**I carry the crown**

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**I carry the crown**

*by TardisIsTheOnlyWayToTravel*

**Summary**

Toby Williams is a wizard. With that revelation, Sarah is plunged back into the world of magic.

**Notes**

This is mostly written, but I won't post the last chapter or two until I've finished and proofread them.
Witches and Wizards

I carry the crown

Chapter One

It began with the sound of the doorbell.

It was just Sarah and Toby home for the evening, as Sarah’s Dad and Irene (Sarah’s stepmother) were out for the evening. As university classes had ended for the semester and Sarah was on summer break, and she hadn’t had any other plans for that evening, Sarah had agreed to babysit.

It wasn’t a chore. Sarah was very attached to her young brother, and the two of them got along tremendously. But then, that was hardly surprising. Both of Toby’s parents had careers; from the time Toby was quite young, he spent most of his day in daycare, followed by Sarah’s care in the evening while Sarah’s Dad and Irene sorted out dinner for all of them.

Once upon a time, Sarah had steadfastly resisted taking on such a role. She’d only been fifteen, after all. But she’d learnt the hard way that life wasn’t fair – and she’d come to realise, after the whole Labyrinth debacle, that she wasn’t the only one this arrangement wasn’t fair to. It wasn’t Toby’s fault that Sarah was the one responsible for his care more often than not; and it certainly wasn’t fair to him that neither of his parents, for all that they showered him with toys and gifts, spent nowhere near enough time with him.

So Sarah had reluctantly divided her time in the evenings after Irene brought Toby home from daycare between doing her homework and supervising her little brother. After a while, however, she found to her surprise that it wasn’t such an onerous task. Toby was a well-behaved baby when he was receiving the attention he needed, and once her resentment finally died away, Sarah found that she enjoyed spending time with him, whether it was helping him add new words to his infant vocabulary, or telling him the stories she’d loved when she herself had been not all that much older than he was.

Even when Sarah graduated from high school and started at university, by which time Toby was better able to entertain himself, Sarah had tried to spend time with her brother whenever she could. These days, the two of them were nearly inseparable.

The sound of the doorbell sent Sarah down the stairs and into the front hall, wondering who could possibly be ringing it at this time of night. Toby was already in bed, hopefully asleep.

His eleventh birthday had been the day before, and he’d spent most of today amusing himself with the various gifts he’d been given. It was possible he was still up, playing with his newest toys, but generally when Sarah told him to go to bed, he obeyed. Hopefully the sound of the doorbell wouldn’t wake him up.

Sarah peered through the glass on the left side of the front door, and blinked. A moment later, she unlocked and opened the door.

“May I help you?” she asked the stern-looking woman who was standing on the stoop.

“This is Mr Toby Williams’ residence?” The woman spoke briskly, with a pronounced Scottish accent.

“I’m sorry, but who are you?” asked Sarah, immediately on her guard at the mention of Toby’s
name. For someone to show up at this time of the evening, asking about a child, was weird enough.

But there was something about this woman that made the hairs of the back of Sarah’s neck prickle, and she knew better than to ignore her instincts. Something wasn’t quite right about this woman – something about her, to Sarah’s senses, said magic. It said it in an understated, sedate sort of way, but the feeling was there, nonetheless.

“I think that would be better discussed inside,” said the woman.

Sarah shook her head, warier than ever. She began to ease the door closed.

“I’m sorry, but I think you have the wrong house–”

“Do strange things ever happen around Toby?” the stranger asked, and Sarah froze – not only because of the question itself, but the knowing way the stranger said it. “Things that can’t easily be explained?”

Sarah stared at the woman, her heart sinking.

“How–” Sarah realised what she was saying, and cut herself off, but too late; the damage had already been done.

The stranger nodded in satisfaction, as though Sarah had confirmed a suspicion.

“I think you had best invite me in.”

“I don’t think I should,” said Sarah.

Sarah knew the rules of magic; and certain beings, of which she had met exactly one, could only act on invitation. Leaving the front door open she walked into the sitting room, and waited to see if the woman would enter.

A moment later the woman walked into the sitting room despite the lack of invitation, and some of the tenseness in Sarah’s shoulders loosened. She was now reasonably sure that whoever she was dealing with, they were more or less human – or at least, weren’t a Being of Power.

Whether they were trouble or not, Sarah had yet to determine.

The woman fixed Sarah with a sharp stare, and Sarah stiffened under it.

“I think,” said Sarah, in uncompromising tones, “that you should tell me what you think you know about Toby.”

“First things first,” said the stranger briskly. “Introductions are in order, I believe. My name is Minerva McGonagall, and I am Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

Absolute silence followed.

Sarah had known – of course she had known – that something had – had clung to Toby, after his time in the Labyrinth. But she’d rescued him in the thirteenth hour, and that was bound to have consequences. She had just been happy that the consequences of her actions weren’t, as far as she could tell, harmful in any way.

But this?
“I’m sorry?” Sarah managed, into the silence. “You’re what?”

Minerva McGonagall fixed her with a not unsympathetic look.

“Why don’t you sit down, and allow me to explain?”

Sarah sat in the nearest armchair, and gestured.

“Go right ahead.”

What followed was two parts explanation, one part practical demonstration of magic – witch and wizard magic, anyway. Sarah was fine, if still a rather shocked, with the explanation Minerva gave. But when the woman – the witch – demonstrated her power by turning into a cat and back, Sarah felt herself blanch white, her fingers digging into the arms of her chair.

Minerva turned back into a human being, and eyed Sarah with concern.

“Are you alright?” she asked. “I know it can be a shock, to discover magic is real.”

Sarah opened her mouth to say, I already knew magic was real, but shut it again just in time. There were some things Sarah kept close to her chest, and any mention of Labyrinths or Goblin Kings was one of them. Some instinct told her that this wasn’t any time to abandon her sense of discretion.

So Sarah swallowed, and said, instead, “I always knew there was… something different about Toby. It’s not really all that surprising to discover he’s magical. No, it’s that I used to have a nightmare with a shape-shifter in it – watching you shift forms reminded me of it.”

A true statement, if a misleading one. To Sarah’s relief, Minerva accepted her words at face value, and went on explaining about the world of wizards and witches.

The more Sarah heard the brisk, no-nonsense woman talk about it, the more certain Sarah was that the witches’ and wizards’ magical world was a very different magical world to the one she had encountered, and one operating by very different rules. Minerva spoke of a school where magic was taught in an orderly fashion – classes on Transfiguration, Potions, Charms, and more; everything divided up into its own tidy magical category. There was even a Ministry for Magic, as though magic was something that could be ruled by bureaucracy, of all things.

“Your world doesn’t sound very much like the way magic is in stories,” Sarah said, when she could get a word in.

Minerva snorted.

“I should think not. Most of those stories were the product of ignorance and superstition amongst the muggles – the non-magical, that is.”

Sarah nodded thoughtfully. The key word in that sentence, she thought, was most. Additionally, she suspected that Minerva was trying to make magic sound – not ordinary, but… safe.

She decided to test the waters.

“Are fairies and the fae real?” she asked.

“Oh, fairies are real,” said Minerva dryly. “Vain little creatures, with very little intellect to speak of. Toby will no doubt encounter them in Care of Magical Creatures.”

Sarah frowned.
“And the fae? I’ve read Tam Lin and other legends, you know. Is there any truth to them?”

For the first time, there was a flicker of unease about the Deputy Headmistress. She covered it well, but Sarah was looking for it.

“Tall tales,” said Minerva brusquely, and changed the subject.

Sarah sat back in her chair, and considered the woman in front of her. So far, Sarah had reached several conclusions. One: Toby was definitely magical, just not in the way Sarah had expected. Two: the wizarding world was almost certainly full of dangers just waiting to imperil a young boy. Three: if Toby was magical, and there was a school where he could learn to control his… magical outbursts… then he probably needed to attend, despite the inherent dangers.

Sarah frowned, and tilted her head to the left as she heard a slight scuffle on the stairs. A moment later she sighed.

“Toby!” she called out. Minerva jumped slightly. “How long have you been listening in?”

There was a guilty silence, and then thudding footsteps the rest of the way down the stairs. A moment later Toby appeared in the doorway.

“Only a little while,” he said. “Am I really a wizard?” His eyes shone with excitement, but there was also a certain degree of caution in his gaze.

As there should be. Sarah had been telling him stories about magic all his life: the important stories, in which people learned not to tell the fae their True Name, not to eat or drink anything while in another realm, and other necessary life lessons.

“Apparently so,” said Sarah. “Toby, this is Ms McGonagall—”

“Professor McGonagall,” the other woman interrupted, and smiled at Toby. “I will be your Transfiguration Professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

Instead of looking even more excited, Toby’s face drew into a thoughtful frown.

“Sarah,” he said, “do you think Mom and Dad will let me go?”

Minerva blinked in surprise.

“You’re not his guardian?”

“Oh, goodness no,” said Sarah, with a small laugh. “I’m his sister. I’m babysitting for Dad and my stepmother; tonight is their night out.”

“I see. I assumed… but no matter. Do you believe your parents will agree to send Toby to our school?”

Sarah drummed her fingers on the arm of her chair, already thinking how best to talk her Dad and Irene around.

“I think,” said Sarah, “That they will find that the decision is… inevitable.”

It wasn’t as simple as that, of course. Sarah should have known better.

But really, how was she to have expected her stepmother’s reaction the moment that Minerva
introduced herself as the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and said that she was here about Toby?

As it was, Irene went so pale that Sarah thought that she was going to faint. Both Sarah and her Dad reached out to steady Irene as she swayed on her feet.

“Irene?” Sarah’s Dad sounded worried.

“I thought he’d be like me,” Irene whispered, barely audible, but Sarah heard the words anyway.

Her Dad looked confused, but Sarah put two and two together.

“You’re from the wizarding world?” she asked, incredulous.

“Don’t be ridiculous – magic doesn’t exist,” said Sarah’s Dad, and he looked at Minerva. “I don’t know who you really are, or how you hoodwinked my daughter into believing–”

“But Dad–” Toby began.

Minerva cut through the argument by turning back into a cat.

“It’s all true, Robert,” said Irene, while Robert was still gaping at the tabby cat where it sat primly on the floor, with its front paws neatly together. “I’m sorry. I should have told you.”

“You’re from the wizarding world, but you’re not a witch, are you?” said Sarah, because there were few people less magical than Irene. It wasn’t just her down-to-earth, thoroughly grounded way of looking at things; Sarah had been able to tell, with Toby, that he was magical. It was all the odd, inexplicable things that happened around him. There was nothing odd or inexplicable about Irene.

“No,” said Irene, and her shoulders sagged. “I’m not. I’m what they call a squib – a non-magical person born to magical parents.”

“But – magic can’t be real,” said Sarah’s Dad, weakly. He finally tore his gaze away from Minerva’s alternate form to stare at Irene. “Can it?”

“I’m sorry,” Irene said again.

“Come on, Dad, why don’t you sit down before you fall down,” said Sarah, and guided him to the couch. He sat. When Sarah turned back around, it was to find that Minerva was human again.

“Well,” the Professor said briskly, “if one of you already knows about the magical world, that makes things easier.”

“I don’t know everything,” said Irene. “We came from America originally, and only moved here when Toby was three – after Sarah graduated high school. Robert got a very good job offer, and so we moved. But things are different in Britain from America, aren’t they?”

“They are,” said Professor McGonagall. “In that case, I shall explain the basics.”

The explanation which followed was very much like the one that she had given Sarah: Sarah had the feeling that Minerva had given it so many times that by this point she could recite it in her sleep. Irene was still pale, but listening intently, while Sarah’s Dad was sitting in a daze, giving no indication of understanding what he was hearing.

Sarah suspected that it would take time to sink in.
“Come on,” Sarah murmured to Toby. “It’s well past your bedtime.”

“But I want to know if Mum and Dad will let me go to magic school,” said Toby, but quietly – he didn’t want to draw attention to himself in case his parents agreed with Sarah that he should go back to bed.

“I promise I’ll tell you tomorrow,” Sarah told him. “Come on, say goodnight, and I’ll tuck you in.”

Toby made a face.

“I’m not a baby, I don’t need you to tuck me in.” But he said goodnight to his parents and Minerva, and Sarah escorted him to his room. She didn’t trust him not to sit on the stairs and eavesdrop all night.

When she came back down, her Dad had roused from his dazed state, and was asking questions of both Minerva and Irene.

“I understand why you didn’t tell me,” he said to Irene. “I probably wouldn’t have believed you, without seeing proof. But we don’t have to send Toby to this school, do we? We can keep him home, act as though nothing has changed—”

“His magic will find a way out,” said Sarah, drawing the attention of the other adults. “It already has, Dad. You might not have noticed, but I have.”

Irene stared at Sarah as though she’d never seen her before.

“You mean – you’ve seen Toby using accidental magic?”

Sarah wasn’t at all sure that Toby’s magical outbursts could be termed ‘accidental,’ but she nodded.

“His magical outbursts have always been insignificant and easy to dismiss, but I saw them.”

“You seem relatively unsurprised by all this,” remarked Minerva, eyeing Sarah with – not quite suspicion, but certainly a shrewdness which Sarah would rather have not had aimed in her direction.

Sarah chose her words carefully.

“I’ve always been astounded by how much people are willing to explain away, rather than see what is right under their noses. As I said to you earlier, I always knew Toby was different, somehow. And… as a child, I always wanted to believe that magic was real. Toby’s difference being magic was easier to believe than you might think.”

Minerva nodded, as though Sarah’s words explained a great deal. Sarah relaxed, careful not to let the others see that she had.

Irene was still looking at her, though.

“I should have known you’d take this well,” said Irene. “But you seemed to suddenly lose interest in the idea of magic, once you reached about fifteen. Before that you were always in the park, play-acting bits out of that book of yours – the fairytale one that you used to love so much, whatever it was called.”

Sarah’s Dad turned his head to stare at Sarah, as did Minerva.

Sarah shrugged helplessly.
“I grew up,” she said, at a loss how else to explain her sudden wariness where magic was concerned.

Everyone looked at her for a moment longer, but then Irene sighed, and put a hand on Sarah’s Dad’s arm.

“Robert. I know this all sounds… fantastical. But if Toby is magical, then Sarah is right. Magic will out. Bad things happen when magical people aren’t trained in their magic.”

“But…” Sarah’s Dad trailed off, looking conflicted. Instead of saying whatever he’d been about to say, he asked, “Are you sure?”

Irene nodded, and Sarah could tell that she was upset herself, but trying to keep up a brave face for her husband’s sake.

Minerva coughed. Everyone looked at her.

“Before term begins, one of our professors is taking all the muggleborn students – that is, those students from non-magical families – and their parents to assist them in buying the necessary supplies in the magical shopping district.”

“Is there an equipment list?” Sarah asked, when her father and Irene only sat looking distressed.

Minerva extracted an envelope from one sleeve, and handed it to Sarah.

“Mr Williams’ acceptance letter and the first-year equipment list, as well as details of the muggleborn shopping trip. What information isn’t in the letter or equipment list, Professor Falsworth will be able to provide on the day.”

“Then I’ll take Toby shopping with the other families,” said Sarah.

But Irene reached out to grasp Sarah’s arm, her expression urgent.

“Sarah, you don’t understand – the magical world is dangerous,” she said. “This isn’t – this isn’t some adventure you’ll be going on.”

Sarah felt a wave of fondness for Irene. She might not be Sarah’s mother, but she’d always tried to look out for Sarah, even when Sarah had hated her guts.

But Sarah understood all too well the dangers of the world of magic, even if Irene didn’t know that.

“I know,” Sarah told Irene, her voice gentler than it would otherwise have been. “But the thought of going back into that world clearly upsets you, and well, someone has to take Toby to get his supplies.”

“I’m sure you’ll do marvellously,” said Minerva, as though it was all settled. “Professor Falsworth will be taking the new students into wizarding London a month and a half before the start of term. The details are included with Mr Williams’ acceptance letter and equipment list.”

“Thank you,” said Sarah. “I’ll give Toby his letter tomorrow, and we can look it over together.”

Minerva didn’t stay very long after that. Once she left, there was a heavy silence.

“Well, I’m going to go to bed,” said Sarah, into the silence. “Toby’s probably going to be awake horribly early, and I know he’ll come bursting into my room to ask me questions.”

Neither her father nor her stepmother answered, so Sarah went upstairs without saying anything.
As she was getting dressed for bed, Sarah resolved to buy some books on the wizarding world’s culture and history. Surely they would have some for sale somewhere in wizarding London. Sarah suspected that whatever knowledge she could learn would prove absolutely necessary to make sure that Toby got through this safely.

She, better than anyone, knew how dangerous magic could be to the unwary.
Diagon Alley

Chapter Notes

I got a bit confused about when Professor Burbage was Muggle Studies Professor, and made up a professor to replace her, only it turns out she was still at Hogwarts at this point in the timeline? So pretend my professor is for some other, previously unmentioned subject at Hogwarts.

Chapter Two

As Sarah had expected, Toby came bouncing into her room as soon as the sun was up, demanding to know whether his parents would let him go to magic school.

“I think so,” said Sarah, and Toby gave a whoop of joy.

Sarah frowned. Best to nip that in the bud, or at least temper Toby’s joy with caution.

“Toby, you’re going to have to be careful,” she told him. “Magic is dangerous – ask your Mom. You can’t just go rushing into things without thinking about them. The world of magic lays traps for the unwary. The wizarding part of it seems to be a bit safer than others, but it’s still important not to do anything silly, do you understand?”

Toby looked at Sarah, his expression attentive, and suddenly serious.

“Like in the stories you told me,” he said. Sarah nodded.

“Exactly.”

“How do you know so much about magic, anyway?” Toby asked.

Sarah shrugged her shoulders.

“You know I’ve always liked to read stories about magic,” she said.

But Toby shook his head impatiently.

“Yeah, but everyone else thinks they’re just stories. You’ve always acted like they’re real.”

Sarah found herself at a loss for words. She hadn’t expected her little brother to be so perceptive – but then, he knew and understood her better than anyone else did. And she didn’t want to lie to him.

She sighed instead.

“Why do you have to be so perceptive?”

“Does that mean you’re not going to tell me?” Toby asked suspiciously.

Sarah hesitated. Toby deserved to know the truth. He’d almost been lost to the Goblin King, after all. But her fear that he’d reject her for what she’d done was strong.
Besides, he was so young; she doubted he’d understand. Fifteen was a difficult age, and one it was hard to comprehend unless you’d lived it.

“Ask me again when you’re older,” said Sarah, and ruffled his hair. “Did I tell you Professor McGonagall left me your acceptance letter and equipment list to give to you?”

Toby’s face lit up.

“I want to see!”

So Sarah picked the letter up off her dresser, and handed it to Toby. He ripped it open, and pulled out three pieces of thick, expensive-looking paper.

Toby read each piece of paper through several times, looking excited.

“It says there’s a trip to buy school supplies. Do I get to go?”

“I’ll be taking you there,” Sarah said.

“Fantastic!” said Toby, but then he sent Sarah a shrewd look. “Mum and Dad aren’t exactly happy about me being a wizard, are they?”

Sarah chose her words carefully.

“Well, you know Dad – he has trouble believing in anything that can’t be explained. And your Mom… well, I get the impression that the wizarding world wasn’t very kind to her, because she didn’t have magic. I think she thought she could leave it behind forever, but you being a wizard reminded her of everything that happened.”


Sarah smiled at him, but her smile was a little sad.

“Of course I am. Your magic is a part of you. I’m glad you’re going to learn how to use it. Besides – you get to explore an entire new world. Doesn’t that sound amazing?”

Toby frowned.

“I thought you said that I had to be careful, that the magical world is dangerous.”

“It is. But I’m sure it will be wonderful, too. Both great and terrible at once.”

“Now you sound like you know about magic, again,” said Toby, his voice accusing. “Do I really have to wait until I’m older before you explain?”

“You really do,” said Sarah.

Toby scowled, but let the issue go, for which Sarah was thankful.

The next few weeks passed slowly. Toby clearly couldn’t wait until he got to visit wizarding London, and said so constantly.

Sarah’s Dad seemed to have resigned himself to the whole magic thing, and was now treating it the same way he treated Sarah’s studies in mythology and folklore: as some completely inexplicable facet of his child that he utterly failed to understand, but tried to be interested in, all the same.
Irene, on the other hand, wasn’t doing too well. Whatever issues she had with the wizarding world, discovering that her son was a wizard seemed to have dragged those issues to the surface. She refused to speculate about what magical classes would be like, or answer questions about whether dragons or unicorns were real. She continued trying to pretend that everything was going to go on as normal, even though it obviously wasn’t. Sarah wasn’t quite sure what to do about the problem.

As for herself... Sarah wasn’t completely certain how she felt about Toby being a wizard. She was worried, and excited for him... and to be honest, a little envious. Sarah’s only foray into the world of magic hadn’t been nearly as pleasant, and while she hoped that Toby would never find himself in a situation like the one which Sarah had unwittingly brought upon herself, Sarah couldn’t help but wish that her own brush with magic had been more forgiving.

A month and a half before Toby was due to begin at Hogwarts, Sarah found herself loitering on a busy street, Toby beside her, while she covertly scanned the crowds for anyone who might conceivably be a wizard. Several other people with children appeared to be doing the same thing. Summoning up her courage, Sarah walked over to the nearest family.

“Are you waiting for Professor Falsworth, too?” she asked.

The family visibly relaxed.

“Oh thank goodness,” said the woman, with a relieved smile. “I was beginning to worry it was just us!”

“It’s a bit daunting to go up and ask, isn’t it?” said Sarah. “‘Hello, is your child going to Hogwarts?’ I mean, even the school’s name sounds so... dubious.”

The couple relaxed even further. Their daughter watched Sarah and Toby curiously.

“I thought it was a joke at first, until that teacher turned our armchair into a cow and back,” said the woman. “I’m Elisabeth, by the way, and my husband is David. This is Isabel.”

“Hello,” Isabel offered.

“I’m Sarah, and this is my brother, Toby,” said Sarah. They all shook hands.

“Are you excited to be going to wizard school, too?” Toby blurted out.

Isabel nodded, a little shyly.

Just then a young man in tweed began calling out in a carrying voice.

“Hogwarts students and their families! Over here, please!”

Passersby sent him odd looks, even as the other families began congregating around him.

“I don’t know how he can say that in public without embarrassing himself,” said David, but quietly, as the small group moved towards the man in tweed.

Sarah grinned, as did Toby.

“Attention!” said the man in tweed. “I am Professor Falsworth, and I will be acting as your guide today. You are all Hogwarts students and their guardians, correct?”

“Sarah’s my sister, not my guardian,” Toby piped up.
Professor Falsworth sent him an amused look.

“But she is acting in loco parentis, I trust?”

Sarah nodded.

“Good, good. Is everyone here?” Professor Falsworth looked around. “In that case, we shall be on our way. Children, if you would cast your eyes to the row of shops in front of you, you will see one which does not match the others.”

Everyone turned to stare at the line of shops.

To Sarah, one building stood out like a sore thumb. It was ancient and dingy, in contrast to the modern, shiny store-fronts on either side of it. A wooden sign labelling it ‘The Leaky Cauldron’ hung from the awning.

“You mean the pub over there?” Sarah called out. Professor Falsworth sent her a surprised look.

“You’re a witch?”

Sarah blinked at the question.

“Not at all. I never knew the wizarding world even existed until three weeks ago. Why?”

It was Professor Falsworth’s turn to blink.

“Well, isn’t that interesting,” he said, and ignored what Sarah had asked. She soon found out why.

“I don’t see any pub,” said one of the other parents, looking puzzled.

“That is because The Leaky Cauldron is visible only to the magical,” said Professor Falsworth, with a thoughtful look at Sarah. “Those of you who are not magical will feel a compulsion to move elsewhere. Try to ignore it. Children, please guide your parents in the correct direction.”

Sarah stood rooted to the spot, even as the others began moving forward. Toby tugged on her arm.

“Sarah?” He sounded curious, but worried.

Sarah shook her head, bringing herself back to reality.

“Let’s go,” she said, and tried to put Professor Falsworth’s words to the back of her mind to contemplate later on. While the other children pulled their confused parents towards the dilapidated old pub, Sarah and Toby strode straight towards it.

Professor Falsworth waited patiently, just inside the doorway into the pub. His gaze lingered on Sarah.

“You never received a letter to a magical school as a child?” he asked, sotto-voce.

Sarah shook her head.

“Not to my knowledge.”

Professor Falsworth looked intrigued, as though he would have liked to ask more questions. But the parents and their children were crowding inside The Leaky Cauldron, the parents shaking off their dazed state to exclaim in surprise. Several look disturbed to realise that for the last several minutes,
their minds had not entirely been their own.

Sarah wondered what else magic could do to peoples’ minds, and repressed a shudder at the thought. But she didn’t voice it.

As the group poured into the little courtyard out the back of the pub, Sarah couldn’t help but wonder about the fact that she could see the pub. Should she have gotten a letter of her own, once upon a time? Or had her time in the Labyrinth changed her in more ways than she knew?

Sarah barely noticed Professor Falsworth tapping the bricks with his magic wand. But when the bricks wriggled and jumped away from it to form an open doorway, Sarah pulled her mind away from its disquieting train of thought, back to the here and now, and entered the wizarding world.

The people here wore long robes and pointed witches’ hats, and light cloaks which billowed in the summer breeze. There were stacks of cauldrons for sale, and objects floating in the shop windows without need of wires or stands; one shop was advertising ‘the Firebolt, the best racing broom on the market.’

The children were talking in excited voices, pointing and shouting. But Toby was quiet by Sarah’s side, his gaze silently drinking in everything that there was to see. Most of the parents were busy taking in their visibly magical surroundings with looks of wonder.

But Sarah had seen incredible, magical things before, and she looked past them now, to the things that the other parents didn’t seem to notice. She looked to the boarded-up shops, to the stores selling protective amulets to ward off ‘Werewolves, Dementors and Inferi’ (whatever those last two were – Sarah doubted she wanted to find out), and the wanted posters with their moving black-and-white photographs which covered every blank wall and were pinned up in several shop windows. She saw the way that the witches and wizards moved in groups, their faces drawn and anxious, keeping their heads down and not making eye contact with anyone who passed by.

She also saw the way that Professor Falsworth scanned the crowd around them, his eyes vigilant even as he kept his tone light and friendly, his hand never more than a few inches from the pocket where he kept his wand. And she saw the way all the magical people gave their little tour group a wide berth, as though getting too close was a dangerous thing.

Toby was still looking around at the sights around them, but he glanced back at Sarah, and frowned at her expression.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” said Sarah, keeping her voice low and quiet. “But something is. Be careful, Toby.”

The small group continued walking down the street, the children and their parents chattering excitedly. But Sarah and Toby were quiet, and stayed close to Professor Falsworth.

“Isn’t this exciting?” Elisabeth asked Sarah. “All this magic!”

Sarah’s smile was a little strained.

“Oh, yes,” she said, and if her words came out sounding insincere, that wasn’t very surprising.

Professor Falsworth glanced back at Sarah. Their eyes met. A moment later, Professor Falsworth turned his head forward again, and went back to surveying their surroundings. But understanding had passed between them, and Professor Falsworth knew that Sarah sensed that something was wrong, while Sarah’s instinct that there was some kind of trouble going on was confirmed.
But she didn’t want to alarm the others, and wasn’t quite sure how to raise the issue, anyway. So she stayed silent, alert and watchful.

They soon reached a snow-white building which towered above the other, smaller ones.

“And this is Gringotts, the wizarding bank, which is run by goblins,” said Professor Falsworth.

Sarah felt the world grind to a halt.

“Goblins?”

Professor Falsworth seemed surprised by Sarah’s reaction.

“Why, yes. The wizarding world has had a treaty with them for the last… five hundred years or so. They’re nothing like Tolkien’s goblins.” He laughed at his own joke. The other adults chuckled nervously.

“We’ll need to go inside and exchange your muggle money for wizarding currency, but I assure you, as long as you are not a thief, you have nothing to fear from the goblins.”

Sarah clutched at Toby, her fingers digging into the fabric of his shirt. Toby turned his head to look up at her.

“Sarah?”

Sarah swallowed, old nightmares rushing to the forefront of her mind.

“You’re absolutely sure?” she asked Professor Falsworth.

“I’m very sure.”

He smiled at her in reassurance and gentle condescension, and if she hadn’t been so afraid, Sarah would have had a sharp word or two to wipe that look off his face.

As it was, she stiffened her spine, and took a deep breath.

“I want your word that if we walk in there, you will protect my brother with every bit of magic you possess.”

“Sarah,” Toby complained, embarrassed that she was making a scene. But Sarah shot him a look full of warning, and he subsided.

“I give you my word,” the wizard promised, as casually as if he was commenting on the weather. Sarah wondered if he was always so careless with his promises. In the magical world she had known, promises had been binding pacts, entered into with care. It was yet another difference between the magical world she knew, and the wizarding world.

But she had Professor Falsworth’s word, so Sarah said, “Alright. But I’ll hold you to it.”

“Does everyone have their money ready?” Professor Falsworth asked, when it was clear Sarah had nothing else to say. He received several nods. “Very well, then let us go inside.”

The group climbed the wide marble steps that led to the bank’s entrance. As they walked in, Toby tugged on Sarah’s sleeve.

“Sarah, look.”
Sarah followed his gaze, to where words were carved into the doors in front of them.

‘Enter stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn,
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.’

A chill ran down Sarah’s spine.

“I see it, Toby,” she muttered back, and kept a hand on Toby’s shoulder all the way up to the counter.

Professor Falsworth instructed everyone to line up, and gave them a brief run-down on wizarding currency and how much it was all worth.

“Are galleons real gold?” someone asked, but Sarah was too busy staring at the goblin teller waiting impatiently behind the counter.

They looked nothing like the childish, gleeful goblins Sarah had seen in the Labyrinth – the teller’s expression was haughty and proud, annoyed at the delay. But then, Sarah supposed, she’d met a number of different kinds of goblins in the Labyrinth. The fact that these goblins seemed different from the ones she’d met in the Underground didn’t necessarily mean anything.

When it was Toby’s turn to step up to the counter, Sarah stepped forward with him.

“Do you wish to open an account?” The goblin teller’s voice was bored.

“Is that usual?” Sarah asked.

The goblin looked at her.

“For those new to the magical world? Yes and no. Some do; but not all.”

“What fees are associated with opening and maintaining an account?” Sarah asked, rather than saying yes or no outright.

The goblin gave her a break-down of the relevant fees.

Sarah looked to Toby, feeling indecisive.

“Do you want to open an account?” she asked him.

Toby looked uncertain.

“Well... from what the others said, no one ever seems to leave the wizarding world. So it could be a good idea.”
Sarah hesitated, but Toby was right: the magical world didn’t seem like the kind of place to ever give up what it had claimed, and if Toby lived there, it would probably be a good idea for him to have an account – even if it was run by goblins.

“Yes, he’d like to open an account,” said Sarah, making her decision.

The goblin opened a large leather-bound book and picked up a quill.

“Name of account holder?”

“Toby Williams,” Toby piped up, his voice far too loud in the quiet environment.

The bank went silent. The little tour group didn’t seem to notice, too busy talking amongst themselves. But every goblin in the bank went silent and still, and Sarah became the focus of a dozen staring eyes.

“World Below,” murmured the goblin teller. Their tone was awed. “You’re the Champion. The Lady.”

Sarah went hot all over, and then cold.

“What of it?” she asked, her voice defiant and just a little bit dangerous.

“The Lady?” Professor Falsworth asked from nearby, eyebrows raised. Evidently he had been eavesdropping.

Sarah opened her mouth, with no clear idea of what she was going to say.

But the goblin teller answered for her.

“If you don’t know, then it’s none of your business, wizard.” The goblin’s tone was distinctly frosty.

Professor Falsworth held up his hands.

“I didn’t mean to intrude.”

The goblin teller glared at him, before looking back at Sarah and Toby.

“Would you also like an account here, my lady?” For the first time, the goblin teller sounded polite. Respectful, even.

Off-balance at the sudden change in manner, Sarah blinked, and almost said no.

Then she thought about it.

While she had no intention of leaving the non-magical world behind, if she really did have magic herself, as earlier events had indicated she might, it might be useful to have an account of her own in this world. If nothing else, it would make it easier to blend in, if she ever needed to.

“What’s the catch?” Sarah asked. When the goblin teller looked blank, she clarified. “At what price?”

The goblin seemed to understand her caution.

“The only obligations you enter into by opening an account are payment of the appropriate fees – and that you do not attempt thievery, of course.”
Sarah considered.

“In that case, Toby and I would both like to open an account, as well as exchange some of our money for wizard money.”

The process took several minutes. Sarah gave the teller the base deposit necessary to open an account, both for her and for Toby. It was a good thing that Sarah had brought a fair bit of money with her; the base deposit cost nearly half of what she’d taken out of her non-magical bank account earlier that morning.

Once the goblin teller had exchanged their money, and taken away the base deposit to be entered into Sarah and Toby’s new vaults, each of them was issued with a large, surprisingly heavy key.

“Gringotts is not responsible for any losses from your account, should your key be stolen,” the goblin teller warned. “Guard it well.”

“Thank you.” Sarah accepted both her own key and Toby’s, and tucked them away into her purse.

“Can’t I have my key?” Toby asked.

“I’ll get you a key-ring or something to put it on, to make it harder to lose. Then you can have your key.”

Toby grinned.

Sarah and Toby stood to one side of the counter, with the other families who had already exchanged their money.

“You took a while,” said David. “Any problems?”

“Oh, no – Toby and I were just opening an account each,” Sarah told him.

Professor Falsworth stepped up beside them.

“Which is very interesting, considering that the goblins can sense magic, and refuse to open accounts for muggles,” he said, raising one eyebrow at Sarah. “Are you sure you’re not a witch?”

Sarah decided to be honest.

“Not any more,” she admitted. “But I was telling the truth when I said I’d never heard of the wizarding world before three weeks ago. Now I’m wondering if I was supposed to get a letter, when I turned eleven, and somehow never did.”

“Hmm,” said Professor Falsworth. “It happens. Rarely, but it does happen. What’s more common is that someone’s parents are told of their child’s magical ability, and choose to hide it from them.”

“My Dad had no idea magic was real,” said Sarah. “You should have seen him when Professor McGonagall turned into a cat. But my mother…” Sarah trailed off for a moment. “Well, I suppose it’s possible she was informed, and never told me.”

Sarah still thought it more likely that she’d been affected by her time Underground, rather than being born a wizard; but both options were possible. If only she knew which one was the truth.

After the bank, the first store they went to was the robe shop. It took a while for all the children to be measured and fitted for their school robes. On a whim, Sarah asked how much it would cost to be
fitted for a set of robes as well, earning questioning looks from the other members of her tour group.

The witch in charge of the store blinked in surprise, but after giving Sarah a brisk once-over, gave a price that was really quite reasonable. Sarah had seen far more expensive items in Topshop.

So Sarah stood next to Toby when their turn came, and was fitted for a set of basic black robes.

“Do you plan on coming here often, then?” Elisabeth asked.

Sarah shrugged.

“Perhaps, if I really do have magic.”

“It would be so cool if you did,” said Toby. “And you already know so much about magic, it seems only fair.”

Sarah laughed.

“Life is rarely fair,” she told him, but with a smile.

“You know a lot about magic?” one of the other parents asked. Several others were listening in, looking at Sarah with curiosity.

“Well, sort of,” said Sarah. “I’m studying mythology and folklore at university.”

There was a collective ‘aah,’ of understanding from all the parents who were listening in.

“But surely that’s different from, uh, real magic?” asked a tall, stocky man. “I mean… all those stories about fairies!” He laughed. So did several other parents.

Sarah didn’t smile.

“You have nothing to fear from fairies,” said Professor Falsworth. “Your children will likely be dealing with them at some point in their Care of Magical Creatures classes, actually.”

“There is a big difference between fairies and the high fae,” Sarah muttered, but no one seemed to be listening; they were too busy questioning Professor Falsworth about what other magical creatures the children would encounter.

The witch fitting Sarah for her robes heard her, though.

“You’d be right about that,” the woman said. “Although there’s not many who really believe in the high fae, these days, even in the wizarding world. The fae have left us alone for too long, since the Great War.”

“I get the impression you’re not talking about World War I,” said Sarah. The witch shook her head.

“I’m talking about the Great War between wizardkind and the high fae, a thousand or more years ago. It’s said that Lord Merlin the Inscrutable led the war himself, to cast out the fae and shore up the boundaries between their realms and ours. It’s said that without the proper rituals, those boundaries will weaken again – but there aren’t enough who believe anymore, to keep the boundaries strong.”

“Nonsense,” said Professor Falsworth sharply, stepping forward. Sarah hadn’t noticed him eavesdropping, again. He seemed genuinely angry. “Those are nothing but myths. You will not find a single, reliable history book which mentions the Wizard-Fae War. It’s a tale made up to frighten children. Do your job, and stop trying to scare the muggles.”
Sarah waited until he’d turned away and resumed conversation with the others before she asked, very quietly, “Are there any history books which do mention the Great War?”

The witch sent a quick glance at Professor Falsworth’s back to check that he wasn’t paying them any attention, before she spoke.

“No history books, but… there is a book of legends. Tales of Fae and Faeries by Robin Zakar.”

Sarah jolted at the sound of a name she would never, ever forget.

It was the same author as the book The Labyrinth, which Sarah had adored for its tale of magic and mystery, right up until the book had led her to wish her brother away to the Goblin King.

These days, her copy of The Labyrinth sat at the back of her wardrobe, in one of those expensive hat-boxes which came with a lock and key, where hopefully no one would ever go looking for it. Sarah had thought about giving the book away, or throwing it in the trash; but there was too much danger of someone else finding it that way, and making the same mistake she had. So Sarah kept the book in the locked hat-box, with the key always on her key-ring so that no one could open the hat-box in her absence.

“You’re certain that the author is Robin Zakar?” she asked, trying to keep her voice level.

“Oh, yes,” the woman assured her, still speaking in a low voice to avoid being overheard. “They have a copy at Flourish & Blotts which they’ve been trying to sell for years, but no one’s interested in buying it. I inherited my copy from my grandfather. He always said it was important to educate children on the dangers of the fae.”

The woman stepped back from Sarah, and said more loudly, “Well, that’s you done, dear! Head to the counter, and we’ll wrap your robes up in paper for you.”

Toby’s robe fitting was already finished, and there was only one other child still being fitted, so it wasn’t long before the tour group left the robe shop, their purchases wrapped in paper parcels with the words Madam Malkin’s Robes for all Occasions stamped on top.

As Sarah stepped up beside Professor Falsworth, he said, “You needn’t pay any attention to what that woman said, you know. The high fae are nothing more than stories.”

“I don’t need you advising me on whether the fae are dangerous, thank you,” said Sarah, more sharply than she’d intended.

Professor Falsworth looked startled.

“I meant no offence.”

Sarah ignored his reply, and Professor Falsworth sent her one last, uncertain look, before his gaze returned to assessing the tour group’s surroundings.

Next was the apothecary for Potions equipment, and then the book store.

“How many books can I get, Sarah?” Toby asked, as the tour group entered the shop.

“The ones on your list, and one book on wizarding history. You can choose which one, but that’s the only extra book you’re allowed,” said Sarah.

Toby pouted a little, but nodded.
“Can I see the list?”

Sarah held it out for him to read. Toby mouthed the different titles to himself before dashing off to search the shelves.

While everyone else was doing the same, Sarah stepped up to the front counter.

“May I help you?” asked the wizard there.

“I think so. I’m looking for the book Tales of Fae and Faeries, by Robin Zakar.”

The wizard’s eyebrows flew upwards, even as his face lit up.

“Finally!” he said. “Someone wants it! It’s in the corner – let me get it for you.”

Sarah followed the shop assistant as he wove his way through the various customers towards the back of the store. He headed for one corner, and pulled a thick book off a dusty stack. Wiping the thick coating of dust off it, he handed it to Sarah and said cheerfully, “That’ll be five galleons. Normally I’d charge you more, but it’s been sitting around gathering dust for years, and frankly I’m happy to be rid of it.”

Just then Toby came up, staggering under the weight of a large pile of books.

“Toby!” Sarah scolded. “You’re going to injure yourself, carrying that many books all at once!”

“Let me take all those up to the counter for you,” said the shop assistant, reaching out to take Toby’s school-books from Toby and Tales of Fae and Fairies from Sarah.

While Sarah was paying for the books at the front counter, Professor Falsworth came up and tapped each book with his wand, muttering something under his breath.

“What did you just do?” Sarah asked, raising her eyebrows.

“Feather-light charm,” said Professor Falsworth. “Makes them lighter, easier to carry.”

“In that case, thank you very much.” Sarah had been wondering how she was going to carry the stack of books and their other purchases for the rest of the day. “Toby, can you carry the books, or are they too heavy?”

Toby gave the stack of books an experimental heave. He grinned, and hauled the lot into his arms.

“What’s this one on top?” he asked. “It’s all dusty.”

“That one’s for me,” Sarah told him, and Toby laughed.

“I should have known you’d buy something!”

“Laugh all you want,” Sarah told him. “It should be useful.”

Finally, after getting everything else on the equipment list, there was only one item left – a magic wand.

The wand shop was narrow and shabby, and as they entered, the group of parents and children were all crammed in like sardines in a tin, barely fitting inside the shop’s narrow confines.

Sarah looked around. Amid the dust, there was a palpable sense of magic in the air. She shivered.
Some instinct warned her, and Sarah looked around just in time to see an old man appear out of the back rooms. No one else seemed to notice him as he looked around the shop with wide, pale eyes, taking in the sight of his shop filled with people.

His eyes met Sarah’s, and widened slightly in what seemed like surprise.

“Good afternoon,” said the old man.

Several children shrieked as they realised he was there, while their parents jumped. Professor Falsworth wore a look of barely-veiled amusement, even though he had flinched slightly, too. Sarah filed that away to be considered later.

“This is Mr Ollivander, the wandmaker,” said the Professor, trying to calm the startled group. “He’s rather quiet on his feet, I know.”

But looking at Mr Ollivander, Sarah rather thought it was more than that. She watched him, intrigued.

The feeling seemed to be mutual. Mr Ollivander pushed his way through the crowd of parents and children until he was standing in front of Sarah. He peered up at her.

“How interesting. I have never sold you a wand… and nor, I think, has anyone else.”

Sarah shook her head.

“I only found out about the magical world a few weeks ago.”

“The magical world, or the wizarding world?” asked the old man, blinking his wide eyes. “They are not necessarily the same thing – as I think you well know.”

The rest of the room was watching them avidly, particularly Professor Falsworth. Sarah gave a short laugh, trying not to feel uneasy. How did he know?

“I suppose.”

The wandmaker’s eyes lingered a moment longer, before he turned away, and made his way back behind the counter. But the others continued to stare at Sarah in varying degrees of confusion – or interest, in Professor Falsworth’s case.

It took a very long time indeed for everyone to choose their wands. The process involved each child waving different wands around to see what happened, sometimes with explosive results. The whole thing was rather alarming for the parents, Sarah could tell; but the children were delighted, giggling every time something blew up or caught fire.

Each time something like that happened, Mr Ollivander would snatch the wand away and put it back in its box, another wand at the ready. And so it went, until the child found a wand which Mr Ollivander deemed satisfactory.

The children were sold their wands in alphabetical order, and Toby was the very last of them to be tested for a wand. Most of the wands he tried did absolutely nothing, but finally, there was one which produced yellow sparks when Toby waved it.

“English oak,” said Mr Ollivander, with a nod. “Eleven inches, with a fairy-wing core. Most suitable for those who are courageous and loyal at heart, and who possess some form of the Sight.”
“The Sight?” asked Toby, before Sarah could say anything. “What’s that?”

Mr Ollivander looked at him without blinking.

“There are many forms of the Sight… the Sight of either the Past, Present or Future is most common, although its strength and reliability varies… the rarest form is the Sight of That Which Goes Unseen.”

“The Sight of That Which Goes Unseen?” Sarah asked, feeling curious. In all her reading, she’d never seen the Sight divided up into categories, and the authors were usually vague about what, precisely, the Sight entailed.

Mr Ollivander looked at her. Professor Falsworth appeared to be listening intently from where he was lounging against the front counter.

“It is said that those with the Sight of That Which Goes Unseen are have usually been touched by the True Fae in some way – whether it is that they carry fae blood, or have entered into a fairy realm. But it means that they are able to see things that ordinary mortals do not.”

Sarah stared at Ollivander. He looked solemnly back, but his gaze was knowing. Far too knowing.

“Oh,” said Sarah, at a loss for what else to say.

Professor Falsworth stopped lounging against the counter, and straightened.

“Thank you for your expertise, Mr Ollivander, but I’m sure Ms Williams wishes to pay for Mr Williams’s wand and to be on her way,” said Professor Falsworth.

Mr Ollivander didn’t look away from Sarah.

“Yes, yes, of course… that will be seven galleons…”

Sarah paid for the wand, but as she passed Mr Ollivander the money, he whispered, too low for anyone but her and Toby to hear: “Should you ever wish to have a wand yourself, young lady, I would gladly provide you with one. Such potential…”

Sarah couldn’t help feeling shaken as she left the shop.

Not long after that, the tour group was guided back to The Leaky Cauldron so that they could return to the non-magical world. Sarah, feeling unnerved by the day’s events and thoroughly in need of something to eat or drink, took Toby to the nearest cafe, and piled their purchases on the extra chair belonging to their table as the two of them took a seat.

Since coming to England, Sarah had become fond of tea, and she ordered a cup now, as well as a slice of cake for her and a slice for Toby. It was a relief to sit down and sip at the reassuring warmth of her favourite beverage and eat a mouthful of food. Sarah hadn’t realised how hungry she was.

“Do you really have magic, do you think?” asked Toby, instead of eating his slice of cake. “How did the goblins know you? Are you going to go back and buy a wand, the way the creepy old guy suggested?”

“I don’t know, I’ll tell you when you’re older, and I have no idea,” said Sarah, rather wearily.

Toby didn’t seem to pick up on her mood.

‘It would be fantastic if you had magic too. We could both be wizards! Well, you’d be a witch, but
you know what I mean.”

Sarah bit her lip.

“Toby… even if I do have magic, that doesn’t mean I’m a witch. There is more than one kind of magic in the world.”

Toby looked confused. Sarah sighed.

“But I suppose I should find out if there’s some way to check if I’m a witch,” she muttered, more to herself than to Toby. “That way I’d know for sure.”

Toby nodded with enthusiasm.

“You really should, Sarah!” He was quiet for a moment. “Do you think Mum will stop pretending that I’m not a wizard, now that I’ve got my wand and my supplies?”

Sarah shook her head.

“I don’t know.”

In the silence that followed, she looked idly out the café window, and froze.

There was a barn owl sitting on the nearest lamp post, and it appeared to be watching her.

Sarah’s hand clenched around the handle of her tea cup. It couldn’t be…

After a moment, the owl flew off, out of sight. Sarah swallowed, and tried to feel relieved. All she felt was a sense of creeping dread, like some kind of premonition.

“Sarah? You’ve gone white,” said Toby, watching her with concern. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Sarah tried to reassure him. “It’s just… today has been a long and pretty tiring day.”

Toby nodded, and went back to eating his cake; not entirely convinced, but willing to let things go.

By the time the pair of them got home, it was late in the afternoon, and both Sarah’s Dad and Irene had just gotten home from work.

As Sarah and Toby walked in, Toby was chattering excitedly about everything they’d seen that day, only to cut himself off as he noticed his mother waiting for him in the entry hall.

Irene smiled sadly, her expression wistful. Sarah thought she understood. Toby was entering a world which Irene either could not or would not enter, and sooner or later Toby would leave them all behind.

Well, perhaps not Sarah, if she had magic. But sooner or later Toby would enter the magical world and never return to the non-magical one he’d been born in. Sarah knew that, deep in her bones; and it seemed that Irene did, too.

“Did you have fun getting your supplies?” Irene asked, into the silence.

Toby beamed.

“It was so awesome!”
“I’ll put your things away in your room,” Sarah told him. Toby nodded, and began telling his mother all about the amazing things he’d seen as he handed Sarah the stack of books he carried. Sarah went past him, up the stairs, and headed towards his room to leave his supplies by the brand-new luggage that Sarah’s Dad had bought him the weekend before.

Sarah walked into her room and sat down on her bed with a sigh, still holding *Tales of Fae and Fairies*.

She was tired, and her mind was too full of churning thoughts; the idea of putting the book aside was tempting.

Instead she cracked open the cover. Sarah went to the back pages first, and sure enough there was an index. She hesitated for a moment, because even to *think* too much about the topic felt dangerous, but… she flipped to the page with the ‘G’ heading, and ran her finger down the page until she came to the entry *Goblin King, 72*. There her finger stopped.

After a long moment, Sarah turned to page seventy-two. The heading for that section said *The Goblin King, Ruler of the Labyrinth and Goblin City* in loopy, old-fashioned letters. Sarah settled down in earnest, and began to read that section.

It proved to be an… *illuminating* read. When Sarah was done, she closed the book, her thoughts churning more than ever.

According to the book, the Goblin King was indeed one of the high fae, but unlike most of the other fae, he bent his head to no one. The book was vague about his lineage, but apparently he was powerful enough that even the Kings and Queens of the Summer and Winter Courts held no power over him; the rulers of both Summer and Winter were in uneasy truce with the Goblin King, not quite daring to enter into conflict with him, because they had no real idea what would happen if they did.

The Goblin King was also the King of Dreams, the high fae’s version of Morpheus, and that was a power the other high fae both highly coveted and little understood. How he had come to be the claimant of abandoned children, no one was quite sure; but to wish away a child meant that they would become a goblin and one of his subjects, if the one who had wished them away did not successfully run the Labyrinth in time.

In the old days, it had apparently been a favourite way of dealing with ‘squib’ children – for the wish was retroactive, making the child always a member of the Goblin King’s Court, so that no one remembered the child’s former existence except for those who had wished them away in the first place (and of course, except for the Goblin King himself). Wizard parents consoled themselves with the thought that at least their child would be cared for, after a fashion, and would no longer be an embarrassment to their magical family.

After reading that sickening part of the book, Sarah thought she understood Irene a lot better. If most wizards thought that wishing away their non-magical offspring was an acceptable thing to do… then Irene could conceivably have been treated very badly by her wizarding family, all because she lacked the ability to use magic.

Sarah had almost closed the book there and then, but something made her read all the way to the last paragraph.

*Of the runners of the Labyrinth*, the book said, *only one is said to have been successful in recent years. Information on this Champion is scant, however it is said that she is known by the moniker of ‘The Lady’ by the subjects of the Goblin King. Quite what she did to earn this moniker is unknown.*
Slowly, Sarah flipped back to the title page, and checked the publishing information.

The date of publication for this edition was 1987 – the year after Sarah had run the Labyrinth.

Sarah shivered, and put the book aside.
Chapter Three

A few days later, while Toby was over at a friend’s house, Sarah went back to Diagon Alley. This time she wore the robes she’d bought from Madam Malkin’s. They earned her some odd looks on the Tube, but Sarah didn’t care. Her instincts told her that someone who looked obviously non-magical was likely to find themselves in danger if they ventured into the wizarding world alone, and Sarah preferred to be safe rather than sorry.

The barkeep at The Leaky Cauldron was happy enough to tap the bricks with his wand to let Sarah into the wizards’ shopping district. Sarah thanked him, and walked quickly from the Leaky Cauldron down to Ollivander’s.

The store appeared deserted.

“Hello?” Sarah called out. “Mr Ollivander?”

A few minutes passed. Sarah was wondering how long she should wait when the wandmaker himself appeared. He looked relieved to see Sarah.

“Is something wrong?” Sarah asked.

Ollivander looked at her, his eyes darting to the open door.

“Many, many things,” he said. “Come into the back rooms. It’s not safe to be overheard discussing such things.”

Confused and wary, Sarah followed him into the first room behind the shop. It was stacked high with wand boxes.

“What, precisely,” said Ollivander, “were you told about the wizard known as He-Who-Must-Not-Be Named?”

Sarah blinked at him.

“Who?”

Ollivander tutted disapprovingly.

“Nothing, I see.”

“Mr Ollivander – if there is some danger in this world that I should know about, then I need you to tell me,” said Sarah, trying to keep her voice polite.

Ollivander sighed.

“Quite right… quite right… let me see – where to begin…”

The story Ollivander told began in the nineteen seventies, with the swiftly rising power of an up and coming Dark Lord. Sarah listened in horrified silence as Ollivander described an atmosphere of
increasing fear and suspicion, as no one knew who they could trust. But then, said Ollivander, in nineteen eighty-one, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had been defeated by powers unknown – wielded by none other than a fifteen-month-old infant called Harry Potter. No one had heard from He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named again, and young Mr Potter had become famous.

But the year before, Mr Potter, now a teenage boy, had claimed that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had returned. The Ministry of Magic had dismissed his claims, painting him in the papers as a delusional attention-seeker.

“But it’s happening again… the disappearances, the fear,” whispered Mr Ollivander. “I believe that young Mr Potter was right, and the Dark Lord is rising again.” He sounded frightened.

“I knew something was wrong last time I was here,” Sarah said to him. “The other parents and guardians didn’t notice, too overwhelmed by wonder, but behind the magic people were afraid.”

Mr Ollivander nodded.

“I fear that for you and your brother to survive what is coming, you will need to be able to defend yourself.” He looked at her out of the corner of his eye. “Officially, I am only allowed to sell wands to Hogwarts students and graduates… however yours is a grey area, where the bureaucratic red tape is concerned. Better to seek forgiveness than permission in this case, I think.”

Sarah understood what he was saying.

“Thank you,” she said, grateful that Mr Ollivander was willing to bend the rules for her.

“It is the least I can do,” said Mr Ollivander. “Now, try this wand…”

It took forty-seven minutes for Sarah to find a wand that suited her magic. Finally, however, she found one that warmed to her touch. When she gave it a wave, green sparks shot out the end.

Mr Ollivander hummed.

“Sycamore with a dual core of phoenix and hippogriff feather, nine inches. Fascinating.”

“What does that signify?” asked Sarah.

Mr Ollivander’s eyes turned from the wand to her.

“This wand is best suited to someone curious and adventurous, and able to adapt easily. As wands go, this one is powerful and versatile. But be careful… it is also a wand which requires respect. I would recommend you purchase a wand-polishing kit, just in case… proper care is essential, with such a wand.”

“How much?” Sarah asked. Given the fact that Mr Ollivander had gone out of his way to help her, Sarah chose to believe him on the necessity of the wand-polishing kit.

The wand-polishing kit was three galleons, while Sarah’s wand was a little more expensive than Toby’s, at nine galleons. Sarah tucked both items into the spacious pockets of her robes, and thanked Mr Ollivander before she left the store.

As she walked out into the open air, one of the many owls flying around the alley suddenly dipped down to land on Sarah’s shoulder. It ruffled its feathers slightly, getting comfortable, and then stared at Sarah with big dark eyes.
It was a barn owl.

Sarah stared at the barn owl, her own eyes wide and shocked. But a moment later, they narrowed.

“Get off, right this instant!”

Sarah knew, intellectually, that it was possible that this was simply a normal owl which had for some reason chosen her as a perch. The rest of her knew, to the centre of her soul, that the bird on her shoulder was no genuine owl, no matter how owl-like it seemed.

The owl continued to simply observe her.

“I mean it!” Sarah fell back on words she remembered all too well. “You have no power–”

The owl took flight with an unearthly shriek, flapping its wings furiously so that it could rise into the air.

A moment later the owl was gone, replaced by a fantastical figure wearing a glittery purple coat and black tights, their hair spiked in all directions, and their expression set in a thunderous scowl.

For a long moment, Sarah stared at the Goblin King, the figure from her teenage nightmares, and felt only terror. Then the anger kicked in, and she forgot about the terror altogether.

Sarah glared at the Goblin King, while he continued to scowl at her. There was a tense and silent stand-off.

Finally the Goblin King spoke.

“You choose the world of magic, you choose to walk my very halls – and yet still you spurn me?” His voice was haughty and aloof, but his eyes glittered like very angry stars.

For a moment Sarah gaped at him. Then her words returned to her.

“First of all, I didn’t choose the world of magic – my brother did.”

Ignoring the way the Goblin King’s eyebrows snapped together in a sudden frown, Sarah went on without a pause.

“As for walking your halls, all I did was open a bank account, something I’m sure a dozen witches and wizards do every day.”

“Those dozen witches and wizards are not you, Sarah,” said the Goblin King; but his eyebrows were still knitted together, and the bright anger in his eyes had turned to careful consideration. “How did your brother choose the magical world?”

Sarah eyed him in suspicion, but there wasn’t much point in not withholding the truth; it wasn’t as thought Toby could hide the fact that he was a wizard.

“He’s a wizard, obviously. He got his acceptance letter on his birthday. I took him shopping for everything he needed for school.”

“Not his parents?”

Sarah snorted.

“Magic is a bit too much for my Dad, and the wizarding world doesn’t hold good memories for my
“She is magical also?” The Goblin King hid it well, but Sarah caught his surprise.

“No,” said Sarah. “That’s the problem.”

“Ah,” said the Goblin King. “I take it she is what the wizards so charmingly call a ‘squib’.”

“Not that it’s any of your business,” Sarah added, wondering suddenly why she’d told him so much in the first place. “Why am I telling you all this?”

The Goblin King smirked.

“I am told I am very charming.”

Sarah scoffed.

“I’ll believe that when I see it.”

The Goblin King lost his smirk, the scowl returning.

“So where your brother leads, you follow,” he said, returning to the main thread of their discussion, having apparently decided to ignore Sarah’s comment on his charm (or rather, lack thereof). “Even when his path leads you into the world of wizards and their magic. Why?”

“I couldn’t let Toby enter this world alone,” said Sarah. “There are too many dangers.” She eyed the Goblin King for a moment. “What do you know about this Dark Lord that’s rising again?”

The Goblin King’s scowl deepened.

“I know that his return means that you have chosen a most… inconvenient time to enter this world.”

“Because this Dark Lord wants to kill people like me and Toby,” said Sarah.

The Goblin King only looked at her, and did not answer. Perhaps he felt that the answer was too obvious to need to be spoken aloud.

“What is his name, anyway?” Sarah asked. “My informant wouldn’t tell me.”

“For good reason.” The Goblin King frowned darkly. “During the last war, this Dark Lord placed a Taboo on his chosen name.”

“A Taboo?”

The Goblin King’s expression turned mocking.

“A spell upon his chosen name, so that his followers would appear wherever it was spoken, in order to exterminate whoever had the audacity to use it.”

A short silence followed his words.

“I suppose that is a good reason to call him He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,” said Sarah, into the silence. “Is there a Taboo on his name now?”

“Not yet,” said the Goblin King. On the surface he appeared bored, but his eyes were too intent for boredom.
“Then will you tell me his name?” Sarah dared to ask.

The Goblin King looked at Sarah. Sarah stared back, chin raised to meet his eyes unflinchingly.

“The name by which he calls himself is Lord Voldemort, but the name which he was given is Tom Marvolo Riddle,” said the Goblin King, watching Sarah closely. “Remember that name, but do not use it unless its use it truly necessary. Few things incite his rage so much as hearing the name he inherited from his non-magical father.”

Sarah blinked in surprise.

“He had a non-magical father, and yet he wants to annihilate people like him?” Sarah shook her head, unable to understand this Dark Lord’s reasoning. “How do you know so much about him?”

The Goblin King’s eyes glinted.

“Why, because he was very nearly wished away,” he said, smiling in a way that wasn’t nice at all. “If only the girl at the orphanage had spoken slightly different words, the boy would have become one of my goblins. Alas – she did not speak the correct words, and young Mr Riddle grew up to darken the fate of all of wizarding Britain.”

Sarah looked at the Goblin King, trying to understand him.

“But you can reorder time. Couldn’t you go back and change things?”

The Goblin King’s smile was cruel.

“Reorder time, for the wizards’ sake? No, Sarah. They who would hold my goblins in the World Above in subjugation to themselves shall receive no aid from me.”

“What are you talking about?” Sarah asked.

“I see you have not yet caught up on the wizards’ history. Allow me to enlighten you. There have been many wars between those goblins who live Aboveground, and the wizards who inhabit Britain. They have many times attempted enslavement, and tried to bend my goblins heads to their will. The last war, some few centuries ago, resulted in an uneasy treaty between my goblins and the wizards. With time, the wizards have forgotten what they once learned; that to insult a goblin of the warrior caste is to court death. But my goblins do not forget.”

The Goblin King’s voice was dark, and promised vengeance. Perhaps not now… but someday. He was the Goblin King: he had all the time in the world to wait.

Sarah stared at him.

“You mean, the goblins that run Gringotts are the warrior caste?”

“Well, Sarah thought, when he put it that way…”

“And I suppose that if there’s ever another war between the goblins and the wizards, the goblins will crash wizarding Britain’s economy by refusing to give back all their money?” asked Sarah, already knowing the answer.

The Goblin King laughed.
“Precisely. Once, few wizards left all their savings in goblin hands. But as I said – time has passed, and the wizards have forgotten the unwisdom of such a thing.”

“You’re not very forgiving, are you?”

The Goblin King bared his teeth in a smile.

“Forgetfulness is for those who are willing to allow themselves to bend before the will of others,” he said.

Sarah suddenly realised that she was standing in the middle of wizarding London’s main shopping district, having a civil conversation with the Goblin King. She surreptitiously pinched herself.

It hurt. Not dreaming, then.

Sarah glanced around. People were still walking to and fro, carefully avoiding each others’ eyes, and giving Sarah and the Goblin King a wide berth.

“I think we should continue this conversation somewhere else,” Sarah said. “Is there a tea-house or cafe around here somewhere? There must be, surely.”

Surprise flared in the Goblin King’s eyes, followed by smug pleasure. Too late, Sarah realised that she’d painted herself into a corner.

She opened her mouth to say that it wasn’t like that, she just wanted more information. Then she shut her mouth, aware that needlessly tempting the Goblin King’s wrath was a bad idea, and that telling him she only wanted to have tea with him so she could extract information from him would probably rouse it.

On the other hand… he might consider it a perfectly good trade for spending time in Sarah’s company. His first words to her had been of affront that Sarah ‘still spurned’ him, after all – which suggested that the Goblin King’s attempts to win her over during her run of the Labyrinth might not have been mere strategy, but genuine infatuation. Sarah wasn’t sure why she would be the recipient of such a thing; but she’d had enough boys inexplicably pine over her in recent years that the idea of the Goblin King doing so wasn’t utterly unthinkable. Odd, yes, but hardly the oddest thing Sarah had encountered.

“There is a teahouse at the other end of Diagon Alley,” the Goblin King offered, very much aware of the thoughts going through Sarah’s head and amused by them, if his half-smile was any indication.

Sarah hesitated, but…what was it the English said? In for a penny, in for a pound?

“Lead the way,” she said, as resolutely as possible. The Goblin King grinned, sudden and sharp, and offered her his arm. Sarah eyed him dubiously, but eventually linked her own arm through his. Nothing happened, except that the Goblin King looked smugly pleased again.

Together, they walked from just outside Mr Ollivander’s wand shop to the other end of Diagon Alley. Sure enough, there was a tall, narrow building there, with columns on each side of the main entrance and a pediment above it. Attached to the pediment was a wooden sign, painted with an intricate flower border, saying Leticia Lovelace’s Tea Rooms in a fancy, old-fashioned font.

The Goblin King led Sarah inside without hesitation. A young woman in lilac robes bustled up to them, smiling.

“A table for two?” the hostess asked.
“Quite,” said the Goblin King. His fantastical appearance seemed to attract no particular interest from the hostess; but then, Sarah reflected, she’d seen some outfits in the wizarding world which were almost as strange to look at, so perhaps it wasn’t all that surprising.

The hostess showed them both to a quiet table in the corner, said that she would be back in a minute to take their orders, and bustled off to greet more customers.

Sarah looked down at the menu. It was made of thick, ivory-coloured cardstock, scalloped at the edges, and printed in royal blue ink. The lettering was so fancy it was difficult to read it.

Sarah looked away from the menu, back up at the Goblin King. He was ignoring his own menu, choosing to watch Sarah instead.

Sarah resolved to ignore his steady regard, and tried to decide what kind of tea and cake she wanted. In the end, she chose a slice of strawberry sponge cake and a cup of blackberry-flavoured tea.

“Are you planning to order anything?” she asked the Goblin King, when the silence stretched on, and still he did nothing but stare at her.

Another half-smile from him.

“I suppose that it has been a while since I have had a genuine cup of tea,” he said. “Why not?”

Just then, the hostess returned, ready to take their order. Only when she bustled off again did Sarah speak.

“I wish—” she began, before biting her tongue, remembering just in time that those were not words she wanted to say in the Goblin King’s presence.

The Goblin King propped his chin on one hand.

“You wish, Sarah?” His eyes glittered with amusement.

Sarah glared at him.

“Oh, no. I’m not foolish to make a wish in your presence.”

The Goblin King still appeared amused.

“It appears that you learned something from your time in the Labyrinth, then.”

“No thanks to you.”

The Goblin King clicked his tongue.

“Really, Sarah? If not me, then who?”

“You may have given me the opportunity to learn something, but I was the one who learned it,” Sarah shot back. “And given the manner in which that opportunity was given, I’m not exactly inclined to thank you for it.”

The Goblin King grinned.

“Very well. Tell me, Sarah: what would you have wished, had you not wisely held your tongue?”

Sarah looked suspiciously at him, but the Goblin King merely looked curious: there was none of the
sinister amusement which, she had learned, preceded life becoming dramatically more uncomfortable. Sarah took a chance.

“I was thinking that it was a shame that the person we were speaking of earlier hadn’t been wished away,” she said. “But I suppose that then there would be other consequences to his absence, wouldn’t there?”

“Perhaps.” The Goblin King’s amusement was gone, replaced by a grave expression. “But should you make that wish, Sarah, for you, and you alone, I would grant it.”

“And demand what in return?” asked Sarah, because she understood the nature of fairy bargains.

“One thing, and one thing only,” said the Goblin King. “That you would give me a year and a day in which to court you, before deciding whether to accept or reject my suit.”

Sarah struggled not to gape. As it was, her eyes went comically wide. She consoled herself with the fact that at least she hadn’t let her jaw drop.

“You were serious, then,” she said, finding her voice. “During my time in the Labyrinth.”

The grave expression didn’t waver.

“Deathly so.”

Sarah closed her eyes for a second, thinking furiously.

When she opened her eyes again, she fixed the Goblin King with a direct look.

“I remember what you said, you know – love me, fear me, do as I say.” Those words were emblazoned in Sarah’s memory, over a backdrop of determination and terror. Even now, recalling them was unpleasant. “But I won’t. I refuse to be the girl who does as she is told, and I won’t quail in fear before you. If you want anything, your only chance of getting it is to treat me as an equal. I shall accept nothing less.”

The look that swept over the Goblin King’s face was thunderous, and the air around them took on the charged, eldritch quality of an imminent lightning strike.

Sarah prepared to stand her ground, even if metaphor turned out to be terrifyingly literal.

“You? You expect to be treated as an equal to the Goblin King?” The Goblin King’s eyes glittered, but this time it wasn’t in amusement. “A mere mortal?”

The words slipped from Sarah before she could bite them back.

“Am I mortal?”

She froze, expecting a derisive laugh, or further fury.

Instead, the Goblin King… went still.

“Now, what makes you ask that?” he asked, fury vanished as quickly as it had come, his voice thoughtful. But his eyes were as bright and sharp as shards of glass.

Sarah gave the question the careful consideration it deserved.

“I have magic,” she said, and saw the Goblin King’s eyes widen slightly. “But I’m not convinced
that I’m a wizard who never got their letter. As explanations so, it seems too… neat. Too easy.”

The Goblin King was silent for a long moment. His eyes were strangely distant, and Sarah got the impression he was thinking things through at high speed.

It was at this inopportune moment that the server brought over the tray holding Sarah and the Goblin King’s tea and Sarah’s slice of cake. Sarah never took her eyes from the Goblin King, even as she thanked the server politely.

But the moment of danger seemed to be over. After a moment, Sarah picked up her tiny fork and began to eat her slice of cake.

Abruptly the Goblin King laughed. The sound was strangely mirthless.

Sarah looked up from her cake.

“For my will is as strong as yours, and my kingdom as great,” the Goblin King said, quoting Sarah’s words from when she was fifteen, when she’d ended her run of the Labyrinth. “Oh, Sarah. What have you done?”

“Are you going to tell me?” asked Sarah, her fork poised in mid-air. Whatever had made the Goblin King laugh like that, it probably wasn’t good.

The Goblin King smiled, as sharp and unforgiving as a blade. Definitely not good, Sarah thought.

“Where is your kingdom, Sarah?” he asked, his voice unexpectedly soft.

It took Sarah a moment to understand the question. The moment she did, understanding hit her like a ton of bricks, as though it had been waiting for this moment for years.

It probably had. The Goblin King’s words had been the catalyst necessary for Sarah to understand the knowledge that had been bouncing around somewhere deep in her subconscious for who knew how long.

“Oh. Oh no,” she said, in dawning dismay, and the Goblin King laughed again.

“I had wondered why the Labyrinth appeared to accept my commands only under sufferance.” The Goblin King seemed to be deriving pleasure from the fact that Sarah was just as unhappy with this development as he was. “To think that all this time, it has had a new master. Or mistress, I should say.”

He raised his cup of tea in a toast.

Sarah just sat there, trying to sort through all the knowledge that was now at the top of her mind, almost overwhelmed by how much of it there was.

Finally, when she felt that her mind was in order again, she took a sip of her blackberry-flavoured tea. It was almost cold. Sarah drank it anyway.

The Goblin King was lounging back in his chair, watching her with a glint in his eyes.

“I’m the Mistress of the Labyrinth,” said Sarah, because it needed to be said aloud.

“Apparently.”

Sarah took a deep breath. Her hands curled into fists where they sat in her lap.
“Does that mean I can protect Toby from the Dark Lord?”

The Goblin King considered her for a long moment. Sarah waited, no longer afraid of being the focus of his regard. They were on equal footing now, even if Sarah was new to the whole thing. Even if they hadn’t been, Sarah still would have refused to do anything other than look him in the eye.

Finally, the Goblin King nodded.

“If you declare him your heir in the eyes of magic, it should be enough for you to intercede on his behalf – wizard or not.”

“But I can’t protect anyone else, can I?” Sarah said in realisation, her heart sinking. “That would be interfering with the wizarding world. And I can’t – it would break the rules.”

“If he is a wizard, your heir may invoke your intervention in very specific circumstances,” said the Goblin King. “With a foot in the fairy realms and one in the mortal realm, he would have the power. But otherwise… congratulations, Sarah. You are as bound as the rest of us.”

Sarah scowled at him, but her heart wasn’t really in it.

“If you’re not going to be helpful…”

The Goblin King gave her a half-smile, and stood.

“In that case, I will take my leave,” he said, and walked around the table to Sarah’s side. Sarah stiffened as he bent his head, but all the Goblin King did was murmur words in her ear.

He straightened, and a moment later disappeared in a cloud of glitter.

The Mistress of the Labyrinth was left sitting alone at the table, her tea gone cold, her slice of cake unfinished, the Goblin King’s parting words playing over and over in her mind.

*My name is Jareth, precious. Keep it close.*

Now that Sarah knew of her status, her connection to the Labyrinth was a bright, warm presence in her mind, playful and capricious. Sarah knew that she really ought to transport herself to the Labyrinth, and survey the lands that were now hers.

Instead, she willed herself to disappear from Diagon Alley, and reappear in her bedroom at home.

It was a little depressing how easily the magic came to her. Sarah collapsed back on her bed, and put a hand to her head.

No wonder she hadn’t realised that she was –

No, Sarah couldn’t think about that right now. Knowing she was the Mistress of the Labyrinth was hard enough to deal with, without thinking about what it meant.

Although she was now equal to the Goblin King, apparently. That was… something, all right.

Sarah closed her eyes, and tried not to think about it.

The worst part was, if she wanted to declare Toby her heir to protect him, she had to explain to him how she’d become Mistress of the Labyrinth in the first place – which meant telling him she’d once
wished him away.

Half an hour later, there was a knock on Sarah’s bedroom door.

“Sarah!” Toby’s voice called through the door. “Are you home?”

“I am,” Sarah called back, finally sitting up.

The door burst open, and Toby flew inside. He stopped as he saw what Sarah was wearing.

“Sarah, did you visit the wizarding world without me?” Toby’s voice was accusing.

Sarah sighed.

“Toby, come here. There are some things I need to tell you.”

Toby came and sat on the edge of Sarah’s bed, and looked up at her expectantly.

Sarah explained first about the rising Dark Lord. Toby listened carefully, no doubt filing everything Sarah told him away somewhere in his mind, for later contemplation.

“So this Dark Lord wants to kill people like me?” Toby’s eyes were wide and scared. “What if… what if he succeeds, Sarah? Maybe I shouldn’t go to Hogwarts, after all.”

Sarah shook her head.

“You need to learn. But there is… there is a way that I can keep you safe, if you consent. But first… I need to tell you why I have magic, and how the goblins know me.”

Toby’s face brightened in sudden eagerness. Sarah watched him, pained.

“Don’t look so excited, Toby. It’s… not a nice story. I’m afraid you might not forgive me by the end of it.”

Toby stilled.

“Why not?”

Sarah took a deep breath, and began the story.

“When you were a year old, I was a very angry, selfish child…”

Sarah tried to explain how she’d felt at fifteen, without bruising Toby’s own feelings. It was clear that she didn’t manage it. She went on to tell him all about how her favourite story had been a book called The Labyrinth, about a beautiful maiden who wished a child away to the goblins. Finally, Sarah got to the point of the story where she found her favourite bear in Toby’s cot, instead of in her room.

Toby’s eyes grew wider and wider. His fingers were tangled in the bedspread, his grip white-knuckled.

“You have to understand,” said Sarah. “I didn’t know that magic was real, back then. I thought The Labyrinth was a story. I was angry and upset, and I didn’t mean it.”

“You wished me away, didn’t you?” Toby’s voice was subdued, but his expression was shattered. He stared at the bedspread as though he couldn’t even bear to look at Sarah.
Sarah nodded, without trying to meet his averted gaze. Looking back on it now, she felt near-unbearable shame for what she had almost done. If she hadn’t won her brother back, he would have been lost forever, transmuted into something different – something that was no longer Toby. She might never even have mourned him, unaware of the person he would one day grow into.

“I had thirteen hours to run the Labyrinth, and win you back,” said Sarah. “Thirteen hours to fight through every obstacle, and make my way to Goblin City, where you were. And I did.”

Toby looked up. His eyes glimmered with unshed tears, but his expression was hopeful.

“You did?”

“The Goblin King was very angry about it, especially when I wouldn’t exchange you away for my dreams. But I told him that my will was as strong as his, and my kingdom as great, and that he had no power over me. And I found myself back home, with you.”

Toby was silent for a long while.

“You really fought your way through the Labyrinth?” he finally asked. “Just to get me back?”

“Of course.” Sarah managed a smile. “I was selfish and angry, but you’re my brother.”

“And you love me now, right?” Toby insisted, clearly seeking reassurance.

“Toby, you are my favourite person in the world,” said Sarah, as sincerely as possible.

It seemed to do the trick. Toby flung himself into Sarah’s arms, and she held him close, rubbing soothing circles on his back.

Eventually he sat back, wiping at his eyes with one arm.

“You said there was a way you could keep me safe,” Toby said.

Sarah nodded, her mouth curving in a wry line.

“It turns out, that when I said my will was as strong as the Goblin King’s, and my kingdom was as great, under the circumstances magic took me at my word. I’m now the Mistress of the Labyrinth, and have been for the last ten years. I just didn’t realise.”

“Does that mean you’re a fairy?” Toby wanted to know. “How did you find out? Is that why you went into the wizarding world?”

Sarah winced.

“I’m… still changing,” she told him. “From an ordinary mortal into someone who is not. I found out because, well, I found out because I ran into the Goblin King.”

Toby’s eyes widened.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” said Sarah. “We’re equals now, as it turns out, which means there are rules. Besides – he wants to court me,” she added, still bemused at the prospect. Not to mention not at all sure how she felt about the idea.

Toby nearly fell off the bed laughing.
Sarah couldn’t help smiling, as well.

“Well, you are the best person in the world – it’s about time someone besides me saw that,” said Toby, when he finished laughing.

“I am not, and we’re getting off-topic. As the Mistress of the Labyrinth, I can declare you my heir in the eyes of magic, which would make you… sort of one of the fae. You’d still be a wizard, but you’d have a foot in both worlds – fairy and mortal. More importantly, if you were my heir, I could step in to protect you from any wizards who might try to hurt you, including this Dark Lord.”

Toby cocked his head, looking at Sarah with bright eyes.

“That means that if anything happened to you, I’d have to be in charge of the Labyrinth, doesn’t it?”

“It does.” Sarah tried to smile. “But hopefully, nothing will.”

“You should make me you heir, then,” Toby said, with decision. “It seems like the sensible decision.”

“When are you ever sensible?” Sarah said, teasing.

“I am always sensible,” said Toby. “You’re the dreamer, Sarah, not me. I’m just... magical.”

Sarah ruffled his hair. The words she needed came easily.

“Toby Williams, blood of my blood, do you consent to act as my heir, and become Master of the Labyrinth should I prove unable to continue as its Mistress?”

Toby’s expression turned solemn. Sarah wondered if he could feel the thrum of ancient, fae magic around them.

“I do.”

“Then I do declare you, Toby Williams, to be my heir,” said Sarah, and kissed his forehead. Magic bloomed where her lips had touched, enveloping Toby in its embrace, and Toby yelped in surprise.

“I felt that!”

“Good,” said Sarah. “It means it worked.”

Toby frowned.

“Do I have to avoid iron, now?”

“It might be a good idea.” Sarah changed the subject, remembering that Toby had been over at a friend’s house today. “Did you enjoy your time at Ben’s house?”

Toby nodded, but looked suddenly sad.

“I did, but it’s going to be hard for us to keep on being friends now I’m a wizard, isn’t it?” he asked. “I can’t tell anyone the truth, unless they already know.”

Sarah didn’t lie to him.

“You’re right,” she said. “It’s going to be difficult to stay friends with anyone you went to primary school with when you’re keeping such a big secret. But hopefully once you get to Hogwarts you’ll
make new friends, even if they can’t replace the friends you’ll be losing.”

Toby nodded, his expression unusually sombre.

“But I’ll always have you, right, Sarah?”

“Of course,” said Sarah, and she wrapped an arm around his shoulders and held him close. “For as long as I can, Toby, where you go, I’ll follow.”

Chapter End Notes

And now you get to wait until I finish the rest... Sorry not sorry.
Off to School

Chapter Notes

This turned out longer than I expected, so you're getting this chapter and a fifth one.

Chapter Four

On the 1st of September, Sarah, her Dad, and Irene were all there to see Toby off at Kings Cross Station. Professor Falsworth had told Sarah and Toby and the others who had been given the tour around Diagon Alley that the Hogwarts Express could be found on Platform Nine and Three Quarters, and so the family group walked around the station, trying to find it.

“Are you sure that man wasn’t joking?” asked Sarah’s Dad. “I mean, Platform Nine and Three Quarters…”

“You’ll discover, my love, that wizards can be very strange,” said Irene, but quietly, so that the people around her wouldn’t hear.

But Sarah was looking around at Platforms Nine and Ten.

“I wonder…” she muttered to herself, and began walking straight at the barrier between the two platforms, which shimmered slightly in Sarah’s vision.

She felt an illusion wash over her as she walked through it, and found herself standing on a train station platform. She knew immediately that it was the one she was looking for – witches and wizards were everywhere, escorting excited children to the edge of the platform where a bright red steam locomotive sat, chugging coloured steam.

Sarah turned, just as Toby burst through the ‘barrier’ and skidded to a stop on the platform.

“Awesome!” he shouted, and bounced up and down in excitement. The tips of his ears, Sarah noted, were slightly more pointed than they used to be. But then, Sarah’s were even more so, since she’d accepted her role as Mistress of the Labyrinth. So far she’d kept her hair hanging down over her ears to keep them hidden, and no one had noticed that they were now pointed instead of rounded, as before.

Toby’s shout attracted the attention of the other people on the platform. People glanced at him, took in his non-magical attire, and kept their distance. As in Diagon Alley, the witches and wizards were in a harried, wary mood, putting their children on the train as quickly as possible after bidding them goodbye.

Already, Sarah thought grimly, people were beginning to distance themselves from anyone who looked muggleborn – from anyone it might be dangerous to have association with, if the Dark Lord continued his rise to power.

Sarah scowled fiercely at everyone who kept their distance, just as her Dad and Irene walked cautiously onto Platform Nine and Three Quarters, rolling Toby’s luggage behind them.

Both Irene and Sarah’s Dad hugged Toby goodbye, giving him anxious reminders to brush his teeth
and hair every day, to be polite, and not to get in any trouble. By the time they were done, it was almost time for the train to leave.

Sarah put her hands on Toby’s shoulders and looked him in the eye.

“If you find yourself in any trouble, call on me,” she said, making it clear in her voice how serious she was about this.

Sarah’s Dad and Irene looked confused by this, but Toby gave Sarah a swift salute, and smiled, although his eyes were sober.

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

Sarah let him go, and stepped back.

“Alright now, let’s get you and your luggage on board before the train leaves,” said Sarah’s Dad, a little gruffly, trying to pretend that he wasn’t upset at the prospect of not seeing his son for the next three months.

The three of them helped Toby onto the train, and watched him wave from the nearest window as the train began to move. Sarah waved back until Toby was out of sight.

“Oh, I do hope he’ll be okay.” Irene sounded worried, and slightly tearful.

“He’ll be fine,” Sarah said absently. “I made sure of it.”

“He will indeed. I have some of my people following him to make sure. Unseen, of course. It would not do for any harm to come to your heir.”

Sarah spun around at the sound of the familiar voice. Sure enough, the Goblin King stood behind them. Most of him was concealed by the voluminous black velvet cloak he wore, but there was no mistaking who had spoken. Besides, most wizards who wanted to wear a black velvet cloak wouldn’t have chosen one decorated with shimmering spangles which caught the light whenever its owner moved.

Sarah stared at him, caught between gratitude and exasperation. The Goblin King must have caught her mood, because he laughed.

“Sarah, who is this?” Sarah’s Dad eyed the Goblin King’s cloaked figure with suspicion.

The Goblin King put his hood back a little, enough so that they could see his face, and grinned.

“James King,” he said. “An… acquaintance of your daughter’s.”

“What kind of acquaintance?” asked Irene. “And why do you have people following my son?”

The Goblin King only eyed her with calculation, and said nothing.

Sarah went for honesty.

“There’s a Dark Lord rising,” she said, keeping her voice quiet. Around them, people were already leaving the platform in droves now that their children were on the train and gone. “He targets people from non-magical families, like Toby.”

“As well as anyone who happens to stand in his way,” the Goblin King put in.
“What?” Irene and Sarah’s Dad said together.

“You mean – like Grindelwald?” Irene blurted out, her face pale. “A true Dark Lord?”

“Then we should contact this school – bring Toby back at once–” Sarah’s Dad began.

“Dad, we can’t–” Sarah tried to tell him, but the Goblin King cut them both off.

“It is already too late; Toby’s name will already on the Dark Lord’s list of the muggleborn and halfblood children, no doubt,” said the Goblin King, sounding bored. “But you need not worry. Toby is under Sarah’s protection.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” asked Sarah’s Dad, red-faced and belligerent with fear for his son.

Sarah rubbed at her face.

“I wasn’t going to bring it up,” she muttered at the Goblin King, before looking back up at her Dad and stepmother.

“We can’t talk about this here. Let’s go back to the car, and I’ll explain.” Sarah glanced at the Goblin King. “Thank you for keeping an eye on Toby,” she said, because that, at least, she was grateful for.

The Goblin King sent her a smirk.

“You’re welcome, precious,” he said, and promptly turned into an owl and flew away. This caused Sarah’s Dad even further consternation.

“Sarah…” Her Dad was regarding her with alarm, and some fear. “What in blazes is going on?”

Sarah glanced around at the nearly-deserted platform.

“Not here, Dad. Like I said, let’s go back to the car.”

They went back to the car, tense and silent all the way there.

Sarah waited until they were all sitting inside the vehicle, the doors closed, before she began to speak.

“I’m… not exactly human, anymore.”

“What?”

“I’m not exactly human,” Sarah repeated, feeling nervous at the admission, aware of her Dad and Irene’s eyes on her reflection in the vehicle’s central rear-view mirror. “I used to be, but… I won a magical challenge, and it changed me. These days, I’m as much high fae as human.”

“You’re what?” Irene slewed around in her seat to stare at Sarah in sudden fear.

“None of you have anything to fear from me,” said Sarah, cut to the quick by Irene’s expression. Irene wasn’t the best mother, always busy working, but she’d been a better mother to Sarah than her own mother had ever been. Seeing that look on Irene’s face hurt. “Especially not Toby.”

Irene’s fear only deepened.

“What have you done?” she demanded. “What have you done to my son?”
“Nothing,” said Sarah, and then immediately corrected herself, because that wasn’t exactly true. “He’s my heir by magic, and if anything happens to me he’ll take on my responsibilities. But he’s still human, just with a bit of fae about him. Irene – I did it to keep him safe.”

Irene took several deep breaths. Finally she said, “You swear he’s still – him?”

“I swear,” said Sarah. “Irene – Toby’s always been magical. Now he’s just a little more magical than he was before.”

“I don’t understand any of this,” said Sarah’s Dad. “But – you can keep Toby safe from this… Dark Lord?”

Sarah nodded, her expression resolute. “Heaven help anyone who tries to hurt my little brother.”

Both Irene and Sarah’s Dad looked relieved. “I’m glad he has you looking out for him,” said Irene, in a quiet voice.

And that – for the moment at least – was the end of it.

Three weeks later, Sarah returned to her studies at university. No matter how she tried to apply herself to her research, she couldn’t help but be supremely aware of the irony of the fact that she was attempting to write a dissertation on a group of mythological beings she now knew she belonged to.

Toby wrote from Hogwarts every week. One letter went to his parents, talking about classes and his new friends and not much else. The other went to Sarah, who received the unexpurgated version of events.

To Sarah, Toby spoke of many things: of disappearances and deaths amongst the wizarding community, of the student in critical condition in the hospital wing after touching a cursed necklace, and of course, the unwise boasting of the Dark Lord’s supporters among the students, who believed that the Dark Lord’s victory over wizarding Britain was guaranteed.

Toby also told her of the good things, of course – such as being Sorted into Hufflepuff, the House of the loyal, where he was already making many friends – but the bad things tended to overshadow the good ones.

Sarah also received reports from the Goblin King’s goblins. These were ordinary goblins, not members of the warrior caste, but while they fought and teased one another they were surprisingly respectful to Sarah, passing on their information as best they could. Sarah thanked them, and usually gave them candy as a reward. The goblins were always remarkably eager to tell her what they had learned, once they realised there was an edible reward out of it. But then, they’d been children, once… children who had never gotten the chance to grow up. Perhaps it wasn’t so surprising that they were an immature group of beings.

Two months after Toby had gone to Hogwarts, Sarah finally visited the Labyrinth.

As Sarah stood at its centre, contemplating her new realm, a warm breeze swept through the Labyrinth. Despite the fact that the ground was dry and dusty beneath her feet, the air smelled of violets, Sarah’s favourite scent.

Sarah couldn’t help but smile, recognising the welcome for what it was.
“Yes, I’m here,” she told the Labyrinth. She looked around one more time, and then got to work.

The Labyrinth had fallen into disrepair in Sarah’s absence, and Sarah used her newfound magic to restore it – not merely to what it had been, but to what it could be. Flowers and thick soft grass grew where she walked, crumbling walls stood tall again, and the withered hedge maze grew strong and green once more.

As she made her way around her realm, Sarah tried to think how long it had been since she had last spoken to her childhood friends from the Labyrinth. There had been a time when she had called on them every day, but that had been years ago. As time had passed, Sarah had become busy with other commitments… and eventually, stopped calling on her friends from the Labyrinth altogether.

Sarah felt rather guilty about it now. She made up her mind to seek out Hoggle and Sir Didymus and the others, to see how they were going.

Walking the bounds of the Labyrinth and visiting her old friends took a long time, but finally Sarah stood at the point where the Labyrinth’s boundary sat flush against the edges of Goblin City. She was not at all surprised to find that the Goblin King was standing there, waiting for her.

“Queen of the Labyrinth,” he greeted her.

“Goblin King,” Sarah said in return.

The Goblin King was dressed in an appropriately magnificent and otherworldly outfit which contrasted with Sarah’s own, rather more ordinary ensemble: a pair of jeans and a bright blue blouse worn with an embroidered jacket. Although given the flower she’d tucked behind one ear and those which were sprouting from where she stood, perhaps the difference between their appearances wasn’t as pronounced as Sarah thought.

The Goblin King certainly didn’t seem to see anything amiss. He was frowning, but Sarah didn’t think he was displeased.

“I see that you have been walking the bounds of your kingdom,” he said.

“To make them stronger,” said Sarah in explanation, realising a moment later that the explanation was probably unnecessary: there was no way that the Goblin King did not know that.

But instead of taking offence, the Goblin King looked intrigued.

“You are aware of such things?”

Sarah let out a slight huff.

“I am now.”

“Interesting,” said the Goblin King, and then, “Welcome back, Sarah.”

Sarah smiled at him, because for once, the Goblin King’s voice was warm and genuine.

The week before Christmas, Toby caught the Hogwarts Express from Hogwarts to Kings Cross. Sarah and his parents were there to meet him. There was much hugging and exclaiming before they left the platform.

“How was school?” Irene asked Toby, once they’d all piled back into the car.

“Mostly good, but boy did I miss my Walkman.” Toby made a face. “Did you know electronics
don’t work at Hogwarts at all? And the music they play over the Wizarding Wireless is terrible – it’s like the wizards never discovered rock and roll, even! All their music sounds super old.”

“That bad?” asked Sarah, amused, even though she understood why Toby was appalled.

Toby nodded.

“I wanted to try and enchant a radio to play muggle music, but Francesca in the year above me says I won’t know the charms or runic arrays necessary until I’m at least a fifth year, and messing around with muggle technology is forbidden by the Ministry anyway. Sarah, I miss electric guitar.”

Sarah thought about this. Given the Goblin King’s more-or-less contemporary taste in music, she very much doubted that there wasn’t some way to make non-magical music play on a magical device. The Goblin King’s singing sounded far too much like David Bowie.

“Let me see what I can do,” said Sarah, resolving to talk to the Goblin King about it.

The next time Sarah was in the Labyrinth, she walked to the boundary she shared with the Goblin King’s kingdom, and ‘knocked’ against it.

The Goblin King appeared a moment later.

“You appear to be learning the appropriate skills in leaps and bounds,” he said, without bothering with a greeting. But considering that his opening words could be interpreted as a compliment, Sarah decided not to take offence.

“You know more about magic than I do,” she said, and watched the Goblin King preen at her words. She stifled a smile. “Is it possible to enchant non-magical technology to run using magic instead of electricity?”

“My dear Sarah, why ever would you want to?” The Goblin King arched one eyebrow.

“Because electronics don’t work at Hogwarts, and Toby misses non-wizard music,” said Sarah, a little irritated by his response.

The Goblin King, however, seemed to understand Toby’s woe – and to share his antipathy for wizarding music, if the Goblin King’s faint grimace was any indication.

“Ah. Yes – wizards’ music is uninspired, to say the least. I sympathise with your brother, in this case.”

“So is it possible?” Sarah asked, persisting in her query.

The Goblin King considered the question.

“Do you know, I don’t think anyone from the fairy realms has ever tried? Usually the others simply steal musicians from the mortal realm.”

“Oh,” said Sarah, disconcerted. Then: “But you don’t do that, do you?”

“Hardly.” The Goblin King smirked. “I prefer to wander in the mortal realm, when the fancy for mortal music takes me.”

Sarah had the sudden mental image of the Goblin King going to a nightclub, dressed in his usual attire. Her laughter rang out before she could stop it.
The Goblin King only smiled, as though he understood the source of Sarah’s mirth.

“I am capable of disguising myself, should the need arise,” he said. “However, there are always those foolish enough to invite me along to their revels. As for your question… it should be possible to enchant a radio to do as you wish. Bring one with you next time, and we shall see what we can do.”

Sarah held him to his word, purchasing a hand-held transistor radio the next time she went shopping, and bringing it with her to the boundary between her lands and the Goblin King’s during her next visit to the Labyrinth.

The Goblin King frowned over the innards of the device, filled with microchips and circuitry.

“I cannot,” he finally said, frowning in distaste. “These small elements… they defy my magic.”

Sarah sighed, disappointed.

“However,” said the Goblin King, “your realm and powers are more transitory than mine. Perhaps you may succeed where I failed.” He handed the radio back to Sarah.

So, for the next few days, in-between last-minute Christmas shopping, Sarah puzzled over how to make the radio run on magic. The Goblin King was right; Sarah was a much younger addition to the ranks of the high fae than most, and still half-mortal, which ought to make a difference to her magic.

On Christmas Eve, when she had almost despaired of getting the radio to work as desired in time, a notion occurred to her. Sarah changed the station to the Golden Oldies channel. Sure enough, the music it were playing was at least twenty years out of date, and often older.

There was a magic about that, Sarah thought. In the liminal space between past and present, this was the music that was heard…

On Christmas morning, as Toby was opening his presents from Sarah’s Dad and Irene, Sarah presented him with a fully-functional, magic-powered radio.

“It won’t tune in to any song more recent than 1969,” said Sarah, who had done her best to make the cut-off date more recent and failed, “but it should play anything on the Golden Oldies station.”

Toby eagerly turned the radio on. Tinny-sounding music filled the room. Toby looked delighted.

“The Beach Boys! Yes!” Toby hugged Sarah. “That’s so much better than endless Celestina Warbeck! Thank you!”

Sarah only smiled, and watched him open the rest of his presents.

Later that day, Toby insisted on going to the park to build a snowman. Sarah’s Dad and Irene, both exhausted from preparing and consuming Christmas dinner, asked Sarah if she would mind taking him there. The park wasn’t particular close, but it wasn’t far away, either; it was about fifteen minutes walk from the Williams household.

Sarah didn’t mind taking Toby to the park, and said so. She and Toby put on their coats and hats and scarves and gloves, and ventured out into the snowy landscape outside the house.

Sarah shivered in the cold air, despite being well rugged up against it. She’d become attuned to the Labyrinth’s warmer temperatures, and was much more comfortable sitting inside by the electric heater than she was outside in the snow.
A couple of minutes away from the house, Toby turned his face to look at Sarah, his eyes wide and solemn, and Sarah asked, “How bad is it?”

“Bad,” said Toby. “I told you that the aunt of one of the sixth years was murdered, didn’t I? She was the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. The new bloke in charge of the department looks like he’s more worried about keeping people from panicking than actually doing anything about You-Know-Who, from what the upper years have said. And then there was that Gryffindor girl who was cursed with a necklace, back in October. Bad things keep happening, Sarah, and I think it’s going to get worse.”

Sarah’s mouth thinned, but Toby hadn’t finished talking.

“I’m worried about Mum and Dad,” Toby added. “Apparently in the last war, Death Eaters used to go to muggleborns’ homes and kill them and all their family. You said you can keep me safe because I’m your heir now – but what about Mum and Dad?”

Sarah frowned, thinking.

“I don’t know,” she said, and looked up as movement caught her eye. There was a barn owl circling above her.

Sarah almost laughed. She glanced at Toby beside her, considering. Sarah had won her brother back fair and square, something which the Goblin King was bound by magic to respect, even if Toby hadn’t been her heir, now; and after sending goblins to watch over Toby, Sarah doubted that the Goblin King had any dangerous designs on him.

Besides, there was a strange understanding which existed between her and the Goblin King, these days. Part and parcel of being one of the high fae, and essentially his equal. Not to mention neighbours.

So Sarah tipped her face up to the sky and called out, “Goblin King! You are invited to walk with us!”

“What?” Toby asked in confusion; but the owl landed on Sarah’s shoulder, briefly preened a strand of her hair with its beak, and flew down to the ground. A second later, the Goblin King moved easily into step beside them.

“Whoa,” said Toby, stopping in his tracks. Sarah was worried for a moment, but then Toby went, “That’s so cool!”

Sarah laughed at the pleased curl of the Goblin King’s mouth, and entirely forgot to reprimand him for preening her hair.

“Greetings, young Toby,” said the Goblin King to Toby, who was still goggling at him in awe. He continued walking in step with Sarah, and after a moment, Toby jogged to catch up with them.

“We’re going to the park,” Sarah told the Goblin King. “Toby’s been telling me about what’s happening in the wizarding world.”

“It’s pretty grim,” Toby added. “And it’s going to get worse.”

“Undoubtedly,” said the Goblin King.

“You two can’t help, can you?” asked Toby, looking up at Sarah and the Goblin King.
The Goblin King looked down at him.

“Even if we were so inclined, Merlin made it difficult for us to use our full powers in the mortal realm. The boundaries are slowly weakening, but unless I have been summoned to take a child, my powers here are limited. Your sister’s powers are a little less constrained, but even she would have difficulty doing much good in the upcoming war, no matter how much she would wish to.”

“Particularly since the wizarding world uses iron more than the muggle one,” said Toby, perceptively. “Muggles use more steel, which doesn’t have the same effect.”

Sarah narrowed her eyes.

“Toby, have you been experimenting with iron?”

“Not on purpose! But we have to use an iron cauldron for school, and it burns a bit when I touch it. But we use steel cutlery at home, and that doesn’t hurt at all.”

Sarah stared at Toby, distressed to hear that his cauldron burnt him, but unsure of how to fix the problem.

“You would do well to buy a set of potioneer’s gloves,” said the Goblin King. “They will insulate you from the effects of cold iron, and even as petty a teacher as your Potion’s Master cannot object to a student using such basic safety equipment.”

“I’ll get you a pair before you go back to school,” promised Sarah. Toby beamed at her.

“Thanks!”

Sarah turned to the Goblin King.

“I have a question for you. Toby said that in the last war, the Dark Lord’s followers used to go after the families of muggleborns. I don’t want Dad and Irene hurt. I still live with them, so is it possible for me to put some kind of protection on the house?”

The Goblin King looked thoughtful.

“You consider their residence home, correct?” At Sarah’s nod, he said, “In that case, it should be possibly for you to place wards around the house which will protect anyone inside it. But I warn you: should you ever cease to consider that residence your home, the wards will fall.”

“Understood,” said Sarah. “Thank you.”

They reached the park then, and Toby ran forward, eager to make a snowman. Sarah expected the Goblin King to use his owl form and fly off, but to her surprise, he stayed, watching as Sarah and Toby began rolling snow together to build their snowman.

It took them a while, laughing, but finally Sarah and Toby had a workable snowman. Toby poked holes in the snowman’s ‘head’ to give it ‘eyes,’ and scraped a curved line to create a ‘smile’.

Sarah glanced up at the sky, which was beginning to darken.

“Come on, Toby,” she said. “It’s starting to get dark. We should get back home.”

The Goblin King accompanied them on the walk home. The three of them walked in companionable silence, Toby tired out from the day’s excitement, and Sarah enjoying the quiet of the snowy landscape.
To Sarah’s surprise, the Goblin King walked up the front path with them, and stood and watched as Sarah unlocked the front door. Toby immediately headed inside, exclaiming at how much warmer and more comfortable it was inside the house.

The Goblin King was still standing there. Sarah looked up at him questioningly.

“I have a gift for you, Sarah,” he said. Before Sarah could respond, the Goblin King twisted his wrist, a necklace appearing in his hands, and he put it around Sarah’s neck before stepping back.

Sarah’s hands went to the necklace in surprise, and she stared down at it. It was a string of beads, made out of some kind of resin, each one with a tiny white-and-purple violet perfectly preserved at its centre.

Sarah stared at the necklace, before looking up at the Goblin King.

“It’s beautiful.” Sarah’s voice was hushed.

“Do you accept my gift?” The Goblin King’s gaze was intense. He didn’t even pretend to be anything other than hanging on Sarah’s answer.

“I…”

Sarah stared down at the necklace, recognising it for what it was: a courtship gift. Her mind flew back to the discussion they’d had in the wizarding tea rooms, months ago, when the Goblin King had asked for a year and a day in which to court her. The conversation had moved on and Sarah had never answered, and until now it had slipped her mind.

“I… yes,” Sarah stammered out. She took a deep breath, composing herself. “You have a year and day, Goblin King, and then I shall give you my answer.”

The Goblin King’s mouth curved in a pleased smile, and he reached up one gloved hand to brush against Sarah’s cheek. She froze, unsure of how to respond, but the Goblin King only smiled and stepped back, recognising the constraints of courtship rules.

“Until we meet again, Sarah,” he said, and disappeared with his usual flair.

Sarah walked back into the house, one hand at the necklace of preserved violets around her neck, holding it so that she could examine the flowers more closely.

Toby sprang at her as she left the front hall and turned to go up the stairs.

“Sarah, did you kiss the Goblin King?” he demanded.

Sarah’s cheeks flamed.

“Toby!”

“Well, you two were outside for a while, that’s all.” Toby’s gaze was suspicious. “Did you, Sarah?”

“No, I did not kiss the Goblin King!” Sarah said, trying to work out why she was so affronted by the accusation. But she hadn’t been expecting Toby to ask such a – such a personal question, and it had put her quite off balance.

“You didn’t kiss who?”

When Sarah turned around, her cheeks still scarlet, her Dad was standing in the doorway to the
kitchen, looking bemused. Irene was peering over his shoulder, her expression alarmed.

“Dad – Irene—” said Sarah, and stopped, unsure of what to say. She felt more flustered than ever.

“Well, I’m not judging, either way,” Toby declared magnanimously. “But he obviously likes you a lot. Do you like him back?”

“I’m not answering that question,” said Sarah, with as much dignity as she could manage. “Toby, go away before I turn you into a frog.”

Toby grinned.

“I bet being a frog would be cool,” he said, but went up the stairs towards his room.

Sarah was left facing her father and stepmother.

“You’re dating the Goblin King?” Irene still looked alarmed. “I thought he was only a story!”

“He isn’t,” said Sarah. “He’s very real. And my kingdom shares a boundary with his, so we see a fair bit of each other.”

Irene blinked at the ‘my kingdom’ part of what Sarah had said, but focused on a more important detail.

“But doesn’t he steal children?”

“What?” asked Sarah’s Dad.

“He only takes children if people ask him to,” Sarah snapped, wondering why she felt so defensive. “There are rules. He doesn’t just steal them. And the children he takes away are often safer that they were before they were wished away.”

Sarah knew that all too well – she knew the Labyrinth’s history, knew of each person who had been offered the chance to run the Labyrinth, and how they’d come to wish away a child in the first place.

Sad though it was, stories like Sarah’s own where the child had been wished away by accident or in a fit of temper, instantly regretted, were rare. Most of the wished-away children were better off being goblins than growing up in the care of those who had wished them away in the first place.

Irene, however, didn’t look reassured.

“Are you sure Toby’s safe?”

“Toby’s my heir,” said Sarah. “The Goblin King can’t touch him without consequences.” She left out the other reason why Toby was safe from the Goblin King’s clutches.

Sarah’s Dad shook his head.

“Some days I think I’m better off not knowing about all this magical stuff.”

Irene sighed, her forehead creased in worry.

“Just – be careful,” she told Sarah.

“I always am,” Sarah promised, and escaped up the stairs before the conversation could become any more awkward.
Chapter Notes

I feel like this chapter should have more development of events in it than it does, but I can't for the life of me think what else to put in. So this is what you're getting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Five

Time passed, and Sarah grew accustomed to dividing her time between home, university, and the Labyrinth. It had been years since Sarah had worn the flowing dresses she'd practically lived in as a teenager, but on a whim she began wearing them again. Most of them needed to be altered slightly to fit her adult figure, but Sarah was magical, and altering her clothing wasn't difficult. Small, insignificant changes to things in the mortal realm came fairly easily, even if bigger magics didn't.

One morning, Sarah awoke to find violets woven in amongst the strands of her hair, still in perfect bloom. Sarah just tied her hair back in a braid, violets still interwoven with it, and went to university with her hair in that style.

After a day of research Sarah caught up with her friends from university for the first time since just before Christmas, the lot of them meeting at the pub nearest to campus. It had been a couple of months since she’d seen them. Life had been busy.

When Sarah walked in, a little late, wearing a flowing velvet dress and a braid interwoven with flowers, all of them stared.

“Sarah, what are you wearing?” Jasmine asked.

Jasmine herself was wearing a rainbow sweater and fake-leather pants. Next to her, Heather was wearing chequered tights and a dark grey coat over a plain long-sleeved shirt. Christopher was wearing jeans, and a buttoned-up denim jacket over his own shirt.

“What?” asked Sarah.

“You look like you just walked out of a Ren Faire,” said Christopher. “Seriously, Sarah – what happened to your usual outfits?”

Sarah looked at her friends.

“I suppose I felt like a change,” she said, keeping it vague.

“Well, you definitely have that,” said Jasmine.

Heather was still staring, but hadn’t said a word, which was unlike her.

“Heather?” Sarah asked. “Are you okay?”

“Your ears are pointed!” Heather blurted out. “You always wear your hair down so I never noticed, but you’ve got pointy ears!”
As one, Jasmine and Christopher turned their heads to stare at Sarah’s exposed ears.

Sarah tried not to shift under their gaze.

“So what?”

“Well, nothing, I guess,” said Heather. She laughed suddenly. “It’s just funny – you’re writing a dissertation on fairies, and you’ve got pointed ears!”

Sarah promptly pulled her braid over one shoulder, untied the ribbon holding it together at the bottom, and began to undo the braid. When she was done, she brushed her hair forward and down with her fingers so that the silky strands hid the tips of her ears.

“Tactful, Heather,” said Jasmine, elbowing Heather.

Heather made a distressed noise.

“Sarah, I didn’t mean–”

“I know,” said Sarah. But she left her hair down, covering the pointed tips of her ears.

“Imagine if you really were a fairy, though,” said Christopher, with a grin, inviting Sarah to share in the joke. “And all this time the uni’s had a fairy writing a thesis on fairies.”

Sarah tried for a smile.

“Very funny.”

The conversation moved onto other topics, and the others spoke animatedly. But Sarah was silent, realising that she didn’t fit in with her friends anymore – and probably hadn’t for a while. She just hadn’t noticed, until now.

The same advice she’d given Toby months ago applied to her: it was hard to maintain a friendship when you were keeping such a big part of your life as the magical world secret. But Sarah knew she couldn’t tell them the truth.

On the way home on the Tube, Sarah braided her hair again, careful this time to braid it so that strands of hair covered the tips of her ears instead of being tucked behind them. The violets were still in place, having neither wilted nor fallen out. Sarah contemplated that for a while, before deciding that things could be much worse. At least she liked violets.

Toby’s letters from Hogwarts continued to arrive like clockwork every week, and the goblins the Goblin King had sent to watch over Toby reported in every couple of days. The situation in the wizarding world was growing darker and darker, Sarah noted grimly.

Sarah, how do I get to the Labyrinth on my own? Toby asked in one of his letters. If things go wrong, I need to know how to get somewhere safe in a hurry.

Call on me as soon as you’re alone, Sarah wrote back. I can’t get into Hogwarts unless a wizard summons me there. She wasn’t sure whether it would work, considering that Toby was now at least a little fae – but given that he was a wizard, chances were that an invitation into Hogwarts would work if it was Toby issuing it.

The next evening, Sarah was reading Tales of Fae and Fairies, specifically the section on the Wizard-Fae War, when she heard Toby’s call.
“Queen of the Labyrinth, I invoke your presence,” Toby’s voice said, as clearly as if he was standing next to her.

Sarah put down her book on her dressing table, and went.

Hogwarts’ wards parted around her as though they weren’t even there, and Sarah appeared where Toby was in a rain of softly-falling blooms. Violets, of course.

Normally Toby would have laughed at that, but his face was solemn and pale.

“You came,” he said, throwing his arms around Sarah in a hug.

“Of course I came,” said Sarah, hugging him back. “I will always come when you call, Toby. Let me show you how to get to the Labyrinth.” She looked around. “First things first – I can get past the wards once I’ve been summoned, but it would take you a lot of effort to do it. Is there a way out of the castle?”

“Sure,” said Toby. He grabbed Sarah’s hand. “This way.”

He led Sarah out of the empty classroom and down several hallways in a row, before he and Sarah reached a set of stairs.

Halfway down, the staircase suddenly jerked and came loose from the hallway below, swinging to the left. Sarah grabbed the railing with one hand and the back of Toby’s robes with the other, holding on for dear life to both.

When the staircase settled into its new configuration, there was a figure standing in the hallway at the bottom of the stairs.

His beard was white, and very long, and he wore blue robes spangled with embroidered stars and exploding galaxies. A hat made of the same fabric sat atop his head, and there was a set of spectacles perched precariously on the end of his nose. But the wizard’s expression was cold, and his eyes were piercing behind the glasses.

Toby let out a slight squeak.

“Er, hi, Professor Dumbledore?”

“Mr Williams,” said the Headmaster of Hogwarts, his tone distinctly chilly. Toby held onto Sarah’s hand a little more tightly. “Who – or perhaps I should say what – is it that you have brought into this school?”

“Who is by far the more polite option, thank you,” said Sarah.

She walked the rest of the way down the staircase until she was only a couple of feet away from Albus Dumbledore. While Toby hung back, looking worried, Sarah met the Headmaster’s icy gaze unflinchingly. The man towered over her a little, but then so did the Goblin King, and he was far more frightening than this man could ever hope to be, despite the vast well of potential that Sarah could sense inside of him.

“My name is Sarah Williams, and I am Queen of the Labyrinth,” Sarah offered, trying to be conciliatory, because it was unwise to cultivate enemies unnecessarily – and this wizard was responsible for the safety of her precious little brother. “I’m Toby’s sister.”

Dumbledore’s eyes widened at Sarah’s title, before they narrowed again.
“And what business do you have in this school?”

“Making sure that my brother can escape it if necessary,” said Sarah. “Toby’s parents are both non-magical – he’s a perfect target for followers of your Dark Lord. I’m not here to harm anyone, I swear. I just want to make sure that Toby is safe.”

Dumbledore relaxed infinitesimally, and the coldness in his eyes receded.

“Very well. I grant you passage through this school for this night only – and in the event that Voldemort seizes power of this school, I grant you invitation to retrieve young Mr Williams from the professors’ care.”

Sarah blinked in surprise as she felt her magic adjust to the terms Dumbledore had offered. She inclined her head.

“Thank you,” she said, and meant it. She glanced down at Toby, still hanging back a little.

“I’m not in trouble am I, Professor Dumbledore?” Toby asked.

Professor Dumbledore looked grave.

“No, on this occasion, Mr Williams. However, please refrain from inviting further high fae to enter into this school. Direct invitations render the school wards defenceless against them.”

“Sorry,” said Toby, looking contrite. “I was just scared, Professor.”

Professor Dumbledore sighed, and suddenly looked his age.

“I understand. These are dark times which we live in. However, it is important not to give up hope.”

Toby nodded, and Sarah tugged on his hand.

“Come on, Toby,” she said. “Outside the school wards, and I’ll show you how to get to the Labyrinth.”

Sarah glanced back over her shoulder at the Headmaster as she and Toby walked away down the corridor. The man was watching them go, and Sarah gave him a nod of farewell as she and Toby continued on their way.

It took Toby an hour to learn how to step from the mortal realm into the Labyrinth. In a pinch he could get away from the school if he had to. And if he couldn’t – well, all he had to do was call for Sarah, and she would come to him.

In late May, events in the Labyrinth were enlivened by a runner.

Mrs Grace Smith, witch, aged nineteen, married in her first year out of school. She’d fallen pregnant almost immediately after her marriage, resulting in a child who was now three months old. Grace loved her daughter fiercely, but she was young, and it had been months since she’d had a decent night’s sleep thanks to little Ophelia crying through the night.

Grace had been home alone that evening, her husband late home, and she was worried and trying to cook dinner and look after the baby all at once, and Ophelia’s ceaseless crying had gotten on her last, frayed nerve. The fateful words which had summoned the Goblin King had slipped from her mouth without a thought.
Grace had begged the Goblin King to renounce his claim on the child; in response he had given her the challenge of running Sarah’s Labyrinth. She had thirteen hours to fulfil the challenge, as all the runners did, or she would lose Ophelia forever.

Grace had cried a bit, but she’d picked herself up and was making her way through the Labyrinth with an air of unshakeable determination. Sarah couldn’t help but see herself in the young runner, and felt for her.

“You’re making things easier for her than they should be,” said a familiar voice. It carried a hint of accusation.

Sarah looked away from where she was watching Grace’s progress in a silver mirror, and turned to face the Goblin King. He didn’t venture into the Labyrinth without an invitation very often. The fact that he had done so this time indicated that he was genuinely displeased about Sarah helping Grace’s run through the Labyrinth.

“She didn’t mean to wish her baby away,” said Sarah. “She was tired and scared and in over her head. I know how that feels.”

The Goblin King only frowned.

“It’s not as though I’m letting her get through without effort,” Sarah added, understanding his reservations. “She’ll learn from this that words and actions have consequences, whether she means them or not. But she doesn’t deserve to lose her baby. As long as she doesn’t give up, she should make it through to Goblin City.”

“You are far too soft-hearted,” said the Goblin King. “Do you think that I will be so forgiving of her sins? That I will simply renounce my claim to the child without a fight? The fact that she did not mean to wish the babe away does not meant that she did not do it.”

Sarah sighed. The high fae had to be careful with their words, bound as they were by their own pacts and promises. The fact that humans went around making and breaking careless promises never ceased to irritate the Goblin King.

“Words have power, I know. But hopefully our runner will learn that too, and be a better mother for it.”

The Goblin King scowled, but did not respond. After a moment, Sarah turned back to the silver mirror.

But the Goblin King stayed where he was, watching her.

“Is there something you wish to talk about, Goblin King?” Sarah asked, when he neither said anything, nor moved from the spot where he stood.

“Sarah, I did not give you my name so that you could refuse to ever use it.”

Sarah blinked in surprise, and turned to look at him properly. He looked displeased, but also… resigned.

“Oh,” said Sarah, as she realised why. Telling her his name had been a gesture of… of trust, for a start, an overture of friendly alliance, and the fact that she’d never once called him by his name even though she knew it had probably been interpreted as a form of rejection. The fact that Sarah had allowed him to court her while still rejecting that overture, probably sent all kinds of mixed messages.
“I didn’t mean…” Sarah began, and then stopped, because it didn’t matter what she hadn’t meant to do, only what she’d done. She started again. “I’m sorry, Jareth.”

It felt odd, calling him anything other than the Goblin King, but Sarah supposed that she would grow used to it soon enough.

Jareth looked at her in obvious surprise – and that hurt, because clearly he hadn’t expected either the apology or the use of his name. It occurred to Sarah that given what most of the high fae were like, he’d probably interpreted her actions as some kind of power game designed to keep him from knowing exactly where he stood with her.

Sarah bit her lip. It upset her that the two of them were still experiencing these kinds of misunderstandings, even if it was inevitable that with their different backgrounds there’d be some culture clash. Sarah was used to being honest, and underhanded games usually never even occurred to her as an option; the Goblin King, on the other hand, had most likely been raised to expect them from everyone he knew.

And there Sarah went, calling him the Goblin King again. She needed to start thinking of him as Jareth.

“I wasn’t refusing to use your name on purpose. It’s just…”

She tried to think of a flattering way to phrase the fact that he completely embodied the title of Goblin King, to the point where Sarah had trouble thinking of him as anything else, even when she knew better.

“I didn’t know your name for so long, and you’re so good at being the Goblin King, that it seemed natural to call you that,” she tried to explain. “I wasn’t trying to reject you, Jareth, or toy with you. I didn’t realise I hadn’t ever called you by your name.”

Jareth was very still.

“I see,” he finally said.

“Can you forgive me?” Sarah asked, point-blank.

Jareth looked at her, and although his countenance was as unforgiving as stone, his eyes were soft.

“There is much I can forgive you for, precious, when the misunderstanding was mine. It is sometimes difficult for me to remember that you do not deal in deceit and misdirection in the way that the rest of us do.”

“Jareth, if ever you think I’m playing games with you, tell me,” said Sarah. “Don’t just… assume that I’m trying to toy with you.”

She stopped for a minute, because this was a big promise to make, but…

“I give you my word that I will do my best never to play those kinds of games against you, for as long as we are courting… or in the case of marriage, should it follow our courtship,” said Sarah, looking him directly in the eye.

She had the dubious pleasure of seeing Jareth lose his composure for the first time that she could ever remember.

He stretched out a gloved hand towards her, his eyes wide and full of such complicated emotion that
even Sarah, who was good at reading him, could not easily decipher what he was feeling right at that moment.

“Sarah–” said Jareth, his voice choked, before he cut himself off. His hand fell back to his side, and Sarah saw his expression shutter itself.

“Jareth, talk to me,” said Sarah, alarmed at the way he was closing himself off.

“Sarah, you do not understand what you are promising,” Jareth said, his voice harsh. “You know what I am. You know that I play those games as well as any of the fae. If you do not–”

“Then perhaps we’ll have a chance of some level of trust and honesty in our relationship,” Sarah interrupted. “I can match you even at your worst, Jareth. Haven’t I already proven that?”

Jareth was silent for a long moment.

“I suppose that you have.”

Sarah reached out a hand to him. After a moment, he took it.

“Let me promise this, Jareth,” said Sarah, as Jareth’s eyes searched hers, as though looking for any trace of a lie or dishonesty. “And try to believe me.”

“I do believe you,” said Jareth after a second, his voice soft. “Of all the people who might promise such a thing, your word is the only one that I would trust, precious.”

His words hit Sarah like a bolt of lightning. In a burst of sudden clarity Sarah realised that although she had given herself a year and a day to make her choice regarding Jareth’s courtship, when the time came it would be no choice at all.

For who could possibly hold her interest, her affection, better than the Goblin King? Yes, he could be cruel, and as unyielding as diamond, not to mention just as sharp and glittering; but that was not all he was. He had as many facets as any precious stone, and Sarah wanted to get to know all of them. It was a staggering realisation.

“Jareth,” said Sarah, and broke off, flushing. But her face was upturned to his, and she didn’t look away.

Jareth seemed to read something of her feelings in her expression.

“Sarah,” he said, his voice full of wonder, and reached up to brush his free hand against her cheek. Sarah found herself leaning into the touch, her eyes still meeting Jareth’s.

Jareth took it as the invitation it was.

The first press of his mouth against hers was gentle, tentative, as though he could barely believe that Sarah was offering what he thought she was. But the kiss after it was firmer, more confident, and as Sarah opened her mouth to his she felt one of his hands thread through her hair while the other came to rest on her waist, pulling her flush against him.

Sarah had dated her share of boyfriends, and made out with them, but nothing had prepared her for the sudden intense heat that filled her body from head to toe in response to Jareth’s kiss. She tried to move back from him for a second, and the kiss faltered; but Sarah only moved to wind her arms around his neck, bringing the two of them even closer than before, and the kiss deepened again.
Sarah had no idea how long they stood there kissing for; it could have been an eternity. But suddenly Jareth pulled away from her a little, although his arm was still around her waist.

“The runner has made it to Goblin City,” he said, scowling. “I must go and deal with her.”

He sounded terribly frustrated by this fact, and Sarah couldn’t help it. She started to laugh, and when Jareth looked at her sharply, his expression affronted, she buried her face in his shoulder and kept on laughing.

“Sarah, I do not understand what you find so amusing,” said Jareth’s voice in her ear, sounding displeased. Sarah lifted her head and smiled at him.

“I’m glad to know that I’m not the only one frustrated by the interruption,” she said honestly, and the stern lines of Jareth’s face softened slightly.

“Hmm.” With a reluctant expression, Jareth detached himself from her. “I must bid you farewell, for the moment.”

“Try not to be too harsh on her,” Sarah suggested.

Jareth looked at her as though considering her words carefully.

“That is neither a threat nor a manipulation, is it?” he said finally. “Merely a request.”

Sarah felt herself flush indignantly at the idea of using herself as reward or punishment for Jareth’s behaviour.

He saw her indignation, and smiled.

“I thought not,” he said, and vanished in his usual fashion.

Sarah was left standing alone at the centre of the Labyrinth, and filled with emotion. After a second she took a deep breath, and let it out. The effects of Jareth’s kisses were still wreaking havoc on her, and it would take time before she felt composed again.

She couldn’t help but share a little of Jareth’s ire towards the runner, for choosing that moment to make it to Goblin City. But all the same, Sarah hoped that Grace triumphed and won her baby back safely.

Smiling, Sarah left the Labyrinth to return home. She should probably put in some work on her thesis for today, and it was probably a good idea not to let things go to fast with Jareth, anyway.

If there was anything they had, after all, then it was time.

On the last day of Hogwarts’ school term, Sarah went to pick Toby up from Kings Cross station.

Foregoing her usual attire of flowing dresses, Sarah wore witches robes instead. Her clothing earned her some curious glances from the non-magical people at Kings Cross, but Sarah thought it was better to avoid looking like a ‘muggle’ while she was surrounded by wizards, considering how badly the war against the Dark Lord was progressing.

She’d told her Dad and Irene that it was safer if she went to collect Toby. They’d been worried by the implications of that, but had agreed to let Sarah do it.

The moment Toby stepped off the train still wearing his Hufflepuff robes, pulling his luggage behind
him, Sarah knew something was wrong. When Toby threw his arms around her, Sarah pulled him in close and held him tight, returning the hug.

“What happened?” she asked, in an undertone. She didn’t want their conversation to be overheard.

“Professor Dumbledore was killed,” said Toby, his voice just as quiet. “The school was invaded by Death Eaters. He was the last thing keeping Hogwarts safe for everyone, Sarah. People said he was the only person You-Know-Who feared. Without him…” Toby trailed off.

“You think the Dark Lord will take over the school.”

Toby nodded miserably.

“They’ve warned all the muggleborn students not to come to Hogwarts next year,” he said. “Told us to hide if we can, go abroad, anything. It looks like You-Know-Who is going to take the Ministry any day now.” Toby hesitated. “Sarah… I told my friends to spread the word that if they need somewhere to go, they should call on the Queen of the Labyrinth and ask for sanctuary.”

“What? Toby–” Sarah took a deep breath, and forced herself to think through what she was about to say. Even if she ignored the fact that the high fae and the wizards didn’t get along… “Toby, if I take them in, there will be a price.”

“I know,” said Toby. “But that’s better than being left to be murdered, isn’t it? Sarah–”

“Let me think about it,” said Sarah. “Come on. We can talk about it more later.”

Toby followed Sarah off the platform, back into the non-magical section of the train station. Once they were out in the parking lot, Sarah took his hand, and brought him into the centre of the Labyrinth.

Sarah took a seat on one of the carved wooden chairs she’d left there. Toby sat on another. They looked at each other.

Sarah broke the silence.

“Goblin King, I could use your help,” she said aloud.

Several seconds passed before a barn owl landed on the chair next to Sarah’s. A moment later, Jareth was no longer an owl.

“You require my assistance?”

Sarah explained what Toby had done.

“I would like to help, but I know that I can only offer them sanctuary with a price,” she said, finishing up her explanation.

Jareth turned a forbidding look on Toby.

“There has been a state of enmity between the high fae and the wizarding world for a millennium,” he said to Toby. His voice was like ice. “And yet you would seek the help of the Queen of the Labyrinth on their behalf?”

Toby only looked stubborn.

“They’re my friends. I’m not leaving them to be murdered. Besides, if they have to pay a price, no
one can claim that Sarah helped them when she shouldn’t have.”

“But I can’t think what I should make the price of such a bargain,” said Sarah. “Ideally, it would be something that the children would lose anyway, but…”

Jareth was silent, clearly thinking.

“Innocence,” he said finally. “A priceless attribute, and yet one which all children eventually lose.”

Sarah blinked, and thought about it.

“I suppose that could work…” She didn’t like the idea of taking children’s innocence away, but if she couldn’t think of anything else…

“Also,” said Toby, and Sarah and Jareth both looked at him, “I want to go back to school next term.”

“No,” said Sarah, without a thought.

But Toby didn’t back down.

“I have friends there, Sarah,” Toby said to her, his voice uncharacteristically fierce. “Hufflepuffs are loyal to the core. They won’t stand for what’s being done to the muggleborns. What do you think a castle full of Death Eaters will do to them? I have to go back.”

“It’s too dangerous,” said Sarah.

“Not if you can make me invisible,” said Toby.

“It would be better to make you unnoticeable,” said Jareth, sounding bored, but watching Sarah and Toby with an intentness which proclaimed his boredom to be a lie.

Both Sarah and Toby looked at him.

“Unnoticeable?” Sarah repeated.

“It is well within your power,” said Jareth. “Enchant an object – jewellery, for instance – which when worn will render the wearer completely beyond any observer’s attention.”

“Please, Sarah,” Toby begged, turning big green eyes on her. “I’ll be safe enough if I have something like that, and if there’s a problem, I can call you to Hogwarts, like I did before. If you don’t let me go back, I’ll never forgive you.”

Toby’s voice wasn’t angry, or petulant. Sarah hadn’t the slightest doubt he was telling the truth.

Sarah felt her face crumple.

“Toby, I only want you to be safe.”

Toby looked at her, and he appeared far older than the almost-twelve years old he was.

“But at what cost, Sarah? I can help, and I want to. Besides, I’m only talking about the school – it’s not like I’ll be storming the Ministry or anything.”

Sarah was torn.

“Give me until the end of August to think about it,” she said. “I’ll give you an answer then.”
Toby looked dissatisfied.

“Do not try your luck any further,” Jareth warned him, “lest it turn against you.”

Toby gave him a thoughtful look.

“That’s good advice,” he said, and then grinned, the expression unexpected for how impish it was. “So how’s the courtship going?”

Sarah felt herself blush.

“That good, huh?”

“Toby!”

“You are an impudent child, aren’t you?” Jareth asked Toby, but he sounded amused.

Toby continued grinning.

“If you’re courting my sister, we should get to know each other better,” he said. “I want to make sure you deserve the honour of being my brother-in-law.”

To Sarah’s surprise, Jareth took the cheeky proposal seriously.

“Your words have merit. How do you suggest that we become better acquainted?”

Toby looked considering.

“I’d like to see Goblin City,” he said. “The way Sarah described it, it sounded pretty cool. You could give me a tour, and we could talk.”

“Agreed,” said Jareth, and without so much as a goodbye he vanished, taking Toby with him.

Sarah sighed, and sat back.

She had little doubt that Jareth and Toby would get along; and even if they didn’t, Jareth wouldn’t let her brother come to any harm within his kingdom.

She was more concerned about Toby’s desire to go back to Hogwarts even if it was overrun with the Dark Lord’s followers. What Sarah wanted was to spirit him away and keep him away from all dangers… but that wasn’t really fair of her, was it? Toby was part of that world. Taking him away from it wouldn’t do him good, in the long run.

Well, she had until the end of August to make her decision. She only hoped she made the right one.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you’ve all enjoyed this fic. Stay tuned for the sequel!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!