

## On Princes, Knights, and Independence

I identify as a paladin. As such, I feel a lot of overlap with the tropes of knights. This story begins some years ago, when I was first coming into my identity as a paladin. It was still new to me- though the traits that influenced it stretched back across my childhood, I was only taking baby steps toward manifesting a deliberate identity into the world. And I felt very eager and excited to be expressing myself as a knight in as many avenues as possible. It was at this time that I took one of those for-fun internet quizzes, meant to answer whether one was the Knight or the Prince. I got the 'Prince' answer and was incensed. Obviously I was supposed to be the knight! It was only an online quiz. But to be put in the prince role felt, at the time, to be labeled as helpless or passive. To be the one who was served, and not the one who served, to be the one in need of protection, and to be the one who gave orders, rather than carry them out.

It feels necessary to point out that knights and princes, are, of course, not opposites. In most stories, they are one and the same. King Arthur led the Round Table, but also went on quests himself. Several fictional stories emphasize the King or Prince's role as being in service to their people. In many fairy tales, either a prince rides out for adventure, or a common hero becomes a prince at the end as a reward for his deeds. Placing 'Prince' and 'Knight' as opposites on a binary is like saying 'dog' and 'cat' are opposites. Genealogically, cats and dogs are quite similar, and are closer relatives to one another than they are to, say, octopi or honeybees. In my observations, the Prince-Knight duality is really a trope specific to romance stories, akin to bodyguard romance, where it allows for the dynamics of power- physical strength versus political command.

But even if we grant the duality, I have recently found my relationship to it changing. I have been disabled since birth, and while my symptoms are not directly progressive, my overall ability is declining

with age. In the last few months, I have found myself in the ‘helplessness’ that I so resented in the Prince archetype. I have had to ask strangers for help crossing the street. I have had to ask my partners’ help in tasks as simple as tying my shoes. I have felt every bit the ‘pampered’ or ‘passive’ princeling. Disability advocacy argues that no human being is truly independent; everyone is interdependent. Even if you are completely physically healthy, or are one of those off-the-grid loner types, in some ways, everyone relies on and supports other people, and is supported by them. It is a blessing to release the shame of being cared for.

At the end of the day, I still see myself as more Knight than Prince (for whatever value that binary holds). Perhaps it’s my right-hand archetrope, but I still prefer to be the second-in-command rather than the one in charge. And I still prefer to position myself as being of service to others in whatever way I can. But even knights, sometimes, need rescuing, even servants need to be waited upon, and even instruments need care. If I understand the beauty of helping, I can allow others to experience it.