

# OF KNIGHTS AND FAIR MAIDENS

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I often think that he enjoys times like this, the moments before we come into contact with one another. I'm sure he savours each step I take towards the hand over. Each step which brings him closer to liberation. For him this hour represents his time, and his chance to be free. Standing before his cave I wonder whether it is too late for a retreat. And yet as I look at my watch I know that it is and that I must honour my end of our covenant. At precisely 6' oclock I cross the threshold and disappear. I am in his world now. He has taken over.

Between the fading illumination and the distant humdrum of city living existed this place. Where Lord and Lady danced through the hall, each step guiding them deeper into the composer's mellifluous rhythm, each movement enforcing their status, each breathe showing off to those brave enough to peek.

It was into this underworld that The Dark Prince had been anointed. Upon arrival his eyes swept the room, the mahogany walls glossed over in a simple swipe as he scanned it. Casually ignoring the elevated ceiling, ignoring the maestro readying the orchestra and even ignoring the evacuation of the cleaning staff, he made his way across the floor and towards her location.

She would have no say in the matter, Lady Lovelace had known that as she had seen him approach and yet experience told her that this lack of agency was not to be bemoaned, in fact for gentlemen such as him, she would tolerate it.

They began with a stride, moving in tandem as he shifted his weight towards her she compensated by giving ground just as he had intended. They swayed towards the side, ascending to their zenith before drifting back down and repeating the motion, gliding their way around the floor as their spectators grew. The Prince stood rigidly even as he steered his partner into the coming night he could feel their bond beginning to slip. Turning her away from the corner of the room he kept them together, dancing them back into the light. But he knew it couldn't last, his resolve failed them as the music faded to silence.

Rising and falling in quick succession, the second song altered their paradigm. In response they rose and fell accordingly, a softening of the knees and a lowering into a coil as the beat slowed. He took a step as the bar came to its midpoint and suddenly his limbs could be free. Bursting from the curl, his heart rate rising as the maestro allowed him the quick-quick motion for which he been waiting. They used a chasse as they sped their way through the room, pausing momentarily to execute a turn once they had run out of dance floor. The build-up of the slow-slow motion was worth it for the exuberance of the quick-quick to follow and as they careened through the hall they felt a new kind of oneness. A kind of pleasure in the speed merely for speed's sake. Yet all too soon the music began to fade and with single glance into her chestnut eyes, he could tell that Miss Lovelace was done with dancing for the time being.

Adequately satisfied by the progression of the evening, the Queen left her throne and descended onto the floor itself. Briefly searching for her Grey Knight, her attention veered towards someone else as he intercepted her. Smiling at the interest, she took the opportunity to enjoy her own engagement for a moment.

The Prince dug his foot into the ground as he sprang into his next move. Kicking with the left, kicking with the right before bouncing to the next position to kick with the right and left again. Jumping around in each other's arms, they grinned as they transferred their energy into their feet. Step-slip-step and swap positions. They spun around the floor popping their hips from one side to another with every hop. The Prince observed her eyes, lips and cheeks curl upwards as he executed a throw-away only to bump hips with her three seconds later. But even as he turned himself under her arm, leaping into a chase to recover, the music came to an abrupt halt and suddenly she was the Queen again and her Grey Knight had appeared to whisk her away to safety.

Miss Anson's party had had to arrive later than she hoped for, yet even a naïve analysis of the castle ballroom could tell her that she had managed to get them there with time to spare. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed The Prince approaching but that would have to wait until her coat was dealt with.

The Prince waited for the fraction of a second between beats to pass as he turned his body, being careful not to transfer his weight before popping his hips in the double step. Executing the long step he turned towards the profile of Lady Anson, her brow scrunched in concentration while her skin exuded the kind of perspiration one would expect from a hardworking individual. Their gazes were broken when they once again stepped to the same side on their inside feet and once again turned on the same beat of music to face one other. They kept pace with each other, focusing on not falling behind, smiling when they could and sneaking glances when they could not. Breaking the cycle The Prince turned himself to run. She would chase him, just as he would chase her after. Once again he spun around, but this time he did not turn his back on her. This time he moved backwards as she chased him, staying face-to-face and moving forward when the dance called for it. He stared into her eyes and dared her to change their model. Returning the gaze she followed him back-and-forth until the music died and the hour waned.

Regaining consciousness inside of his terrain I cast my eyes towards the woman in front of me and realised that she had lost her title. Even looking at the Queen, I saw her as she was, simply the leader of his club.

For me the end of this hour represents my time and my chance to regain my life. Leaving his domain behind, I could see the former Lady Lovelace in the distance. Later we would drive off together and I would remember why I entered into this arrangement in the first place and rediscover that my time as The Dark Prince isn't always fruitless.

## THE HOUR OF KNIGHTS AND FAIR MAIDENS - UNEDITED VERSION

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I often think that he enjoys times like this, the slow and ominous moments before we come into contact with one another. As if he savours each step I take towards the hand over, the hopelessness I exude must delight him and yet, tonight – no this evening- I find myself enjoying the trip to borderlands of his existence.

Whether I'm masochistic or just plain silly is a different debate but in this case the source of my happiness does not come from me. No, for this I must thank Corona and the deep pools of sapphire occupying her visage which never fail to threaten drowning me in their crashing waves.

You see, for him this hour represents his time, his life and a chance to be free. Standing before the cave I wonder whether or not it is too late for a retreat, too late to retreat from the covenant binding us to an eternal contract. And yet as I look at my watch I know that it is, that I signed my soul away the second I first entered the circle, and that I must honour my end of our bargain. At precisely 6'oclock I cross the threshold and disappear. I am in his world now. He has taken over.

Betwixt the fading illumination and the distant humdrum of city living existed this place. Where Lord and Lady danced through the hall, each step guiding them deeper into the composer's mellifluous rhythm, each second further enslaving their souls to the motion, each movement enforcing their status, each breathe showing off to those brave enough to peek.

It was into this underworld that The Dark Prince had been anointed. Upon arrival his eyes swept the room, the majesty of the familiar mahogany walls glossed over in a simple swipe by his pet trackers as they scanned the room. Casually he ignored the elevated ceiling, which had been adorned with the finest collection of creative endeavours the kingdom could procure, he ignored the maestro reading the orchestra and even the hasty evacuation of the cleaning staff, as he made his way across the floor and towards her location.

She would have no say in the matter, Lady Lovelace had known that as she had seen him approach and yet experience told her that this lack of agency was not to be bemoaned, in fact for gentlemen such as him, she would appreciate it.

They began with a stride, moving in tandem as he shifted his weight towards her, bringing their bodies even closer than the usual embrace, she compensated by giving ground just as he had intended. They swayed towards the side, ascending to their zenith before drifting back down and repeating the motion, gliding their way around the floor as their spectators grew. The Prince stood rigidly even as he steered his partner into the coming night he could feel their bond beginning to slip. Turning her away from the corner of the room he kept them together, dancing us back into the light. But he knew it couldn't last, his resolve failing them as music faded to silence, leaving only two people in the centre of the floor.

The pause offered him a moment to collect himself before the orchestra restarted, belting out a gambit of a second wave of music. Judging by the number of spectators which had decided to join himself and Lady Lovelace, the Prince ascertained that the gambit had been accepted. Whereas the opening number had been graceful, if a tad predictable the follow up with anything but. Rising and falling in quick succession, it created an altered paradigm between himself and Lady Lovelace. In response to this they rose and fell according to the music, a softening of the knees, a lowering themselves into a coil as the beat slowed. A single step, his spring-loaded muscles going unsatisfied as they pleaded with him to be unleashed for their temporary prison, followed by another as the bar came to its midpoint and suddenly they could be free. Exploding from his curl he burst out, his heart rate rising as the maestro allowed him the quick-quick motion for which he been waiting. This had been what he wanted, they used a chasse as they sped their way through the room, pausing momentarily to execute a turn once they had run out of dance floor. The build-up of the slow-slow motion was worth it for the exuberance of the quick-quick to follow and as they careened through the hall they felt a new kind of oneness, a kind of pleasure in the speed merely for speed's sake brought on by this shift in dynamic. Yet all too soon the music began to fade and with single glance beyond her glasses and into her chestnut eyes, he could tell that Miss Lovelace was done with dancing for the moment.

As she sat top her throne The Queen, perused her agenda for the evening. Adequately satisfied by the progression made thus far Her Highness descend onto floor itself. Briefly searching the room for The Grey Knight her attention veered towards someone else as he intercepted her. Smiling at the interest he offered she took the opportunity to enjoy her own engagement for a moment.

The Prince dug his foot into the ground as sprang into his next move, stepping back with his left and readying it for action. Kicking with the left, kicking with the right before bouncing to the next position to kick with the right and left again. His arm around Her Majesty's waist, they practically jumped around in each other's arms, grinning as they transferred their energy into their feet. Step-slip-step and swap positions. They spun around the floor popping their hips from one side to another with every hop. If she had had any tension before the jive she showed none now as the Prince observed her eyes, lips and cheeks curl. Her whole face smiled as he executed a throw-away only bump hips with her three seconds later. But even as he turned himself under arm, leaping into a chase to recover, the music came to an abrupt halt and suddenly she was the Queen again and her Grey Knight and The Lawmaker had appeared to whisk her away to safety.

Miss Anson's party had had to arrive later than she hoped for, yet even a naïve analysis of the castle ballroom could tell her that she had managed to get them there with time to spare. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed The Prince approaching but that would have to wait until her coat was dealt with.

If The Dark Prince had forgotten that Lady Corona Anson was due to arrive on this night then her entrance had served as a strong reminder. The doors had swung open to reveal a young woman whose golden locks were illuminated by a halo of dying light behind her as she entrenched herself deeper and deeper into his world with each time she placed her elegant one foot in front the other. Where each step – nay – each stride of her gait served to, paradoxically, take him out of the very same place she was entering and to deposit him somewhere new.

The Prince waited for the fraction of a second between beats to pass as he turned his body on his left foot being careful not to transfer his weight before popping his hips in the double step. Quickly executing the long step he turned towards the profile of Lady Anson, her golden brows scrunched in concentration while her skin exuded the kind of perspiration one would expect from a hardworking individual. Their gazes were quickly broken when they once again stepped to the same side on their inside feet and once again turn on the same beat of music to face each other once more. They kept pace with each other, concentrating on not falling behind yet smiling at one another when they could and sneaking glances when they could not. Breaking the cycle The Prince turned her before turning himself to run. She would chase him, just as he would chase immediately after. Once again he spun around, though this time he had no intention of turning his back on her. This time he moved backwards as she chased him, taking lock steps backwards as he did, unravelling when the dance called for it. He stared into her eyes and dared her to change their model. With a smile returned his gaze and followed him back-and-forth until the music died and the hour waned.

Regaining consciousness inside of the rectangular volume that served as his terrain I cast my eyes towards the woman in front of me and realised that she had lost her title. Even glancing upon the Queen I saw her as she was now relegated to being the leader of his club.

For me the end of this hour represents my time and my chance to regain my life. Leaving his domain behind, I could see Arianne Lovelace, Harry Grey and Troy Lawson in distance. Smiling, I hurried to catch up to them before they got too far ahead. Later I would drive off with her and the others while I remembered why I entered into this arrangement in the first place and rediscovered that my time as The Dark Prince isn't always fruitless.