

## **Chandelier**

By Easton Chau

Prince discreetly leaned his head forward and squinted outside over and over before shutting an aged creaking door. He could smell out nothing more than a sneaking well-fed rat and a stench of urine in the shadowy, slimy alley. It was always a desolate passage, the best spot for a rendezvous.

Prince made his way to an empty stool at a counter while Barman got stuck in polishing his wine glasses with a cloth. The squeaks were an amusing piece of music to the only two figures in a dim and dull speakeasy bar until Barman turned around to retrieve the other tray of glasses.

“My Goodness! You nearly gave me a heart attack!” Barman gasped, his voice trembling with astonishment.

Dead air didn’t last for three seconds. “Oh! My apologies! Your Highness,” Barman exclaimed, his face blushing as he quickly realised that it had been an offence to a member of a royal family.

“It happens to the best of us,” Prince said. “How didn’t you notice me at all? The rigid door growled like a wolf when I was coming in.”

“The old door always growls, Your Highness,” Barman said, saluting respectfully.

“Come on! Make yourself at home. That’s your home by the way,” Prince said.

“All that is mine is yours, Your Highness,” Barman said.

“Hogwash!” Prince said. “Call me Prince when I am off.”

“Understood, Your Highness,” Barman said.

“You don’t understand me. Where is Knight?” Prince muttered under his breath, longing for the presence of his trusted companion. “I’m looking for something with a real kick.”

Without hesitation, Prince downed a whole glass of whiskey in one gulp, and then he turned to gaze at a magnum whose sparkling amber faded into a radiant chandelier of a masquerade ball.

Its eternal brightness, which entailed the most skilled artisans and the edgiest technology, illuminated the whole festive hall. People clustered around the floor-to-ceiling light that, far from being dazzling, had a magical power of healing. Some took their masks and disguises off to enjoy as much chan-shine as they could, and their vision problems vanished instantly. They tossed their spectacles and goggles in the air, celebrating their recovery while others gave a big hand to the advent of the technological magnificence and the greatness of humanity.

Far from the chandelier, there was a distinct crowd enveloping Prince. All the girls in town conceived him as a Prince Charming and dressed up with shimmering jewels all over their bodies, trying to seduce Prince and longing for a dance with him.

“Your Highness, would you honour me with a dance?” a lady said.

“It would be my utmost pleasure if I could have a dance with Your Highness,” a lady said.

“May I have this dance, Your Highness?” a lady said.

Prince didn’t spare a glance at them, but a lady in an unadorned azure dress stood out from the crowd. She didn’t doll herself up like a peacock, nor did she surround Prince like an admirer. Prince walked up to her.

“May I have the pleasure of dancing with you?” Prince asked.

“Certainly, I would love to dance with you,” the lady replied.

She leaned on Prince’s shoulders, and their fingers intertwined tightly. Prince had never been so close to a woman that he could even sniff out her delicate fragrance of roses. As they danced together, their movements were perfectly in sync as if they had rehearsed time and again before.

“May I have your name, please?” Prince asked.

“Cinderella,” the lady replied.

Their eyes were locked to each other without unnecessary words, and their affections were conveyed through harmonious twirls and glides around the chandelier. They received a round of cheers and applause while the well-dressed ladies were green with envy. The shiniest lady couldn’t resist the bitterness and tried to tarnish the perfect moment by throwing her high heels towards Cinderella. Thankfully, Prince could swiftly spin around, using his back as a barrier to shield Cinderella. Other ladies followed in the footsteps, held shoes in their hands, and glared at Cinderella. Prince clenched her hand to evade the angry mob, and his muscular arms managed to climb on the chandelier, simultaneously gripping the damsel in distress. A stream of shoes raged on beneath the valentines.

“Prince! Prince!” Knight said, shaking Prince’s shoulder.

“Knight! You came late to the party. I am gonna tell you some-wing,” Prince said.

“Hey, are you okay? You seem a bit different tonight. Is there something bothering you?” Knight said.

“I can’t be more okay,” Prince said, but he then threw up all over his trousers.

“Famous last words,” Knight said.

“I will get married soon,” Prince said.

“Oh! Really? Congratulations, I guess,” Knight said.

“I’ve been hesitant about it,” Prince said.

“Are you getting cold feet?” Knight said.

“It feels like I am a caged bird. I recently found out that,” Prince said.

“What do you mean?” Knight said.

“The Mrs Right, the one I’m ready to spend my life with was sent to me by my stepmother. It was her conspiracy. The masquerade ball went according to her plan,” Prince said.

“How?” Knight said.

“They wanted me to get married, so they found a gal for me,” Prince said.

“That sounds good. It kills two birds with one stone unless you don’t love the woman they got you,” Knight said.

“I love her. She holds a special spot in my heart that no one else can fill. But, I could be replaced. She is just a program. Everyone could be her husband or master. They just got my DNA and fabricated a perfect match for me. They knew my instinct for frugality, azure blue, the scent of roses, heroism, and the one who doesn’t address me My Highness. By the way, can you fix Barman? Barman kept calling me My Highness, and its sensor’s spotty,” Prince said.

“I am at a loss as to how to fix him. He is an old model. Wait! Do you mean she is an AI robot? Don’t be so old-fashioned, and get with the programme. Human-AI Marriage was legalised a few months ago,” Knight said.

“A prince gets married to an AI Robot. It was the royal means to gain public approval,” Prince said.

“Now, AI robots have a biological body like a human. They do the same as humans, right?” Knight said.

“Like the Chandelier, people tried to make it as great as it could. However, it can’t be as great as the sun,” Prince said.