

You step onto the balcony, and the crowd below falls silent. A hundred faces turn in your direction, gazing up at you. The silky material flows off your body like liquid, swishing around your feet in a solid pool. One foot on the stairs, then another. The crowd bursts into applause as you descend the staircase. He's waiting at the bottom. His firm hand takes yours, leading you gently to a spot in the middle of the room. Eyes stare as you walk, but no one says a word. He puts a hand on your waist, and draws the other up and into his grasp. The violins begin, and you start to move.

Step, step, step.

You don't remember getting into your dress, or having your hair done. You don't even remember arriving at the hall you're now dancing in. It has a high ceiling, and huge windows made of glass. Outside of them is only black. He doesn't answer your questions.

The violins pick up the pace, and he starts to move you faster. Everyone else has also started dancing, and their colours fill the floor. Dresses swish and shoes clack under the sound of the music. You try to catch glimpses of their faces as they pass, try to spot someone familiar – surely someone must be familiar? – but they're no longer looking at you. They're too busy with each other, and the dance. He changes the steps, speeds up, and you have to half-step a bit to fall in line.

His hand is warm through the material of your dress. You look up at his face, and his eyes are pools of ink, and fathomless. He doesn't acknowledge your gaze, even though he's matching your eyes. You turn back to look at the crowd again, but you can still feel his gaze staring at a point on your head. A feeling tries to rear in your stomach that at one time might have been called uncertainty. You entertain the thought of disentangling yourself from the dance and finding a place to sit still a moment. But suddenly he lets go of your waist and spins you out with one hand, and the music just glosses over it. It would be too tiring to stop, you begin to think. So much simpler to just go with the music, and let it take you where it pleases.

You notice that the crowd around you is slowly coming to a stop, while you move ever faster.

Step, step, step.

They face you and stare, watching your every movement. Light glints off of jewellery and catches in the corner of your eye. Some people are wearing masks – why didn't you notice that before?

Spin, kick, lift, turn, step, step, lift, kick, sway, bend, turn, spin, dip, step, step, step.

A glint of metal amongst the dresses. More masks lowered over faces. The sound of something being loaded.

The glass windows blow in.

There are screams in the air, punctuating the violin lifts, the drum beats. Figures are jumping in through the windows from the darkness outside. Warm red splashes your dress and arm. People crumble like card towers around your feet while bullets keep up a brisk staccato percussion. Through it all, you can't stop dancing.

You dance as masks shatter and silk is crushed.

You dance as dislodged chandelier crystals rain down like diamond hailstones.

You dance over the bodies of the dead and dying. You don't glance down.

He holds you close, and you wrap your arms around him like he's the last life ring from a sinking boat. The blood has turned to rivers of notation around your feet. The chandelier is a treble clef on the dance-floor bars. The beating of your heart is in four-by-four time. You breathe air like music into your lungs and never breathe it out.

You don't wonder how you got here anymore. You don't dream of stopping. Now you have all you'll ever need. The dance mends the hole in your heart that you can't remember gaining.