment with me.

We met up, I took his portrait (that I did not end up using for this assignment, by the way), and before leaving, he insisted we go to church and brunch the upcoming Sunday.

Um, yes. Absolutely. What on earth? My heart actually imploded. I was in. I was more than in. We were in this thing.

One night out of each following week he’d ask me on some sort of date. We went to the beach, a few breweries, Kemah Boardwalk and NASA. I had to let Houston know that there was no longer a problem. Cormac Kelly had fixed it — the problem being my attitude toward a person I didn’t know.

One year later we are still dating and it all started with an “intentional, but seemingly unintentional, pursuit of man by woman.”

For a year I have been getting to know a guy who shares my same ambitions, values and sense of humor. In a year we’ve traveled often (Ireland included, where

they call me the yellow rose of Texas), ran some races, smiled plenty and laughed even more. The guy I know now is even cooler than I thought he was a year ago at Sertinos. I’ve been perpetually dazed.

I’m learning what it looks like to love fully, not just Cormac, but people in general. In doing so, I’ve also learned a few things about myself since last year in the dining hall.

First, I was much more selfish than the boy I thought was selfish, especially with my time. Cormac says he was interested when we chatted about my travels at the dining hall, but my idea of even a friendship was clouded by misconceptions of who I thought he was.

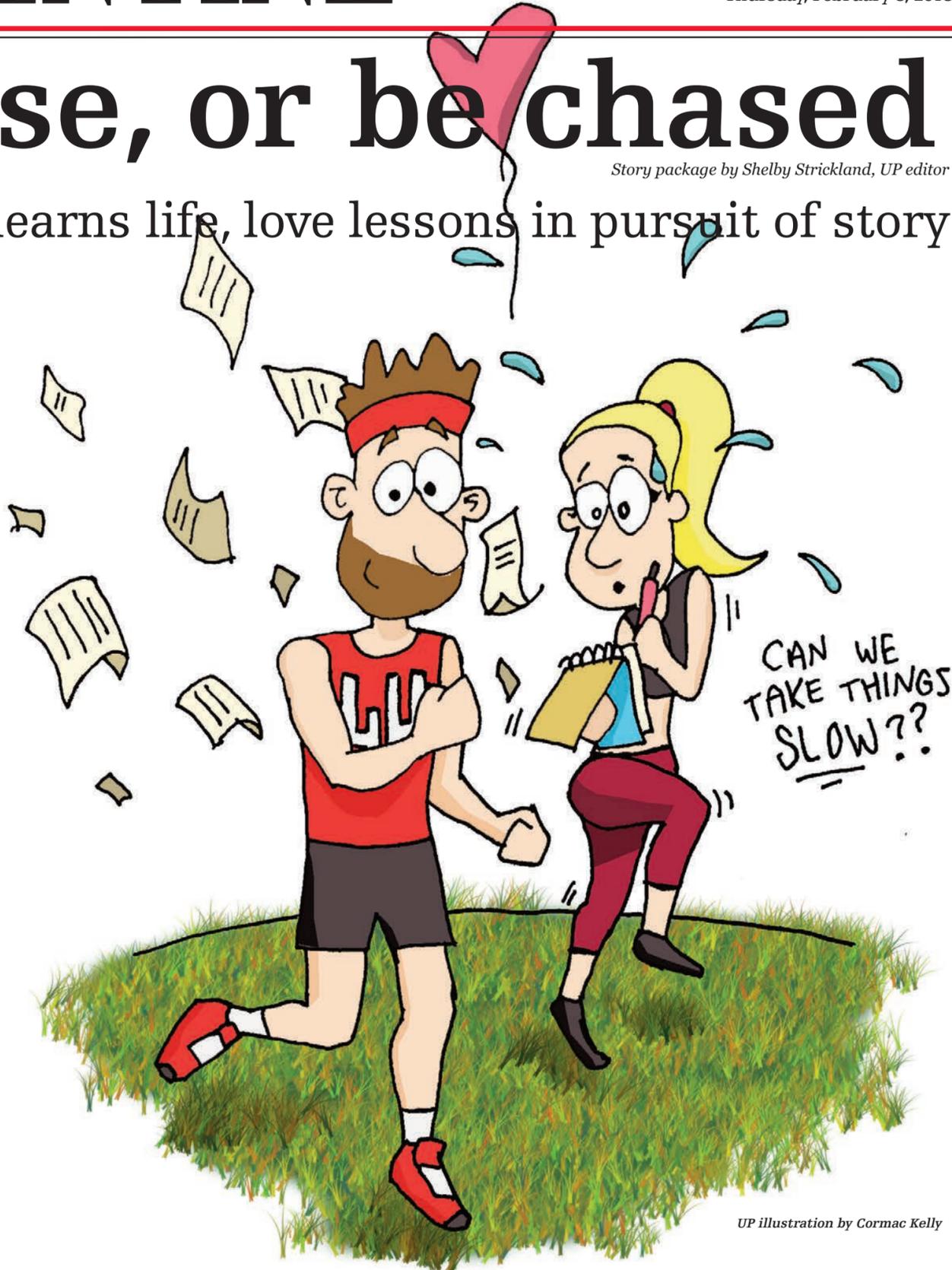
Or maybe I felt pre-let down so I tried to avoid any sort of relationship with Cormac initially altogether. I would certainly change how I approach a situation like this in the future, but I wouldn’t change this one for a second. Thank goodness Cormac looked past my rude demeanor.

Second, working at the University Press is so fun. It always has been, but even moreso now that Cormac works alongside me. Maybe it is a conflict of interest, but I find it exciting to collaborate and create with someone you’re dating. That goes for any job. Granted, I was the favorite until Cormac came along, but I’ll settle for second if it means writing and illustrating together.

Lastly, and most importantly, if a boy winks at you be aware that you too could find yourself in my situation.

Maybe it won’t begin with a social media message, but don’t discount the numerous other things that wink could lead to. Maybe a green card, maybe love. Or if you’re lucky, both.

There is always the potential for an “intentional, but seemingly unintentional, pursuit.” This one was started by Cormac and hastily followed-up by yours truly. From his side or yours, who’s to know. But as the Irish say, “Have the craic. Go for it.”



UP illustration by Cormac Kelly



A photograph of Cormac Kelly from Shelby Strickland’s UP assignment in spring 2017.