Muse

by RebelRebel

Summary

“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Notes

This is my first Labyrinth fic. Ever. Daunting? A bit. I wrote it years ago, and suddenly felt compelled to finish it and post it, just to see what happened. It’s also on Fanfic and Tumblr if you’re interested; this is actually my first work on Archive Of Our Own, which I discovered thanks to some steamy ASoIaF fanfics. Anyway, I’d love any feedback - thanks!

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

Uprising

Paranoia is in bloom,
The PR, transmissions will resume
They'll try to, push drugs that keep us all dumbed down
And hope that, we will never see the truth around
So come on
Another promise, another seed
Another packaged lie to keep us trapped in greed…
(“Uprising”, The Resistance, Muse)

Most stories have a hero or a heroine. It has been that way since the beginning of stories; the reason for this is simply that heroes and heroines are easy to root for, for their innate ability to overcome hardship and emerge triumphant.

But—let’s face it—heroes are boring. The heroes of those stories belong to childish fancies, content to live in worlds where they have but one drawn-out victory, and therefore one ending. Simply put, they lack the depth and complexity to exist as real human beings—which is hard enough.

And aren’t villains just so much more fun?

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They all knew her, of course. Everyone knew of Sarah Williams, whether it was by name or not—it was impossible to ignore such cold beauty. But no one spoke to her if they could help it, even her professors, who, despite her obvious intelligence, knew something was just...not quite right about the girl.

At Boston University, it wasn’t out of the norm to see students with their noses buried in books, but Sarah was somehow different. When she first came to school, she was considered a normal freshman: nervous, small in a way that made it apparent she was still fresh out of high school, and a bit shy, despite her obvious good looks. Boys flocked after her and girls in her hall asked her for beauty tips; the intellectual coffee-drinkers invited her to poetry readings and the religious ones assured her they would save her a seat at church on Sundays.

After mere weeks, though, they all promptly stopped talking to her. Something was unnatural about her smile (when she actually did smile, that is), her cautious steps, her lilting voice. When you looked at her, you couldn’t see yourself in her big green eyes. She was beautiful, definitely, and altogether a gracious girl, but somehow just too...odd.

The way she spoke, it was as if she was always waiting for something, always slightly peering around the people she was talking to as if they were not really there, but someone else was, just out
of reach. On top of that, she never stopped reading, and though it was common to walk around one-handed while studying for the next big exam, Sarah was relentless. Book after book after book, Sarah read them all. Even the campus librarian didn’t warm to her; in fact, quite the reverse. Of course, that behavior could have been cultivated just after everyone started avoiding her.

When anyone bothered to remark upon Sarah behind her back, they all said the same thing: it had to be lonely. She spoke only in class, and rarely then. Her roommate opted out of living with her after their first two months at school, mysteriously complaining of “strange nightmares”. How Sarah could be the cause, no one knew, but they secretly thought they’d rather not share a room with her, either.

So beautiful, but so strange—of course they all knew of Sarah Williams. She was like something out of a dream—or a nightmare. At Boston U, she was the oddity, and she had been for years.

In Sarah’s mind, though, she considered herself something closer to a leper. When she first entered college, she thought it might be different. In high school she had been the freak, too (though not always, not at first). She had hoped that by going away to school she would meet people who would understand her, befriend her, but as hard as she had tried to make friends, she somehow managed to spook everyone into acting as if she didn’t exist.

After the first few months of this kind of behavior from the students and the staff, Sarah taught herself not to care. She was there to learn, and she would do it and then get the hell out of there. Despite her reputation as the weird quiet girl, she still had a will stronger than the fiercest of Kings (that she knew from experience). She knew that somewhere in the world, she belonged. High school hadn’t been it. Nor university. Perhaps someplace after that.

Deep down, Sarah thought she knew why they didn’t want to know her. Perhaps she had been irrevocably changed; perhaps magic just couldn’t be undone. She had long since riddled out why she kept dreaming of broken crystals, mazes, owls, and cackling goblins—those were obvious. But what about everything else? What about her strained relationship with her parents? They, like every other adult she knew, sometimes seemed to have trouble just looking at her, let alone having an adult conversation. There had to be a reason to explain how every time she looked in a mirror too long, she thought she saw something out of corner of her eye in the reflection, but then there was nothing. The persistence of magic could even explain why her brother Toby seemed like the only person in the entire world that smiled at the sight of her…but she refused to accept that. It was too cruel.

*But then, he said he could be cruel.*

These days, Sarah pretended it didn’t bother her; that none of it mattered or even existed. She was normal, and she tried her best to conduct herself that way, despite what others seemed to think, or see in her. It had been nine years since everything had changed—nine years since that fateful night and thirteen hours in the Labyrinth. She pretended it had never happened, even though every nightmare and dream proved otherwise, even though she sometimes felt she would go mad if she couldn’t acknowledge just how real it had been.

Then again, Sarah had always been brilliant at pretending.

In school, she earned top grades. After graduating from Boston with honors, she had decided to stay to get her Masters, despite her less-than-welcome reception at the place. She told herself it wasn’t...
cowardice that kept her from moving on into the real world, though she had a healthy fear that she might not belong there, either. Besides—having no friends meant no distractions from her studies, which were almost a relief from her lonely existence.

After getting her undergraduate degrees in English and Early Childhood Education, she enrolled in Boston U’s grad program for English. She still wasn’t sure what age she would end up teaching for the long haul, children or college students, but she wanted to be prepared either way (despite the astronomical amount of debt she was racking up in the process). Currently, she favored the former; with a part-time practicum with one of nearby Morse Elementary’s kindergarten classes, Sarah had found that she greatly enjoyed working with young children, mostly because they didn’t seem to find her as odd as everyone else did. If older people didn’t understand her quiet dreaming, children always did. Still, she couldn’t help but wish for intellectual conversation with someone over the age of 5 now and then.

Nine years after her imagined adventure in the Labyrinth, sitting in a kindergarten classroom, helping manage boisterous children is where Sarah Williams’ story resumes.

The day is October 31st.

“Robbie, you know better than to glue the Lincoln Logs together,” scolded Sarah. The small kindergartner she was reprimanding, Robbie Colt, looked up at her with big blue eyes.

“I’m sorry Sarah,” he muttered apologetically, shuffling his feet. Sarah wasn’t buying it. Robbie was the class menace, adorable as he was with his baby blues and mop of dark curls. On average, he got into trouble at least three times a week.

“You know I’ll have to tell Ms. Frank, don’t you?” asked Sarah. Robbie gulped and nodded. Sarah hated having to play the disciplinarian with the children, but that was a part of the job. She was a firm believer that it was possible to be liked as well as respected.

“All right, take a seat. The day is almost over,” said Sarah, ushering him to his tiny desk. The rest of the class had just finished coloring time at their desks and were all looking up at her expectantly.

Usually following coloring was show-and-tell, and Ms. Frank was in charge of that. If she would hurry up and finish screwing her boyfriend in the parking lot…

Sarah opened her mouth to speak just as Ms. Frank rushed back into the room, large blonde hair tousled.

Kelly Frank was older than Sarah by about ten years, and was one of those women that never really met your eyes, as if she was ashamed of something she would never admit. She was taller than Sarah, with a tiny waist in comparison to large hips and bigger thighs, and wore copious amounts of makeup, but the overall effect was a good one, if a bit out of place in a school setting—she was definitely an attractive woman.

She often left Sarah on the days she was there for a half an hour or so to have sex with her current boyfriend in the back of her parked car. It wasn’t the actual sex that bothered Sarah; in regards to that, she subscribed to the ‘to each their own’ school of thought. What bothered her was Ms. Frank’s complete disregard for her students at times. Well, that and Ms. Frank did a particularly bad job of
not staring at Sarah like she was something she couldn’t quite figure out. Despite Ms. Frank’s flaws, however, she was good with the children, and they took to her no-nonsense attitude.

“Back in the nick of time,” boomed Ms. Frank, glancing at Sarah as she chuckled. She had a large voice, distinctly feminine, but it still carried. The children turned to her in rapt attention. Sarah glanced at the clock on the opposite wall, noticing that it was time for her to go. Ms. Frank had obviously noticed, too.

“Say goodbye to Sarah until next week, kids,” called Ms. Frank.

“Happy Halloween, Sarah!” shouted the children gleefully.

“Sarah, can I come trick-or-treat at your house?!” asked Robbie.

Sarah smiled at him as she grabbed her jacket off of the hook on the wall and gave him the thumbs up sign. Ms. Frank nodded at her jerkily before giving her a rare, if somewhat plastic grin before Sarah turned to leave.

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Later that evening, Sarah smiled contentedly to herself as she emptied a bag of candy into a big bowl in her tiny kitchen. She never had visitors to her little apartment, and while trick-or-treaters weren’t exactly company, she was still excited to take part in such a fun time for them.

She didn’t have much of a costume, though. In addition to the outfit she had worn that day—black tights, ballet flats, a floral skirt with a long sleeve white top and a little vest—all she had was a sequined little black mask she had picked up on her way home from the grocery store. It wasn’t much, but hopefully it would add enough flair to her ensemble to appease any trick-or-treaters. Besides, if any of tonight’s little visitors were her “students”, they would think it funny enough.

Sarah glanced at her kitchen clock. It was nearly six, which meant they would start buoying up if she didn’t hurry. Grabbing the bowl of candy, she dashed to her front door and set it on the table where she usually threw her keys. Just as she went to sit down on her little couch in the tiny living room, the doorbell rang and little happy voices could be heard crowing outside the door.

Roughly two hours or so later, Sarah was nearly out of candy and already drained of her energy, but still in a pleasant mood. She was always happy to be around human beings who didn’t whisper about her or throw furtive looks in her direction. Children were the only people that didn’t judge her…until they got older, anyway.

When the doorbell rang for what Sarah concluded might have to be the last time (glancing down into the last of her candy she noted that she was significantly low on Snickers), she rushed to the door. To her surprise, there stood Robbie and a few other little ones, an exasperated young father behind them exclaiming “Trick-or-treat!” with a force that rivaled thunder.

But that wasn’t what had shocked Sarah.

…They were all dressed head-to-toe as goblins.
“Sarah!” shouted Robbie.

Sarah’s heart nearly jumped out of her chest before she realized that none of them bore too much of a resemblance to a real goblin (or, at least, what they had looked like in her imagination). Smiling and forcing her breathing to calm, she held out the bowl.

“You lot can have the rest, I’m nearly out,” said Sarah. The little goblins squealed with joy, reaching into the bowl as quick as they could.

“Thanks, Sarah!” shouted Robbie gleefully (he, of course, got the rest of the Snickers).

“So this is the famous Sarah,” remarked the man standing behind the children, “My son talks of nothing but you.” Sarah blushed.

“Well, I’m sure he’s exaggerated a bit,” she said. Her grip on the candy bowl slackened, and before she knew it, the kids had stolen it, debating over whether Twizzlers or gummy bears were better.

“I’m Robert, Robbie’s father,” said the man, holding out his hand. His eyes quickly appraised Sarah, which she didn’t miss. She couldn’t really summon the need to be opposed, though—most men ignored her like the plague.

Sarah took his hand.

“Nice to meet you,” she said, noticing that Robbie was Robert in miniature by more than name. He was tall, well built, with bright blue eyes, a dimple in his left cheek and a mess of brown curls. All in all, very cute, she thought—as well as being her student’s father, probably taken, and out of her league, she hastily reminded herself.

“So how’d you get stuck with all of these little rascals on such a crazy night?” Sarah asked.

“Oh, you know,” said Robert, chuckling, “When you’re the only single parent on the block, the other ones beg you to take theirs so they can go out. Halloween is crazy, isn’t it?”

Sarah perked up instantly after he said he was single. (In the back of her mind, rational Sarah marveled at how silly she was being. But rational Sarah and lonely Sarah were often at odds with one another).

“Yes, it is,” she agreed quietly.

“I had no idea you lived in the neighborhood,” continued Robert, still smiling, “Not a far walk from the school, is it?”

“Oh, no, not at all,” said Sarah, smiling back tentatively. “It’s great, actually; I can walk to work and to the university.”

“You don’t work there too, do you?” asked Robert.

“Oh, no, I’m a grad student. English,” supplied Sarah.

“Nice,” said Robert appreciatively, “So, why aren’t you out tonight? No tubular frat parties calling
your name?”

Sarah couldn’t help it; she burst out laughing. Robert reddened slightly, but it still took Sarah a few seconds to regain her composure before she could respond.

“Tubular?” she choked.

“It’s been a bit since I got my undergrad—I admit it, I don’t know the hip slang,” shrugged Robert. Sarah finally gave him a full smile. At that, he seemed a little less embarrassed, and grinned back at her.

“No worries,” said Sarah, “Me neither. And no, no frat parties. Not really my thing. Plus—I’m a bit old for that kind of stuff, anyway.”

“I hear that,” said Robert, looking down at his son and the other kids, who were still arguing somewhat loudly over the candy.

Robert looked back up, opening his mouth to say something else, but before he could say anything, one of the children tugged on her skirt. Sarah looked down. A scream died in her throat.

Pulling on her skirt was a real goblin. With coal black eyes and a leathery, pinched face, there was no mistaking that this was no human child.

“More candy?” it asked, revealing dagger-like teeth as he grinned at her. Sarah shut her lips tightly, nodding her head no. The goblin shrugged and, without any warning, disappeared with a loud CRACK.

Sarah looked up. Robert was staring at her like she was insane, which led her to believe he hadn’t seen the goblin at all; instead, he must’ve just seen her appear to react to thin air.

“Well, kids, I think it’s time to leave Sarah be,” said Robert, ushering the children away from the candy bowl, which finally lay abandoned on the floor. Sarah stared after them; her lips still shut tight, her eyes wide.

“Bye Sarah!” shouted Robbie as the children rounded the corner to the stairwell and disappeared, out of sight.


For a few moments, Sarah just stood there, unsure what to do. Finally, she glanced down at the bowl on the floor and bent to pick it up. Peering down the hallway one more time, she went back inside her apartment and closed the door, locking it hastily.

A part of her wanted to believe she was acting silly, that that goblin simply couldn’t have been real and that perhaps she was going loony, but the sick feeling in her stomach was much too real to ignore. She deposited the bowl on her kitchen counter and made for her small bedroom.

The room was dark, lit only by the moon in her window, but Sarah made no move to turn on the
light. She sat on the edge of her bed in silence, wondering. Why would a goblin be here if not to drive her to the nuthouse? Coincidence wasn’t an option; she knew better than that. Her only explanation was that she had imagined it, just as she must have imagined the whole thing, the whole Labyrinth. A part of her knew she was lying to herself, but it was so much better than believing the truth.

After a few minutes in the still darkness, Sarah made a hasty decision. Slowly, she got up from the bed, and knelt to look underneath it. After spotting what she wanted, she reached out and grabbed a shoebox that was buried deep underneath. Righting herself, she resumed her position on her mattress and lifted the lid.

There was only one thing inside. A small, tattered red book titled *Labyrinth*.

Sarah had hidden it literally hours after her little quest, and had resolved never to open it again. When she had returned to the Aboveground, she often fancied herself like Frodo: more than once, she imagined she heard tiny voices issuing from the book, if she listened hard enough…but she was no hobbit, and she knew that story well enough, too. She shut the book away, knowing full well she’d never be able to truly get rid of it.

Until tonight. Perhaps her run-in with the little goblin had made her as reckless as she was curious. That, and she was still stinging from the way Robert had looked at her as if she was completely mental. Somehow, the idea of seeing the words again made the possibility of her being completely bonkers less likely. Not to mention, seeing a goblin was worth a little investigation, wasn’t it?

Cautiously, Sarah reached in and plucked the book out of the box, which she carefully set aside. Running her nimble fingers over its rough binding, Sarah sucked in a breath.

She opened the book to the familiar words—because, even after nine years, she still knew them by heart.

*Once upon a time, there was a beautiful young girl whose stepmother always made her stay home with the baby. And the baby was a spoiled child, and wanted everything to himself, and the young girl was practically a slave. But what no one knew is that the King of the Goblins had fallen in love with the girl, and he had given her certain powers.*

“King of the Goblins,” Sarah muttered, absorbed by the memory of mismatched eyes, “Jareth.”

In the moment after the name left her lips, time stopped. A terrible chill engulfed Sarah, and a rushing sound filled her ears. For a split second, she couldn’t see anything. Her room was dense in its darkness, and then suddenly, the world was itself again.

Sarah blinked, breathing roughly. Everything appeared to be the same. She was still alone in her room, sitting on the edge of her bed, holding her old book. Once again, it seemed her overactive imagination was playing tricks on her. Maybe she really was crazy. Chuckling nervously, she let out a sigh of sweet relief.

Then, quite suddenly, a figure silently emerged out of the shadow next to her window.
Sarah wanted to scream, but no sound could escape her mouth. She gaped in horror as the figure stepped closer to her, finally bathed in the moonlight where she could recognize him for who he was.

There was no thunderstorm, no sneaking goblins in her room, no persistent owl clawing at her window and no shower of glitter signifying his entrance, but the Goblin King was no less impressive. If anything, he was more so.

Tall and imposing, he was exactly as she remembered him. He was clothed entirely in black, in the familiar open shirt and tight breeches paired with leather boots. A strange pendant gleamed at her from around the man’s neck. A halo of platinum hair framed his hard-lined face like a circle of fire. His sharp teeth were set in a feral grin, and his mismatched eyes, one pupil larger than the other, bore into hers mercilessly.

The predator sizing up its prey.

"My dear Sarah," he drawled casually, his cultured accent caressing her name as if it were a lover's, "It has been far too long."

Sarah still couldn't speak. This wasn't real, it couldn't be. She was dreaming, or had finally lost it. How many times had she thought of seeing the Goblin King again?

Whether she was dreaming or not, the Goblin King smirked at her, taking another step forward. He raised an eyebrow.

"No tantrum? Dear me, has little Sarah lost her spark?"

Sarah frowned at his taunt and miraculously found her voice.

"Assuming you're not a figment of my imagination, Goblin King, what are you doing here? You are not welcome," she hissed.

Jareth looked her up and down, a cold smile forming on his lips before he chuckled, his eyes glinting. Sarah felt some of her courage falter.

"Ah, but there you are wrong, Sarah, darling," he said smoothly, "You invited me here."

"No I most certainly did not!" shouted Sarah, leaping up from her seat on her bed.

"Yes, you did," replied Jareth, "You spoke my Fae name."

"So what?" she countered, "It's the first time I've even thought about you since the Labyrinth. So what if I remembered your worthless name?"

Jareth's expression grew dark, and in a flash, he was right in front of her, his strong grip twisting her arm. Sarah whimpered in pain, knowing she had gone too far.
"Do not lie to me, little Sarah," Jareth growled, "I am here because you wished it so, and now you can do nothing but accept the consequences of your foolish impulse."

"What? What are you talking about?" asked Sarah, her voice trembling in fear. He was too close to her. She could smell his scent; one of autumn and wild magic. She hated herself for it, but her knees grew weak.

Jareth smiled, bearing his sharp teeth, and leaned in to whisper in her ear,

"Time to go home, Sarah."

In a whirl of color, they were gone, the copy of *Labyrinth* lying open on the floor.
Apocalypse, Please

Chapter Summary

“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 2

Apocalypse, Please

Declare this an emergency
Come on and spread a sense of urgency
And pull us through, and pull us through
And this is the end
This is the end of the world
It's time we saw a miracle
Come on it's time for something biblical
To pull us through, and pull us through
And this is the end
This is the end of the world…
(“Apocalypse, Please”, Absolution, Muse)

In what felt like both days and seconds, Sarah opened her eyes. At first she couldn’t tell where she was, she was too dizzy, and it was too dark. Sinking to her knees, she stared at cold hard ground. After the spinning stopped, she was able to look up.

She was on the hill just above the gate to the Labyrinth, only this time; it was night in the Underground. The inky black sky was starless except for a giant moon that looked so close she thought she might touch it if she ran far enough East. Off in the distance, she saw the Goblin City, and beyond that, his castle, dark and foreboding in the motionless night.

“It’s further than you think,” whispered a sly voice in her ear.

Sarah sprang to her feet and turned around. Jareth stood there, still smirking cruelly at her, a small crystal at his gloved fingertips. She was about to demand he return her home when she felt a familiar swooping sensation in her stomach. Collapsing to the ground, she retched, mere inches away from his shining black boots.
“Yes, the journey can sometimes be harrowing for more delicate humans,” tutted Jareth, sidestepping her and her sick. With a flick of his wrist, the evidence that she had been ill vanished. Wiping her mouth, Sarah looked up at him from the ground, her eyes narrowed.

“Take me back,” she whispered defiantly. He stared at her.

“What’s done is done, my dear Sarah,” he replied loftily, juggling the crystal between his two hands, “What’s said is said. You are home now.”

Sarah glared at him for a few moments before her lips curled into a satisfied smirk.

“You have no power over me,” she hissed venomously. To her instant shock, nothing happened except Jareth’s eyes reduced to slits.

“Foolish girl,” he whispered dangerously, “Your arrogance won’t relieve you this time, my dear. You are no longer a runner, or a child at that. The rules have changed.”

“This will never be my home,” growled Sarah, urging herself to stand. Her legs felt like jelly, but she didn’t like him towering over her.

“Au contraire, my little one,” said Jareth silkily, “You made it so.”

“I did not!” shouted Sarah.

“There is no use exclaiming how unfair your life is, darling,” said Jareth, anticipating her next choice of words. Sarah shut her mouth, glaring at him.

“Why have you brought me here?” she asked quietly, her hands balled into fists.

“I?” asked Jareth, laughing, “Me, tra la la? You brought yourself here, Sarah, you. I have only given you a lift—as to the how’s and the why’s, do not ask it of me, love. You will have to decipher the riddle yourself. I can only show you the way.”

With a flourish of his hands (Sarah just noticed that the crystal had vanished), he gestured to the Labyrinth. Looking down, she saw the gate had opened.
“I’m not running your little maze again, Goblin King,” she spat. Jareth’s smirk turned into a mocking grin.

“You may not be a runner in the strictest sense, darling, but as it pleases me, I assure you that you are,” he said.

“What if I just turn around and run the other way?” Sarah countered. As if to demonstrate her point, she glanced behind her fleetingly and caught nothing but the still darkness. Upon turning back around, she noticed Jareth standing much closer to her, all humor gone from his face. Instead, he wore a sneer.

“Then you will have let your stubbornness lead you into wild countryside, where there is no shortage of beasts and brutes who will try to harm you—in more than one sense," said Jareth dryly. "No, Sarah, I think you'll find my little maze agreeable enough."

“I have nothing to find. I have nothing to seek, no one to save—no reason to find my way to the castle this time,” she argued, trying in vain to keep the desperation from creeping into her voice. The heat of his gaze was unnerving her.

“Don’t you?” he asked, and before she could argue with him further, he was gone in a shimmer of glitter.

Sarah let out an angry noise like a cat.

“Show-off,” she muttered. Now that Jareth was gone, she felt it appropriate to let herself cry a little. Sinking to her knees again, she let the hot tears run down her cheeks as she stared down at the open gate to the Labyrinth.

What could she do now? She had no way of getting home without Jareth taking her there. And whether or not he was embellishing about the vast expanse of land behind her being chock-full of danger, she wasn’t one to risk it; not to mention, she’d most likely get lost, anyway.

There was nothing for it. She would have to play his Majesty’s twisted little game and re-run the Labyrinth. She would have to go back to what had been haunting her for the last nine years.

Wiping her tears with the back of her hand, Sarah suddenly tensed. With the moon as her only source of light, it made it hard to tell, but she was fairly certain someone very short and stout was moving slowly toward the entrance to the Labyrinth. With a jolt of recognition, Sarah stood. Could it be…?
After she had left the Labyrinth, she had never contacted her friends again. It wasn’t that she hadn’t wanted to; on the contrary, sometimes, when the loneliness threatened to overwhelm her, her desire to call out to them was so strong she caught herself mid-sentence. But she never did. Had she done so, it would have meant admitting that the Labyrinth—all of it—had been real. It had been nine years since she had last seen Hoggle.

Until, perhaps, now…

Rushing down the hill, tears still streaming down her face, Sarah broke into a run. It had to be him. She couldn’t believe she had forgotten that she had had friends here, people besides the cold, cruel King clearly hell-bent on vengeance. If she could just see a friendly face in this awful place, then maybe she could make it through the Labyrinth again and convince Jareth to release her.

That is, if Hoggle doesn’t hate you for all the years of silence.

Quite abruptly, Sarah halted at the thought, and in the process, tripped over her own feet with a loud OOF that broke the quiet—as well as made her fall flat on her face.

“Who’s there? If it’s that damn Bloewsabella again, I swear it, missy, you come near my chomping roses with another nasty frost and I’ll have you—Sarah?!”

Panting a bit, Sarah hoisted herself back up into a kneeling position before finally managing to look up at the little dwarf now standing in front of her, eyes wide in shock.

“Hoggle?” she croaked. She was surprised to hear how strained her voice sounded.

“Sarah?” he asked incredulously, “What in the names of baātten and päätten are you doing here?!!”

“Oh, Hoggle!” she cried, attempting to rise rapidly and failing miserably. Frustrated, she pulled herself up in order to stand, ignoring the slight wave of dizziness that overcame her as she sprinted toward her friend. Hoggle let out a little “oomph” as their bodies collided, but did not push her away. She sunk to a kneel again so she was at his eye level, and without any warning, promptly began sobbing into his rough shoulder.

“Sarah, Sarah, why are you here? Does Jareth know you’re here? Sarah, if he finds out—” Hoggle started. Sarah released the dwarf, wiping her eyes furiously so she could see him.

“He more than knows I’m here, Hoggle,” she said miserably, “He brought me here!”

“He brought you? But...Sarah, that doesn’t make any sense,” said Hoggle.
“Well, he did,” said Sarah.

“He couldn’t have just taken you for no reason,” said Hoggle slowly, rubbing his chin, “You would’ve had to wish yourself here, or be wished away by someone else. Unless…”

“Unless what, Hoggle?” asked Sarah. Hoggle looked up at her seriously.

“Did you do anything before he came and took you?” he asked.

Sarah sighed, embarrassed. She had done so well before what was really only a few hours ago…one tiny slip in nine years…

“Yes, Hoggle,” she said in a resigned voice, “I said his name. I was rereading the beginning of the book and I said his name.”

At that, Hoggle’s brow furrowed in slight confusion, but to her surprise, Hoggle didn’t immediately reprimand her for her foolishness. He didn’t say anything, just resumed stroking his chin in thought before glancing around into the night.

“No matter why you’re here, you’ll have to go through the Labyrinth again,” he said grimly, still peering around cautiously. Just then, he seemed to come to himself, and turned to fix her with glare.

“And you won’t be getting any help from me, missy!”

“Hoggle?” Sarah asked, trepidation coloring her voice.

“You heard me,” he harrumphed, promptly turning his back on her and continuing his trek towards the Labyrinth’s entrance. To Sarah’s surprise, though, he kept up a stream of grumbling conversation.

“Some friend…never once…it’s been years and years and years without a word…”

“Hoggle, wait!” called Sarah, scrambling to get up once again so she could follow her small friend.

“Nothing doing,” said Hoggle, “I’m not falling for all of that again. ‘Friends’, indeed! We was such
good friends when you needed me to get you through the Labyrinth, but after that—"

“Is that what you think?” Sarah asked, desperately trying to keep her voice steady as she followed Hoggle inside the maze, picking her way over the wayward branches and stones that littered the Labyrinth floor. They took a left, and then Hoggle found an opening immediately in what, to the untrained eye, seemed like miles of a straight path. At her question, Hoggle stopped, but didn’t turn around, and didn’t speak. Sarah’s heart seemed to be in her throat, which would explain why it was so hard to get any words out.

“Hoggle, I—I know what you must think of me. And I don’t blame you for being angry...not in the least. There’s no excuse, really. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I never...I’m sorry.” Her voice broke.

Slowly, Hoggle turned around to face her, his squat little figure stiff; his large eyes vulnerable. For such a proud, haughty little man, he always did have trouble hiding his true feelings with those eyes of his.

“Why, Sarah? Did you...just not need any of us anymore?”

Sarah hung her head. If it was difficult to speak before, it was impossible now. A few moments of tense silence passed before Sarah started to speak, and then somehow, all of the words she had wanted to say for years started spilling out of her.

“No, Hoggle—I did need you. Of course I needed you! I needed you so much that I stopped myself from calling out to you and Ludo and Sir Didymus more times than I can count.”

“Why, then?” Hoggle asked stubbornly.

“Because,” Sarah started, tears starting to leak out of her eyes again, “Hoggle, I live in a world where you’re not supposed to be real. Do you know what that’s like? Remembering something everyone else would think you’re crazy for? Sometimes, I still think I am insane, and this is all just one long dream...that it can’t be real. Don’t you see? I had to grow up. Over the years I convinced myself none of it had happened; that I had made it all up. How else was I supposed to live in a world where magic didn’t exist?”

By then, Sarah was full-out crying again, and angry at herself it. She was turning into a human hosepipe.

“Ah, Sarah, don’t cry,” said Hoggle, stepping toward her cautiously.

“I’m sorry, Hoggle, I really am,” Sarah choked out.
“‘S’all right,” Hoggle said gruffly, “I was just surprised to see you is all. I dunno how long it’s been for you, Sarah, but it’s been a while for us. Here in the Underground, that is. You look different.”

Sarah smiled weakly.

“I am,” she said, “I’m much older than I was before.”

Hoggle raised his eyebrows, and then very obviously coughed. Sarah hiccuped, wiping away the last of her tears, and quirked an eyebrow at his strange response.

“Come on then,” he said hurriedly, peering around them once more, “We might as well be walking and talking.”

They started to move again, wending their way through the maze slowly, Sarah especially so—she felt like someone had put her through the laundry machine before wringing her out to dry, both emotionally and physically. On top of that, her stomach still felt strange from the journey to the Underground. Still, she had to keep moving.

“So…” Sarah began.

“So.” said Hoggle. “How long has it been in that place you come from? Last time I saw you, you was a girl, but now—”

Sarah chuckled.

“It’s been nine years. Almost ten. I’m 24 now.”

“And what do you do in your…place?” asked Hoggle, glancing back at her. He seemed concerned for some reason.

“I teach small children, and I still go to school, but I’ve been there for a while. I’m almost done,” supplied Sarah.

Hoggle nodded.

“There, do you have a—a man who…?” Hoggle began. He didn’t seem to know how to finish his sentence. This time, Sarah held back a laugh.
“Are you blushing, Hoggle?” she asked, giggling.

“No!” he protested, frowning in embarrassment, “I was only askin’ because...well...I don’t know nothing about your world, do I? Sarah, I’m worried about what Jareth brought you here for...last time, you was too young, but now...if you had a man that was yours at home, maybe he won’t…”

Sarah’s eyes widened.

“I don’t,” she admitted, her face flushing.

“But don’t worry about that, Hoggle,” she continued reassuringly, “I’m guessing your King is just happy getting his little revenge now all because I slipped up. Once I solve his Labyrinth again, I can go home. I did this once, remember?”

“It’s not that simple, Sarah,” said Hoggle, “You said all you did was say his name, and then he brought you here. None of it makes sense. If all you did was say his name, then all that really let him do is find you. He can only take those who are wished away, and they aren’t often full-grown...er...ladies.”

“So you don’t know why was he able to bring me here?” pressed Sarah. Hoggle stopped walking, turning to look up at her, his expression fearful.

“I don’t,” he said truthfully, “But it ain’t good.” Slowly, Sarah nodded, biting her lip. Not wanting to appear deterred in front of Hoggle (or worse, start crying again), she glanced at the stone walls they were traveling through. The last time she had been in the Labyrinth, the stone had been rough and worn enough; now they seemed weathered by age, on the verge of crumbling into dust.

She pressed her palm to a wall, wondering how old the Labyrinth was. The stone was cold at first, but to her surprise, after a moment, it grew quite hot. Jolted by the sensation, Sarah pulled her hand back.

Sarah’s eyes widened. In the space where her hand had been, the stone had disappeared, creating a new opening in the Labyrinth—what appeared to be a more direct path to the castle.

"Hoggle?” Sarah called. The frightened tone of her voice brought Hoggle to her side before she could utter another word.

“Where did that opening come from?” asked Hoggle.
“I touched the wall, and it appeared,” said Sarah.

"You made a new path?" Hoggle asked incredulously. Sarah nodded. Both stared down the dark entry that was the new lane. As far as they could both tell, it led onward to the castle, but it was too dark to see too far.

"Were you able to do that last time?" Hoggle asked. Both of them already knew the answer, but neither wanted to admit the strangeness of what had just happened.

"No," Sarah replied.

"The Labyrinth moves on its own, but never to help the people in it. We better avoid it, just to be safe," Hoggle surmised. Sarah couldn't have agreed more. They turned their backs on the new path and trudged on.

“Hoggle, why is the Labyrinth so…?" asked Sarah. She couldn’t think of the word.

“You noticed. Yeah, it's like it’s...tired, or summat.” Hoggle finished for her, sighing, “I think it’s still gettin’ better, Sarah. It was pretty wrecked after you left last time.”

“It was?” she asked, “Why?”

“I ‘spose because you beat it,” said Hoggle simply, “And you beat, well, him.”

Sarah didn’t need to ask who “him” was.

After what felt like hours of walking aimlessly through walls of stone, Sarah was having a rough go of it. She was weak from exhaustion, and being sick hadn’t helped. Had she known she’d be whisked away to the Underground and forced back into running the Labyrinth, she would have eaten something a little more substantial than a few pieces of Halloween candy for dinner.

Sarah and Hoggle didn’t speak much as they traveled through the darkness. It was much harder to see the moon inside the Labyrinth, and so the only real source of light they had was what shone off of the sparkling walls.
Sarah felt as though she was walking through a never-ending oubliette, an infinite black hole. The further she walked, the more it seemed that she was descending into darkness she wouldn’t be able to find her way out of. Another wave of dizziness hit her, this time much stronger than earlier. Her stomach started doing flip-flops, but she managed to stumble on without Hoggle noticing. When the walls started to spin around her, she stretched out a hand to find something solid to keep her balance. She could just barely make out Hoggle’s form trudging on slowly in front of her, and then everything went black.

Hoggle stopped abruptly after he heard her body crumple to the ground. He turned around, afraid at what he would see.

Her small form was spread at an awkward angle between the walls. She was slumped against the right side, as if she had hit her head against it, unmoving. He rushed forward, gently cradling her head and pulling it into his lap; struggling a bit with her weight.

“Oh, Sarah,” he mumbled, panting a little, “I don’t know what to do with you. Who knows why Jareth brought you here! I don’t know if you’re sleeping or sick. What do I do?”

“Perhaps you should run along, Hogwart,” issued a silky voice. Hoggle froze.

He was like the wind, the way he was able to move without making any sound. Slowly, Hoggle turned his head towards the voice.

Jareth stood directly behind him, towering over the little man like an irate vulture.

“What have you done to her?” asked Hoggle slowly, still clinging to Sarah, “Why did you bring her here?”

“That, Hogbrain, is none of your concern,” Jareth said slowly, raising an eyebrow at him, “Do you want the same punishment as the one you got for helping the girl years ago? Leave little Sarah to me. She has come here all on her own; you know the laws I am bound by. She must continue her trek the way it began.”

“What way?” asked Hoggle, his voice trembling. In the dark, Jareth’s avian eyes chilled his bones.


Slowly, and with great care, Hoggle moved Sarah’s head from his little lap to the stone floor. He looked down at the unconscious young woman sadly before turning to stare at his king with an expression of both fear and defiance.
Finally, he stepped away from Sarah’s body and hung his head, ashamed of his own cowardice. Jareth moved forward with the quickness of a ghost, scooping the girl up into his arms with surprising strength for his lithe body. Alarmed, Hoggle glared at him.

“I thought you said she needed to do it alone! Why you rat-”

“Careful, dwarf,” interrupted Jareth, his tone colder than ice. Hoggle opened his mouth to say something else, but the look on Jareth’s face promptly made him reconsider. His jaw closed with a snap.

“My dear Sarah,” whispered Jareth, brushing the young woman’s hair out of her face with a gloved fingertip. Hoggle started, frightened at what Jareth planned on doing to her, but in a rustle of the wind, both of them were gone, leaving Hoggle alone in the cold dark maze.

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Sarah was stiff. Her back and shoulders ached, and there was an unpleasant pain in her left temple. After remembering everything that had transpired, she opened her eyes, hoping it had all been a candy-induced dream, and that she would wake up in her apartment.

No such luck.

She was lying in a large four-poster bed adorned with lacy white curtains, still in the same (now rather dirty) clothes she had been in before Jareth had stolen her from the Aboveground. Carefully, she sat up. The pain in her left temple throbbed, but she grit her teeth and ignored it, swinging her legs over to one side of the bed.

On her right was an open window, sun streaming in, meaning it was no longer night in the Underground. Underneath the window was a solid oak desk, bare except for a stack of books gathering dust. Behind her, to the left of the bed, were two doors and a large wardrobe. Judging by the modest but comfortable room, Sarah knew she was no longer under Hoggle’s care. She frowned.

What had he done to poor Hoggle? She hoped he hadn’t thrown him into the Bog of Eternal Stench. And even more disconcerting, why had the ruthless Goblin King taken pity on her and brought her to the castle? She had thought that he wanted to see her struggle through the maze once more; she doubted she would be lucky enough to get out of it because she had passed out from overexposure to magic, or whatever it had been.

Sarah bit her lip. Despite her abrupt change in location, the fact that she needed Jareth to take her home was still true. Sighing, resigned, Sarah stood up slowly from the bed. She stretched out her sore muscles a bit before heading towards the two doors. She chose the one on the left first, only to
be greeted by a small but brightly lit bathroom. Curious, Sarah peered in to find not only the necessary facilities, but also a large gilded mirror and vanity in the corner.

Shrugging, Sarah closed the door and chose the door to the right, only to find herself in a dark and deserted corridor. She stalled for a moment, letting her eyes adjust to the sudden darkness in contrast to her bright room, and then started moving forward through the shadows, wondering where to look first.

She assumed he would be in his throne room, which she remembered vaguely from last time. She dearly hoped he wasn’t in that Escher-like room with all of the stairs—she didn’t think her stomach would be able to take it at the moment.

After fifteen minutes of fruitless searching down endless passageways, Sarah began to grow exasperated. Doors upon doors surrounded her, but she had no inkling of where to go, and she had climbed staircase after another up and down again. Jareth’s castle was a labyrinth in itself. She was hopelessly lost.

Leaning against a wall, she assessed the situation. Should she call for him? Would that even work here the way it had obviously worked in the Aboveground? She couldn’t waste much more time. She had to get home. Time ran differently here, and she didn’t yet understand how. She needed to find Jareth and demand he take her back. Maybe it was the only way.

Before she could will herself to spit out his name again, a lone crystal rolled across the floor from behind her towards a large set of double doors at the end of the corridor. Sarah followed it, rolling her eyes—he had such a flair for the dramatic. She pushed the doors open, allowing the crystal to roll inside to its master.

Before Sarah could focus on the smug Goblin King waiting inside the room, the room itself captured her eye (which was saying something, as the King certainly commanded attention). It was the largest library she had ever seen, with walls upon walls of books of every shape, size, and color.

Her jaw dropped open of its own accord and she was forcibly reminded of *Beauty and the Beast*. The teenage romantic in Sarah would have liked to be Belle—but then Jareth would have to be the Beast, and she knew the end to that version of the story. At that thought, she shut her mouth, internally cursed Walt Disney, and tore her eyes away from the inviting books and towards the unforgiving Goblin King.

He was lounging on what looked like a very comfortable chintz armchair, his calf resting across his thigh, gloved fingertips pressed together underneath his chin. He watched her as if he was watching a mildly interesting television program, his lips curled into a smirk. He wore gray breeches today, paired with a billowy white shirt, his odd pendant, and a black leather vest to match his boots.

Sarah averted her eyes from his figure, blushing slightly, and looked him in his mismatched eyes.

“My dear Sarah,” he said slowly, still watching her, “I’m glad to see you’re awake from your beauty sleep.”
“What have you done to Hoggle?” she asked immediately. Her hands made their way to her hips, which she cocked to one side in open defiance. He quirked an eyebrow at her, his smirk widening.

“What have I done to poor Higgle? Sarah, darling, what must you think of me to assume I’ve done anything to him at all?” asked Jareth, standing slowly before looking her up and down. Sarah felt the color burn her cheeks.

“He’s not with me anymore, so you must have done something,” she returned.

“You blacked out, Sarah, I merely saved you the rest of your trip through my Labyrinth. Hoggle has returned to his post,” he said smoothly, walking toward her, “You should be on bended knee thanking me for my generosity.”

“Thanking you?!?” asked Sarah incredulously, “Thank you for kidnapping me and forcing me to play your pathetic game for no reason? You’re out of your mind.”

In a flash, Jareth was in front of her again. Sarah backed up against the wall, trapped. He had propped both of his long arms against the wall on either side of her; though they weren’t actually touching, she was unable to move an inch, his breath at her neck. What was he, one large glittery vampire? If Sarah's heart hadn't been racing in slight panic, she might've laughed at such a ludicrous idea.

“I would be careful, little Sarah,” he whispered softly, eyes trained on hers, which were wide open in surprise, “I have been lenient with you thus far. I have let you into my castle without making you solve my Labyrinth yet again. I have been more than generous.”

“Get out of my way,” Sarah hissed, “I’m not a little fifteen-year-old anymore; you can’t frighten me.” He chuckled.

“No, you are not so young anymore,” he said quietly, his too-close breath sending shivers down her spine as he let his mouth travel up the side of her throat to her ear, “On the contrary, Sarah, I believe I frighten you in quite a different way.”

Her eyes widened once again at his implication. Smirking, he took a few steps back, his eyes still dancing with mirth. She gulped, refusing to look at him straight-on.

“Go back to your room, Sarah, wash and change. You will meet me for supper in one hour,” he said.
She opened her mouth to argue, but he had already disappeared. Sarah let out another little growl of frustration. It was so…*unfair* that he kept doing that!

Well, if he wanted to play the hard way, she would do so. She would pull a Belle and disregard his *request*. He could eat his tainted food all by himself, and once she was sure he was busy or sleeping, she would try and find Hoggle…he had to have at least some idea of a way she could get out of here.

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After searching for her room for nearly half an hour, Sarah was finally able to locate it after opening many different other doors that seemed to lead nowhere and everywhere. Sighing, she stepped inside and shut the door, locking it. She doubted a lock would stop Jareth from entering if he really wanted to, but at least she would get the message across.

Looking down at herself, Sarah cringed. Traveling (and falling a lot) through the dusty, dirty outer perimeter of the Labyrinth had done her appearance—and her cleanliness—no favors. Perhaps it wouldn’t be a terrible idea to wash and change…after all, she wasn’t doing it to obey *him*, but because she wanted to. There was a difference.

And she wasn’t going to do anything else his *Highness* demanded.

Making up her mind, Sarah strode through the door to the facilities, shutting and locking it behind her once again. Once inside, she paused. The tub was ancient, sitting on clawed feet that greatly resembled a goblin’s, but it stood alone. It was not connected to any pipes, and somehow Sarah doubted the Underground utilized the wonder that was indoor plumbing. How on earth was she supposed to fill it?

Hesitantly, she sat on the edge of the tub and dipped her hand inside, hoping to find a knob or a bucket to fill, but amazingly as soon as she felt her hand go past the rim, she felt it submerge in warm water. The tub filled when she had wished it so.

Sarah tried not to the let the strangeness bother her.

She stood up, looking around for a towel for when she was finished. A few hung on the wall near the vanity. Satisfied, she stripped off her clothes, leaving them on the vanity, and stepped inside the tub.

The warm water felt like heaven on her sore muscles, and Sarah couldn’t help but lay her head back against the edge and sigh in contentment. If she didn’t think about it for a few seconds, she could almost imagine she wasn’t in a strange otherworld, stolen away by an incensed Goblin King hell-bent on revenge.

Sarah sat in the tub for a full ten minutes before attempting to wash herself clean. It was then that she realized her hour was nearly up, and she didn’t really want Jareth bursting in demanding her
presence while she wasn’t clothed. With only twenty minutes left, she set about washing her hair and body with the soaps (encased in crystal bottles, naturally) next to the tub.

With ten minutes left, Sarah nearly jumped out of the tub. She grabbed a towel, wrapped it around her body tightly, and set about looking in the wardrobe. Inside were dresses upon dresses, nearly all made from soft and silky materials Sarah didn’t recognize. It wasn’t as if she expected there to be Aboveground clothing provided for her, but the loss set off a little pain in her heart. There was once a time where she would’ve loved to play dress-up in any one of these gowns, but that sort of urge had evaporated some nine years ago.

Reluctantly, she grabbed a frock in midnight blue with matching slippers. It was light and airy, so it would be easy to run in if need be, but it was still dark so she could hopefully blend in with the shadows. The shoes were a bit delicate, but the rest were just much too elaborate to suit her purpose.

Once dressed, Sarah glanced at the clock on the wall. Six minutes left. She walked back into the bathroom and sat in front of the vanity, gazing at her reflection. She was still the same Sarah—the same long dark hair, the same large green eyes, the same pale skin and pink lips. Idly, she wondered if she looked any different to Jareth, or if the aging of humans was like seeing the life and the death of a fly to him. Hoggle had said she looked different, though. It hardly mattered, anyway, but she couldn’t seem to shake his little remark from earlier.

Getting annoyed with herself for her train of thought, she picked up a brush left on top of the vanity and perhaps a little too violently ran it through her hair in an attempt to get out the wet tangles.

She knew that Jareth would come storming in any minute now, and it made her nervous. She tried counting strokes, but it was to no avail. Her heart seemed to be beating like a racehorse.

After she dropped the brush a few times, she gave up and retreated into the bedroom. She made to sit on the bed, thought better of it, and sat at the desk in anticipation. She looked at the clock again. One minute left. Sarah looked down at her hands. They were visibly shaking! Getting even more irritated with herself, she clasped her hands together and sat there, waiting.

One minute passed. Then two. The time went slowly. By ten past, Sarah let out a breath she hadn’t known she was holding. It seemed she was safe, for now. Perhaps Jareth was giving her time to herself. Whatever his thoughts were, she was sure that he would have collected her by now if he really wanted to.

Trying to ignore her growing hunger, Sarah got up from the desk and lay down on the bed. She wasn’t too tired, having rested most of the day, but she thought sleep would be best if she was to wake up in the middle of the night and try and find Hoggle. Perhaps he knew something about the lands outside of the Labyrinth’s border; if they were really as dangerous as Jareth had said they were. The more she thought about it, it seemed obvious that he may have been just trying to scare her. Still, it wouldn’t do to go barreling into unexplored territory armed with nothing. Sarah was a firm believer in knowledge being one of the universe’s greatest weapons.
Despite this semblance of a plan she was beginning to form, a part of her was reluctant to leave the Labyrinth. She was doubtful that Jareth’s power was only contained within the Labyrinth itself, and quite certain that if she tried, he would inevitably stop her. With that worrisome thought in her head, she turned over to her side and shut her eyes, willing herself to dream of home.

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When Sarah awoke, it was dark in her room. She rose up slowly, not wanting to disturb the silence. True, she was alone in her room, but somehow that thought did not comfort her. The fact that Jareth had never come for her made her uneasy, but she pressed on. She had to at least try to get out of here. If nothing else, it would show his Majesty that she wasn’t about to give up anytime soon.

Looking around the room, she decided she had better get moving. She didn’t need her Aboveground clothes; it was better to leave them here. She realized then that she didn’t really have high hopes of actually escaping—that outfit was one of her favorites. Pushing that thought to the back of her mind, she left her room, quiet as a mouse.

It took her ages to steal through the hallways, looking for goblins or worse, their King. It was the first time she was thankful that the castle was so dark. She moved slowly, and by the time she finally saw the archway leading to the throne room, she breathed in blessed relief. Slipping through the large room littered with chicken feathers and a few little sleeping goblins, Sarah held her breath. She made it through the other entrance and quietly out of the doors to the castle. Shutting the large wooden doors carefully behind her, she turned to face the still Goblin City.

“My, my, what have we here?”

Sarah’s heart deflated on the spot. There the Goblin King stood in all his menacing glory, waiting for her. She knew it was too good to be true…Jareth would never willingly let her go. He was the kind of man you imagined played with his food before eating it. Sarah grimaced.

One look at Jareth and Sarah knew he was not amused. He was dressed entirely in black again, including an impressive traveling cloak that whirled around his feet in the wind. His eyes glinted with anger, and his smile was something akin to a wolf baring its teeth, readying itself for the attack.

“Going somewhere, Sarah?” he asked. Sarah stood still, frozen. He laughed at her, before stalking towards her. She stood rooted to the spot.

“If you wanted to run my Labyrinth again, Sarah, all you had to do was ask,” he said coldly, grabbing her arm. Sarah blinked, and suddenly they were no longer standing at the door to his castle, but in the glittering maze once more. Sarah could tell from the stone that they were in outer perimeter of the Labyrinth, furthest from the castle.
"No traitorous dwarf to help you this time, love, as I have conveniently transported us to the other side of the maze, far from his post and the exit," whispered Jareth, closing the distance between them. Sarah stiffened as he raised a gloved finger to her cheek.

"But as I’ve said, I am generous. No 13 hours—take all the time you need, darling," he murmured, and with an intake of her breath, he was, once again, gone.

Sarah felt her eyes burning with tears of frustration, and she suppressed a whimper that could easily have turned into a sob. She clenched her hands into fists and looked around, deciding to go right. If his plan was to force her to run his Labyrinth for the rest of her life, so be it. She would keep going. He wanted to break her; that much was clear. She wouldn’t let him.

She kept walking, not daring to run. She had to take her time. She knew there was no use trying to find Hoggle—Jareth obviously knew that that had been her plan all along. And she didn’t want to think about what would happen if she continued to try and leave the Labyrinth altogether. She had to keep her wits about her.

Left, right, then left again, then two rights, then left. She tried to count which way was winning over the other, but it was useless.

Now and again she would meet a dead end and have to go back, but otherwise she kept moving. She moved slowly. Despite the rest she had had before, she was tiring. Her feet hurt, and her stomach growled uncontrollably. She was weakening from hunger, or perhaps from dehydration, but she was determined not to let Jareth get the best of her. She hadn’t let him when she was fifteen, and she wouldn’t now.

Through walls and walls of stone, she wondered how long it would take her to reach hedges, and then forest, and then trash, and then finally the city. That is, if it all happened in the same order as last time (she wouldn’t be at all surprised if it didn’t). She thought about trying to make a new path as she had seemed to have done with Hoggle, but she didn’t trust that it wouldn’t lead to something dangerous.

Looking around at her surroundings, she felt claustrophobic. The Labyrinth seemed to tower over her menacingly. Before it had seemed like nothing more than a large puzzle at times, despite some of her rather trying run-ins with its inhabitants. Last time, she never doubted that she would figure it out and save Toby. Last time, she had never doubted herself. Now the very walls seemed alive, closing in around her.

Sarah’s throat burned. How long had it been since she had eaten something or had a glass of water? Her head was swimming. Her will was fading, and she was angry at herself for it. How had she done this last time? With a fat lot of help, she thought bitterly, and it was easier then, knowing Toby was at risk.

She hurried forward before noticing an opening to her right where the light from the moon was able to permeate the darkness. Distracted by the sudden glow, Sarah cautiously walked through.

She was in a clearing of the Labyrinth, it seemed. Walls still surrounded the open space, but in the
center was a giant pool of sparkling water, clear as glass. All around the pool, bordering the walls, were trees dotted with blushing fruit.

Peaches.

Sarah’s stomach whined at her in protest, but she ignored it and stumbled toward the inviting water. Kneeling by the side of the pool, she cupped her hands together and dipped them into it, causing ripples. Greedily, she tipped her hands to her lips and drank.

She lost count of how many times she drank. Mindlessly, she continued to gulp down handful after handful. The water was cool on her dry hands and throat, and it tasted like sweet relief, allowing her to ignore the call of the juicy peaches nearby.

After what felt like hours but really could only have been minutes, she was pulled from her reverie by a noise, a twitch in the cold stillness. The hair on the back of her neck stood up, and still kneeling, she turned around.

A few feet from her sat a barn owl, perched in the nearest peach tree. He (and Sarah knew this owl couldn’t be female) cocked his head to the side, staring at her. Defeated, Sarah sank further in her kneel as the owl flew down to the ground in front of her before sprouting into a man—or, more fittingly, a King.

"Poor, starving little beast," said Jareth slowly, circling her the way an owl would circle a mouse, "I did not want this, Sarah. I offered you nourishment but you denied me. You constantly do this; defy me, deny me."

“I don’t want what you offer me,” Sarah croaked. Her mouth was dry, despite the copious amounts of water she had drunk.

“I can’t trust whatever you give me,” she continued, “How do I know it isn’t poisoned, or drugged? How do I know you even want me alive?”

Jareth stepped forward again, kneeling in front of her so that they were at eye level with one another. He gently grabbed her chin and tilted it upward, forcing her to meet his eyes.

“You don’t,” he murmured. Her eyes watched his lips move.

“And do you?” she whispered, her breath taken away by his proximity, his honesty, his curiously mismatched eyes boring into hers. She wondered vaguely if he would lie this time.

“Want you alive?” he repeated. He mirrored her, his eyes leaving hers to glance at her lips, “Oh yes, Sarah. Very much so do I want you living.”
He grinned, and before Sarah knew it, she was being scooped up into his arms like a child. Before she could emit another sound of protest, they were gone in a whirl of wind and color, a shower of shining dust swirling behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Yay, chapter 2! Thanks to anyone who reads, comments, or gives kudos. I'm trying to upload all of the chapters that are on Fanfic here as quickly as I am able. Thanks again!
“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. “The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

As soon as reality was gone for Sarah, it was suddenly back again. They emerged in the library, now lit by numerous lamps dotted across the room like faerie lights. In the far corner were two chairs; between them a small table laden with food. She was still in Jareth’s arms, and to her own shock, she was clinging to him rather tightly. After realizing this, she let go, and started to proclaim that he put her down. He ignored her, carrying her over to the place setting, and gingerly placed her in the left armchair.

Scrambling to sit upright as he sat across from her, she looked at the full plate in front of her. Her stomach grumbled, but she hesitated. She looked up to see Jareth’s eyes on her again.

“Eat, Sarah,” he commanded. Sarah gave in, reaching for a piece of bread. She tore off a piece, stuck it into her mouth, and began to chew. The pangs in her stomach changed to a purr. It tasted delicious; freshly baked, and still warm.
“Do know much about the food of the Fae, Sarah?” asked Jareth, still watching her. Sarah shook her head no slowly, suspicious, but she continued to eat in silence.

“It was rumored, in your world, that to accept food from the Fae would mean that they were eternally trapped in Faerie,” he said slowly, watching her eat. Sarah’s fork clattered to the table as she abruptly stopped eating.

“So now I’m trapped here, in the Underground?” she hissed, glaring daggers at him.

“So dramatic, Sarah,” Jareth drawled, “You ate Fae food the last time you were here, did you not? You were perfectly capable of leaving us then.”

Sarah instantly relaxed, picking up her fork again. The potatoes were better than any she had had before.

“So it’s not true, then? I’m able to leave the Underground?” Sarah dared to ask. Jareth smirked.

“It is perfectly true,” he said, “And Sarah, you will never be able to leave the Underground for any indefinite period of time.”

“What?” asked Sarah, “I don’t understand.”

“To eat Fae food is to become trapped in Faerie, or, as you said, the Underground,” Jareth continued, “But as I said before, you left after taking a bite of my enchanted peach. It puzzled me too, for some time.”

“So why was I able to leave?” pressed Sarah, “Why did you bring me here now?”

“Once again, Sarah, you fail to grasp the truth of your situation,” Jareth murmured, a touch of anger coloring his voice, “It was not I who decided you would come here. It was you, when you said those wretched words all those years ago, and when you were foolish enough to say my name once more.”

“I don’t understand,” said Sarah heatedly, “If you would just-”
“Sarah,” interrupted Jareth. Sarah promptly shut her mouth.

“You were able to leave, little Sarah, because the Labyrinth allowed you to. In your rather dramatic attempt to recover your brother, you claimed I had no power over you, something no one had ever professed before,” Jareth began, his lips curling into an oddly handsome sneer. Sarah could tell he did not enjoy recalling the particular memory.

“The Labyrinth has it’s own magic, an extension of my own power, if you will. When you said those words, it branded you for all eternity, much more deeply than any bite of an enchanted peach ever could. You singlehandedly destroyed my Labyrinth—it sought this, because it marked you as my equal. Essentially, the Labyrinth lay in ruin on purpose. It saw a greater power, and set about reshaping to encompass it.”

“But it’s reshaped already,” said Sarah slowly, “It’s the same as before. It’s healing, Hoggle showed me when we were passing through.”

“Not quite,” said Jareth, “There was a piece missing before, one that I had ignored, one that had to age before it could be claimed. It took me some time before I was able to understand why the Labyrinth was not reforming the way it should; why it had been reduced to magical rubble in the first place. Your power, Sarah.”

“My power?” asked Sarah, “I haven’t got any-”

“I have just told you, Sarah, darling,” said Jareth impatiently, “When you said those words, the Labyrinth deemed you worthy of magic and gave you not only the power to leave and age appropriately, but also the power to rule it by my side. It is rebuilding, reforming, reshaping to match both you and I. It is sentient, but under my control, and it grows impatient. It wants to be restored to its former glory just as much as I want it to.”

Sarah stared at him, eyes wide.

“So…you’re saying that you brought me here because I have to rule the Labyrinth with you, according to the magic I invoked last time?”

“You brought yourself here by carelessly uttering my true name, and likely because you are—and always will be—drawn to the magic you unknowingly claimed as half yours,” said Jareth smoothly, leaning in towards her, “You are bound to the Labyrinth. You are marked for eternity, just as I am.”

“How were you able to take me away in the first place?,” Sarah asked, “Hoggle said I would’ve had
“I have told you this,” Jareth said, aggravated, “You spoke my Fae name. I never revealed it to you; to do so would have given you power over me. You learned it from that traitorous dwarf, and by speaking it, I was able to journey Aboveground without needing to collect someone wished away. It was my duty to bring the Queen of the Labyrinth back.”

“Queen?” asked Sarah, gulping. “No thanks. I’d rather be an English teacher.”

“T’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He sat back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips.

“The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

It took Sarah a moment to respond. This couldn’t be happening. She had won. She had beaten this… this man and yet she was the one who was bound to live a life in a strange world, alone?

Well, alone except for him, the person (or faerie, or sorcerer, or whatever) who wanted nothing more than to exact his revenge on her.

Well, so far he was doing an excellent job.

“As far as revenge goes, Goblin King, you are unparalleled in your efforts,” she hissed, leaping to her feet. Her half-eaten plate lay forgotten. Jareth narrowed his eyes at her, opening his mouth to speak, but Sarah didn’t let him get a word in.

“I beat you, remember? You stole away my brother, you forced me to run your wretched Labyrinth, you tricked me and drugged me and tried distracting me but I beat you in the end!” Sarah shouted, clenching her hands into fists.

“Sarah-” Jareth warned.

“No!” Sarah yelled. “You’d think that after all of that you would have enough decency to be a graceful loser, but of course not. The Goblin King couldn’t allow a little girl to strike his pride. I played your game of tricks and lies and I beat you, and now your attempt at revenge is to force me to abandon my own life, trapped in a world of magic and deception forever with you? No. Fucking. Way.”
“Sarah!” roared Jareth, his eyes blazing with fury as he was suddenly on his feet in front of her. Just like earlier that day, he seemed much too close. Their noses were inches apart, eyes locked on each other.

“Do not try me, little Sarah,” Jareth growled, “You are no longer a child, and I will no longer treat you as such, or indulge you in your selfish wishes and childish fancies. I have saved you from your own destruction. I have given you everything you have asked for and you have thrown it back into my face. Did you never wonder why, after going back to that wretched place devoid of any magic or feeling or wonder, why the others could scarcely look at you? It is because you are too bright for their eyes to comprehend; they have become too cold, lacking belief in all that made a place such as this. If you were to remain Aboveground you would go slowly insane, never meant to exist in a place devoid of any true magic. You would never have lasted there. Once again, my love, you should be thanking me.”

“And those are the words of a King?” spat Sarah, “Take a bow, Goblin King—you’re out of your mind if you think I believe you for one second. You’re a sore loser and a terrible ruler if you think playing this fruitless game will work. You will never rule me.”

Sarah knew she had crossed a line. She had been intending to cross it. She anticipated him to hurt her, strike her down, anything that would match his obvious ire for her.

What he did do was infinitely more frightening.

For a moment, he didn’t move, he just stared at her, his eyes searing with rage, his lips pressed into a firm line. She almost thought he wasn’t even breathing. Finally, he moved.

Slowly, too slowly, his hand came up to caress her cheek. The leather of his glove was cold and smooth across it, and it took a great effort from Sarah not to close her eyes to the sensation. Her breathing was growing labored. Fury and something else entirely had set her skin on fire. Neither one broke eye contact; to do so somehow seemed the same as losing.

Without warning, Jareth’s other arm snaked its way around Sarah’s waist, pressing her body against his own. The hard lines shocked Sarah’s small, soft form. This wasn’t familiar. She hadn’t been this close to a man in...well.

Sarah couldn’t help it; she closed her eyes, despite the fear pulsing through her body like a tidal wave. She felt his mouth travel along her exposed collarbone, and then slowly up her neck. Sarah shuddered. If he hadn’t been holding her, she didn’t think she would have been able to stand.
“Sarah,” he murmured softly, his voice touched with a hint of something completely foreign before he pressed his lips to her throat in a chaste kiss.

A sound escaped from Sarah’s lips, but she didn’t recognize what it was. Jareth, however, knew a moan when he heard one, and grabbed her waist with both hands, pulling her, if possible, even more tightly against him. Sarah’s eyes opened in shock as she felt his body more fully against hers, and finally seemed to come to her senses with the realization that he was trying to prove just how easily he could gain power over her. And he was doing a hell of a job.

As if awoken from a dream, Sarah shook her head and tried pushing him off of her. He immediately let her go, looking down at her with dark eyes.

“Go now, little Sarah,” he said softly, his eyes burning, “Tomorrow, you will learn the consequences of insulting a King.”

Sarah stared at him for a few more seconds, unable to tear her eyes away for a reason she didn’t know, but eventually she collected herself and sprinted from the room, not daring to look back.

Jareth watched her go, a cruel smile forming on his pale lips.

“My beautiful Sarah,” he whispered to himself, “How you turned my world, you precious thing…no matter. It is my turn now.”

~||~

Back in her room, Sarah sank onto her bed, shaking. She glanced at the wall, looking for a clock, and was disappointed when she saw nothing. She didn’t know when the sun rose here, especially when a thirteenth hour was added, but she was sure she had less than five hours of sleep ahead of her before she would be woken up.

Unfortunately, she was wide-awake.

Back in the library, she had not only crossed the line between herself and the Goblin King, she had ran past it and spat on it along the way. She should’ve known he would find a new and more torturous way to punish her…

She buried her face in her hands, still shaking madly. It had felt too good, his body near hers. After so much neglect, after being so lonely for so long in the human world, he just had to demonstrate
how easily he could beat her pathetic little human body.

_I have saved you from your own destruction. I have given you everything you have asked for and you have thrown it back into my face. Did you never wonder why, after going back to that wretched place devoid of any magic or feeling or wonder, why the others could scarcely look at you? It is because you are too bright for their eyes to comprehend; they have become too cold, lacking belief in all that made a place such as this. If you were to remain Aboveground you would go slowly insane, never meant to exist in a place devoid of any true magic. You would never have lasted there._

Could it be true? Was that the reason she had never fit in, not since that first adventure nine years ago? Was that the reason why she had spooked nearly everyone she knew away? Was that the reason she was so alone? The idea that the Labyrinth had decided she would be Jareth’s prisoner-queen was cruel enough, but what was worse was the notion that she had condemned herself the moment she had claimed he held no power over her. Taking that triumph and turning it into the source of her current imprisonment was too much to bear. As for Jareth himself...had he really saved her from a lifetime in the Aboveground locked inside a padded cell?

If she chose to believe what he was telling her, whether it was true or not, she was facing the loss of her freedom, her whole life, either way.

Sarah’s head snapped up. No. She wouldn’t believe it, not yet. He had to be manipulating her, tricking her into believing what he wanted her to believe so he could keep her trapped here. He had never played fair; why would he start now? She was no fool. She wouldn’t let him win so easily.

With that thought in her mind, Sarah lay back, fully clothed, to drift into a fitful sleep.
“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter 4

City of Delusion

Can I believe
When I don't trust
All your theories
Turn to dust
I choose to hide
From the all seeing eye
Destroy this City of Delusion
Break these walls down…
(“City of Delusion”, Black Holes and Revelations, Muse)

The next morning, Sarah was rudely awakened by two small female goblins prodding and poking her.

“Wake up!” crowed the one on her left, a short plump little thing with a mess of ginger hair.

“I’ve never seen a human so lazy!” cried the one to her right, grabbing Sarah’s arm and pulling with surprising strength. She was taller than her companion, reaching nearly to Sarah’s waist, and had black hair to match her coal-black eyes. Both were old and weathered, with faces that looked as if they were carved out of wood—a feature customary of many goblins Sarah had come in contact with.

Sarah groaned, snatching her arm back from the black-haired one, and sat up. She had been right in thinking she wouldn’t get much sleep; she couldn’t have drifted off more than four hours prior. Glaring, she paid no attention to the little female goblins and slowly got out of bed.

“Too slow, little human!” shouted the first goblin.
“I’m going as fast as humanly possible at this hour,” Sarah mumbled, expecting them not to hear her.

To her immense surprise, both clucked at her and ushered her into the bathroom. Before she knew what was happening they were prying off her clothes and forcing her into the tub, exclaiming how late she was. Sarah didn’t have the strength to care, she just let herself be picked and fussed over.

After the fastest wash of her life (she had enough time to be amused by how you brushed your teeth in the Underground) and being stuffed into a pretty green dress that perfectly matched her eyes (though the bodice was a bit low-cut for Sarah’s modest taste), she was being towed out of her room by the two little goblins to who-knows-where.

After a series of dizzying staircases leading downward, Sarah was led through another set of large oak doors just past Jareth’s throne room. An enormous table, with room for at least 100 place settings, stretched the length of the long, high-ceilinged hall. At the end of the table sat Jareth eating breakfast, a grand fireplace crackling directly behind him.

At her entrance, the Goblin King looked up from his eggs, his lips curling into a mischievous grin.

“Sarah,” he murmured, inclining his head toward her, “Best get some breakfast, my dear.”

Sarah hesitated. He was being much too…cordial. She knew he was still angry with her, and didn’t care one jot. She was still angry with him.

Noticing that her goblin caretakers had vanished, Sarah set her mouth into a firm line and made her way to sit next to Jareth’s immediate right at the head of the table. Before them, a variety of breakfast foods sat waiting.

Jareth watched Sarah take every step, and his eyes didn’t leave her until she had settled herself in her seat and begun to take a helping of eggs and some toast.

“Eat up, Sarah,” Jareth remarked, “You will need your strength.”

“Will I?” asked Sarah, pausing her eating to take a sip of juice, trying to act as though his pleasure at her discomfort didn’t bother her in the least.

“Oh yes,” continued Jareth, “You will be going through a foreign part of the Labyrinth today. You did not venture there on your last visit. So young then, it seemed hideously cruel to spoil you so soon. Had it not been for your brazen manner last night, I would’ve thought you were still too young
to go there. Of course, your sentiments have proven me mistaken.”

Jareth raised his glass to her before drinking the rest of its contents. Sarah glared at him and bit back the tirade she wanted to hurl his way. So this was her punishment, was it? Her punishment for telling him exactly what he didn’t want to hear. Well, he could try and scare her all he wanted, she would get through this part of the Labyrinth or die trying.

And she knew he didn’t want her dead.

Upon her finishing her breakfast, Jareth stood, and to Sarah’s shock, pulled her chair out for her and offered her his hand. Reluctantly, Sarah took it and allowed him to pull her up gracefully.

“You do look very well today, Sarah,” he purred, pulling her close to him, “Regal, in fact.”

Just as Sarah was going to push herself free of him, she felt the transportation magic begin to take hold. She found herself burying her face into his chest, not wanting to see the popping lights as she knew they moved through space and time to where he was planning on depositing her. She could hear him chuckle as time both seemed to speed up and halt; colors burned and paled around her as they became no more than ghosts. She closed her eyes, and they were there.

Her eyes flickered open. They had moved past walls of glittering stone within the Labyrinth and made it to the dense hedge mazes. Before them was a large, rusty wooden door with a gleaming brass knocker and doorknob, placed in the center of the green path they stood in. Around the edge of the wood were gleaming runes and symbols Sarah had no hope of reading.

Just as Sarah was about to ask Jareth what was so frightening about a door, she realized she was still being held in his arms. Eyes wide, she looked up to see a strange look on his face, and hastily pushed him away from her. He let her go easily, the strange look gone. Sarah wondered if she had imagined it.

Striding forward, Jareth smirked, gesturing to the door with a flourish.

“The entrance to the Dream Roads, Sarah,” he drawled, “You will follow the path only, and you will remember this: the way out is what you wish for.”

“What I wish for?” she asked skeptically.

“Yes,” Jareth said softly, turning the brass door handle, “What your heart desires most.”
He opened the door and leaned back against the green hedge next to it, arms folded smugly across his chest. With a satisfied smirk, he beckoned for her to walk through it. Sarah narrowed her eyes at him before marching forward through the door and into the sunlight.

Sarah had to shield her eyes for a minute before she could see. Eyes adjusting to the light, she peered around. She felt her heart constrict with painful pleasure, and her spirit soared with joy. She was in the park near her parents’ house! Her face broke into a giant smile and she spun around in a circle, laughing without a thought. She was home! She threw her arms and face up to the sky-

*The sky was purple.*

Sarah froze. The sky was a deep, rich, unnatural violet, and there were no clouds, only a bright orange sun, whose warmth kissed her face pleasantly. She definitely had never seen a purple, cloudless sky on Earth; least of all one that resembled a drawing from one of her kindergarteners.

Sarah bit her lip, holding back the tears of frustration that threatened to fall. Seriously, when had she gotten so weepy? She had been foolish, thoughtless for a moment, and now the crushing reality hurt her insides.

She was still in the Labyrinth, of course...now it was just showing her what she wanted to see. It was foolish of her to abandon her sense, even for just a moment. She had witnessed the Labyrinth recreate things that were familiar to her before; how could she have so readily forgotten the trash lady and her bedroom? This time was no different.

But what harm could come from her wanting to be home? Jareth had said to stay to the path. What was the path?

Sarah looked down at her feet, but there was no trail of breadcrumbs to guide her. She looked around the park, instantly noticing the changes from the real one and this copy. There were no daisies by the pond back home, and the colors here were brighter, more vibrant. Combined with the purple sky, she felt like she had walked into a dream.

*Well I have, Sarah thought, my own dream.*

Well, if this was her dream, then she knew where she wanted to go. She wanted to go home. At that encouraging thought, Sarah broke into a sprint towards the house she had lived in as a child.

Sarah reached her old Victorian out of breath, and then jumped the last step to her doorstep. Looking down, she briefly noticed that her clothes had changed; she was wearing jeans and a green
blouse. She pushed open the unlocked door, allowing herself a small smile at the seemingly familiar smell, and sidled into the kitchen. Her jaw dropped as soon as she stepped inside.

“Sarah, baby, you’re home!” beamed an older, breathtaking woman with long dark hair just like Sarah’s from the kitchen counter.

“Mom?” Sarah choked, halting immediately. What was her mother doing here?
Linda Williams frowned at her daughter for a split-second, and then regained her radiant smile. She was chopping vegetables for a salad.

“Who else would it be, honey?” she asked, chuckling, “Your father should be home any minute, do you want to set the table for dinner?”

“Um, sure,” Sarah said, still unable to tear her eyes away from her mother. As Sarah grabbed forks and knives from the proper drawer, her mind reeled. Her mother had left her father years ago…why was she here now?

Suddenly, it dawned on her. This was her dream; it wasn’t real. She had often dreamt that her mother had never left…and here, she hadn’t.

Sarah was pulled from her reverie by the sound of her father coming in through the front door. As he walked into the kitchen, he grinned at his daughter and made to kiss his wife. Sarah watched in awe as her father planted a sweet kiss on her giggling mother. She had long lost hope of ever seeing that happen again.

“Sarah?” asked her father quizzically, giving her a strange look from his position next to her mother. “Is something wrong?”

“Er, no,” said Sarah quickly, setting the last place at the table, “You two are just so…affectionate, is all.”

“Oh, Sarah,” laughed her mother, flushing, “Quit being too observant. It’s time to eat, anyway. Honey, why did you set four places?”

Caught off-guard, Sarah looked down at the table. She had set four places. One for her, her dad, her mother, and…Toby.
Toby.

Sarah froze. It felt as if someone had just pulled all of her organs out through her stomach and she was empty inside; cold.

“Sarah?” asked her father, peering at her with concern.

Sarah didn’t hear him. In this world, in this dream where her mother and father still loved each other, her brother Toby didn’t exist.

*She had wished her brother away again.*

Sarah felt hot tears roll down her cheeks. This couldn’t be. She loved Toby—he was the only person in her world that loved her back. In the real world, her mother barely spoke to her, and her father and Karen were just as put off by her as everyone else. But Toby…

Toby couldn’t not exist.

“Sarah, are you all right?” asked her father worriedly, letting go of his wife to rush over to his daughter. Sarah heard him this time, and looked up at him with watery eyes.

“The fourth place is for Toby,” she said quietly, testing him. Toby had to exist in her dreams. He had to.

“Sweetheart,” said her father, his brow furrowed in confusion, “Who is Toby?”

Sarah’s world spun. She felt dangerously close to falling down, but her father reached out and grabbed her. She heard him continue to ask her what was wrong, growing more panicked after each exclamation. Tears clouded her vision. All she really felt in addition to blind panic were her father’s nails digging into her arm.

“You don’t know Toby,” she whispered, “You don’t know your own son.”

Her father abruptly stopped speaking and stared at her as if she was insane; ironically enough, he finally looked like her father in the real world actually might. Sarah furiously wiped away the tears obscuring her sight and pushed her father away from her, bolting for the door. The last sounds she heard were her parents calling for her to come back.

Sarah didn’t go back. She kept running, barely seeing where she was going. She moved from her yard to the familiar streets of her hometown, the bright sun burning the back of her neck, the heavy feeling of guilt and selfishness weighing her down. It felt as if a large piece of iron was lodged between her heart and her stomach. How could she keep falling for everything the Labyrinth threw
at her? Had she grown so weak?

After a few minutes of pointless running, not paying attention to where she was going, Sarah fell, wheezing, to the ground. She landed on her hands and knees, and for the second time she noticed her attire had changed—this time, into jeans, a long-sleeve gray top and one of her favorite hooded jackets.

“Sarah, are you all right?”

Sarah looked up at the sound of her name and gasped.

Walking towards her was her old roommate, Emily, a concerned look on her face. Emily was a tall, athletic girl, sort of abrasive but otherwise friendly, with dirty blonde hair that fell to her shoulders and gray-blue eyes. She was walking towards her with a backpack slung over one arm, the other extended toward Sarah.

Sarah stared up at Emily in shock. Emily and her had started out friendly enough their freshman year living together, but in the short space of two months, Emily had begun to avoid her, finally going so far as to request that Sarah be moved to live in a single. She had complained of strange nightmares and had told her that she was better off “living alone” for the time being. Two days later she had moved in with another girl from the soccer team.

Sarah had been hurt, of course, but after a few more months had passed by, she grew used to the way people grew to act around her. Knowing a possible reason now why everyone felt uneasy around her (and possibly identifying the source of Emily’s odd nightmares), it blew her mind to see Emily standing in front of her, offering her help.

“Yes,” said Sarah slowly, pulling herself to her feet. Emily frowned as Sarah didn’t take her offered hand.

“You sure?” asked Emily, “I was wondering where you ran off to, James has been waiting for us for half an hour! Did you forget we were all going to study together this afternoon?”

Sarah’s eyes grew wider and she glanced around. She was no longer in the quiet streets of her hometown, but back in Boston on campus. Looking around at the usually comforting brick buildings, Sarah felt nauseous. The landscape changes were too sudden—she wasn’t used to dreaming while awake, or traveling through dreams so rapidly.

The buildings seemed distorted, almost in ruin, as if they were decaying from age around them. Once
again, the colors here were more vibrant than they were in reality, and Sarah noticed that the season had changed: the reds, oranges, and browns dotting Boston U’s campus indicated that it was now autumn instead of summer.


“What?” asked Emily incredulously, chuckling, “Did you hit your head when you fell, Sarah? Come on, he’s waiting.”

Before Sarah could mumble a “no”, Emily grabbed her arm and pulled her onward towards the library. Clearly, Emily didn’t notice that their whole campus looked like it was about to collapse.

“You have such a weird sense of humor, Sarah,” Emily commented, “Pretending not to know your own boyfriend.”

“What?” asked Sarah loudly as they entered the double doors leading to the library. Emily glared at her and pressed a finger to her lips, leading her to the right in the direction of the group study room. Sarah had never been inside, having always studied alone; she sucked in a breath as she entered, though it turned out to be relatively normal—a little room filled with cozy armchairs and tables for groups to sit at, though it was much darker than outside. She felt claustrophobic, like it was some sort of personal dungeon.

Emily lead her to a table near the back, where a tall young man with platinum blonde hair falling into dark gray eyes sat waiting for them. Sarah’s jaw dropped. Emily didn’t mean James Bennett?

At the suggestive look on James’ face, though, Sarah concluded that Emily did. James Bennett was a year older than Sarah and Emily, and had been the highlight of Sarah’s fantasies for a few months when she had begun at Boston. He was the perfect candidate for a crush: in addition to his good looks, he was intelligent and popular throughout campus.

He had even asked her out. After a few days together, however, he had dumped her for no discernable reason. Less than a week later, she had seen him walking across campus, arm in arm with another girl. By then, Sarah was used to disappointment, but she was still struck hard—in those days it seemed that no one would ever be interested in knowing her. Either way, it was nothing short of bizarre seeing him here, in this dream of hers, along with Emily, looking at her the way she had always wanted him to, however brief their involvement had been. Her stomach suddenly seemed full of butterflies, silly as it was.
What was worse was that all of that pain, all of that hurt—all of that loneliness apparently had nothing to do with who she truly was. She was finally starting to come to terms with what she had, for so long, denied…and understand why it had been that way. It didn’t have to do entirely with who she was, but whom she had made the mistake of entangling with.

The butterflies turned into angry snakes in her stomach as she steadily grew more and more furious at these revelations. She frowned.

“Sarah, babe, is something wrong?” asked James, leaning to kiss her on her cheek. Shocked, Sarah froze for a moment, but then shook her head no and sat down at the table with her two companions. Both pulled out literature texts, but Sarah stared blankly at them.

“I forgot my books,” she said lamely. Both of them looked at her with odd expressions, but Sarah shrugged, not knowing what else to do. As her two companions struck up a conversation, Sarah listened carefully, curious.

“I found her down over by Marsh Plaza,” said Emily, glancing at Sarah.

“You shouldn’t disappear on us like that,” said James, taking Sarah’s hand in his and smiling at her. Sarah nearly jumped at his touch and felt her cheeks grow warm.

“Seriously, he’s right,” said Emily, concerned, “You gave us a scare. I know it’s only just past three, but it’s a big campus, and seeing as we hadn’t heard from you since yesterday...you just never know, Sarah.”

Sarah looked over at Emily, who was watching her carefully. She felt strangely touched, but something was off. Sarah felt a pang in her heart as she once again forced herself back to reality—the care and concern in these two people’s eyes wasn’t genuine. It wasn’t real. The Labyrinth was recreating two people Sarah remembered, had wanted to befriend and love, from her own life…and done it for her. It was magic at its cruelest, mocking her, making her realize that this dream wasn’t real, and never would be.

These two copies weren’t the real Emily and James. She didn’t know the real Emily and James, not really.

But she had obviously wished she did.

Sarah felt her eyes well up with tears again. Though her heart ached with longing to stay with them, to bask in their familiarity and simultaneous foreignness, she just couldn’t lie so thoroughly to herself.
“Sarah?” asked James, rubbing his thumb over her palm. Tears leaked from Sarah’s eyes and she bit her lip, ignoring the alarmed looks from the friend and lover she never had or would have. She stood, dropping James’s hand from hers, who looked at her in surprise. His handsome face showed deep concern. The magic was well done, after all.

“I have to go,” Sarah whispered, “Goodbye.”

Without another word, Sarah spun on her heel and ran away again, bursting out of the group study room and then out of the library (noticing but choosing to ignore the evil looks from the illusions around her), and running into darkness.

Streaking across the campus, Sarah felt more than saw the illusion fade away this time, as the landscape grew darker and darker. She couldn’t see where she was going, but she knew she was running the right way. The change didn’t shock or scare her this time because she had learned what Jareth had wanted to teach her by feeding her her lost dreams—that she was alone, and by her own doing. Always alone.

*He said he could be cruel.*

Sarah slowed. She was in a narrow passageway now, still dark, but she could still see a familiar stone staircase at the end of the corridor. She reached the staircase, catching her breath for a moment, and then became to climb.

It took her shorter than she expected. After a few minutes, she reached the top, and looked in horror at a dizzyingly familiar scene that made her sick to her stomach.

There she was, perched precariously on the edge of reason. She was in Jareth’s Escher room again—the disorienting staircases just as absurdly placed as she remembered, meant to confuse and trick her from finding what she was supposed to find. But there was no Toby this time. He existed safely Aboveground because of her, Sarah reminded herself. So what she supposed to look for? A door, an exit?

Sarah decided to go left, down a staircase and up another, and peered over the edge of the stair she was standing on, wanting to judge the distance. She nearly jumped out of her skin as she was thrown back into the nightmare of nine years ago.

Jareth, in all his black, sinister glory, stood beneath her, opposite her, defying gravity. Sarah’s stomach lurched as he smirked at her cruelly, opening his mouth to speak.

*How you turned my world, you precious thing…*
He flew over her, weightless, and then appeared through another doorway. Sarah tried her best to ignore him, searching for Toby. If Jareth was here in her dream, then it had to be a repeat of what had transpired years ago. She had wanted so desperately to save Toby then—surely it had to be same?

*You starve and near exhaust me…*

He appeared behind her then, the hair standing upright on the back of her neck told her as much; she felt him there, and she turned reluctantly, heart racing, as she knew what happened next. He walked towards her slowly, and then *through* her as if she was no more than vapor.

*Everything I've done I've done for you…*

She turned to watch him, unable to stop herself from repeating what she had done the last time she had been here. She was too curious; too eager to find a change so she could understand where the way out was. His face twisted with an unfamiliar emotion as he continued.

*I move the stars for no one.*

He dropped beneath her again and she ran thoughtlessly through the doorway to her right, hearing his voice echo behind her.

*You run so long, you run so far…*

She reached another teetering edge, and he was there.

*Your eyes can be so cruel.*

For some reason, she couldn’t look away from those strange eyes. He held up a crystal, sneering.

*Just as I can be so cruel.*
He threw the crystal away from them, and Sarah’s breathing quickened. She tore her eyes away from Jareth, searching… she knew this part… Toby was there, he had to be, he was the one who Jareth had thrown the crystal to…

*Oh, I do believe in you…*

He wasn’t there.

Toby wasn’t there.

*Where was he?*

“Toby?” Sarah cried out pleadingly.

*Yes I do…*

Sarah felt her feet moving, felt herself sprinting in mindless directions, away from the sensuous voice ringing in her ears towards what she knew in her heart wasn’t there.

She searched for Toby anyway. He was the way out of this delusion in her memory, in her dream.

*Live without the sunlight…*

Her legs felt shaky, but she kept moving. The voice scared her, because she knew who it belonged to.

*Love without your heartbeat…*

Sarah stumbled, but drew herself back up, and made the mistake of turning in the wrong direction. She was no longer staring in the direction she thought Toby must be in, instead, her eyes had met Jareth’s.

*I can’t live within you.*
He appraised her coldly, his eyes clouded with a burning question that Sarah felt she could not answer. She realized then, suddenly, forcefully, *painfully* that her baby brother truly wasn’t there. This was not a repeat of her dream. This was a copy, yes, recreated by the Labyrinth, but the copy had been altered the same as the others, and what she had once wanted was not the same as it had been. The only person there besides herself was Jareth.

*The way out is what you wish for...what your heart desires most.*

Sarah took a step back, and felt her foot reach the edge of the top stair she stood on.

Amazingly, she kept her balance. Her eyes had not left Jareth’s, and in that single moment she realized she was half an inch from falling, one way or the other. She made a choice.

She turned her back on him.

Jumping off the edge of the stair, she wished with all of her heart that her baby brother was still waiting for her at the bottom.

As she fell, a tortured growl pierced the air around her and she heard the sound of shattering glass.
“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Jareth the Goblin King was not adverse to revenge—not in the least bit. He was often sadistic, and he could be cruel, even drew pleasure from it when called for. It was in his nature, embedded deep within his race, as well as a part of his role as king. Thus, he had no reason to ever apologize for such actions, or worse, feel any sense of regret.

But when it came to the human Sarah Williams, Jareth grew hesitant. Though she was the one living creature that held considerable power over him, he found himself reluctant to punish her. She was an unyielding, fiery, annoyingly practical yet silly girl, but she was also kind-hearted, noble, and treacherously beautiful. She both tortured and fascinated him…all reasons for which he had fallen dangerously in love with her.

The mere human girl who had broken his entire Labyrinth; shattered his cold heart with six slow, meaningful words.

…The girl walking toward him now.
Jareth looked up from his breakfast in the Great Hall to a stoic Sarah. She looked as lovely as ever in a luscious green gown that very obviously highlighted the fact that she had blossomed from girl to woman.

“Sarah,” he murmured, inclining his head toward her, “Best get some breakfast, my dear.”

She hesitated. Jareth watched her carefully. She was terrible at hiding her emotions; he could easily see her wonder why he was so polite. Inwardly, he chuckled. Despite all the time that had passed, she still had so much to learn.

At last, she moved forward again, her lips pulled into a firm line. He watched her as she sat next to him and began to help herself to breakfast.

“Eat up, Sarah,” Jareth remarked, “You will need your strength.”

“Will I?” asked Sarah, pausing her eating to take a sip of juice. Jareth noticed her hand was shaking slightly. The anger in her green eyes was palpable.

“Oh yes,” continued Jareth, “You will be going through a foreign part of the Labyrinth today. You did not venture there on your last visit. So young then, it seemed hideously cruel to spoil you so soon. Had it not been for your brazen manner last night, I would’ve thought you were still too young to go there. Of course, your sentiments have proven me mistaken.”

Jareth raised his glass to her before drinking the rest of its contents. His eyes never left hers as he observed her bite her lip in anger, seemingly restraining herself from raving at him. He smirked. He watched her closely as she finished the rest of her breakfast in strained silence.

Once she was finished, Jareth stood and pulled her chair out for her, offering her his hand. Reluctantly, she accepted. His lips curved into a roguish grin.

“You do look very well today, Sarah,” he purred, yanking her close to him, “Regal, in fact.”

She struggled, but to his surprise, she instantly relaxed as soon as he performed the transportation spell, burying her face into his chest and closing her eyes. He chuckled. As they moved through time and space as freely as spirits, he wrapped one gloved hand around her small waist, cradling her head in the other.

In an instant, they were motionless, standing amidst green hedges in front of an aging door. The door that led to the Labyrinth’s greatest but most terrible path…The Dream Roads.
Sarah moved against Jareth, peering over his shoulder to see where he had taken her. Jareth looked down at her, surprised that she had not yet forced him off of her, and found himself mesmerized by her bright, curious, unabashedly human eyes—human eyes that were the way they should be, wide-eyed in wonder. Of course, just at that moment, Sarah looked back up at him in horror, and he rearranged his stare into a mischievous grin. As expected, she scurried away from him.

Jareth smirked and strode forward, gesturing to the door with a flourish.

“The entrance to the Dream Roads, Sarah,” he drawled, “You will follow the path only, and you will remember this: the way out is what you wish for.”

“What I wish for?” she asked skeptically.

“Yes,” Jareth said softly, turning the brass door handle, “What your heart desires most.”

He opened the door and leaned back against the green hedge next to it, arms folded smugly across his chest. With a satisfied smirk, he beckoned for her to walk through. Sarah narrowed her eyes at him before marching forward through the door and into the sunlight.

After she disappeared from his sight underneath the burning sun, Jareth closed the door, slowly. The old oak groaned as it sealed itself shut. Jareth ran his gloved fingertips over the wood.

“Careful, Sarah, my love,” he murmured, “I cannot save you from yourself.”

With a sigh, Jareth turned on the spot, and disappeared. Mere moments later, he sat carelessly atop his throne, alone. Normally, Jareth’s goblin subjects kept to the city, unless they had business with the King or court was being held. Only when a runner occupied the Labyrinth did they truly try and vacate the entire maze. That was when many of them congregated in the throne room, excited at the prospect of another taken child.

Sarah, though, was no longer a runner. Not to mention, his goblin subjects never dared enter the Dream Roads. She would be quite alone, and so would he.

Jareth had never walked the Dream Roads—not in his given form, at least. He had traveled over them as an owl, but he felt no pull to enter them. The magic they held would show him nothing but green hedges, the same as the rest of that part of the Labyrinth. Jareth was the Dream Giver; he had no dreams of his own.

Not to mention, he knew the deceit of the promise the Dream Roads made—they did not just show dreams, they also destroyed them. He had designed them to do so.

His thoughts wandering, Jareth twisted his fingers and formed a crystal in his hand. Running his
thumb over the smooth surface, he closed his eyes and thought of Sarah.

After a split-second, he opened his eyes only to see the same empty, shining crystal sitting still in his palm.

“Bugger,” he growled, shaking the crystal slightly. Still, it remained empty. Jareth sighed. He had known that it was unlikely that he would be able to view Sarah while she traveled the length of her own dreams, but he had thought that since they were linked by the magic of the Labyrinth that perhaps she might be an exception to the rule.

Jareth could never truly see a human’s dreams. He could only offer them. Only then, once a human accepted him, was he allowed to see what a person truly wanted. The only loophole in this rule of magic was if a human dreamed of him—which was, truth be told, an often occurrence. He was accustomed to playing a large role in a person’s nightmares. He was both the Dream Giver and the Boogeyman, no matter how humans imagined him.

Jareth was broken from his reverie by the sound of rough footsteps approaching. Looking up, he saw a small, wiry goblin called Gregnok rushing forward, his head bowed as if he brought bad news.

Gregnok was Jareth’s chief of staff. He oversaw the running of the castle, and had those in charge of keeping the peace in the city report to him before they lodged any worry or complaint to the King. When he reached Jareth’s throne, his knees bent into a low bow.

“Your majesty,” he croaked slowly, “The dwarf demands an audience with you.”

“The dwarf?” Jareth asked coldly.

Gregnok nodded, looking up at Jareth.

“The human girl’s dwarf, my King.”

Scowling, Jareth nodded in compliance, and then waved away Gregnok in a clear dismissal. Nearly as soon as Gregnok had disappeared past the door, Hoggle sidled in wearing a wrinkled frown.

“Hedgewart, how lovely of you to drop by,” Jareth issued smoothly, setting the crystal on his throne as he stood to address the dwarf, “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“It’s Hoggle,” growled the dwarf, clearly irate. He balled his stubby fingers into fists. “And you
know why I’m here, Jareth! Where’s Sarah?”

“My dear Higwiggle,” began Jareth dangerously, his eyes flashing, “I believe I remember warning you what would happen if I detected even a hint of defiance from you concerning the lady last time we met.”

“Yeah, I remember,” affirmed Hoggle, “That was before you as good as killed her!”

Neither party spoke. Hoggle had thrown a dagger at his King, and they both knew it. Hoggle was frozen, breathing roughly from his outburst, watching and waiting for Jareth to strike him down. The Goblin King stood, unmoving, like a statue. Finally, he shifted his body into a regal position, hands behind his back and head held high. His eyes were trained on the angry little dwarf in front of him, lips set in a firm line.

“My dear Hoghead,” he whispered slowly, “There is much you seem to take for granted. This is very unwise. If I had ever wanted to have a hand in dear Sarah’s death, her body would already be cold.”

“You threw her to the dogs,” growled Hoggle, taking a daring step forward, “She won’t ever be the same after she’s been in there. You’ll have ruined her.”

“Silence!” roared Jareth, “For someone who has seen the truth of dreams that become poisoned, you understand nothing, dwarf! I will have taught her, the same as I have taught all the others—including you.”

Hoggle took a step back, frightened. Gossip traveled as rapidly as scurrying mice in the Underground, and the moment he had heard where Jareth was planning to take Sarah, he knew he had to defend her. He had never seen the Goblin King so angry, but he had to stand his ground. For Sarah, he had to. She was his only friend, and he had already done too much to forsake that. He could not let her suffer the same fate he had; he couldn’t let anything tarnish that shining hope in her that made her so special.

“Sarah cannot hope to survive as a human in the Underground without knowing the meaning of cruelty; the importance of understanding that though dreams may never come true, they are not lost, that they change,” said Jareth, “Humans naturally resist what is inevitable, the passing of time and change; and worse, they deny their pain. Sarah must confront hers before she can be responsible for the task that will be entrusted to her.”
“But she doesn’t belong here!” shouted Hoggle, “You just want to keep her for yourself! You just want to **play** with her, turn her into something twisted and **wrong**, and when you’re finally bored you’ll just...”

Hoggle couldn’t finish—Jareth had said nothing to interrupt his tirade, but with the quickness of a ghost, he had slipped forward so he was towering right over the small man, his features livid with anger.

“There is much about sweet Sarah you do not comprehend, dwarf,” Jareth drawled, his voice as hard and cold as ice. “She is not here for some trifle plot of vengeance, nor is she here for a mere 13 hours. She is here for lifetime. It is resolute, unchangeable, and that is all you ever need know. I care nothing for your pitiful anger or your feelings for her. Sarah never has been, and never will be your concern.”

Hoggle opened his mouth to speak, but the look on Jareth’s face stopped him.

“Sarah’s affection for you saved you and your treacherous friends from the worst of my wrath last time,” Jareth said coldly, “But mark my words, Hegwig, it will not suffice much longer. Speak out of turn again and I will do much worse than throw you into the Bog of Eternal Stench, or even imprison you in the Dream Roads for all eternity. I promise you that.”

Hoggle’s face fell and slowly, he nodded, defeated. He turned to leave, but was distracted by a strange sound. Jareth turned and saw the crystal lying atop of his throne spinning madly across the surface. Jareth’s eyes widened, and he reached out his arm. The crystal flew obediently into his palm.

“Out!” shouted Jareth to Hoggle, who ran at the sight of Jareth’s twisted face. After the dwarf had sprinted away, Jareth peered into the crystal, his heart pumping wildly in excitement. There was only one way he was now allowed to see Sarah…

She was dreaming of him.

The scene within the crystal was a familiar one. Inside the shining orb, he saw her in his inspired Escher room, searching in vain for her baby brother. It was the same as it had been those many years ago, only now she was a woman, and the lively little chap known as Toby was not there. Puzzled, Jareth watched the scene closely, clutching the crystal tightly between his fingertips. It seemed exactly as he remembered it, only now Sarah was much older. Here, in this dream, the difference was undeniable. He watched her peer over the edge of one of the hanging staircases, and to his slight surprise, he saw himself emerge on the other side. He heard his own voice.

*How you turned my world, you precious thing*…
Jareth closed his eyes in concentration, and when he opened them again, he was seeing Sarah from his eyes in her dream. He could not feel his body move, could not understand what this dream version of him was doing as he could not actively take its place, but he could see her much better now, as if he was standing there with her.

_You starve and near exhaust me._

Internally, Jareth smirked. Sarah was behaving as she did the time before this, but soon she would see that Toby was not there to find. This was not a replica of what had transpired those years ago; this was happening _now_, and the Labyrinth was forcing her to see what she truly wanted. She continued to run from him, to run from what she _really_ wanted, but soon she would realize that _he_ was that. He was the way out, because Jareth was what she was wishing for.

For what, he could not know for certain, but it was a beginning, one he had been hoping for.

The hunter inside Jareth purred in delight.

Inside her dream, Jareth watched as his dream body pursued her as she searched for her infant brother. He waited with bated breath for the moment she would understand.

_Your eyes can be so cruel…_  

Any moment now, Jareth thought, Sarah was a bright girl…denial could only take her so far….

He observed Sarah look around wildly, eyes searching for the baby, but the Labyrinth’s dream was true, and no child existed in it. She called to the boy in desperation.

“Toby?” her voice echoed. When she didn’t find him, she fled Jareth’s searching eyes anyway. He paid this no mind. Her resolve was weakening. The reality was pressing in on her. She only had a little time left.

_Live without the sunlight…_

Jareth couldn’t take his eyes off of her as she moved frantically, running from her own dream, frightened of her own desire. His heart leapt when he heard his own voice utter the final words.

_I can’t live within you._
He stopped breathing the instant the change happened. Instead of seeing Toby, Sarah turned to him, met his gaze, and he watched the realization dawn on her face. Through the looking glass, he saw her stare back at him, finally knowing the answer to the riddle.

Without warning, she took a step backwards, turned her back on him, and jumped off the edge to where, years ago, Toby would have sat waiting.

Jareth felt an inhuman roar erupt from his chest, he blinked, and he was out of her dream, back in his throne room, and in his pain he smashed the crystal, shards flying everywhere.

Within an instant, he was swirling, moving through time and space, searching, searching for her. Finally, he could see her small frame falling through her dream, darkness and a myriad of colors closing in all around her. He moved soundlessly to where she was and grabbed her. He pulled her to him, one hand on her waist, the other holding her face very close to his own, gently, gently, he reminded himself.

Her eyes were wide, unbelieving that he could accompany her as she fell slowly from dreams to reality, but she didn’t make a sound.

“Sarah,” he said slowly, his voice past dangerous, eyes glinting with raw, uncontainable pain, “That was not the way out.”

With that, he let her go, let her fall, and wished for nothing else but to forget Sarah Williams for a while.
“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter 6

Supermassive Black Hole

I thought I was a fool for no one
Ooo baby I'm a fool for you
You're the queen of the superficial
And how long before you tell the truth?
You set my soul alight
You set my soul alight
Glaciers melting in the dead of night
And the superstars sucked into the supermassive
Supermassive black hole...
(Supermassive Black Hole, “Black Holes and Revelations”, Muse)

Sarah was still falling. She had jumped, fled from her dream, and she was still falling in between blinding colors and menacing shadows, not knowing whether gravity existed and quite ready to believe she would die just from falling.

Then, something strange happened. Stranger than her never-ending trek down, down, down—and much more frightening than the Labyrinth’s cruel twist on her cursed dreams.

Suddenly, Jareth was there.

As soon as he grabbed her and held her close to him, she knew this was not the Jareth of her dream, not the Jareth of the past. This was the Goblin King of the present, falling with her, and from the look on his face; she knew he was not there to save her from her rash decision to jump. To flee.

“Sarah,” he said slowly, his voice past dangerous, eyes glinting with raw, uncontainable pain, “That was not the way out.”
Sarah opened her mouth to speak, but he vanished, and in what felt like hours and mere moments, she hit the ground with a thud, landing sorely on her bottom. She looked up. Judging from her aching backside, it felt as if she had only fallen from a few feet at most, but she knew that wasn’t possible. Had she really even been falling at all, or had that too been an illusion?

Now she sat in a dark, near black hole. The only source of light came from a hole high above her, and it shone on her face, too bright in her eyes. Everything around her was black. She couldn’t see her own arms if she held them out in front of her.

She was in an oubliette. She heard Hoggle’s voice ringing distantly in her ears.

*It's a place you put people...to forget about 'em!*

Jareth wanted to forget about her.

Sarah’s small face contorted into a grimace. If he was so angry, couldn’t he forget about her while she was safe living her life in the Aboveground?

Sarah didn’t know how long she sat there, doing nothing, her mind numb. Eventually she figured that not moving wasn’t really doing her much good—she’d be damned if she sat around waiting like a good prisoner for her captor to retrieve her when *he* wanted.

Not happy at all and refusing point-blank to think about the dream that had ignited the Goblin King’s fury, Sarah chose to look for a way out of this grubby little hole. Last time she had been in one, Hoggle had found a door...she could do the same, couldn’t she?

*Maybe.*

Using her hands to feel the dirty floor around her, she moved forward slowly, searching for a wall. After a few seconds, her hands met something hard, and she was able to use the wall to prop herself up. She had left the small circle of light behind her, and was now encompassed in complete darkness. Sarah gulped and resolved to try very hard not to think about it.

Totally blind, she reached out both hands, still steady against the wall, and wondered whether to go right or left. She strained her ears to listen for any sound, hoping one direction would win over the other.

*Never go that way*, called a memory inside her head. She decided to take the worm’s advice, and
chose left.

Using the wall to guide her forward, Sarah moved. Slowly but surely, she waited to feel the curve of the hole. Surely since the oubliette was just a hole in the ground meant for putting people, the wall would begin to feel circular, wouldn’t it?

Sarah wasn’t keen on going round and round for ages, but to her surprise, the wall never turned. Straight as a board, she followed the wall, all the while wondering nervously just where she might end up.

~||~

The word throughout the Goblin City that evening was synonymous.

_Stay far away from the Castle_. For, after a pleasantly raucous day in the city (the way goblins preferred their days to be), at a time nearing dusk, without any warning whatsoever, nearly every goblin in the city who lived near the castle yelped in fear as they heard a sound that thoroughly set them ill at ease…an anguished roar, and the sharp shattering sound of breaking glass.

Goblins by nature were cleverer than they looked or were perceived in faerie stories in the Aboveground, and they had more than enough sense to conclude who could make such a sound. The word spread rapidly. Clearly, their King was in no mood to be trifled with. That was why, just after the moon rose that night, every goblin interested in protecting their hide gave the castle a wide berth.

Indeed, Jareth was quite alone inside his castle, which, truth be told, was probably for the best. Torturing innocent goblins wasn’t very productive behavior when he was truly angry with a very infuriating, very lovely human woman.

Having abandoned his throne room for the more private refuge that was his vast library, Jareth’s normally casual stance had all but evaporated and in its stead he sat stiffly in a random armchair, the tension in his body language giving away his fury.

"Foolish, stubborn girl," he muttered to himself, “Intent on driving me barking mad.”

Curling his fingers around the arms of the soft chair, Jareth launched himself up and forward. He couldn’t sit any longer; couldn’t remain immobile. He began to pace wildly across the library floor while his thoughts spun in all directions faster than the speed of sound.
Sarah had deliberately turned her back on him, knowing full well that she was the one wishing for him to be her rescuer, to be the way out of her nightmare. Her stubbornness aggravated him to no end, but her blatant refusal stung him much more than anything else she could throw at him.

*Why?* He hadn’t even anticipated that she might dream of him, and now that she had—and in such an obvious way—he had expected at least some level of acceptance from her. That wish had been shattered just as fast as the crystal he had been holding, which had borne some nasty cuts on his left hand. Thankfully, he was adept enough at righting small injuries not to need to call Rowan, his healer.

What was it? What was frightening her away?

She could hardly still use the excuse that he had stolen her brother; she had *asked* him to do so. The girl had no understanding of the power of a few words. He had let her battle his Labyrinth to reclaim the boy, hadn’t he? That was all he could ever have allowed; the laws of magic were resolute.

His giving her the enchanted peach, perhaps? But even there, he believed himself faultless. It was in his nature to be devious; he was Fae, after all, and he remembered Sarah’s fantasy of the ballroom better than anyone. Those human eyes of hers hid nothing; the look of her blatant fascination had haunted him for years. That stolen hour was solid proof of her obvious attraction to him, even then, when she was on the cusp of womanhood. Their previous interaction in the library was another shining scrap of evidence. If anything, those two incidents should have been bringing her closer to him. This dream of hers, one in which she was meant to choose him, well, that was just another piece of proof. That, surely, could not be the reason.

*Why, then? Why?*

Jareth had never prepared himself to be in a position where he was a fool for anyone. That was, of course, before he had met Sarah Williams.

Jareth’s pacing began to slow, until quite abruptly, he stopped altogether, stock-still in the middle of the room. He frowned. Sarah was undoubtedly stubborn, and though he was very capable of being angry with her, he could not seem to love her any less.

It was maddening.

He sighed, gazing at nothing in particular, trying to come to grips with the myriad of feelings within him that, at times, threatened to overcome his careful control. Even after the many years in which he had waited for Sarah, it was still somewhat foreign to him, this concept of love.
The Fae were not quick to love, after all, quite the opposite of humankind. Instead, they were cold, calculating; unfeeling in ways. Their detached nature was what had allowed them to abandon the Aboveground altogether, and it was what made most believe that they had nothing they could learn from humanity—and so they were superior.

But, for his kind, Jareth had always been different. It was why he was the Goblin King, purveyor of dreams and of nightmares; the man who took children from their mothers.

Love was a tenuous thing, something he felt burning within him so hot it would scald, but also something he could scarcely comprehend. Love was not logic, it was unbridled emotion.

Perhaps the most puzzling part about love for Jareth was that, for him, much of it up till now had meant only pain. Pain that he endured solely for the promise of exhilaration, even if it only ever amounted to a few stolen moments.

Truthfully, he was not even sure how he had come to love Sarah, only certain that he did. When he thought back to when she had been just another runner, he could hardly recall the progression of his feelings well enough to pinpoint just when he had started to love her. Those 13 hours seemed like fat dollops of time that would drip, drop into an outstretched palm, only to slip through the cracks of the fingers; of his memory.

He recalled meeting her, of course, the same way he met countless foolish others who wished away someone. There had been nothing particularly extraordinary about her then; in truth, she had been a rather dramatic, spoiled thing. Beyond that, his thoughts surrounding Sarah were limited to thinking of ways to thwart her progress to the center of his Labyrinth, and on what to do with her brother once she failed.

It wasn't until his tête-à-tête with her and the dwarf that he took any real notice of her. Not much had changed, really; she was still haughty and proud in the face of her opponent, and when he had subtracted hours from her allotted 13, as expected, she grew even more petulant. What was curious about her, however, was her ability to charm others—something he had first noticed happen between her and the dwarf, but which then blossomed into several residents of his Labyrinth not only letting her pass safely, but actually helping her make her way to the castle. This was something unprecedented; to charm the likes of the grumbling dwarf, the duty-bound knight, and, perhaps most curiously, the once ferocious beast.

And so, he began to watch her more closely. Her ability to befriend was nothing compared to his power, after all. In the Labyrinth, he was ruler.

He quickly surmised that despite their tentative friendship, he could easily use Hoggle to stall her progress. He conjured a dream meant just for her, then, and gave it to Hoggle to give to her…

W-what is it? the dwarf had asked.
It’s a present.

Indeed it had been…

Perhaps it had happened before he even realized. Perhaps he, like the other inhabitants of his Labyrinth, had been charmed by Sarah in a way he could not explain easily. The only thing he was certain of now was his progression from indifference to relishing antagonizing her, and the disappointment when she fled his arms in the dream he had spun just for her. In the end, that disappointment became an agony deeper than anything he had felt in centuries when she rejected him.

His frown deepened, becoming a scowl. She had been too young then, that much had been clear, though she had been of age for courtship here in the Underground. Nevertheless, the rejection had wounded him and his pride, and it still pressed in on his heart like a thorn of iron.

It no longer mattered. Enough time had passed now that revisiting old wounds was pointless as well as unnecessarily painful. Sarah was here now, and she would remain here, with him. Even if she never grew to love him back, he at least would know she was not doomed to a life of madness in the world of humans.

Without thinking, he twisted his fingers, conjuring a crystal with ease, his thoughts still swirling around his dark-haired human. He glanced at the crystal to see how she was faring in the oubliette.

For the second time that day, Jareth felt the crystal smash between the hard grip of his gloved fingertips, only now his heart seized with panic, not rage. In a flash, he turned on the spot and vanished.

~||~

Sarah felt as if she had been traveling against the wall of what had been an oubliette for hours when she finally noticed a difference. The darkness that surrounded her was growing denser, as if light could not hope to penetrate it. Her footsteps, before moving along soundlessly, had begun to echo. She slowly understood that the passage she had been traveling along was opening up and becoming much, much bigger.

Frightened, Sarah’s pace quickened. Goosebumps had risen on her skin, and in her haste, she tripped and fell forward, catching herself in time to prevent her face hitting the ground. She fell forward farther than anticipated, and was met with shock when she burst into an open cavern dancing with light.

Sarah rose on shaky legs, pressing her back to the wall for support once more. She gazed around in
wonder. She had stumbled into a giant cave, its ceiling too high up to make out. Thousands of stars, so bright they permeated the darkness, glittered from the same indiscernible height, forcing Sarah to wonder if she had made it back outside in the open air. She had never seen stars in the Underground. It always made the place seem even more bizarre.

There had been no hint of light before she fell; how could she have just stumbled into this place so easily? Despite her growing fear, Sarah couldn’t seem to think clearly. The stars seemed to flicker innocently above her, dancing across what she thought the sky. It looked like they were descending. Sarah breathed them in, and they seemed to move closer.

With a jolt of realization, Sarah peered closer as what she thought must be stars approached.

*Faeries.*

Instantly, Sarah drew slightly back, pushing her back even further up against the dirt wall. The last time she had visited the Underground, a faerie had bitten her. These faeries, though, seemed vastly different from the light-haired little one she had thought she had saved from Hoggle.

Slowly sinking closer to her, these faeries radiated a soft, bright light, as if their skin was made of diamonds. They danced through the air gracefully on rose-colored wings that seemed as if they had been spun from silk sprinkled with shimmering dewdrops. As they drew even closer to her, Sarah was able to make out the one closest, their clear leader.

No bigger than the length of Sarah’s palm and seemingly fragile, she wore only a bit of pearly white fabric, covering her from her chest down to mid-thigh. Wild dark hair surrounded her angelic face like a lioness’s mane, and placed directly on the top of her head was a beaded, glittering crown to match her opulent skin.

She was the most beautiful creature Sarah had ever laid eyes upon, apart from perhaps the Goblin King himself, and despite the warning bells going off in her head; she could do nothing but stare at her. Finally, she drew close enough to touch. Without thinking, Sarah reached out her hand. The faerie smiled, and landed softly on her palm.

“Little human,” said the faerie, nodding her head in acknowledgement. Sarah was surprised—she had expected the faerie’s voice to be high-pitched and musical, but instead, she spoke in a low, guttural tone. The other faeries, this queen’s companions, flickered like fireflies around them anxiously. Sarah’s fear was mounting, but she could still not tear her eyes away, or muster up the courage to try and leave.
"This is a place one can only find if it is the right time," rasped the faerie. She seemed to glide across Sarah's palm as if she was dancing, but her face never turned from Sarah's. There was something dangerous lurking behind her large, dark eyes. The grace with which she moved unnerved Sarah.

"You, human, seek escape, though not from what you choose to see," continued the faerie, "You dance between enemy and lover."

Sarah waited for the faerie to continue speaking, but she said no more. She only smiled mysteriously, still breathtakingly radiant. For some inexplicable reason, Sarah's heart was still threatening to spasm with fear. And yet, she couldn't seem to get her limbs moving.

*What is she waiting for?* Sarah thought.

Finally, the faerie spoke.

"I can show you the way out," she said slowly, clearly.

For some reason, Sarah couldn't find her voice. Should she trust her? The weight in her stomach indicated not to, but what choice did she have? If the faerie had thought to harm her, wouldn't the whole swarm have attacked her by now? The seconds ticked by, the faerie waiting patiently, and Sarah's stomach twisted into knots.

Finally, Sarah nodded.

The faerie's smile widened. She reached behind her back and pulled out a fine, silvery gossamer thread that seemed to come right from her left wing. Still smiling, she bent her knees, lowering her tiny winged body to crouch on Sarah's palm. With one delicate hand, the other holding the thread, she traced Sarah's lifeline. She looked up at her, black eyes fathomless.

"Touch," she murmured.

She carefully placed the thread so that it mirrored the line in Sarah's palm.

Sarah felt the pain before she could summon anything else. Pain in her knees told her that she had sunk to the floor, but it was nothing to the white-hot pain boiling underneath every inch of her skin. The only urge she felt was to rip the thread from her, which felt as if it was now slowly coursing through her veins like liquid.

Her eyes only lasted a few seconds before she closed them in defeat, but just before she saw the faerie fluttering above her, smiling, her lips moving. Sarah couldn't make out anything she might've said. Her ears could no longer hear; her eyes were forced shut so she couldn't see. Her brain felt disconnected from her body, and all she could comprehend was the burning so hot that it was cold.
She felt the pain, thinking it would be endless...and then, without warning, the pain was nothing. Nothing compared to a new ache deeper than anything physical.

Behind her eyes burst a parade of endless faces from the blackness, all of them calling out to her in shrieking cries that would make anyone’s skin crawl. Sarah tried to call back to them, to reach out to them, even; but she still couldn’t seem to move a muscle. Everything hurt all over as waves and waves of ghosts passed her by, still crying, still calling her name. They moved so fast that Sarah couldn’t make out their faces to see if she recognized any of them.

*What do you want?* she thought hopelessly, trying to scream. It felt as if her mouth was glued shut.

They kept streaking past her, past her range of comprehension so quickly she could not understand who they were or why she was seeing them now, so minutely, without any reason. They passed as if being stolen away, as if the darkness surrounding them swallowed them whole.

The experience was, at best, similar to a dream, visions so fleeting she wasn’t sure they were at all real. But she knew, instinctively, she was not dreaming. She did not feel so acutely during a dream; was not so painfully aware of her own feelings, or those of others. *Was that where the pain was coming from?* she thought absentmindedly, *does it hurt so much because they’re in pain?*

The parade of others began to slow as Sarah felt the pain begin to lessen slightly, and as they moved more slowly, less and less came, until finally, only one was left. Finally, she could make out this tortured life’s face.

This man’s face was not human, no, not like the others. His features were unnaturally still, and yet, he looked much more alive than the marred faces of those that came before him. A swath of emotions consumed Sarah as she stared into his mismatched eyes.

Then and there, Sarah truly seized, truly rebelled, but only because she hated how wrong she had been; hated herself for what she wanted. She wanted to scream her refusal, wanted to return to the white-hot burning of the thread in her skin, for the thread had finally connected to the darkest corner of her mind, her heart, and she did not want to see the connection; the realization.

The man sneered at her, and she felt both sick and pleased.

Then, quite suddenly, the darkness swallowed her too. She had no time for relief. She was gone.
“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter 7

Blackout

Don’t kid yourself
And don’t fool yourself
This life could be the last
And we’re too young to see…
(Blackout, “Absolution”, Muse)

Gregnok was an important goblin. So important, he thought grumpily as he descended the steps of the castle into the still city, that he was required to stay at the castle until after dark.

Being the Goblin King’s chief of staff usually required working until a late hour, and Gregnok was not usually so opposed, but his wife Brina was with child and he wanted to get home early to be with her. If only the kitchen goblins didn’t get so reckless all over a bit of pudding.

Gregnok sighed, scratching his head. Working long days at the castle was necessary if he was going to provide for his growing family. This was his and Brina’s first, so he was especially nervous...he hadn't even told the King yet. Regardless, he was sure he would be accommodating. Whatever was said about the fearsome Goblin King, he was certainly a powerful yet passionate creature. Much more so than the rest of his kind.

Gregnok found the King's temper especially amusing whenever he was raging over the human girl (though of course, he was never so foolish to display his mirth in front of His Majesty).

Gregnok hurriedly made his trek home, quirking a lopsided grin at the thought of Jareth and his human queen, Sarah. Perhaps Jareth would be the next to expect a growing family.

Gregnok's thoughts were interrupted a few steps from his front door. Goosebumps protruded all over Gregnok's tough skin as a sudden chill stole over the once warm autumn evening. He froze.

Before he could investigate the abrupt change in temperature further, Brina opened the window to
their cottage and waved to him.

"Gregnok, what are you-?"

"Shh," Gregnok interrupted, "Do you feel the chill? Something...is not right. Something is wrong."

Brina frowned and mimicked Gregnok by looking around the area for a change in the night. Nothing moved on their street. The city was motionless.

Then, quite distinctly, both goblins’ large ears perked up at a new sound. Their beady eyes followed their ears, and they looked up.

High above them, flying slowly in traveling circles, was the Goblin King. Unearthly magic carried him and his burden across the sky as if gravity didn't exist. In his arms lay the small body of the human girl, her face stark white against the King's dark cloak and armor.

She looked barely alive.

The sound Gregnok and Brina had heard was an ethereal, mournful waltz pouring from the King's lips in a language neither goblin understood. The music the King sang brought a dense cold to Gregnok's very bones. It reached over the entire city; the entire Labyrinth in one sweeping melody that spoke only of the deepest agony. The wind whipped his cloak around him frantically, making him look impressive and foreboding, encompassed in a cloak of magic.

The dark god carrying home his ailing princess.

Gregnok had never seen the King travel so slowly, so cautiously. He was much more prone to appearing where he wanted to in an instant.

…The girl must have been very weak to have him moving so carefully.

All around Gregnok and Brina, doors and windows from other goblin households were bursting open, their owners wondering aloud what was going on. All fell silent when they saw the King.

Little by little, the King reached his castle, and it wasn’t until long after he disappeared with the girl inside did the goblins retreat to their warm homes.

~||~
It was a sight he had seldom seen; could scarcely have imagined happening to a human. He had found her in the cave with mere moments to act. Upon seeing her, his heart pounded feverishly within his chest. He had reached her just as the convulsing began to slow.

Jareth knelt next to Sarah and hurriedly threw out his hands over her still shaking body. He was just happy she was still capable of movement. Her eyes were closed; her skin damp with cold perspiration; her lips a startling, sickening blue.

Sarah lay on the dirty floor of the cavern, hundreds of silvery threads shining through her skin, embedded inside, piercing her with a rare, formidable magic. Magic not meant for her, Jareth thought savagely, too strong, and totally unnecessary.

At the sight of him, the faeries scattered, though the Queen waited, poised, watching him attempt to contain the magic spreading throughout Sarah with his hands. He paid her no mind. He would deal with her later.

This would take his sole concentration. He hastily peeled off his leather gloves and threw them aside. He reached with his consciousness, pulling, tugging, until he caught a single thread of the magic with both his hand and his mind. He did not need to touch Sarah, only feel for the magic stirring around her; inside her.

He allowed his body to absorb the magical current of the thread he had captured. His was much more equipped to handle such trembling force. He felt the sparks through his fingertips, and slowly, slowly, the lines illuminating Sarah's veins began to fade; retreat. The magic pulsed angrily at him, but he held it in control.

A bead of sweat formed on his brow.

He found the source of the magic; where it had spread like a disease through this limp human’s body. A tiny pinprick in Sarah's palm was the only flicker of light left, and then, like extracting poison from a wound, Jareth was able to pull the thread of magic from her palm and into his own.

Finally, thankfully, she was something like a human again.

The magic had pooled into his hand to resemble one of his own crystals, but not empty or full of dreams. The substance of the orb he held suspended over his palm was like light made liquid; a molten silver, gurgling in anger at its keeper.

The magic had wanted that girl.
Jareth let go of the magic; let it escape his powerful hands outside of Sarah's body. Without the thread, the magic had no host, and would return to its dark home caged inside the Labyrinth. It became wind, or something like it, and moved around him in the empty cavern as a gentle breeze before it was swallowed by the cold darkness.

For a few moments, Jareth did not do or say anything.

Shimmering behind him, Queen Lilu waited, dancing on the air. She knew why the King was silent. Control.

Jareth continued to ignore the little faerie, picking up Sarah and cradling her in his arms. He smoothed the hair back from her forehead. It was drenched in cold sweat. He touched her lips briefly with his forefinger, hoping to bring some warmth back to the young woman's tortured body.

With a great effort, he turned to meet the faerie's coy smile.

"You will pay for this insolence," he murmured, his voice silky, low, dangerous. The faerie’s smile did not change.

"Your Majesty," she replied, inclining her head to him.

~||~

"Out of my way, dwarf!" growled a murderous Goblin King. Hoggle hesitated, unsure of whether or not he ought to step aside as the King rushed forward, Sarah's limp body in his arms. He had seen, just the same as every other inhabitant of the Goblin City, the King's struggle to bring her here. He was afraid of what had happened, of what Jareth might have done to her. And so he had waited, steeling himself at the entrance to Jareth's throne room, ready to protect Sarah.

Hoggle needn't have worried. Jareth had spent much of his own power to ensure that Sarah's life last through the night, and much longer afterwards. He had found her, through lucky chance; had dispelled the poisonous magic surging through her body with great effort.

He had even had to bend gravity to his will, slowly, gently, as to not overwhelm Sarah's overwrought body as he brought her back to the castle.

And then, naturally, the Goblin King had entered his castle, so close to relief, to be bombarded with the curses of an irate Hoggle anxiously awaiting his and Sarah's return.

He had entered the castle through the large window that opened into his throne room. It was centrally located, which would mean he was close to both his healer and a place to deposit the ailing human. Predictably, the irksome dwarf thought to block him from his goal by hovering around in an attempt
to save Sarah from him. The irony would compel him to chuckle with mirth if it wasn't so bloody infuriating.

"What have you done to her?" asked Hoggle forcefully, throwing out his tiny arms in a pitiful attempt to stop Jareth from taking Sarah to his chief healer. Of course, Hoggle did not know this. He assumed Jareth had caused Sarah's coma-like state.

If he hadn't have been holding Sarah carefully in his arms, Jareth would have made to strike the little dwarf down. Instead he felt his panic and frustration pour from his lips in an inhuman snarl.

"Fetch Rowan, dwarf – Sarah needs healing. Fetch Rowan and bring him to my chambers!"

"If you think I'm gonna let you-" Hoggle began, drawing himself up to his full height. He was still blocking Sarah's path to safety.

"You will!" thundered Jareth. The room quivered, and the darkest of magics swirled out of and around the King, engulfing him and Sarah in black and shining silver.

Hoggle had never seen such a sight, and only for the look that had crossed Jareth's mad face, he turned and ran off in the direction of the healer's corridor, hoping with all hope he had made the right choice.

As Hoggle left, Jareth looked down at the still unconscious Sarah. Opting not to use any more magic or even sprint to his destination in case he worsened her condition, Jareth slowly and purposefully carried her to his chambers.

~||~

Many hours later, Queen Lilu still waited, poised, crouching on the edge of reason as always in her cavern of cold truth. Her subjects had scattered, frightened for the King's inevitable return, for punishment.

Lilu was not afraid of the inevitable, the necessary. It was why she was Queen.

Finally, Jareth reappeared without warning. A tall, intimidating creature known for the power that radiated off of every inch of him, it did not take him long to find her. She waited where he had last seen her; airborne, flickering like a firefly through the dense darkness. She was as close to the soil as she dared. The light radiating from her skin illuminated the King's hard-lined face.

"Your Majesty," she purred, inclining her head to him. She smiled.
The King stared at her, his lips set in a firm line. His mismatched eyes, indicative of the unique brand of magic found rarely even in his own race, found hers, and for a moment, he did nothing.

Then, quite suddenly, he raised his arm towards her and she felt a force unlike anything she had ever experienced grip her tightly. She was frozen in midair, motionless.

Queen Lilu's grin faded.

"My dear Queen," began the King. His voice was ice. If she could've moved, she might've actually trembled.

"I warned you that you would reap the benefits of such a stunt," said Jareth coldly, "The only thing I could think that might be deserving enough for the havoc you have wrought upon my kingdom was to strip you of your physical freedom."

Queen Lilu permitted herself to frown. The King knew the most dangerous thing for her kind: she could not remain still. As a faerie of the darkest magic—a magic that required her to dance between dreams, desires, and nightmares—to remain stagnant was the same as ripping apart her very soul. She could not stand being caged for very long.

The King was angrier than she had ever seen him. He did not understand.

"My King," Queen Lilu rasped quite calmly, "This is a place one can only find if it is the right time-

"Silence!" roared Jareth. She felt another force ripple over her body, her sensitive wings. She couldn't even struggle. She was beginning to feel the pain of remaining still, deep in the recesses of her chest. Torture.

She understood why Jareth was vengeful, but she wasn't too pleased with his method of revenge. Especially when it was unnecessary.

"My King," continued Lilu. She fixed him with a meaningful stare as to relay the importance of the words she would speak.

"The human girl wandered into my domain; not by accident, not through any method of my own manipulation. Like you, I am bound for eternity by law. You know this. You forged my sentence the same as the Labyrinth's. She was given her choice."
"You saw she was human," hissed Jareth, though Lilu felt more than saw some of his resolve falter. She hesitated to struggle, still. The King was reasonable. Even in love, the King always saw reason.

"A human with the mark of magic, my King. Regardless of the human's race, I am still bound," finished the faerie, "She will survive the magic. She is meant to survive. That is all I am able to convey to you. Each thread reveals itself in due course, and only to the host."

Jareth stared at her. After many long, agonizing minutes in which Lilu actually felt her soul dying, he spoke.

"She lives," he said quietly.

Without anything else said, she felt his grip slacken. She was able to move. A grin broke through her mask, and she danced through the air, reborn, free. When she gazed back at Jareth, his back was turned to her, fists clenched at his sides.

"It will soon be time for you to seek this place," said Lilu.

The King did not turn. He did nothing to acknowledge he had heard or understood Lilu's prophecy. He only vanished, like time gone missing.
“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

For Sarah it was like emerging from a deep, dense fog. Or perhaps from emerging from underwater, never knowing how long you had managed to hold your breath...it felt like ages, forever even, but was truly never a full minute.

For a few seconds she could see. She couldn't hear. She wasn't very aware of what she was seeing, she just knew she was lying down and surrounded by black. A shadow crossed the blackness, and she was gone again.

("Time is Running Out", Absolution, Muse)
The next time she was aware of herself, she was able to hear. She heard before she saw. Hushed voices penetrated wherever she was, and she strained to hear them, to understand.

"She's been healing for nearly 3 days."

"The lady doth recover, brave Hoggle!"

"Shh! You'll jar her awake, and Rowan said that was the last thing he wanted."

She tried opening her mouth, to say something to these friends she vaguely remembered—they were talking about her, weren't they? She should tell them she was all right, that she was okay...

Her eyes flickered open and she caught a brief glimpse of a massive being; a giant beast, covered in auburn fur. The beast's large, toothy grin spread across his face the instant she knew she was seeing him.

"Sarah?" croaked the beast.

By the time the others had rushed to see her awake, she was gone again.

Hoggle and Sir Didymus questioned Ludo whether or not she had really been awake at all.

Sarah was floating. Or, at least, that was what it felt like.

No.

No, she wasn't floating at all. She was on something soft. She felt it, in her back. This led her to believe she was solid. She was real; she existed.

If she was solid, then she should still be human. She remembered she was human before. Humans had eyes.

Sarah opened hers.

Her surroundings swam hazily in her line of sight for a few seconds, but then, mercifully, her vision cleared. She was in a giant four-poster bed adorned in ebony sheets and curtains. The curtains were pulled nearly all the way shut except for a peeping hole by her right foot, so she could see little else.

Sarah felt fear pool in the pit of her stomach. Where was she? How did she get here? She didn't seem hurt at all, just weak. She tried sitting up a little. Her lack of strength only permitted her to move slowly, and after great effort, she moved herself to a sitting position.

"Hello?" she called quietly.
The resounding noise following her timid call nearly knocked her back down again. A short creature immediately thrust the hangings of her bed aside, and she was greeted by an enthusiastic fox dressed in knight's garb and a very angry dwarf.

"The lady doth awaken!" cried the fox.

"Quiet Didymus! You'll scare her back to sleepin'!" shouted the dwarf.

"Hoggle? Sir Didymus?" she asked, confused. Was she dreaming? For a moment Sarah did not understand. But then without any preamble, her memories of recent life Underground came rushing back to her in a dizzying sequence of images. She nearly swooned from the onslaught of knowledge.


"What's…what's happened? Where am I? The cave…I was in a cave," Sarah murmured. Her own thoughts were making her faint. She remembered gruesome faces, one after the other…

"You were in an oubliette, Sarah…and you…you went to a dark place," said Hoggle quietly, "Jareth will be able to tell you."

At the mention of the Goblin King's name, Sarah felt her heart burn, and a sickening swoop in her stomach. She firmly closed her eyes and grasped Hoggle's outstretched hand tightly. 

Later, she thought, I'll think about that later.

"Milady?" asked Sir Didymus. Sarah opened her eyes. She gazed at her friends, who looked at her with deep concern. She let go of Hoggle's hand, placing hers in her lap, and attempted a small smile.

"It's all right. I'm all right. I just feel…very tired," she said lamely.

"Milady, I must say, we are all so pleased you've come back to us," said Didymus excitedly with a bow and a sweep of his hat, "A few days ago Sir Ludo thought you had awoken and we were very worried when you had fallen back…asleep. What is important now is that you are well on your way to recovery!"

"Thank you, Didymus," said Sarah, really smiling this time.

"We've been very worried about you, Sarah," said Hoggle.

"Now that you're doing better, I must inform Sir Ludo," cried Didymus gleefully, "His Majesty ordered him to leave some days ago for all the excitement he caused over supposedly seeing you conscious. We will visit next when the King permits it, Milady," he assured her. Sarah nodded, frowning slightly, as Didymus turned and left the unfamiliar but otherwise grand room.

Something had just occurred to her. Why hadn't they taken her to the room she had been in before? Where was she, anyway? She had a sneaking suspicion that this very comfortable and luxurious room didn't belong to just anyone…

"Hoggle," Sarah began slowly, meeting his eyes, "Where am I? I'm not in my old room."

"Er…no," said Hoggle slowly, looking at his feet.

"Hoggle," Sarah pleaded.

"Well, er…Sarah, you've got to understand-"

Whatever Hoggle had been about to say, however, was interrupted by the door bursting open. Sarah,
still blocked by the curtains lining the foot and left side of her bed, did not see the newcomer at first, though she had a nagging suspicion that it was the Goblin King. The suspense ended in an instant, however, when the drapes were thrust aside.

"You're a human?" blurted Sarah. Standing before her was not the formidable Goblin King but a different man altogether: he was of average height and build, with light brown hair falling into his eyes. Perched on his rather generous nose was a pair of spectacles, though they didn't mask twinkling cerulean eyes. He wore a decidedly friendly grin, and was dressed somewhat strangely for an inhabitant of the Underground, in almost modern-day tan slacks, a clean white shirt and a brown vest.

"Ah, Sarah, you've finally awoken!" said the man, still smiling, "And yes, I am somewhat human, I suppose, in a manner of speaking."

"Sarah, this is Rowan, the healer," said Hoggle, looking relieved that he didn't have to answer Sarah's question.

"Yes, indeed," continued Rowan, coming round to join Hoggle at her right side, "And I'm afraid, my dear, that now that you're awake, I will have to check a few things to make sure you're on the proper route to recovery."

"Oh," said Sarah somewhat nervously.

"Sounds like I should be going," said Hoggle quickly. Sarah shot him another pleading look but he gave her a guilty look before shuffling out of the room without another word.

"It's all right," began Rowan slowly, peering down at her with a gentle smile, "I suppose the best place to start would be to explain just what exactly has happened to your body."

Still smiling gently, he raised an arm and to Sarah's immense surprise, a chair from a desk across the room flew towards them and landed just next to the bed.

"You can do magic?" she asked incredulously.

"All in good time, my dear," said Rowan, chuckling, "Now. The magic infused within your circulatory system is a very rare, old magic. What happened to your body, as a result, is quite curious. I have never seen such a reaction. Most humans subjected to that amount of power die almost instantly."

Rowan's eyes widened.

"Who was she?" she asked quietly, "Why did she want to give me the thread?"

"That I cannot say. Those questions—the questions pertaining to the how's and why's—must be asked of the King. He will tell you, I am sure, in time. I am here only to inform you of how you will be recuperating."

"I don't want the King to-" began Sarah stubbornly, but Rowan carefully interrupted.

"Do not be silly, my dear. Do take note that had you not been brought here by the King, had he not contained and drew the magic out of you, you would certainly no longer be with us."

"Now," began Rowan, the smile easing back onto his lips, "You will feel very weak for some time. A few weeks, at most. It will take your body some time to...adjust."
"Adjust?" asked Sarah. Rowan opened his mouth to further explain, but in that same moment, the air shifted—suddenly, Jareth stood next to Rowan.

Sarah felt a searing pain in her heart and the same ill feeling in her stomach, but she refused to acknowledge it as the Goblin King fixed his eyes on her. He was as intimidating as ever, especially as he towered over both Rowan and herself. After appraising the apparent improvement in her health, he turned to Rowan.

"Report, Your Highness?" asked the healer. Jareth nodded curtly.

"She seems to be doing just fine. I have just told her that she will be weak for a few weeks, at best, as her body recuperates. As we have been speaking, she has been more than responsive in terms of her motor skills. She appears to have no memory loss and is, naturally, quite exhausted. She must be wary of overtiring and should slowly resume consuming solid foods. Your Majesty, if there were any serious complications, particularly pertaining to her brain or organs, they would have made themselves known by now."

"Very good," said Jareth. His eyes left Rowan's and turned back to Sarah's.

"Leave us," he said slowly. Rowan nodded and smiled at Sarah once more before standing and making his way to the door.

After he left, Jareth turned his back on Sarah, walking purposefully away from her towards an open balcony in the corner of the room. Sarah was indignantly surprised. This was unlike him; Jareth loved flaunting his power over her. This was as good a time as any.

"I'm sure you are wondering, Sarah, just what has progressed over the time you have been unconscious," said Jareth softly. She listened for any note of emotion in his voice, but it was carefully calm—and unnerving.

He turned to look at her now, his hands held behind his back regally. He was still very far away.

"You must have many questions," he said silkily.

"Yes," Sarah agreed softly. Now that he was looking at her, his mismatched eyes once again mesmerized her. She felt very vulnerable, lying there barely able to move, with his gaze boring into her like that.

He did not speak. It seemed that he was waiting for her to.

"Who was she?" she asked. Jareth raised his eyebrows in slight surprise, but then opened his mouth to answer.

"She is the keeper of cold truth," said Jareth slowly, his eyes never leaving hers. It seemed to Sarah that he was trying to read her mind.

He turned to look at her now, his hands held behind his back regally. He was still very far away.

"She is Lilu, the Spinner, provocateur of restless nights and erotic dreams. Crouching on the edge of reason, just beyond rationality, she is the dark faerie who ensnares with compulsions, fixations, and feverish imaginings. Yet...within the dark tangle of images she weaves are the glittering threads of our own healing—for even as she conjures our compulsions, she too holds out the ability to release their grip, enabling us to confront and let go of all that we no longer need," finished Jareth.

Sarah nodded, understanding. She looked down at her hands. She was slightly aghast at her own lack of reaction, but in truth, she had guessed, known, really, what the little faerie had done to her, or tried to show her. Perhaps she had known the moment the thread had connected. She might've even known as soon as she had accepted it from her what it might mean. That didn't mean she had to
believe that it was true—or had happened without cause. A senseless heat blossomed in the pit of her stomach as she looked back up at Jareth.

"Did you put me in there?" she asked carefully, voice brimming with anger. Jareth's face could have been a mask. He said nothing.

"Did you?" she asked forcefully, attempting to sit a bit a taller before falling back in the cushions, slightly out of breath. As she fell back, a tiny spasm seemed to go through Jareth's body, as if he was forcing himself to stay still.

"Careful, Sarah," he warned, eyes darting quickly up and down her now limp form.

"Answer me," Sarah said, voice shaking slightly, whether from anger or exhaustion, she didn't quite know. Jareth's eyes bore into hers for a few prickly moments of silence before he answered.

"No. I did not."

"And the other dreams?" Sarah asked stiffly, keeping her eyes locked on his. Jareth's expressionless face twisted into an angry sneer.

"I can create dreams, Sarah, but I cannot see such intimacies unless I am apart of them," he whispered coolly. At his answer, Sarah tore her eyes away, looking at her lap again, consciously trying to still her rapidly beating heart. The minutes passed, and Sarah felt her once white-hot anger begin to ebb away, much as she tried to hold onto it.

She was broken from her reverie when Jareth spoke.

"Sarah," he said carefully, his voice deep, controlled, "What did she show you?"

She looked up at him now, the fear palpable in her large eyes. Jareth studied her more intensely than he ever had before. It was plain he cared very much about her answer.

"No," Sarah pleaded, "I can't tell you."

Surprising her again, he dropped his gaze for a moment before looking back up at her, a haughty smirk dancing across his lips. He nodded, not speaking. His eyes were cold fire. Forcing herself to push his very personal question and strange lack of insistence to the back of her mind, Sarah pressed on.

"Why?" she whispered.

"You were in an oubliette," said Jareth, beginning to pace the length of the room. It was amazing how, without even trying, he stalked like a predator.

"You left that oubliette. Foolish of you," he remarked dryly, "But you would never have found that place if you were not meant to, nor would you have been able to refuse her. Her cavern is one of the darkest places in the Labyrinth, visited rarely. The Labyrinth led you there, as it does for everyone. It was traditional for a Fae male, when he came of age, to seek Lilu out—she would give him the same gift she gave you—the thread revealing the cold truth of the deepest, darkest recess of his heart, his future."

Sarah stared at him, unbelieving. She knew he knew she was wondering whether or not he had ever been given his own thread of reason.

"Upon entering the cavern, you were given a false choice. You could never have resisted. Lilu is—
regrettably—bound by law," Jareth continued, his pace slow, "Most that seek her never find her; are not worthy of the thread she might have woven for them. It is, as I said, uncommon. The tradition is not attempted very often much more—only those in the Fae Realm still believing of the power of her gift and meant to find it ever visit my Labyrinth for such a reason."

Sarah frowned. So what happened could not have happened any other way, she thought. The Labyrinth would only have led her there if she was meant to see what she had inevitably seen. Once again, she was faced with the consequences of her own impulse. No matter what, it seemed that the Labyrinth wanted to force her to see truth—or was it really truth? The Labyrinth, as Jareth had said, was sentient. Maybe it was possible that what she had seen wasn't true, that this time the Labyrinth had done as such to ensure she would accept her life here.

She looked up at Jareth and swallowed a fresh wave of heat that passed over her.

"How long was I...?"

"You were unconscious for nearly a week," supplied Jareth, "6 days."

"Rowan is human," she said. It wasn't a question. Jareth's smirk widened.

"He is a child of both worlds," he said, "Half-Fae, half-human—born from a human mother that was wished away to the Labyrinth and a Fae Lord. He is a useful healer, understanding of both the human body and the Fae. Anything I alone cannot determine through the use of more advanced magic, he can surmise. I preferred that he assess your human physical condition."

A surge of new questions threatened to spill from Sarah's lips at all of this new information.

"I thought you turned humans wished away into goblins?" she asked.

Jareth laughed coldly, and began to stalk closer to her. She made no attempt to move, or let him know how this unsettled her.

"For someone so thoroughly defiant against staying here, you know very little about the place you reside, Sarah." said Jareth, "Children wished away are given a choice, depending on their age. If too young to comprehend the burden of such a choice, they are immediately turned. They will not remember ever being anything else besides goblin."

"What happens to the children who stay human?" asked Sarah, wide-eyed.

"They enter the Fae Realm," said Jareth, "The northern kingdom of my kind. There they reside as second-class citizens. Unable to perform magic, they usually become servants to the Fae."

"Well, that's just-" began Sarah heatedly, but Jareth raised a hand to shush her, and she let the words fall away.

"Sarah," he began, "Limit your raving. You are not well. You must not overexert yourself. When you have recovered, you may learn all you like in the library. Limit your questions to what is necessary that you hear from me."

Sarah glared at him. Raving, was she? Well, that was rich, coming from a—

"Sarah," Jareth continued, interrupting her thoughts as if he knew exactly what she had been thinking. He strode even closer to the side of the bed, "It does not bode well for your health."

Sarah sighed loudly, looking away from him to take in her surroundings once more, only to become infuriated again.

"Where am I?" she asked indignantly. She already knew the answer, but she wanted to hear him say it.
"You are in my chambers," Jareth replied. His face, mostly an emotionless mask for the duration of her questioning, betrayed a hint of amusement.

"Why?" she asked pointedly.

"It was the most suitable for you in terms of recovery," he said mockingly, sneering, "Do not worry your pretty little head, Sarah. I am capable of being a gentleman. I have no intention of being anything but that with an ailing young woman."
Slightly ashamed but still annoyed, Sarah lowered her gaze from his.

"What did Rowan mean...'adjust'?" she asked, finally.

She expected Jareth to answer immediately, and when he didn't, she looked back up at him. He was looking at her calculatingly, as if he wasn't sure how much to tell her.

"Rowan meant to imply that your body has been irrevocably changed," he drawled, finally, "Being a true human in the Underground is impossible. Humans wished away slowly adapt over time to live much longer than they would have in the Aboveground. Most become near-immortal the same as the Fae, but this process usually happens over time. You were subjected to a deep, altering magic. Your aging process will slow much more quickly. That and the Labyrinth's claim upon you has, undoubtedly, secured your immortal life."

"So I'm going to be 24-years-old for the rest of my life?" Sarah asked incredulously.

"Yes," confirmed Jareth.

A tense silence pervaded the room, stealing the hearts from both lion and lamb. Neither Sarah nor Jareth seemed able to look away from each other. Sarah felt her breath quicken, and she suddenly realized again that Jareth had saved her life. Whatever the circumstances, she still owed him her gratitude.

"Our time is running out, Jareth," Sarah said quietly, "And now I feel in debt to you for your little rescue."

He continued to stare at her. For once, she thought she might be able to read his expression: he recognized her inch towards defeat. He knew that she knew it was slowly becoming less likely she could ever leave the Underground.
A ghost of a grin crossed Jareth's face.

"I assure you, Sarah, here, all there is is time," replied Jareth, his cold eyes sparkling strangely, with an odd sort of mirth, "And I will no longer be alone for the eons of it."
Without another word, he turned his back on her and swept from the room.
If anyone had asked her, Sarah wouldn't have been able to explain the sudden rush of blood to her heart.
Chapter 9

Map of the Problematique

Fear and panic in the air
I want to be free
From desolation and despair
And I feel like everything I saw
Is being swept away
When I refuse to let you go
I can't get it right
Get it right
Since I met you
Loneliness be over
When will this loneliness be over?
("Map of the Problematique", Black Holes and Revelations, Muse)

Time passed slowly for Sarah as her body healed from Lilu's gift. Unfortunately, she was confined to Jareth's monstrous bed and wasn't allowed to attempt anything on her own. Every day, she woke up and was assisted by a few female goblins in washing and dressing herself in a new nightgown, only to return to bed.

Having never been literally helpless in her life, Sarah was easily frustrated by this routine. She hated being without the use of her own legs; hated relying on goblins much smaller than her to help her with her most basic needs. It wasn't just annoying; it was humiliating.

The only break in the monotony of Sarah's day-to-day life was visits from her friends and Rowan. Rowan dropped by every day to check on her condition. Apparently, she was making excellent progress, albeit slow. How he could discern this from anything other than her quick return to eating solid foods and ability to start moving again, she didn't know, but she found she quite liked his company. They often spoke of the human world, to which Rowan was a frequent visitor. He explained his unorthodox position in the Underground, and the luck he had in the use of magic.

"It is unheard of, in a human, even a part-human," Rowan said on the fourth day of Sarah's bed rest, "The use of magic is limited to the inhabitants that are born here."

"But you aren't fully human. And you were born here," said Sarah.

"Yes," nodded Rowan, smiling, "Yes, I was. My mother chose the life of living in the Seelie kingdom of the north after being wished away…but my father, Lord Tiberius, should never have fell
in love with her. Though the humans that reside in the Underground are not actively oppressed, it was certainly a scandal—a Fae male falling in love and subsequently marrying a human."

"All because we don't have magic?" Sarah asked indignantly. Rowan chuckled.

"You speak heatedly, Sarah. I do not flaunt the views of most of the Fae kind. To do so would be wholly ignorant of half of myself."

"I didn't mean you," Sarah said, blushing, embarrassed.

"It's all right," Rowan said gently, "I just want to be sure you understand me. It is ignorant, to be sure, of the Fae, but they have their reasons to distrust and denigrate humans, just as humans have to be doubtful of them. For centuries each race has taunted one another, and not until humans became less believing in the existence of magic did the line separating the two worlds become invisible. At least in your world, anyway."

"After living here, can a human never return to the Aboveground?" asked Sarah. Rowan watched her carefully.

"No. The magic that gives most prolonged life and even immortality ensures this. It is a like putting a fish out of water; a bird underground."

"But you can journey between the two worlds," Sarah persisted.

"Yes, I can," agreed Rowan, "But I am of both. I can exist in both; I am born with magic, the only, thus far, to be of both the race of man and Fae. My magic is limited, and so is my human nature. If I wished to make my permanent residence in the Aboveground, I would have no use of magic, and I would eventually age, and die. I am not saying this is an undesirable life, Sarah, but my use is much better served in the Underground. I am the only like myself, and therefore the only being here equipped to help humans."

"I'm very glad you're here, and not just because you helped save my life, Rowan," Sarah assured him, "I'm just…trying to understand, is all."

"You're trying to understand, my dear," said Rowan, patting her arm, a wistful smile playing on his lips, "Trying to understand your place here."

"Yes," Sarah admitted quietly. Rowan sighed and stood from his current position in the chair next to her. With a flick of his wrist, the chair soared back to its rightful place behind Jareth's desk.

"What sorts of magic can you do?" Sarah asked quickly, keen for a change of subject. Rowan raised his eyebrows in mock surprise, but did not snub her.

"Little, I'm afraid. In comparison to the power of the Fae, I am limited. Very limited. Mere parlor tricks by their standards…by the standards of the Goblin King, most especially," he said. A slight shadow crossed over his usually congenial features.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Sarah. She did not like the absence of Rowan's smile—it was like watching an eclipse take over the sun.

Rowan looked at her full on, a frown still marring his features.

"I mean only that the power of the Fae far surpasses mine," he answered, looking at her intently, "And that the Goblin King's power is all but invincible in the whole of Faerie. The Labyrinth is quite unlike anything else. But I am the wrong person to ask when uncovering those secrets."
Sarah bowed her head, ignoring his suggestion. Rowan, always the gentleman, continued on.

"It is still useful, to be sure. I am not ungrateful for my power. It puts me into a position to be useful to both the Fae and mankind; as you know by seeing me here before you!" he continued, regaining his smile. He pushed his glasses up from the end of his nose.

"But do not think we can avoid you, Sarah. I think it important to relay to you that I do not include you when I speak of humans in the Underground."

"I'm not Fae," Sarah said slowly, "I'm definitely human. Just because some faerie laced me with-"

"Sarah," interrupted Rowan, "You are human. Yes, this is true. But remember why you are here. You have done what no one else has, beaten what was known as unbeatable. You have been marked, been given a magic known only as unconquerable. You are legend in the Underground, and will become much more. If anyone-Fae, human, goblin, anyone was to treat you as inferior, I am quite sure the King's wrath—and, in time, your own power—would quite convince them otherwise."

Sarah stared at him, unsure whether she wanted to agree or not. He was paying her a compliment, but it also meant that he too thought she had no hope of ever leaving the Underground.

"Till tomorrow, my dear," he said after she didn't speak. With a wink, he left her, still quite puzzled.

As the days passed, Sarah slowly began to improve. She was finally beginning to become slightly pleased with her progression, too—she often was allowed to try walking across the room to get used to the feeling again, although she was always closely watched by Rowan in doing so.

Jareth visited rarely while she was restricted to bed rest. Sarah often wondered where he slept, though there was no change in his appearance and demeanor. He rarely dropped in on her alone, preferring to pop up when Rowan was there so he could ask him his professional opinion. He barely even spoke to Sarah.

She told herself this didn't bother her, but the sinking feeling she had every passing day he did not come was undeniable. This abrupt change in Jareth's manner was odd, and it put her on edge. It was like he was biding his time—but for what, she had no idea.

One nice way to force Jareth to the back of her mind was Sarah's visits with her friends. Ludo and Didymus came every few days, and Hoggle was with her as often as the otherwise indifferent Goblin King allowed him.

The first time Sarah met with Ludo and Didymus, the two were overjoyed to see her doing so well. Ludo was beside himself, roaring and growling in happiness, and nearly hurt Sarah in a backbreaking hug. Didymus was his usual chipper self. Sarah thought them great company, and was touched by their insistence to ensure her safety and well-being. Hoggle, however, seemed a bit on-edge, though Sarah couldn't be sure why. She thought about asking him several times, but couldn't seem to work up the nerve. Whenever he visited, he put on such a show of smiling and fussing over her that she couldn't bring herself to diminish his efforts to be cheerful.

During one particular visit near the end of Sarah's recuperation, Sarah finally managed to steel herself into asking Hoggle what was wrong.

"Hoggle," she began slowly, "Is something wrong?"

"Wrong?" asked Hoggle, frowning slightly, "Er, no, Sarah, why'd you ask that?"

"I don't know, you've just seemed rather quiet lately," pressed Sarah. She was sitting cross-legged on
the bed above the covers, fidgeting with the hem of her nightgown a bit nervously.

Hoggle, who was standing next to the bed, said nothing, only turned away from her and walked towards the open balcony.

"Hoggle, you can tell me," said Sarah, "Is it...something to do with Jareth?"

Hoggle turned to look at her so sharply that she flinched.

"What makes you think that?" he snapped. Sarah frowned.

"Well, whenever he's mentioned, albeit rarely, by Rowan or the others, it's like you're somewhere else. Did he do something to you, Hoggle? If he did, I swear, when I'm back on my feet I'll-"

"No," Hoggle interrupted her. He turned back to face her again. His expression was shrewd, but also frightened. He clearly did not want to have this conversation.

"What is it then?" Sarah asked. Hoggle sighed.

"Jareth's done nothin' to me-recently, anyway," chuckled Hoggle. When he caught Sarah's look of alarm, he waved a hand at her in dismissal.

"What's done is done when it comes to that. Never forget, Sarah, though I may not like the man, he is still my King."

"So…” started Sarah.

"So nothin'," said Hoggle somewhat gruffly, "He does nothin' to me, even though I's been a bad subject to him more than once, if I'm honest. I know why that is-it's because you made me your friend, Sarah. He knows we're friends. I just never thought it meant so much to him until…"

"Until what?" asked Sarah. Hoggle sighed.

"Until he brought you back," said Hoggle simply.

"I don't understand, Hoggle," Sarah said.

The dwarf sighed, and something in his eyes broke open.

"You were dying," said Hoggle. "You were dying. Cold, and...pale. I wanted to protect you from him. I had to try. I waited for him to bring you back, ready. But he was something...else. He was—has been—even more protective of you than I ever could be. He wouldn't do nothing to harm you. In all my hundreds of years gardening and guarding the gates of the Labyrinth, I've never seen the King…"

He broke off, looking away from her for a moment, before turning back to fix her with a look that was, somehow, both stern and gentle.

"I thought before…but I never wanted to think anything good 'o' him. But I can't lie anymore, to myself or to you. He saved you. Not me, him. And us being friends has saved me in turn, because of why he did."

Slightly stunned, Sarah cleared her throat, willing herself to respond.

"I know, Hoggle," she said, "I know what Jareth has done for me. I...I admit, I don't hate him. I don't think I ever have. Our...relationship is not a simple one. I am more than grateful for his saving me…"
but he is still my captor, and despite what you may think, I don't believe he did it for anything other than selfish reasons. Do you even know why he brought me here? Do you?"

"I know why you think he brought you here," said Hoggle, "But Sarah, you didn't see-"

"It doesn't matter!" shouted Sarah shrilly, "He's the Goblin King! I'm not a person to him, Hoggle. If anything, I'm a prize—to be claimed, subdued, and kept on display. To be used. He only wants to break me so I have no chance of ever escaping him, or the Labyrinth."

"I wish I could say I think you're right, Sarah," said Hoggle, "I really wish I still could."

That conversation disturbed Sarah more than anything else she had learned in the days she slowly improved. On top of that, while she had been able to avoid dwelling on the memory of the cave for a while, in the last few days of her recovery, she was constantly plagued by endless nightmares—tortured face after another, until finally, she reached the dead mask, alive only by his eyes. He would come closer and closer to her, with words on his lips she was somehow greedy to hear, and then, before he could say anything, she would wake up, cold tears burning her cheeks.

That face scared her much more than any of the others.

On the last night of Sarah's stint in Jareth's room, she woke up from the same nightmare. She bolted up from where she lay, clutching her heaving chest, out of breath. She tried to understand what she had just seen. The dream had changed, but she was already forgetting it—like sand washed from her hands, the memory slipped through her fingertips, impossible to hold onto. What had been different?

He had started towards her, like always. She had looked into his eyes and recognized what looked like two colors. As he came closer, she had waited, as always, to hear what he might say to her, and finally, it looked like the dream would last long enough for her to hear something, when she got distracted by his eyes again. There had been something there, a look of something unrecognizable, something there that wasn't there before...

Sarah shook her head in an attempt to dispel Jareth's face from behind her eyelids. Taking a steadying breath, she peered out towards the balcony, flooded in the moonlight. She suddenly had an incredible urge to walk outside and feel the breeze against her skin. She hadn't been outside in weeks; the prospect of real air on her face and in her hair was practically irresistible.

This was her last night, after all. It wasn't as if she couldn't walk now. Sure, she hadn't done it yet without Rowan around, but she knew the strength in her legs. Besides, fresh air would do her health some good.

Making up her mind, Sarah scooted to the edge of the bed. Slowly, she twisted her body around so her feet dangled off of the side. Part of her felt silly for her cautiousness, but the rest of her knew it wouldn't do well to injure herself just for a nighttime stroll. So, carefully, she lowered her feet, gingerly placing her weight on them as she stood. She clutched the side of the bed to hold herself steady, and then, began to move.

Sarah felt her legs tingle slightly as she walked—the feeling was a lot like how a limb might feel after falling asleep and being used again—but it seemed that as long as she didn't go too fast, she was fine.
In fact, the more she moved forward, the better her legs seemed to feel. For the first time in a while, Sarah felt a true smile form on her lips.

When she reached the opening to the balcony, moonlight lit up her bare feet while the rest of her remained clothed in darkness. Another step. She felt the wind blow gently around her. The silk nightgown and robe she wore both hit her just above the knee—she felt goosebumps along her bare calves, but didn't care.

Another step. She was out in the open air now, submerged entirely in the moonlight. Still smiling, she looked up at the inky night sky. One giant moon. No stars.

She took another step, and was only a foot or two from the edge of the balcony. The stone that surrounded the view would easily protect her from a terrible fall, she surmised. What had she even been worried about?

She started to take her last step, reaching out for the balcony ledge, and her smile faded. She took a bad step, feeling a pinch in her left ankle, and stumbled.

Before she could even utter a small gasp, a large hand caught her waist, and she was upright again. Sarah's initial fear of falling was quickly replaced with another sort of fear entirely.

His lips were at her ear, warm, and soft. She felt his breath on her neck.

"Careful, Sarah, my dear," he whispered.

Sarah drew in a much-needed breath, not realizing that she had been holding hers. She didn't turn her head. She didn't need to. There was only one person who could be there.

Holding her carefully, Jareth helped her to the balcony ledge. She rested her hands atop it, perfectly stable once more, but his warm hand remained wrapped firmly around her waist. He moved from behind her to stand next to her, but his closeness did not go unnoticed.

Sarah didn't exactly like how this made the skin on the back of her neck stand up. The other unrecognizable fear gurgled in the pit of her stomach.

"It was unwise to come out here alone," Jareth chided her softly. She still avoided his eyes. He hadn't spoken to her in at least three days, and for some reason she was unsure what to do with herself. He didn't seem angry with her, as she might have expected.

"I…wanted some fresh air," she said lamely, finally turning to look at him. He was taller than her, so she had to crane her neck a little to see his face properly. The moonlight that hit his face made the angular features look somewhat softer. Or perhaps it was his expression. *Trick of the light*, Sarah reassured herself.

"Understandable," agreed Jareth somewhat coldly, nodding. As Sarah watched him, she unconsciously pictured the Jareth in her dream. It was strange how different and alike both faces were—did Lilu's thread distort everything? Was it part of the nightmare? Or was it all in her head?

"Something on your mind, Sarah?" asked Jareth, interrupting her appraisal of him.

"No," she quickly, looking away from him, embarrassed. To her surprise, Jareth did not ask her why she had been staring.

"I find it rather interesting you should feel compelled to a walk in the moonlight tonight of all nights," Jareth said instead. His tone was aloof, not cold, but not warm, either. Masked, maybe.
Figures, Sarah thought.

"Why?" she asked. She hadn't forgotten his hand on her waist. She supposed he thought he had to support her; was afraid of her falling again. The body heat from his hand had all but evaporated any chill she had felt before when she was alone.

Curiously enough, the goosebumps on her calves had spread to the rest of her body.

She ignored this.

"Look," he said. He raised his other arm to point at the endless maze surrounding the castle. In the dark, it looked much more menacing, like it might swallow you whole.

"I don't see anything," Sarah said, "It looks still."

"Does it?" whispered Jareth, "I see it changing. Just there, to the north."

Sarah peered closer, and let out an audible gasp. Just where Jareth said, on the northern edge of the great maze, the walls were moving.

She had noticed that the Labyrinth could move and change when she had gone after Toby (and thought it really unfair, too), but it was...different now. Somehow, she could make out clouds of magic that encompassed the area, sparkling and twisting and frothing, a dark blue-gray that blended easily into the starless night.

"Magic," she whispered.

"Yes, you see it now," acknowledged Jareth, "You are seeing out of your new eyes. Look, to the east."

Jareth pointed again, and she looked. Less like clouds here, the magic seemed like light, but more solid, shaping and changing solid hedges in a vivid, dark green.

"Fear. Panic. Dreams. Desolation. Despair. Your beauty, Sarah," said Jareth, "All of these and thousands more shape and change the Labyrinth. It is moving much more quickly now."

"It's...beautiful," Sarah whispered. The word fell from her lips easily, and she was surprised to realize she meant it.

"As all magic can be," said Jareth, "It won't be much longer now. But there is still something missing, and I cannot fathom what it might be. I have ideas, of course, but..."

"It's shaping to match me," Sarah said slowly, realizing. Why wasn't she more horrified?

"It is shaping to include you," corrected Jareth. She looked back up at him, at a loss at what to say.

He stared back. For a few moments, neither said anything, until Sarah turned back to gaze at the ever-shifting Labyrinth.

"Can others see it?" she asked.

"Not humans, no," said Jareth, "They, like you when you were a runner, can comprehend the shifts in walls and paths, but they cannot see the magic that makes it so."

Sarah nodded. All was quiet for a few minutes until Jareth spoke again.
"What will you do, tomorrow, Sarah, when you are free?"

"What?" asked Sarah incredulously. A shadow passed over Jareth's face.

"I mean free from bed rest, of course. You can never leave the Underground, Sarah," he said. The stark change in his tone was instant; his voice had become hard ice.

"Oh," said Sarah.

"I hope you're not dreaming up another elaborate scheme in an attempt to run away again," Jareth remarked dryly, voice still cold, "The last time wasn't so successful. Nor prudent. Your place is here."

Sarah scowled at him.

"I thought about…visiting the library," she said grudgingly.

"Very appropriate," said Jareth. His tone seemed much less severe.

Without warning, the hand holding her steady was gone, and Sarah suddenly felt cold.

"I will permit you to go back to sleep without my aid. If you stumble again, I will of course be there to assist you-just call for me," said Jareth. He took a step away from her, gazing at the sky.

"Jareth," Sarah asked, "Why aren't there any stars here?"

He looked at her, his expression unfathomable.

"A question to be answered by the library, I think," Jareth replied quietly, his eyes twinkling strangely in the limited light. She waited for him to disappear, but he stood there.

"I won't stay here forever, Jareth," she said finally. Her usual defiance had been replaced by a calm seriousness.

"It's only forever...not long at all," mused Jareth, a smirk curling his lips. In an instant, he was gone.

Sarah decided she hated him.
Undisclosed Desires

Chapter Summary

“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter 10

Undisclosed Desires

You trick your lovers
That you're wicked and divine
You may be a sinner
But your innocence is mine
Please me, show me how it's done
Tease me, you are the one
I want to reconcile the violence in your heart
I want to recognize your beauty's not just a mask
I want to exorcise the demons from your past
I want to satisfy the undisclosed desires in your heart
("Undisclosed Desires", The Resistance, Muse)

The next morning, Sarah rose in good spirits, happy at the prospect of finally leaving her confinement. Before she was allowed to roam the castle, however, she had to receive a clean bill of health from Rowan.

"Stop fidgeting, Sarah," Rowan said, chuckling, as he circled her like a hawk. She was standing in the middle of Jareth's bedroom, fully-dressed in her Aboveground clothes (which she had sternly requested be washed and returned to her, despite Ludie and Fauna's—her goblin caretakers—insistence upon throwing them out), impatiently waiting for Rowan to tell her she was free to be up and out the door.

"You have to admit, it's taking a while," Sarah whined. She knew she was acting like a teenager, but she didn't care. It had been over a week since she had been out of the room. The balcony didn't count. At the memory of the night before, she stiffened slightly, trying to push away the thought of Jareth's warm hand on her waist. Her throat felt very dry.

"Finished!" said Rowan. He ceased circling her like an orbiting planet, stopping in front of her with an infectious grin on his face. Sarah smiled back.

"You're looking well, my dear," he said, smile softening, "I'm very pleased with your improvement, though I have to say, I am somewhat sad. I've grown quite fond of our daily talks."

Sarah's smile widened.

"Well, then we'll just have to keep having them, won't we?" she said. Rowan laughed.

"Very well, very well," he replied, "Though I'm not sure I can promise daily; as you know, I travel
"Oh, that's right," Sarah said, frowning slightly, "I don't even know where you live, you know, permanently. Do you live in the Seelie kingdom up North, Rowan? Wow, I hope you haven't had to travel far to get here every day."

"Not to worry, Sarah," Rowan interrupted her, "My permanent residence is here, in the Goblin King's domain. In the castle, actually—business, however, does often call me North, where the most humans reside. But don't fret, I shall promise to call on you as often as I am able—as long as you are willing, of course."

"Of course," said Sarah, chuckling, "I'd like that very much."

Rowan smiled.

"Lovely," he said, "Well, I'm off. Much to do. I'll try and visit soon, Sarah." With a wink, Rowan bowed himself out of the room. Once gone, Sarah set out for the library in high spirits.

By the time Sarah actually found the library again, however, her mood had taken a slight downturn. Finding it again had taken her ages, considering her last visit had been quite some time before, and that forced Sarah to realize she didn't exactly know how long she had been in the Underground. An unwelcome revelation, to be sure, but she resolved not to panic and simply make Jareth tell her how long he had been keeping her when they next met.

Upon entering the library, Sarah nearly lost her composure. She had forgotten how many books Jareth's castle housed. A self-professed book nerd, it took a lot of Sarah's self control to ignore the thousands of books begging her to devour them and to begin looking for something more substantial.

She imagined that the volume best-suited for her purpose would delve into the Underground's history, meaning it would most likely be large, heavy, and probably dusty. As Sarah began her search on the lowest of shelves, numerous complications blossomed in her mind. What if the book she was looking for was on one of the higher shelves? Sarah wasn't a pixie, but her 5 '6' frame wasn't exactly tall. Even if she had grown to Amazonian heights, she'd still have to be a giant to comfortably reach the top shelf—it was as high as the church-like ceiling.

Jareth probably just snaps his fingers and the book he wants flies toward him, Sarah thought, irritated. No need to ever worry about a powerless little human.

An image of Sarah's bathtub floated lazily to the surface of her mind, and Sarah suddenly had an idea. She didn't know if it could possibly work, but there was no harm in trying.

Turning away from the bookshelves, she approached one of the small tables that littered the library. Closing her eyes, she silently wished: Please show me the book with the history of the Underground.

Holding her breath, she blinked open her eyes. Her mouth popped open in silent incredulity.

There on the table in front of her sat 14 identical books, fat, but not dusty or worn. In fact, they were pristine—perfectly preserved to stand the test of time. They were in numerical order, beginning with zero.

Sarah shook her head in an effort to dispel her own disbelief. Slowly, she sat down in the chair in front of the books and lightly grabbed the book labeled "0". Curiously, she opened it to the first page, and began to read:

The History of the Underground
i.e. Faerie,

(a world created by and for the people of Magick

and long sought-after by their covetous kinsmen,

the Race of Man).

The Underground, the Otherworld, was created to separate Man from Fae, for Man coveted the Magick the Fae possessed, and hence sought to destroy them for it. The creatures that here reside were born into existence the same as Man, for it was Man that created them.

T.W.M.

Sarah turned the page, eager for more, and also dying to know who T.W.M. could be. The next page divided the lands into kingdoms and realms:

Sidhe; The Seelie Kingdom (3-364)

Elven Realm (365-416)

Dwarf Villages (417-504)

Dragon Territory (505-561)

The Goblin Kingdom & The Labyrinth (562-803)

The Marshes (804-857)

The Woodlands (858-1000)

Not bothering to read the rest of the list (time for that later), Sarah quickly turned the pages in order to find page 562. After skimming past another table of contents divvying up the chapter into sections, she perked up after spotting Jareth’s name:

...as referenced in previous chapters, The Goblin Kingdom is home to the numerous species of Goblins that inhabit the Underground, and ruled by High Prince Jareth, younger brother to Seelie King Tyrnan. Of the numerous realms that populate the Underground, the Kingdom of Goblins is one of the oldest, along with the curious lands surrounding the small city; otherwise known as The Labyrinth.

Contrary to much rumor and speculation as to which came first, it was the Goblin settlement that came before the mighty Labyrinth. However, it should be noted that prior to the creation of the Labyrinth, the settlement was entrenched in disarray and chaos. Goblins are, by their nature, clever creatures—in fact much more clever than initially perceived (more detail in Section f)—though without proper stimulation, are prone to destruction. Thus, Seelie King Tyrnan appointed his brother, Jareth, as King of the Goblins in the Year 0173.

After assuming his throne, High Prince Jareth, notorious for his magical prodigy and his highly controversial view of the Race of Man in the Seelie kingdom, built his Labyrinth, weaving within its impenetrable magic the dreams of humanity, of which he is the Keeper and Creator.

It is said that High Prince Jareth created the Labyrinth for two purposes, though only one is widely accepted as fact: to serve as a test of will for all wished-away humans to bear if they so choose. It is through this test, or series of obstacles, that they may recover their freedom to the Aboveground.
The second reason, of course, is less credible: that the King of the Goblins created the Labyrinth to keep King Tyman at a safe distance. This, however, is only speculation, and has never been verified with anything more substantial than whispers and murmurs.

Sarah frowned, biting her lip, and blankly stared at the words on the page for a few more moments before deciding to look for something a little more specific. After skimming several more pages, she found something:

The Labyrinth is more than a mere maze. It is a sentient being, held in control by the Goblin King, and very much apart of him, for he is its Brother. It can move and change all on its own, and often does so in order to manipulate or obstruct those that walk its paths. It can create, and it can destroy; it is home to many a creature, most who devote their lives to do its bidding, which is often to thwart the progress of any runner who attempts to solve it. This is the test of will and perseverance runners must face in order to learn the power of words and wishes and dreams. Indeed, the Goblin King even obscured all trace of stars in the sky, so that runners may not rely on the heavens to guide them through the Labyrinth.

"So that's why," Sarah murmured to herself. Despite her soft volume, her voice seemed to echo. Absentmindedly, she tucked a fallen hair behind her ear, before flipping back to read the entire section devoted to the Labyrinth and its King.

Once Jareth had been informed by Sarah's goblin maids that she had been moved from his bedchamber back to her own, he set out for the room immediately. He had been happy to give Sarah the room for her recovery, but was also pleased to have it back. It was one of the primary places within his castle he knew he would not be disturbed.

Upon reaching his destination; however, he was proven mistaken when he found Rowan there, his back to the door, seemingly staring off into space. Upon hearing Jareth enter, he jumped around, clearly startled.

"Your Majesty!" he said, "My apologies—I promised Sarah that I would try calling again this afternoon—I wasn't sure where to find her now, actually…"

Jareth raised an eyebrow.

"I was under the impression she had been moved back to her room in the North tower; however, she also mentioned plans to visit the library today."

Rowan looked at him curiously.

"When did she mention that? If you don't mind me asking," he added on. Jareth smirked.

"Last night."

This time, it was Rowan who quirked an eyebrow.

"Does this mean that Sarah has returned your feelings, Your Majesty?" he asked, his tone politely incredulous.
Jareth frowned. Without answering, he strode past Rowan onto the balcony. Upon seeing the spot in the daylight, he couldn't help but remember the feeling of his hand wrapped around Sarah's waist. His frown was unknowingly replaced with a wistful little smile.

Rowan had followed him out the balcony, fixing him with an amused gaze. Jareth dropped the smile.

"No. I merely helped her out here, to the balcony, for some fresh air."

Rowan's grin fell away.

"She does, however, seem to be thawing slightly," admitted Jareth, turning his gaze away from the young healer. While Rowan was one of his few true friends, he was still altogether uncomfortable discussing such intimacies. He knew it was no secret to anyone in his kingdom the feelings he harbored for Sarah; nevertheless, he was careful to never confirm them as truth, both for his own pride, and now, especially, so that Sarah was not put in any unnecessary danger.

Of course, if she accepted her role as Queen, she would never need worry about such things.

Rowan chuckled.

"The girl is a stubborn one, I'll give you that."

"Stubborn?" asked Jareth incredulously, "She's more than a bit stubborn, Rowan. After all I have done for her, including explaining why she cannot go back, she continues to torment me, and flat-out refuses to even consider that I may be acting in her best interest."

Rowan sighed.

"Your Majesty, have you never considered what she may be feeling?"

Jareth shot him a sour look.

"Of course I have. I have considered her feelings for a very long time, as you well know, Rowan."

"That's not what I meant," persisted Rowan, his tone patient, "I meant, simply, have you considered everything that has transpired from her point of view? Not what she must do, however prudent it may be, or even her feelings toward you, but the weight of the burden that's been placed upon her shoulders."

Silence fell between the two of them for a few moments until Jareth spoke.

"I have."

"And have you communicated to Sarah that you understand why she might be having difficulty accepting her life here?"

Jareth scowled.

"It is not so simple, Rowan."

"Perhaps not," Rowan said quietly, "After all, admittedly, I know less of love than you do, Jareth. But of what I know of Sarah, and humanity in general, I say this to you: you will not win her heart if she does not know that you covet it, or that you see her as anything more than advantageous."

"You think she believes me indifferent to her? That her role as Queen is merely useful to me?" Jareth asked, anger coloring his voice.
"I believe she has painted you with the colors of an adversary, though she becomes less and less certain, particularly after your rescue of her from Lilu's cave."

"Madness," muttered Jareth, "She refuses to see what is plainly in front of her."

"Perhaps you must be more direct."

The next look Jareth shot at Rowan was cold and calculating, though, if one looked closely enough, they would see a touch of pain behind his eyes.

"Again, Rowan, it is not so simple."

"Indeed," agreed Rowan, looking away from his King and out into the Labyrinth, "But the time for acts of spite and revenge are beyond you. Do not let your pain ruin what you could foster. It is time to treat Sarah as the Queen she will become, rather than the girl who spurned you. Only then will she see herself as such."

Had it been anyone else that had spoken those words to the King, they might not have indulged in another breath. Thankfully, all that Rowan received was another appraising look before Jareth nodded at him in clear dismissal.

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...

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He was there again, watching her. He always seemed to be watching her. But it didn't mean what it used to; it was somehow...different from before. She would be lying if she said it was and always had been unwelcome. No, that had never been true. Instead, the change was more that she was now more likely to admit that she had lied.

There they were, staring at each other from across an empty room. In what felt like no time at all, he was in front of her; close. She closed her eyes. Softly, he pressed his lips to her forehead. Next, her right cheek, then the left. One eyelid, the other. Both ears. The crook of her neck.

She wasn't sure where she was anymore; she was lost to the sensation. Her breathing became labored as she felt his lips move to her own, and the kisses were more insistent now, and she was kissing him back…

"Sarah?"

Sarah woke with a jolt, bolting upright so quickly from her seat slumped over the library table that upon blinking open her bleary eyes, her world spun. Heart still beating rather rapidly, she put a hand on the table to steady herself before turning to look at none other than the Goblin King.

There he stood next to her little table, in all of his regal glory. Truth be told, he almost looked casual compared to his usual attire; he was adorned in dark blue and black, his odd pendant gleaming at his chest.

She couldn't help it; her face flushed a deep pink. Jareth noticed, quirkling an eyebrow.

"Are you alright, Sarah? I apologize for waking you so...abruptly."

"S'all right," she mumbled, looking away from him. *Pull yourself together,* she thought, *he doesn't*
Sarah frowned, brow furrowing in thought. Was it worth the risk? What if he asked about what Lilu had shown her?
"Okay," she said finally, "On two conditions."

"Name your terms."

"We each get one question that we can refuse to answer, and you can't lie, either," she said. She couldn't keep the proud smirk from sliding onto her face. Let's see him try to wriggle his way out of this one.

"I have never lied to you, Sarah," said Jareth, his face suddenly quite serious. Sarah's smile faded slightly, but she said nothing.

"Done."

Roughly thirty or so minutes later, they sat across from each other at a table next to the one still littered with books detailing the history of the Underground. Half-eaten plates sat in front of them. Neither had truly spoken in the brief time that had passed; somehow, though, the silence wasn't awkward. In fact, to Sarah, it felt charged with something she couldn't put her finger on.

"So," she started, watching Jareth as he cut a piece of chicken for himself.

"Ladies first," he replied, taking a bite.

Sarah let out an anxious sigh. Everything would be fine if she stuck to her game plan. She just had to ease into everything—at this point, she wanted to avoid any confrontation if she could.

"How long have I been here, in the Underground?" she asked. Jareth considered her.

"An interesting question," he replied, "Though not altogether unexpected, of course. It is difficult to answer with too much certainty. What I can tell you is that time moves much more slowly here in the Underground than it does in the world of humans. A week here may be a month or a year there; there is no direct method of determining how long without journeying to the Aboveground for comparison."

Sarah's heart sank.

"Then how do you explain how time passed when I was here last time? I came here and thirteen hours passed, but when I...went home, it had only been about three," she persisted.

"In that case, Sarah, you were a runner, and so I reordered time in case you bested my Labyrinth," said Jareth, his voice slightly colder. "Now, time flows the way it should here, and the way it should there."

"Am I just...missing there, then?" she asked, fighting to keep her voice steady as she thought of her parents, and of Toby, "Do the people who know me know that I'm gone?"

Jareth seemed to hesitate in his answer, his eyes searching hers.

"Yes."

Sarah nodded, biting her lip, and looked down at her plate. One fat tear rolled down her cheek as she fought to compose herself. Regardless of how miserable her life had been in the Aboveground, the idea that she was causing her family pain by effectively abandoning them was still terrible.

"Sarah," Jareth said softly. She didn't look back up. There was a giant lump in her throat she needed to get rid of first.
"I do not wish to upset you by telling you this," he continued, his tone surprisingly gentle.

"Well," she muttered, forcing herself to look at him again, "I suspected as much. Okay. Your question."

He was still looking at her intently, but pressed on nevertheless.

"Do you miss them?"

"What?" asked Sarah, surprised.

"Your family," clarified Jareth, "Or any of the others you knew there, your friends. Tell me of that life."

"Why do you want to know?" she asked. The Goblin King inclined his head politely, but said nothing, only stared at her.

"Of course I do," she said somewhat heatedly, her voice rising, "Toby most of all. My brother."

"I remember Toby," said Jareth, somewhat impishly. A ghost of a grin danced on his lips before Sarah gave him a look, to which he arranged his features back into a polite mask.

"I miss my parents," continued Sarah, "I miss my students…"

"Students?" asked Jareth sharply.

"Yes," said Sarah, "That's what I did there. I taught small children, and went to school. I was almost finished getting my Masters degree."

"A high-order academic certification?" Jareth asked shrewdly.

"Yes," confirmed Sarah. "I didn't get to see my parents or Toby much, going to school and working in Boston—which is this big city I lived in—but it was still good. Rewarding, I guess."

"Was it?" he asked. Sarah remembered then that Jareth had somehow known that she had been something of a pariah in her world.

"It was," she said firmly, "The work was. My turn." He nodded.

"How did you know that the other...that I didn't fit in Aboveground?" She felt she already knew the answer, but she was looking for a clarification; wanted to hear him say it.

"I have told you," he said, "You were marked with magic after your first trip through the Labyrinth, and thus, you became unmade for the world you were born into. You could exist there, live and breathe and die, but life would not be the same, would not be right. This will have affected all of your relationships with other humans; particularly those set ill at ease by the presence of magic."

"Children always liked me, though," she said softly.

"Yes," said Jareth, "But human children see magic in all things; until they age, at least. The human world represses it."

Sarah didn't quite know how to respond to that. Part of her wanted to defend her world, while another part of her—the part of her that had donned a pretty costume and recited the words from Labyrinth determinedly in a neighboring park—knew he was undeniably correct. She contented herself with silence.
"So, apart from your family and your students, did you have no other companions?" asked Jareth. Sarah tensed, stung.

"No," she said tersely, "Thanks for that, by the way."

Jareth frowned slightly.

"While I will not deny that my Labyrinth was the cause of that particular unhappiness, I will not myself take direct blame," he said coolly, "I empathize. I quite understand loneliness, believe it or not, my dear Sarah. It is not something I would wish on anyone, particularly you."

"Why particularly me?" she asked.

Having finished his meal, Jareth pushed his empty plate to the side and propped his arms up on the table, leaning in closer to her.

"Contrary to what you may think, Sarah, I do not wish for you to suffer," he said, his tone hovering somewhere between carefully controlled and irate, "So, hopefully, I can put your mind at ease: you cannot judge any of the relationships you had in the Aboveground with any real conviction, because those humans never had a chance at knowing the true you. It is through no fault of their own, or of yours, that they withdrew from you. This is the steep price of magic; of power; something I can tell you I know very intimately."

Again, Sarah didn't know what to say. Looking down at her hands, she saw they were shaking slightly. To be sure, it was a relief to know that who she was had no bearing on how her life had been Aboveground, how lonely it had been. But to know that she shared this with Jareth...

"Might I ask the next question?"

She nodded.

"What will you miss most?"

"What do you mean?" asked Sarah, "And that doesn't count as a question."

Jareth's lips twitched as he nodded in agreement.

"To clarify—if there was anything I could bring to you, here, from the Aboveground, what would it be? Understand, I cannot bring you your family; not without being wished away, but a trinket, perhaps."

"You would do that?" asked Sarah, eyes wide.

"Perhaps," he said softly.

"Why?"

"Answer first."

She paused.

"Can I think about it?"

He nodded.

"Why, then?"
Jareth sighed, sounding slightly irritated. Quite abruptly, a crystal appeared in his left palm. He absently twirled it between his fingertips.

"I am merely trying to provide you some comfort," he said slowly, eyes still fixed on hers, "You may ask the next question."

"Okay," she said, trying to organize her thoughts. She didn't have as much control over the conversation as she would have liked, but at least they hadn't started shouting at each other. *Yet,* she thought.

"Why did you create the Labyrinth?"

At that, the crystal stopped spinning, and a flicker of pleasure crossed Jareth's features.

"My, my," he cooed, "How interesting. I take it this question was inspired by your reading?" She thought about telling him to answer the question first, but instead, just nodded.

"Very well," he said, the crystal resuming its dance, "I created the Labyrinth for many reasons, the most important of which, to protect the goblins and their city. But I assume that is not the reason you're interested in."

"No," agreed Sarah, "I want to know why the Labyrinth is so powerful and why you made it that way. Did you really create it to keep your brother out? Why would you do that? What happened between you two? And what does it have to do with humans?"

Jareth's smile widened. Sarah was surprised; she had expected him to be much more resistant.

"So many questions, Sarah. You needn't worry; since they are part of your larger question, I will answer. Listen carefully. As with all things, I must start at the beginning: I was given the task of ruling over the goblins for one purpose, and one purpose only—to be out of the way of my brother, Tyrman."

As he began recounting his personal history, his smile slipped away.

"Tyrman is a tyrant, and it suits him, as he is King of the Seelie. Before I was banished to the Goblin Kingdom, I made it known that I did not approve of the way the Seelie were rounding up humans. You may have come across some of this in your lore Aboveground, but throughout history, the Fae have been just as unkind to humanity as humanity has been to them. Hence, the need for the Underground. Once here, however, the Fae still delighted in stealing humans, seeing it as sport; most often children from their mothers, replaced with changelings."

"And you opposed that?" asked Sarah. She had a hard time keeping the surprise out of her voice, which led to Jareth fixing her with somewhat of a contemptuous stare.

"Yes. I opposed and still oppose the needless oppression of the innocent."

"Even humans?" asked Sarah.

"Do not sound so surprised, Sarah, darling," Jareth drawled, a bite in his voice now, "I am not entirely unfeeling, despite my race. I take only the humans that are wished away, and I give them a choice. This is the magic I set in motion after my brother banished me here; to make certain that only those humans who were wished away could journey to the Underground, and once they did, they would be given the chance to find a way back. It was preferable to their lives being stolen from them entirely; to living lives in which they could never truly regain their freedom."
"Why create the Labyrinth at all, then?" asked Sarah, "Couldn't you just send them back yourself?"

A shadow crossed over Jareth's face.

"This is not the way of magic, Sarah. It is a great feat to return to what we knew after wishing for something else entirely, and having that wish granted. The human saying 'Be careful what you wish for', is it? is very apt. Remember—there is always a lesson to be learnt, and always, always a price to be paid. Not even I can change that."

Sarah stared at him for a few moments, unspeaking. He didn't even flinch. Sarah cleared her throat.

"All right," she said.

"Good," said Jareth, his tone still somewhat frosty, "As I was saying...this was the source of my and my brother's estrangement; our different opinions of humankind. My subsequent creation of the Labyrinth only further poisoned our relationship. I knew he would not dare enter, not without my consent."

"How could you be sure?" asked Sarah. This time, Jareth actually smiled, but it didn't seem to reach his eyes.

"I designed the Labyrinth just so."

"So it's true, then?" asked Sarah, "One of the reasons you created the Labyrinth was to keep him at a safe distance?"

Jareth inclined his head once more.

"Is he afraid of you?"

Jareth's smile widened.

"Yes."

"Why is he?" asked Sarah, "Why is the Labyrinth so powerful?"

"Do you no longer find me intimidating, Sarah?" Jareth teased her again, smirking. Sarah frowned.

"Is this the question you won't answer, then?" she asked. Jareth's smirk faded.

"I know my brother well; even after all this time," he began, "His fears, his weaknesses. He is not immune to the desolation of dreams, or the uprising of nightmares. He knows this, and for this he is wise not to meddle in my affairs, and to stay well away from here. As for the Labyrinth..."

Sarah, already extremely interested in the conversation, sat up a little straighter in her eagerness to understand better.

"What did it say in these books? Forgive me, I am curious," he said, smirking again.

Sarah furrowed her brow, trying to remember exactly.

"It said something about how you made it out of the dreams of humans," she recalled, "And that you even took away the stars, so that runners couldn't use them to navigate their way to the center."

"You solved that particular riddle, then," he drawled, "Though the stars are not truly gone, just hidden."
"What about the dreams of humans makes the Labyrinth so strong?" asked Sarah.

"An excellent question," replied Jareth, "The Fae believe that humanity is beneath them for their lack of magic. And, truthfully, were we to compare and contrast the two races, we would find that the Fae do possess many of the traits most humans covet: immortality, beauty, the use of magic."

"But..." Sarah interrupted.

"Yes, but." Jareth agreed, nodding, "But my kind also cannot truly be called perfect beings. Our greatest weakness, perhaps, is our penchant for what humans consider cruelty, or..." Quite abruptly, Jareth stopped speaking. His eyes hardened, and he looked away from her.

"Or what?" she asked. For some inexplicable reason, part of her was afraid to know the answer.

"The Fae do not easily love," he said, his voice stiff.

"Oh," said Sarah. Despite the full supper she had eaten throughout the conversation, her stomach felt oddly empty all of a sudden.

"It is not impossible, just rare," continued Jareth, his voice relaxing slightly. He was looking at her again, his eyes boring into hers intently, "The differences between our respective races notwithstanding, the issue of superiority is all only a matter of opinion, if you believe it matters at all. But there is another important fact to consider in all of this, when debating such matters of superiority and hierarchy: who came first, Fae, or man?"

"The book said...said that man created the Fae. Is that true?" asked Sarah.

Jareth grinned lightly again, his eyes dancing with something secret.

"Another time, perhaps."

For some reason, Sarah didn't press him. She wasn't sure she wanted to know.

"More importantly, it doesn't necessarily matter, Sarah," continued Jareth, "Just imagine that it was true. This would make humans my kinsmen's Gods, and yet, they regard them as barely more than slaves. It is the belief that mattered, in the beginning. And now...nothing is certain anymore," he trailed off, finally breaking eye contact and gazing off into the space behind her.

For a few moments, neither one spoke. Their eyes found each other again, and, finally, Sarah spoke.

"I think I've got one last question. But I'm afraid it might require a long answer."

"Do tell," said Jareth.

She hesitated.

"I...I'm curious about the other parts of the Underground, the other kingdoms and lands. Do you ever go there? To see the dragons, or the elves?"

She was smiling now; she couldn't help it. While so much of her wanted to go home, there was still a very large part of Sarah that longed for the fantasy, to see the creatures that had, for so long, occupied her imagination.

Jareth's eyes widened in slight surprise, and he smiled back, this time, genuinely, the smile touching his eyes. Even Sarah could admit, he had a beautiful smile.
"Yes. I would be happy to take you with me."

"Really?" asked Sarah, smile widening. "Even the Seelie kingdom?"

Jareth's smile faltered slightly.

"I would, in time," he said, "After proper precautions were made."

"Precautions?" asked Sarah.

"Yes," said Jareth, "To the Fae, you are still just a human, Sarah. I would prefer to wait until after you are Queen to make that particular visit."

Something seemed to slide back into place in Sarah's brain.

"Queen," she said quietly, "...right. If I stay here."

Jareth's smile vanished, but amazingly, he did not contradict her. Sarah saw this as an opportunity.

"When you say Queen, you mean..." she started.

Jareth's face was a perfect mask, but still, he answered.

"Ideally, my wife."

Sarah's eyebrows shot so far up that she imagined they reached her hairline. Somehow, despite everything that had happened and all she already knew about Jareth's plans for her, she hadn't thought of that.

"Oh."

"I assure you, Sarah, it would not be so miserable as you likely have pictured in that pretty little head of yours," said Jareth, his tone mocking, "You would have your own power, remember."

"Yeah, that's just what all the girls want to hear when they're being proposed to," retorted Sarah sarcastically.

Jareth ignored her retort. After a few more moments of strained silence, Sarah finally decided on an exit strategy.

"It's your question, if you want it."

He was silent for a few more breaths. For what felt like the millionth time since she had come back to the Underground, Sarah felt that the intensity of his gaze would burn her somehow.

Finally, he leaned even further into her, his voice low.

"Sarah, what did Lilu show you?"

She was prepared for the question; knew he would ask again, and had her answer ready.

"That's the question I won't answer."

This time, Jareth betrayed his frustration at her refusal. A scowl blossomed on his lips as he leaned back into his chair, putting the most distance between them since they began their conversation.

"I cannot say I am surprised," he said slowly, his tone clipped. She could tell he was choosing his
words with caution. "Such a private thing to ask. Please...forgive my curiosity."

Sarah nodded.

"Well," he said, standing, "You had your last query, and I, mine. Shall we retire?"

Sarah started to stand, too, until, quite suddenly, she felt as if something hard had slammed into her stomach as she realized something, something undeniably important. How had it taken her so long to...?

"Sarah?"

"Jareth," she said, her voice soft; unnervingly calm. She remained seated, looking up at him.

"Why did you give me the peach?"

He stared at her, his expression unfathomable.

"Are you going to answer me?" asked Sarah quietly.

"You know why I gave it to you," replied Jareth, "To make you forget."

"No," continued Sarah, "I know. That wasn't what I meant. Why did you give me the peach, knowing that I would never be able to leave after taking a bite?"
"I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter," replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Chapter 11

Unnatural Selection

I'm hungry for some unrest
I want to push this beyond a peaceful protest
I wanna speak in a language that they'll understand
Dedication to a new age
Is this the end of destruction and rampage?
Another chance to erase then repeat it again
Counter balance this commotion
We're not droplets in the ocean...ocean
They'll laugh as they watch us fall
The lucky don't care at all
No chance for fate
It's unnatural selection
I want the truth
("Unnatural Selection", The Resistance, Muse)

"Jareth," she said, her voice soft; unnervingly calm. She looked at him.

"Why did you give me the peach?"

He stared at her, his expression unfathomable.

"Are you going to answer me?" asked Sarah quietly.

"You know why I gave it to you," replied Jareth, "To make you forget."

"No," continued Sarah, "I know. That wasn't what I meant. Why did you give me the peach, knowing that I would never be able to leave after taking a bite?"

An eternity seemed to pass between them. Sarah's heart was racing as she stared at him, the Goblin King, who stood, seemingly frozen. Sarah felt acutely aware of her own senses; her ragged breaths, the tiny prickle of anticipation at the back of her neck, the faint scent of Jareth across from her—an intoxicating whiff of magic and autumn air and something darker than anything else she could name.

Finally, he moved. His eyes fell closed as a low sigh poured from his lips, sounding almost like a groan of pain. In a blink, he crossed the space separating them. His scent was even stronger now that he was so close. Gently, he grasped her hands in his, his eyes searching hers. All of a sudden it was
very difficult for her to swallow. Any words died in her throat.

"I wanted you, Sarah. I wanted you then, and I want you now."

His words came in a rough whisper, but Sarah heard them without difficulty. A tameless fire had started to spread from the pit of her stomach to the rest of her body, causing her breathing to become even more labored. She didn't know what to say, or do. Her heart had stopped beating so quickly; instead, it seemed to have lodged itself into her throat.

"You..." she started, her voice just as quiet as his. She had barely spoken, but the word came out stilted and awkward to her ears. She couldn't think. She couldn't move. She didn't know what she was doing or what she waiting for; she had never felt more frozen in her life, or terrified—of what, exactly, again, she didn't know. She was completely numb.

Slowly, hesitantly, he reached out a gloved hand to cup her chin. His eyes dropped from her own to gaze at her lips, and unbidden, she thought of the dream Jareth had woken her from earlier.

"Do you not remember my offer to you, Sarah, all those years ago?"

For a moment, it was even more difficult for Sarah to focus. Her brain felt like a marshmallow—especially in comparison to the clarity she'd had just minutes ago. Still, despite how close her dream from that afternoon was to becoming reality, the words came back to her with ease.

*Just fear me, love me, do as I say, and I will be your slave...* 

"Yes," she said, her voice suddenly tight. Her hands curled around Jareth's, trembling slightly, before she pushed back; pushing him away from her. For the second time since she had come back to the Underground, Sarah turned her back on him, wrapping her arms around herself protectively.

"I can't. You can't," she said stiffly.

With her back turned, she couldn't see Jareth's face, but she could hear his breath coming in and out in short bursts. A tense silence pervaded the room. Something had broken between them. The air in the stillness was heavy, but the quiet only lasted a few more seconds before Jareth spoke.

"Goodnight, Sarah."

She didn't turn, even once she knew he had gone. Instead, she stood there, hugging herself, trying to quell her shaking anger as she stared at the storm raging on outside.

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Somewhere deep in the vast, dark Labyrinth, rain still thundering down into the maze, Jareth walked. Within seconds, he was soaked, but he barely noticed. His heart was pumping in his ears. Within a few minutes, he stood in front of the door to the Dream Roads.

He didn't know how long he stood there, staring at the door. A wave of emotions threatened to sweep over him as he looked at it through the wet fringe in his eyes. Then, quite abruptly, he strode forward with the speed of a raging bull and began to pound and claw at the ornate slab of wood. From his lips, a long, guttural howl sounded as he took out his maddening frustration and pain on that impenetrable gateway to the dreams he would never, ever obtain.
The next morning, Sarah rose so early it was still dark outside her little window. For a few minutes, she sat motionlessly in bed, trying to figure out what to do with herself that day. She couldn't stomach the idea of heading back to the library, not for a while, at least—which was a shame; it provided endless entertainment in the form of thousands upon thousands of books she had yet to absorb. Not to mention, it had been one of the few places in the Goblin King's realm she had ever felt remotely comfortable.

_Not anymore_, she thought bitterly, clenching her fingers around the bedsheets.

Try as she might, she couldn't seem to drive away what had happened the previous night from her mind. At least here, in her little room, she had something like solace; a quiet place where she could try to reconcile everything that had transpired with her muddled feelings.

If she was honest with herself—_truly_ honest—she had to admit that she had at least gotten what she wanted, despite getting more than she had bargained for.

But the truth was there. She had started it. She had asked Jareth for honest answers, and in doing so, had agreed she would give as much as he gave. For the most part, it had gone well, or, perhaps more accurately, as well she could have hoped. She had anticipated that he wouldn't miss the opportunity to ask her what Lilu had shown her, so she had come up with a way to avoid answering. Somehow, he had still agreed.

_Why had he?_

That was what she hadn't prepared herself for—his compliance. No, it had been more than that; he had been _kind_ to her. He had listened and inquired about her life; he had even asked if there was something she wanted from home. _Wasn't_ that kindness?

Or, at least, it had seemed that he was trying, at first.

"_I have never lied to you, Sarah._"

Sarah frowned, twisting the sheets even more, suddenly angry again.

He _had_ lied; had always been lying. All of it, their entire conversation, had lead up to that ending—an ending she couldn't shake. How had she not realized until now that Jareth had always, from the beginning, been planning on never letting her go? If she hadn't beaten his Labyrinth, she and Toby would have been stuck in the Underground, transformed into goblins or worse, enslaved by the Fae. And, by winning, she had somehow ensured that she was doomed here anyway. The only comfort she had left was knowing that she had still managed to save Toby.

The truth was, it had never been a fair fight—not when she had been a naive teenager, and not now.

"_It's just a game to him,_" she reminded herself. Hearing the words out loud made her angrier. But it was true, it had to be—there was no other explanation left, regardless of how Jareth acted towards her. She couldn't trust him. The idea that she had ever even entertained the idea that she could trust the devious, manipulative King was downright laughable, and she felt stupid for somehow getting to that point, all without realizing she had.
What she had dreamt (she flushed a deep scarlet as her dream of Jareth came back to her in a quick haze before she buried it somewhere far, far away) whether or not she had wanted to admit it to herself; what Lilu had shown her; none of it mattered.

It wasn't even that she didn't believe Jareth wanted her—in fact, that notion was hardly a revelation considering all he had done to keep her under his control. No, it was the 'how' and 'why' that concerned Sarah, and that's where the Goblin King truly couldn't seem to lie to her. Jareth had said it himself: the Fae rarely loved. That had been the truth, and it made the rest meaningless.

Sarah's thoughts were interrupted by a sudden loud rapping on her door, causing her to jump.

"Miss? Miss Sarah, are you awake?" Sarah sighed at the voice of one of her goblin caretakers, Ludie.

"Come in!"

The door burst open. Ludie, a short little black-haired goblin who looked tougher than she actually was, waddled in carrying an assortment of fabrics in her arms. In the time that Sarah had sat in bed, the sun had risen, making the array of colors bright in the morning sunlight.

"What are those?" asked Sarah suspiciously. A funny feeling had settled into her chest rather unexpectedly; similar to heartburn, but different in that at the same time, she felt an odd sort of triumph.

Ludie grinned impishly at her before setting the bundle on the bed near Sarah's her feet. She was barely taller than the mattress.

"I got them for you, dearie. Now you can pick your favorites and we can get them sent North to be made into more real dresses; ones not so grand, but still appropriate. You see, no need for those rags you came here in…"

"I like my clothes," Sarah said sternly, ignoring the odd feeling increasingly constricting her chest, "And there's no use looking for them so you can throw them out; I've hidden them somewhere you won't find them."

Ludie abruptly halted peering under Sarah's bed, emerging with a scowl. The feeling in Sarah's chest changed rapidly; instead of a nagging, almost satisfied itch, it became a flare of heat that roared through her, causing her to tremble slightly.

"You're to be a Queen," Ludie said indignantly, unaware of her mistress's discomfort, "A Queen doesn't wear dresses that show their legs! It's indecent, even if they are covered in those tight breeches like the King wears."

"Yeah, well, we'll see about that," Sarah said under her breath, gritting her teeth against the strange, uncomfortable pressure building within her. This time, Ludie seemed to notice that something was off. The little goblin's scowl was replaced with concern.

"Are you alright, Miss Sarah? You look a bit peaky," she said. Quite abruptly, the tightness in Sarah's chest subsided to a mere fizzle. Sarah let out a long, deep breath, her left hand fluttering to her chest.

"I...I don't know," she said truthfully.

Ludie's eyes widened, and she rushed to Sarah's side. Half of Sarah's heart seemed to have lodged itself in her throat; her brow furrowed in confusion.
"What is it, Miss Sarah? What can I do?" asked Ludie, all trace of consternation now gone.

Still breathing a bit roughly, Sarah looked down at the little goblin, suddenly feeling quite guilty for causing her to fret. She had just gotten done being an invalid, and wasn't keen on being one again anytime soon. Perhaps all she needed was to get out of this room; maybe even the castle itself. At the moment, nothing sounded better than some fresh air.

"Nothing," said Sarah firmly, "It's nothing. I'm fine, Ludie, I'm sorry for worrying you. I'll start dressing more...appropriately. But please, let me keep my clothes. I promise I won't wear them anywhere but here in the castle."

Ludie didn't look entirely convinced by Sarah's sudden acceptance of wearing beautiful albeit stifling gowns, but only nodded before turning to leave. As she scuttled toward the door, Sarah called out to her.

"Ludie—wait."

"Yes, Miss?" Ludie asked, turning around to look at her again.

"Would you—do you think you could take me outside?"

"Outside, Miss?" asked Ludie, eyebrows raised, surprised by Sarah's request.

"Yes," confirmed Sarah, "Into the Labyrinth."

At that, Ludie's eyebrows shot so far up they seemed to disappear into the black hairline at the top of her forehead.

"You want to go into the Labyrinth, Miss Sarah?"

"Yes," said Sarah firmly. She still felt a bit odd, but she pushed any uncertainty away as she swung her legs over the side of the bed before standing up. Hastily, she tied back half of the upper crown of her long waves with some ribbon she'd found in her bathroom.

"But...but why? The Labyrinth...how you'd find your way...I'm not sure the King would..." the little goblin trailed off, watching Sarah as she marched over to her wardrobe and hurriedly selected a rich amethyst gown with matching slippers to wear.

"If I'm supposed to be Queen of it, shouldn't I explore the Labyrinth a little better?" Sarah asked, her voice slightly muffled as she got caught while trying to pull the gown over her head. It was a beautiful thing, to be sure, all jewels and rich fabric, complete with a flowing cloak that attached at the shoulders, but definitely cumbersome, and much too elaborate for Sarah's taste. Ludie rushed over to help her.

"I 'spose," admitted the little goblin, still sounding quite unsure. "But Miss Sarah, the King-"

"If the King really wants me to rule the Labyrinth alongside him, he's going to have to start trusting me, especially when it comes to taking care of myself," Sarah said, perhaps a bit too sternly as she slipped her feet into the dainty little slippers—her anger at Jareth had somehow boiled to the surface, despite her best efforts to ignore it. Ludie didn't respond right away, as she was busy fussing over the dress that now clung to Sarah's figure. Sarah gave her the silence to consider the idea, choosing instead to wrestle with her uneasiness with what was, once again, a troublingly low v-neckline. She instantly forgot her musings over the pros and cons of changing as soon as Ludie re-emerged from the folds of her dress.
"Alright, Miss Sarah. I'll take you into the Labyrinth...but not far in, mind you! I don't want you getting lost. And if the King asks-"

"If the King asks, I'll tell him I made you take me," said Sarah, smiling at her. Ludie gave her a little half-smile before reaching up to grab Sarah's hand. Confused, Sarah frowned slightly as she grasped the little goblin's bony fingers in hers. Ludie noticed her hesitation.

"We'll go the faster way," she explained. At that, all Sarah could do was nod. Ludie's little hand gripped Sarah's tightly, and before Sarah had a chance to blink, there was a large CRACK, and suddenly her insides were jelly; the room was spinning so she shut her eyes and she gulped but there wasn't any air left and her knees shook (Where had the ground gone? Was she flying?) and then—silence. Her feet had found ground, and she was breathing hard.

Her heart still thumping in fear, Sarah's eyes fluttered open.

They were there. Momentarily deaf to the little groans Ludie was making next to her, Sarah surveyed their new surroundings—piles and piles of junk and debris, stacked as much as nine or ten feet high, many of which looked close to toppling over. Sarah let go of Ludie's little hand, whipping around to see the familiar large silver gate that guarded the city; the same one which, she remembered, was home to a metal giant ready to defend its citizens to intruders.

Or runners, thought Sarah.

"Well, we're here, Miss," said Ludie, still grumbling a bit. Sarah tore her eyes away from the gate to look down at her.

"How did you do that, Ludie? I thought only Jareth could-"

"It's not just the Fae that has magics, Miss Sarah," interrupted Ludie irritably. A spike of hot annoyance streaked through Sarah, causing her alarm—this time, she noticed it: the annoyance was real, truly, but it felt distant, somehow separate from her own feelings. It was the strangest thing; she hadn't been angry or annoyed in the slightest.

Now, apart from the annoyance, she felt slightly ashamed. She hadn't even considered that the goblins had their own magic; after all, every goblin she had come into contact with, though often friendlier than she expected, didn't show much affinity for the kind of magic Jareth or Rowan or even the dark faerie Lilu produced.

"No need to look so sorry, dearie," continued Ludie, her voice softening. Sarah looked back up at her, meeting her warm black eyes. The annoyance, as hard and fast as it had taken hold of her heart, ebbed away; her shame, however, was still there.

"To tell truth, Miss Sarah, flittin' about everywhere isn't somethin' most goblins take to," Ludie said, absentmindedly rubbing the small of her back, "It hurts, see? Tough on the bones. For the King, that kind of energy is nothin', but for us, well, it takes more strength is all. Most goblins never bother learnin' how to flit from place to place; the magics we do learn are more for what we like to do, or our jobs. Like me, I use my magics to sew and clean your pretty gowns, and other things in the castle. And your dwarf friend, he's got a way with growing things, so he's in charge of the gardens. You see, Miss Sarah?"

"Yes," said Sarah, wary as she spoke. She had a theory, a mad one.

"I'm sorry, Ludie. I didn't mean for you to have to hurt yourself just to take me here."

"Don't fret on it, it was my idea," said Ludie, waving her little bony hand as if she was swatting a fly,
"It was much faster; anyhow, if we had run into the King...I'm still not sure he'd be keen on this little outing of yours, dearie."

"I know," agreed Sarah, being very careful to watch Ludie as well as pay attention to her own thrumming insides.

Ludie looked around too, letting out a low whistle.

"Well, you're here, safe and sound. I'll be back to the castle then, if you think you'll really be all right, Miss Sarah. Y'know, I could always take you back-"

"No," said Sarah quickly, still scrutinizing the little goblin, "I'll be alright. I can find my own way back, I'm sure of it."

Looking doubtful, Ludie nodded.

"Alright then, be careful—and don't stray too far! Keep to the junk," said Ludie, chuckling a little.

There it is, thought Sarah, feeling the little surge of amusement trickle through her. Before Ludie could vanish, Sarah opened her mouth to speak.

"Ludie—thank you, truly. You've been so helpful to me since I got here, and I don't think I've said thank you enough. I appreciate it."

At that, the little goblin beamed, and Sarah felt a surge of happiness quite unconnected to her own pleasure at making her little caretaker happy. The CRACK that sounded as Ludie disappeared from sight did nothing to startle Sarah this time—instead, she merely stood on the precipice of her next little adventure, trying to put together the pieces to a new and altogether more overwhelming puzzle.

She was feeling Ludie's emotions.

It was insane, downright mad; but somehow, she knew it in her gut as soon as she realized what all of the pains and glimmers and itches had been, from the dismissed to the forgotten to the noticeable, ever since she had narrowly escaped death at the touch of a seemingly harmless thread.

The weight of her realization was staggering; so much so that Sarah continued to stand there for ages, quite forgetting her original purpose of asking Ludie to take her into the Labyrinth. Her mind was reeling. Was it just Ludie, or was it everyone? If she tried, could she feel what anyone was feeling? At the thought, she couldn't help but try to recall every moment since her time in Lilu's cave, from her interactions with everyone from her friends to Rowan to her goblin caretakers to...

Jareth.

As far as she could remember, she hadn't felt anything around the Goblin King except her own rather muddied emotions. She scowled and started to walk, slowly, deeper into the maze of trinkets and trash, occasionally outstretching a hand to a less filthy pile for balance as she meandered, half-unaware of where she was even going.

Even if she truly was capable of empathy so strong that she could actually feel what another living being was feeling, she was certain she had yet to feel anything that belonged to the cold Goblin King. He was, and always had been, an enigma to her. Even magic couldn't seem to change that.

Her scowl deepened for a moment before she let it go.

She had no doubt, though, that if what she suspected was true and she wasn't going completely and
utterly bonkers, that if she were to ask herself how or why, the only answer she would be able to conjure was a somewhat simple one—magic. They had told her, Lilu and Rowan and Jareth; warned her that something like this could happen, interpreting it as a fledgling of power rather than a burden, but she had refused to acknowledge the signs, content to instead focus her energy on returning to normal. Perhaps if she had been patient enough to try and understand or listen, she would've realized sooner that 'normal' was now forever out of reach.

Perhaps Lilu had given her a gift after all. A gift or a curse, she wasn't quite sure yet.

Sarah was pulled from her reverie by a distinct sound ahead. She stopped abruptly, drawing her outstretched hand to her heart, straining her ears. Listening closely, she noticed that the sound was a strange one; a marriage of slithering and a rasping that made the hair on the back of her neck stand straight up. It was unmistakable—the sound, wherever it was coming from (it was hard to tell amidst the mountains upon mountains of litter and waste), was getting louder and louder.

Nervously, Sarah glanced quickly behind her. She had traveled quite a ways from the gate, which was gleaming off in the distance. She could try back that way, but then she'd have to face the metal giant again, this time unassisted. She couldn't count on the giant letting her pass. Turning back around, she boldly decided to continue her trek forward. She had come into the Labyrinth in an attempt to further unravel some of its mysteries; there was no turning back now. As far as getting back later...she winced.

Well, I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

After barely another minute journeying forward, Sarah turned a corner on the limited path between heaps of junk, only to come face-to-face with something straight out of a nightmare. It took an incredible amount of composure for her to stifle a scream, and instead she stood stock-still, mouth firmly closed in a firm line.

Only a few feet from where she stood sat what looked like another pile of discarded items, though this pile seemed to have been fashioned into a mock-throne. Sitting atop its throne of trash—if you could describe it as sitting, it was more a perch—was a creature Sarah had only read of in lore and story books, though she knew there was a basis for it in her own world: a massive Rat King, at least eight or nine feet tall and four feet wide; a beast made of thousands upon thousands of rats squirming and squealing, roiling and writhing like worms. The beast moved ceaselessly, like water; fluid and flailing, the rats tied together by their tails, thousands of mean little eyes gleaming red in the morning light.

Sarah's stomach turned over. Her nose caught the scent of the creature, and again, it took an enormous amount of willpower to hold back a gag and not vomit all over her beautiful gown. The stench was the rotting, sweet, sickly smell of the dead or the dying, only much, much worse. The creature had no eyes apart from those that belonged to the rats, but still, Sarah felt it somehow take notice of her, standing only a few feet away. To her horror, it chuckled, its voice both scratching and slithering over its many tongues. There was no doubt; the noise she had heard belonged to this creature.

"Greetings, little human," rasped the Rat King. It had no face, but she could feel it smiling unkindly at her. Trying to keep her fear in check, Sarah blinked, then held her head up high, attempting to look regal.

"Good morning," she said carefully, "We...haven't been introduced. I'm Sarah." Careful to keep her face masklike, Sarah tried to concentrate on the creature, actively trying now to discern what it was feeling, if it did feel. She reached out with a few tendrils of her own consciousness, hesitantly, unsure; searching. It was more difficult than she had anticipated, despite her new awareness of her
ability; but it was necessary to control her own growing panic. Because the Rat King was faceless, she couldn't rely on expressions to determine the amount of danger she might be in.

"Sarah," murmured the Rat King, tasting her name, "Yes. You are known. Sarah, the conqueror. Sarah, the solver of riddles. Sarah, the friend to beasts, brutes, and boors. Sarah, the girl with stars and sky in her eyes. Sarah, the rogue of hearts and dreams. Sarah, the Queen of the Labyrinth. Well..."

The Rat King chuckled again.

"...Not yet, though you certainly look the part. Soon, perhaps."

"You know me?" asked Sarah, raising an eyebrow, refusing to comment on the names she hadn't known she'd been given. She was still reaching, reaching with her mind and her heart, searching for any note of emotion within this creature that she might understand it better.

"Yes. You would find it difficult to find one of us who does not know of you, little human, here in this timeless prison," rasped the Rat King.

Sarah wanted to avert her eyes, but didn't. Instead, she felt her face soften as a part of her latched onto something, finally; a tiny piece of this being's black heart, buried deep in the recesses of what had once been a chest. There was no denying it once she felt it; held it like a key, close to her own heart.

The Rat King was angry.

"A prison?"

"Oh yes, little human," rumbled the Rat King, its voice growing deeper and more menacing, "The Labyrinth is surely a prison. You wouldn't know this the way I do, for you triumphed where I did not."

Sarah couldn't hide her surprise, but she managed to hold onto the Rat King's anger, even as it grew while the creature spoke.

"You..."

"Yes," rasped the King, "Yes. Once, I was human, just like you. Barely a man grown, only nineteen years to my name."

Slowly, the Rat King started to move. Somehow, it hoisted itself off of its chosen throne with fingers made of pale pink, wriggling tails. Sarah tried to slow her racing heart, almost losing her connection to the Rat King's growing fury, but she held fast; hard and tight in the center of her chest.

The Rat King had stepped down from its throne, and was starting toward her, sluggish, but still coming. It took nearly all of Sarah's resolve not to run.

"A boy, I was," continued the Rat King, its voice growing louder and more irate, "A boy who merely lost track of time, of thirteen hours, in this maze of treasures and trophies. Why was I not to carry back some of these riches? Wasn't it a just reward for the attempted rescue of my little brother? Shouldn't I have found another way to get my dreams?"

The Rat King was less than two feet from her, but still, Sarah didn't budge. Instead, she waited, a trickle of sweat running down the back of her neck in anticipation. The anger flooding the Rat King was swift and powerful, but there was something else there too, something different...
"Why should a girl like you succeed, and not I?" asked the Rat King, drawing closer and closer, "Why should I lose my flesh and blood to the realm of the goblins and nightmares? Hundreds and hundreds of years I have been doomed here to the Labyrinth, and you see what I've become? A scavenger; a thousand little scavengers for my trouble, and for my reward."

The Rat King had reached her now; he towered over her, nearly blocking out the sun. Its wormy fingers just barely brushed her exposed neck. Sarah took a shuddering breath, and finally pinpointed the swirling sadness inside the Rat King the way an archer shot an arrow—dead-on.

Slowly, she reached her palm out to the Rat King, letting her hand be overcome by the slimy, soft tails that were the Rat King's fingers.

"I'm sad for you, my friend," said Sarah, choosing her words carefully, "It's...an injustice, to suffer in silence for so long. The Labyrinth is an insurmountable thing; even winning isn't truly that. I'm doomed the same as you. I could save my brother, but not myself. I, too, can never go home—not without slowly being tortured by the madness of life without magic. So, in a way, we are all prisoners here."

For a moment, nothing was said, but Sarah felt the anger that had nearly consumed this creature slowly begin to fade. His sadness, however, only grew and grew, until finally, he spoke again.

"My Queen," he rasped, "You are most wise. I thank you for your compassion, and understanding without judgment. In truth, I did not do all I could. I was blinded by my greed."

The Rat King's voice broke, then, and Sarah felt her own twinge of sadness.

"As we all are, at times," said Sarah, smiling sadly, "I forgot my friends, and despaired in my own loneliness. We all have our faults, and our weaknesses."

The Rat King almost seemed to nod then, before he began to retreat, moving slowly back to his throne.

"You will rule well," he said simply, "The King is right to love you, Sarah, Queen of the Labyrinth. Remember me, then; and do your best to save others from such a fate."

Sarah kept her own feelings in check somehow as the Rat King moved further away from her, his sadness ebbing away, only to be replaced with numbness. She turned to go.

"I will," she murmured, "I promise."

She began to walk away then, registering the sound of the Rat King sliding back into his eternal seat before she walked far enough away that all sounds of the beast were gone, now no more than memory.

For a long time, Sarah walked on in silence, her own mind—and heart—quiet, recovering. Finally, after what felt like hours, she reached the edge of the glittering forest she knew from her time as a runner, and only then did she pause. Resting her back against a tree, she gazed up at the sky. The morning sun had descended, making her think it had to be well past noon already.

Sarah's stomach growled uncontrollably, and with a jolt, she realized she had forgotten to eat or even bother to bring something along for her little adventure (which she already thought she had perhaps begun a bit hastily). She trekked on into the forest, going deeper and deeper so that the sun barely permeated the darkness, thinking (not for the first time) that she might be able to find some berries.

*No matter how hungry I get, Sarah thought, smirking slightly, there is no way I'm picking up any*
After another hour or so with no luck in finding any edible vegetation, however, Sarah was beginning to dream of a succulent peach, much to her own chagrin. After winding her way over branches, stumps, and all other signs of life that littered the forest floor with some difficulty, Sarah was starting to feel lost as well as hungry. Her earlier confidence at being able to withstand the rough terrain of the Labyrinth long enough to forge some kind of meaningful connection with it had dissipated slightly, but still, she pressed on with a grim smile.

She was tired and hungry, but determined. She wasn't sure just what she was looking for, though her encounter with the Rat King had shed a little light; a chance at knowing the place she was doomed to a little better, only to ease her own mind, maybe. Perhaps even a last attempt to find a way home. All she knew was that she needed to look, if for no other reason than to escape the tense confinement of the castle, and Jareth.

*The King is right to love you, Sarah, Queen of the Labyrinth.*

She recalled the words of the sad, frightening beast, only to push them away. Like her, he had been fooled.

Finally, it seemed to Sarah that the trees were growing less thick. Smiling, she absentmindedly pressed her palm to the glittering bark of a nearby tree, only to see that the tree was dotted with dark berries. She grinned, reaching to pluck a few.

She froze as soon as she heard the low, threatening growls.

Horrified, she snatched her arm back and turned around, pressing her back against the bark in mute terror. She was surrounded by a pack of wolves, inky black in the dark forest, with keen, terrifying yellow eyes. The pack, seven in all, had formed a semicircle around her in the shape of a half moon, and they all had their teeth bared, ready for the attack.

"It is ours," snarled the pack; to Sarah's astonishment, they all spoke with one sharp, distinctly feminine voice.

"Oh," she squeaked.

The pack cackled horribly. Forgetting herself, Sarah closed her eyes in sheer terror, wishing harder than she ever had that she was dreaming. They kept laughing as one. She opened her eyes again, this time not closing them for anything.

"The little girl is frightened," said the pack in perfect unison, eyes gleaming in the dim light, "The pack of one is amused."

"Who-who are you?" asked Sarah bravely, her voice faltering. Weakly, she tried again to reach out with her consciousness, her empathy, in an attempt to understand them in a way to save herself. If she didn't, she was definitely dead.

Her fear intensified when her weak attempt at reaching out produced nothing at all.

"We are the pack of one," chorused the sniggering wolves, "And you, little human girl, are stealing from our tree."

"Stealing?" asked Sarah, forcing herself to keep talking, "Not at all. Just traversing the forest, that's all. Trying to get to know the landscape a little better, since I'm going to be Queen."
"Queen?" the wolves asked, their ears perking up. They sniffed at her. "This one does have the smell of magic; of the immortal."

Finding some courage, Sarah stepped slightly forward, away from the tree. The wolves retreated back a step, but their fangs were still visible.

"Yes, Queen," Sarah said, managing to infuse a shot of authority into her voice, "I am Sarah, the conqueror; Sarah, the-"

The wolves cackled some more, and the words—words she didn't truly believe herself—fell away.

"The human bride? Ah, yes, the pack of one knows this girl. Queen, indeed, but powerless nonetheless; and not exempt from the consequences for thievery. Even the King knows this."

"I've told you, I wasn't stealing," Sarah pressed on. She dared to take another step forward. This time the wolves didn't retreat. She tried looking into each pair of eyes, all of which seemed to be bright with hunger.

"The pack of one saw you reach for our mulberries," sang the wolves. Low snarls erupted from their throats now, all seven pairs of eyes never leaving her. They were poised, waiting.

Again, Sarah tried to slow her racing heart. So much for immortality, she thought, which she wouldn't have minded at the moment. Somehow, she doubted her apparent new lack of aging translated to being immune from sharp teeth tearing into her flesh.

She had two choices. Call for Jareth and hope for the best—she wasn't entirely sure he could even help her out of this mess; perhaps the wolves were right?—or try to change the pack of one's minds. Or hearts, she thought.

Steeling herself for the worst, Sarah tried again to reach out and touch the souls of the beasts, to find where their hearts were. Sweat formed on her brow and she groaned a little, softly, as she groped with her consciousness, until, yes, finally, there it was—a hive mind of feelings centered around her, feelings of hatred and hunger.

Cautiously, Sarah spoke, her consciousness grasping the hive mind's hostility, wishing against all hope that they would feel her own fear and regret as she tried to ease into them a sense of calm; of peace.

"I won't lie to you, pack of one," she said bravely, handling their threaded ball of emotions as if it were as delicate as a butterfly, "Your Queen was hungry. I'm...shameful. I did try and take some berries; I'm sorry for my inconsideration."

The pack of one was silent as Sarah continued to turn their hive mind of feelings over in her mind and chest, attempting to manipulate them to the point of love; of loyalty. The closest thing she could compare it to was that of two lovers' first embrace—the flicker of hesitation, the slow, careful entry, and then that final moment of daring movement before the climb began.

Finally, after what seemed like hours but was mere moments, the pack of one spoke.

"The Queen can take some berries," they spoke lowly, voices now devoid of all bite, "For it is bravery that wins such a sweet gift, and the Queen is brave in the face of death. Take them as you will, our Queen."

At that, the wolves retreated back a few paces in perfect unison, opening up the circle enough to let
her pass safely, but still remaining within her sight. Sarah nodded slowly, smiling at each wolf in turn, before picking a handful of berries. Once she was done, she turned back to the wolves and bowed.

"Thank you, pack of one, my friends of the forest," she said, "I will remember your generosity, as well as your kindness."

The wolves sank to the ground in clear submission. Knowing that she had succeeded, Sarah took great care to walk out of the circle deliberately, but not quickly, so she wouldn't betray her still ripe fear.

Once she was far enough away from the wolves that she felt it was safe to run, Sarah burst into a clumsy sprint, nearly falling more than once, cloak streaming behind her. When she finally emerged from the shade of the trees, leaving the Labyrinth's forest for the maze of stone walls, she stopped, hunching over and breathing roughly from exhaustion and a stitch in her side.

It took some time for Sarah to catch her breath. Once she had, she glanced behind her to ensure that the pack wasn't following. Thankfully, they weren't—she was alone again. Sweet, blessed relief blossomed within her, helping to slow her still thundering heart. Sarah stumbled a few paces forward toward one of the maze's many walls, slumped to the ground and propped her back up against the stone.

_Well, that was close,_ she thought somewhat deliriously.

Despite the fact that she was still quite alone, Sarah let out a bark of laughter, internally trying to come to terms with everything that had just happened.

So it wasn't just that her newfound supernatural empathy could reach other beings, enabling her to feel what they felt; she could also, it seemed, _change_ what they were feeling.

She shuddered. _It's a cruel joke_, she thought viciously. No one deserved that kind of power; the ability to intrude on and manipulate others; to sow distrust and discord for their own selfish means. She knew that, even though she had already shown that she was capable of such corruption. Feeling what others felt wasn't so terrible, not if she used that to help and understand them, but the act of _changing what others felt_...

She would never do it again. She didn't know if she could hold to that if her life was in such imminent danger again, but she convinced herself that she could screw up the courage if she ever needed to. The act was too intimate; too personal; _wrong_—she felt unclean now, afterwards. The ability to falsely manipulate what others were feeling was not something any human should have the power to do, and whatever happened, Sarah was unwilling to part with the humanity she still had left.

Sarah spread the fingers of her left hand over heart, wondering if she could feel the change in her, if it was at all physical. Upon looking down, she realized she still had the berries clenched in her right fist. She quirked an eyebrow, unclenching her fist to view the handful before tipping her head back and swallowing them all in one reckless, messy gulp.

As she chewed, juice from the berries got all over her hands and lips, but Sarah didn't care. She wiped her face with her hands before wiping her hands on her gown—the juice was a dark bluish purple, so it blended right in anyway. At the moment she didn't care much about the state of her attire, but she had an inkling she'd feel guilty later on when she met Ludie again.
She was as clean as she was going to be for the moment, so Sarah used the wall as leverage to push herself back up. The berries had done almost nothing to satiate her hunger, which had returned in full-force after being temporarily replaced with horror in the forest. Worse, the dry berries had alerted her to just how thirsty she was. She frowned, her mind straying back to her first escape attempt—she had found a courtyard of sorts, dotted with peach trees and a pool of sparkling water in the center. She wasn't at all confident that she would be able to find it again, and yet...

Sarah raised both of her hands out in front of her, examining them closely. They didn't look any different to her, just the same pale, slender fingers she'd always had. *Still*, she thought, her eyes moving from her hands to the wall across from her, *this is why I ventured here.*

Feeling a bit silly, but also like she was on the cusp of discovering the answer to a riddle she had long been puzzled by, Sarah strode forward, touching both of her palms to the wall opposite her.

The stone didn't make a sound, not a whisper, but as soon as Sarah touched it, it grew warm, and part of the wall disappeared in a cloud of shining black smoke. She smiled.

This time, she wasn't afraid or even wary of walking on the new path she had forged for herself. She simply followed it, positive that it would take her where she needed to go. As she walked, following her path and occasionally creating new ones when she met dead ends or couldn't decide between forks, she noticed that the day had grown late. The sun was already setting, causing her shadow to dance behind her on the wall.

*The air is getting colder, too,* thought Sarah as goosebumps prickled her bare arms. She picked up her pace, hoping to find the familiar courtyard and then devise a route that would return her to the castle. Surprisingly, she was anxious to return—she wanted to find Rowan and tell him what had transpired in the formidable maze, as well as eat a hot meal. She tried not to think of seeing Jareth again.

Trying her best to erase all thought or feeling relating to the Goblin King, she paused, glancing behind her. She felt odd, like someone or something was watching her, but when she looked, nothing was there except her shadow.

And her shadow was moving.

Sarah stumbled backward, caught off-guard. She hadn't been moving, but her shadow was creeping steadily closer and closer to her, its long arms reaching out to touch her; to grab her throat.

"Come now, Sarah, sweetling," said the shadow in her own voice, "Let me comfort you."

Sarah ran. She had no idea how she could even try to outrun her own shadow, but it didn't matter—nothing was right or sane or normal here, not in the Labyrinth. She ran even faster than she had from the pack of one, legs and arms pumping hard, helping her along, path to path. She could hear the shadow gliding behind her, could *feel* its cold, cruel smile.

"You can't run from me, Sarah, sweetling," it called, "No, you can't run from me."

She tried anyway. Turning left at another fork, she burst down another path, only to finally find the opening she was looking for—the entry to the courtyard with the peaches and the pool. Panicked, she ran inside, straight to the pool with water clear as glass before turning around to face her shadow.

It was gone.

Breathing heavily, heart careening madly in her chest, Sarah peered around the courtyard, surveying
her own feet, but even though the sun was still slowly sinking below the horizon, she no longer had a shadow, murderous or otherwise.

"This is ludicrous!" she shouted, eyes still wide in fear, "I'm done, do you hear me? Done! I'm sick and tired of being the helpless little human around here, so you can end your games! Do what you came here to do, or leave me be!"

She was shouting to no one, but saying the words helped calm her, if only a little. Still, there was no response. It seemed that the shadow was truly gone.

Or maybe it was never there, Sarah thought, sitting on the edge of the smooth stone surrounding the pool, maybe I really am mad as a hatter.

When she peered into the water, she decided that she was.

The shadow hadn't gone; it had changed. Staring back at her was her own reflection, true, but it was another Sarah altogether, and this one was smiling at something secret.

"Sarah, sweetling," it cooed at her, "You're lost, dear. Lost and alone, like you always have been, and always will be."

"Shut up," the real Sarah growled back, hating her own twinkling green eyes, her own cloying grin.

"Now, now," tsked the Shadow Sarah, "Is that any way to treat yourself, sweetling? No, no it isn't. Of course, that's your lot in life, isn't it? To be unworthy of anything other than loneliness and disdain. In the Aboveground, you were nothing, and even here, where you thought you found triumph, you are nothing. Nothing to anyone, least of all the man who you thought considered you special."

"Shut up!" screamed Sarah, her eyes suddenly stinging with tears. The Shadow Sarah laughed.

"You are amusing, sweetling," Shadow Sarah purred, her green eyes, so similar to the Sarah that lived and breathed, were as cold as ice.

"Go away," whispered the real Sarah. At that, the Shadow Sarah laughed even harder.

"Go away?" she asked, still shaking with laughter, "I am you, sweetling."

The real Sarah sat up a little straighter, staring at herself—or whatever the thing looking back at her really was—before wiping her tears away with her arm.

"No," the real Sarah said quietly, all expression falling away from her features. She looked at her reflection like she was studying a vaguely interesting insect.

"You're not."

"Of course I am," said the Shadow Sarah haughtily.

"No," said the real Sarah, "You're just a reflection." Quite calmly, she reached out her hand to touch the water. At the same time, she rooted around inside herself, searching, searching until she found what she had been looking for.

There, thought Sarah, there it is.

As her fingers broke through the surface of the clear water, her reflection vanished, and her world turned upside down. She was falling, the wind and thousands of colors circling around her in a giant
flame warm as summer breeze, and she thought she must've fell into the pool somehow, though she didn't remember leaning over; and anyhow, *this wasn't what water felt like*. The colors were bright, so bright they dazzled her eyes, and she seemed to dance toward the brightest light of them all. Without a thought, she passed through it, emerging on the other side.

Head spinning and eyes momentarily blind, Sarah blinked furiously, trying to see again. Slowly, her vision returned to her.

She was in her own bathroom inside the castle, her back to her full-length, gilded mirror. Still blinking rather rapidly, she looked around; looked down at herself, noting that she wasn't the least bit wet.

She examined her hands last. Slowly, cautiously, as she looked down at her fingers, she smiled.

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Jareth paced, waiting impatiently, in Rowan's chambers. As he walked furiously back and forth, wondering just where his healer and only confidante *was* at the precise time they were meant to meet, he caught a glance of himself in Rowan's mirror across the room. He halted.

Normally, Jareth took great pride in his appearance. He was a King, after all, and a High Prince of the Seelie; his appearance was meant to be formidable, intimidating, and appropriate for his station. At the moment, though, even he could admit that he looked terrible.

His eyes were sunken, his hair lank, and his face was paler than he had ever seen it; his black attire was devoid of all ornament and decoration save for his pendant, and he looked worn and ragged. He looked so wretched, in fact, he could imagine Rowan thinking he had somehow been exposed to trace amounts of iron—which was impossible.

No, he knew the source of his downtrodden appearance, and it had nothing to do with poison, only pain.

Jareth was pulled from his reverie as he heard footsteps approaching. His intense frustration returning to him, he stalked toward the door, ready to meet Rowan with his displeasure at his lateness, but the door creaked open before he could reach it. To his surprise, it wasn't Rowan at all.

It was Sarah.
“I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 12

Hoodoo

"Come into my life"
"Regress into a dream"
"We will hide"
"Build a new reality"
"Draw another picture"
"Of the life you could have had"
"Follow your instincts"
"And choose the other path"

"You should never be afraid"
"You're protected...from trouble and pain"
"Why, why?"
"Is this a crisis in your eyes again?"

"And I've had recurring nightmares"
"That I was loved for who I am"
"And missed the opportunity"
"To be a better man..."

("Hoodoo", Black Holes & Revelations, Muse)

After a hurried supper of bread, cheese and ham in which Ludie chastised her for coming back to the castle far later than expected ("You promised you wouldn't go in too far!") as well as fussed over the state of her appearance ("What happened in there?! Your hair is a mess and your gown..."), Sarah managed to placate her little caretaker enough that she was able to take her leave. She was determined to find Rowan and, hopefully, confide in the healer about all the things she had seen inside the vast Labyrinth.

Thankfully, it seemed that her time spent wandering Jareth's actual Labyrinth had somehow imbued Sarah with a better sense of direction; or, perhaps she was actually just starting to learn her way around. In any case, it wasn't nearly as difficult for her to navigate the halls of Jareth's castle (according to Ludie's instructions) this time around.

Within a quarter of hour, she was face-to-face with the door she had been told led to Rowan's chambers, her eagerness to see the healer causing her to seize the door handle and rudely enter
without knocking. After practically pushing her way inside Rowan's rooms, Sarah received a bit of a nasty shock—for, upon looking around, she jumped when instead of seeing Rowan, she saw Jareth standing there instead.

She halted abruptly, feeling self-conscious about her mussed hair and downtrodden dress, and then quite silly for caring. Noticeably, she felt no emotions emanating from Jareth, who was also frozen, looking just as surprised as she felt. Still, his look at least gave something away—compared to his usual impeccable garb and appearance, he looked a bit ill. His face, made beautiful by impossibly high cheekbones and a sculpted jaw, was paler than normal, almost sallow, making his mismatched eyes seem even more prominent. Compared to his usual over-the-top dress, his clothing seemed plain as well as ragged; his all-black attire hung loosely from his lithe body, and the only ornament he had left was the strange pendant that still hung from his neck, drawing the eye to the top of his exposed white chest. For the first time since she had met him, she noticed he wore no gloves.

Realizing she was staring at him again, Sarah averted her eyes from Jareth's figure, forcing herself to meet his stony gaze. He seemed to come to himself then.

"What do you want?" he barked at her, his voice uncharacteristically rough. Sarah frowned.

"I was looking for Rowan," she responded.

"He isn't here at the moment," sneered Jareth, "But rest assured, I will tell him you came looking for him."

At that, he turned his back on her in a clear dismissal. Sarah frowned deeply, unmoving. Carefully, she began to try to reach out with her consciousness again, uncoiling a few tendrils of her empathy from around her heart to attempt to find one that belonged to the Goblin King. It was difficult; much more difficult than the others had been, causing Sarah to actually slowly extend a hand towards him, still reaching; searching for something.

He flinched, but otherwise, he didn't move.

"Go, Sarah," he said, his voice low in his throat, his back still turned toward her.

Sarah only concentrated harder, her eyes becoming unfocused as she stretched, further and further, prodding and prying...there was something there, she knew it, she just had to-

Quite abruptly, Jareth spun around so fast that Sarah didn't have time to react. He grabbed her outstretched arm and yanked her closer, causing the link she had almost forged to fade away into nothing. His eyes were on her, somehow incredulous and irate at the same time.

"Incredible," he murmured. Sarah shook her head, still a little stunned by the loss of the almost-connection. She looked up at Jareth through her eyelashes with a sense of foreboding, but no trace of fear. His eyes searched hers.

"You're aware of it, then," confirmed Jareth, his voice still quiet, his ungloved hand still wrapped around her arm tightly, though not uncomfortably so. His hand was warm.

Somehow unsurprised that he had sensed or known what she had been trying to do, she nodded. He dropped her arm before retreating back a few steps, his eyes bright. He was looking at her with a mix of awe and anger painted across his face. Sarah wished he would say something.

"How dare you?" he asked, finally breaking the silence. When she didn't answer, a low growl erupted from his throat.
"It seems humans are just as capable of cruelty as the Fae," he spat out furiously, "It's a bitter jape, Sarah; this new ability of yours. To possess the power to so easily see and manipulate the emotions of others—tell me, do you take pleasure in toying with others' feelings because you have none of your own? Did I become blind once I looked upon your face? Surely not, though at every turn, I have wondered—how else to explain an infatuation with the siren? Take my heart and eat it whole then. I don't want it anymore. Perhaps that will please you."

He laughed coldly.

The words were like a slap to her face. She felt the color rise in her cheeks as she balled her hands into fists.

"Me?" she retorted, "All you are is pretty words that don't mean anything except lie after lie after lie. I'm using what I have to, the only thing I've got left, and I wouldn't have even had it if it weren't for you in the first place! I only bothered to see if you had a heart at all. No wonder I couldn't find anything."

"Silly, obstinate girl," snarled Jareth, his eyes devoid of any of their usual mirth—now, he was all ice. "I will tell you again, even though you refuse to listen. I have never lied to you. I have tried to be open with you about my desires, Sarah. Must you be so persistent, love? Fine. I will show you."

At that, he forcefully tugged at the pendant sitting prettily around his neck until the chain broke clean in half. Sarah's eyes widened.

"What are you doing?" asked Sarah.

Jareth said nothing. All humor, cruel or otherwise, had fled his face; only to be replaced with his all-too-familiar impassive mask. He held the broken pendant out to her. Reluctantly, she held out her palm and accepted it. It was quite heavy; gleaming silver and gold. It seemed to thrum in her hand, and she knew, somehow, that she was holding something more powerful than herself in her palm.

Despite Sarah's interest in the curious medallion, however, her eyes never left Jareth's.

He had conjured another one of his crystals, which he held between them, carefully balanced in the palm of his naked hand. Still, Sarah only stared at him, her eyes questioning, her lips silent. Slowly, Jareth brought the crystal to his lips.

"No lies, Sarah."

He blew on the crystal like a child would blow a bubble, and to Sarah's surprise, it floated between them, growing larger and larger until it reached roughly the size of a pumpkin. A wave of deja vu washed over her; inside the shimmering surface of the crystal, she saw her younger self, as if from far away. Hesitantly, she took a step forward, reaching out her hand before looking at Jareth again. He nodded back at her.

Gripping the pendant even more tightly in her hand, she took another step forward, her hand still outstretched. When her fingers met the crystal, the world around her changed.

She was no longer standing in Rowan's rooms, but in the world encased by crystal—which was a familiar one. The scene was unmistakable; she was with her younger self at the base of Jareth's dream-like Escher room, now in pieces, and the Jareth of years past was there, too. She watched as the younger Sarah advanced upon the Goblin King, murmuring the words the current Sarah remembered only too well. The speech echoed in the vast cavern that was Jareth's once-strong domain:

"Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered, I have fought my way here to the castle
"Stop—wait," commanded the younger Jareth, his eyes imploring the teenage Sarah to understand. As the older Sarah stood there, watching the exchange she had lived as a ghost, she could feel him—the Jareth of then and now, and the mix of panic and desperation building to a crescendo inside a tortured heart. Even though she knew this wasn't real, not anymore; just a recreation of a memory they shared, her breathing grew constricted. Jareth's feelings were powerful, stronger than any she had ever dared touch, perhaps even stronger than her own. Without the pendant to protect her from them, she was suddenly afraid of their toll.

"Look, Sarah," continued the younger Jareth, "Look what I'm offering you—your dreams."

Sarah watched her younger self pause, but only just. The steel in her own eyes made her feel a twinge of her own pride, but it was nearly lost in the river that was Jareth inside of her.

"And my kingdom as great."

"I ask for so little," continued the younger Jareth, pleading now, "Just let me rule you, and you can have...everything that you want."

"Kingdom as great..." muttered the younger Sarah, ignoring the younger Jareth; causing a spike of panic mingled with pain to pierce the real Sarah's heart, "Damn! I can never remember that line!

The younger Jareth's face was almost impassive; she had thought that nine years ago, anyway, but this time she was actually paying attention, and the real Sarah understood now, because she was feeling what he was. He was afraid—afraid of her refusal; afraid of more pain; afraid of the tumultuous swell of feelings threatening to erupt inside of him.

And, now, her too.

Still, he pressed on, his eyes burning into the 15-year-old girl, arrogant but begging.

"Just fear me, love me, do as I say and I will be your slave."

The real Sarah knew too well what happened next, but despite not wanting to relive it, she stood there, trapped in the memory, this time feeling more than she thought was possible.

"My kingdom is great...my kingdom is great..." murmured her younger self, "You have no power over me!"

The swell seized the real Sarah's heart, and an unimaginable pain held it in a vice grip that made it difficult for her to breathe. She sunk to her knees, clutching her chest. She watched the younger Jareth throw the crystal in the air, wondering how he could appear so stoic when she knew that inside, it felt as if his heart had splintered.

 Abruptly, the scene changed. Sarah was still kneeling on the ground, but the pain was dissipating the same as the world around her, only to be replaced with a new one. Instead of Jareth's Escher room, she was back in her dark bedroom in her little apartment. For a split-second, her own heart stopped, until she saw another version of herself backing away from an approaching Jareth. Another memory; another exchange.

Though this time, the balance of power had shifted.

"My dear Sarah," drawled the Jareth of the recent past, "It has been far too long."
The blinding pain of the scene before was mostly gone, now, held in check by a dam Jareth had built inside himself. Now, seeing her again after so many years, the real Sarah felt his triumph mingled with trepidation at finding her again.

"No tantrum? Dear me, has little Sarah lost her spark?" There, the trepidation ebbed away, and amusement took its place. As the two bickered, Jareth's feelings flickered between amusement and anger, all the while separate from the dam that held his pain prisoner.

The scene continued to change, again and again, but the real Sarah did not stir. She stayed on the ground, afraid to move, afraid that her own feelings would never be hers again.

From her place on the floor, feeling broken and still breathing roughly, she watched as the crystal world recreated each of their exchanges since she had beaten his Labyrinth, all with his emotions surging through her, seamless and sharp and stronger than even her own. His feelings surrounded her, engulfed her; piercing her insides like claws. With every word they spoke to each other, his feelings shifted; changed—they were more fluid than most, like the way a river could rage into a flood in what seemed like no time at all.

Through their first few exchanges, his feelings flowed mostly between the same amusement and anger, with twinges and tweaks of annoyance and affection weaving in and out. But that wasn't counting the twisted knot of pain still hiding deeper, much deeper; a pulsing ball of nerves Sarah didn't dare touch, for fear of knowing it even more than she already did. When they came to Jareth finding her in Lilu's cave, however, she couldn't avoid it any longer.

She watched him as he found her; convulsing and sweating bullets, lips a vivid blue from a burning cold Sarah remembered only too well. The knot of pain erupted, then, as soon as he laid eyes on her dying body. The real Sarah hugged herself at the onslaught of pain racking her limbs, squinting and whimpering, just trying to keep herself together. Jareth's agony—even as he sat there and saved her, carefully, with concentration—was immeasurable, and only lessened when she breathed again.

This isn't selfish, the real Sarah thought as the excruciating pain lessened as Jareth healed her younger self, this is...this is...

The scene changed again. The pain was still there as she watched him watch her, from afar, waiting, agonizing, deducing, deciding—what to do, what to say, what not to say, just how much to say.

In the end, he didn't give much away. The pain was still there, after all, and it threatened so much of Jareth. The real Sarah understood.

Finally, she reached the scene of mere days prior; their long appraisal of each other and her own realization—and the confrontation that followed it.

"I wanted you, Sarah. I wanted you then, and I want you now."

In that moment, all of that insurmountable pain—pain that encompassed so much more; fear, desperation, loneliness—was on the line. As he spoke the words, Sarah could finally feel what he had meant; as well as what it had cost him to say it.

When it all ended, she awoke—as if from a dream—on the cold stone ground of Rowan's rooms.

For a moment, all she heard was her own breathing, still labored. Then, he came rushing to her side.

"Sarah—are you alright?"

Tears streamed down Sarah's pale cheeks without her permission. Shaking madly, through grit teeth,
she managed to gasp out,

"It...hurts…"

Without hesitation, he knelt beside her, gently gathering her into his arms. The tears continued to fall, harder now, even though the pain was starting to slowly (too slowly) recede. As his emotions ebbed away inside of her, his naked hands soothed her, caressing her arms and her back, and he sang words she didn't understand in a low, rasping voice. The words helped soothe the pain that had become physical more quickly; within a few minutes, her tears had ceased, and the stress on her body had all but gone. The emotional ache, however, needed more time to fade.

Despite that she had quieted and her body had calmed, neither of them immediately broke the embrace.

After a few beats of intimate silence, Jareth let her go, but he only retreated far enough away so that he was looking into her eyes, his hands grasped holding hers. She could still feel him, his pain and his pleasure, but most of all, the desire for penance.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone for their continued support in the form of comments and kudos! You guys are really too kind. This story is moving quickly for me, and I think it may speed up now that we're at Chapter 12 (especially since of season 4 of Game of Thrones is done...sigh). Again, thanks! Have a great weekend.
I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter," replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 13

Madness

I, I can't get these memories out of my mind,
And some kind of madness has started to evolve.
And I, I tried so hard to let you go,
But some kind of madness is swallowing me whole, yeah
I have finally seen the light,
And I have finally realized
What you mean.
And now I need to know is this real love,
Or is it just madness keeping us afloat?
And when I look back at all the crazy fights we had,
Like some kind of madness was taking control, yeah
And now I have finally seen the light,
And I have finally realized
What you need...
Yes I know, I can be wrong,
Maybe I'm too headstrong.
Our love is
Madness
("Madness", The 2nd Law, Muse)

After a few beats of intimate silence, Jareth let her go, but he only retreated far enough away so that he was looking into her eyes, his hands grasped holding hers. She could still feel him, his pain and his pleasure, but most of all, the desire for penance.

Finally, he spoke.

"I'm sorry, Sarah," he murmured, dropping his eyes from hers, the pain threatening to crash over him (and her, too) again. "I did not know the pain would manifest physically...or hurt you so badly."

Sarah didn't say anything. She wasn't sure what to say. When he raised his eyes to hers again, she opened her mouth to speak, but was interrupted by the door creaking open. Startled, they both looked toward the door to see an even more surprised Rowan standing there.

"Oh!" Rowan exclaimed, eyes moving back and forth between them, "I...er...I apologize, Your
Highness; Sarah, I..." Sarah instantly felt Rowan's discomfort tickle her insides at the awkward situation; and while his feelings weren't nearly as strong as Jareth's, the added pressure didn't help relieve the tightness still in her chest.

Jareth stood, gently guiding Sarah up with him, his hands still holding hers.

"No need to apologize, Rowan," Jareth said, "I was merely waiting for you here when Sarah came to call. Isn't that right, Sarah?"

He looked at her again, his eyes imploring, and Sarah felt his heart seems to skip a beat. This is maddening, she thought.

"I can go," said Rowan, beginning to turn away, "I didn't mean to interrupt-

"No," said Sarah, extending a hand out to him, causing her to drop one of Jareth's hands. A white-hot surge of envy shot through her, and the Goblin King's grip on her right hand grew a bit tighter.

"What is it, Sarah?" asked Rowan. She looked between him and Jareth, trying desperately to ignore the surging stream that was now the tangled emotions of both Jareth and Rowan within her chest.

"I'll go," she said, her eyes finding Jareth's again, "Let me go. Just for a little while. I'm…"

Her voice died, and then Jareth realized—she felt it.

"Yes, go," he agreed. He took a moment to glance down at their entwined hands for a moment before looking up at her again. Seemingly uncaring of Rowan's presence, he leaned into her, gently grabbing her chin with his free hand so that their lips were inches apart.

"Do not stray too far, Sarah. I will be waiting for you."

At that, she felt a rush to her head and her heart, though she couldn't say who any of it belonged to. She nodded.

"Thank you," she murmured, squeezing his hand slightly before letting it go. It was then that she remembered she was still holding his pendant. Before turning to leave, she pressed it back into his palm with a meaningful look.

She spared a brief, apologetic glance for Rowan before hurrying out of the door without looking back. Both men watched her depart before turning to look at one another.


"Fine," murmured the Goblin King, his eyes still transfixed on the spot where Sarah had left, "Well, better, perhaps. Much has happened. Sarah has…" The right side of his mouth perked up in a strange little smirk.

"Sarah has…?" Jareth finally tore his eyes away from the door, looking at his healer.

"It seems she has cultivated a new ability, likely from her visit to Queen Lilu's cave. The magic has finished permeating her soul."

"What?" asked Rowan, his eyes wide, "So soon?"

"Yes," nodded Jareth, looking down at the pendant in his palm, "And it is quite formidable. She can feel and manipulate the emotions of others."
Rowan watched the Goblin King as he whispered a few Sidhe words, mending the chain of the pendant before putting it back in place around his neck.

"You don't mean…" he started. Jareth looked back up at him.

"I do," he said grimly, "She tried to see my heart. So I showed it to her, unencumbered. And, now, she's gone again."

It took Rowan a few moments to respond.

"But you heard her. She needs time. I'm sure what you showed her was-"

"I know," Jareth interrupted curtly, beginning to pace the length of the room, wringing his hands, "I do not mean that my impatience is justified, Rowan. I hurt her. The pain...I meant only to give her what she wanted; what you advised I do...but the pain pierced her physical form, and more deeply than I thought possible..."

"And now she understands," said Rowan sharply, taking a few steps closer to his King, "Remember, she sought that understanding. Doesn't that mean something, that she wanted to see? It was her choice."

"Yes," admitted the Goblin King. He ceased pacing, looking down at his ungloved hands.

"But that fact does not bring me any solace, so why should it for her? After this, can I blame her for wanting away from me? In my selfish heart, she is all I want...but I could even live with her hatred if it meant she would stay. What if, now that she has a taste of the pain of power, she flees? It is even worse to imagine losing her again, only to see her return to a world without magic where she will suffer further, and lose herself to madness."

"Jareth," said Rowan quietly, moving closer to his King, "She can't go back. She knows she can't."

Briefly, Jareth looked Rowan in the eye.

"Magic has its limits, Rowan. As for Sarah..."

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Sarah didn't go back to her room. Instead, she ran out into the night, wanting to get further and further away from any feelings that weren't hers. At first, it seemed impossible with the number of little and large goblins she passed by throughout the castle and the city, but eventually, she made it far enough on foot that she was back inside the Labyrinth itself, finally, blissfully, alone.

This little journey was almost dream-like in its pace; she moved almost seamlessly from the city to lush gardens just a bit south of the citadel at the center, all without truly seeing where she was going, or how she was getting there.

If she had cared to ponder it, she would realize that she had perhaps learned more of this place than any human had a right to. Then again, if any human had the right, it was her.

She stopped running when she reached a garden path overgrown with massive onyx hydrangeas roughly the size of her head. Her footsteps echoed as she walked, her breathing finally returning to normal. Vaguely, she wondered if Hoggle tended to these gardens; the flora was beautiful in its dark wildness, and she felt lucky to have to found this part of the Labyrinth at all.
That, and distinctly relieved to have only her own feelings again.

Despite her welcome solitude, the pain was still there, inching its way back to the forefront of her mind. Apart of her wanted to shut it out forever, but she knew she wouldn't. She couldn't. She had seen the world out of her new eyes now, and there was no going back once you could truly understand what a person was, and how they came to be that way.

Lightly, she let her fingertips brush a few of the large flowers as she traveled the path, her pace slowing. How could she have been so oblivious? Her small face contorted into a grimace. Jareth's pain was only an echo, now; but that didn't make it any less immeasurable, or any less overwhelming.

*He wants me,* she thought, the realization finally sinking in, filling a hollow part of her with a strange buzzing feeling, *he wants me because he really is in love with me.*

While before it seemed unbelievable, now, she knew better. She had felt it, after all, clear as day and dark as night; a blackened, bruised love that was almost toxic, burning a gaping hole inside of him, and for a time, her too. It hadn't been anything like she had imagined it could be, but was somehow better and worse at the same time.

She didn't know when he had started loving her, exactly; he had kept their first interactions to himself, but she had seen that he had loved her even when she was a stubborn, awkward teenager, barely more than a child, and of course she hadn't seen it then, no, not when she had fancied him as her villain. In their years apart, they had both suffered in silence and loneliness, separate but never truly free of the other. He had haunted her, her ghost of magic and goblins and growing up, and now, she knew, she had done the same to him.

What baffled Sarah most was how he didn't hate her, too. Even if she—her cheeks flushed a bright pink at the thought, and even now, after everything, she willed it away—she couldn't imagine how he couldn't hate her for that pain she had caused, and for so long. The buzzing inside of her stomach was getting stronger, making her feel somewhat nauseous and shaky.

Still deep in thought, she rounded a corner, coming across scores of peonies mingling with white daisies; an odd hybrid, Sarah thought. Still, they were beautiful. Sarah inhaled the evening air, trying to ease her ailing stomach and quiet her mind just a little.

Definitely impossible.

The craziest part of it was that the whole time—the whole entire goddamn time—Jareth had been the one to see it all, not her. She had bested his Labyrinth, but he had still beaten her, and in a way she had never been prepared for; could never have guessed at or seen coming.

At that, she laughed out loud. Tears sprung to her eyes, but she laughed herself hoarse regardless.

For someone with the newfound power to feel so much; really, anything and everything she wanted, Sarah was still somehow having a hard time sorting her own emotions out. As she slowly lost herself in the maze of flowers, her fingers continuing to delicately graze their sweet-smelling petals, she reached inside herself, too, trying to really grasp what was there. She couldn't fathom just why it was so difficult.

She stretched her consciousness further, the fingers of her empathy scraping around inside of herself. It was a strange feeling; the same, really, as it had always been, but it helped to somehow give names to the emotions inside of her a lot easier. When she reached far enough, she made a connection to a handful of messy feelings caged inside her heart. Something that was unmistakably fear pooled in the
pit of her stomach—a part of her didn't want to feel those things.

"I have to," she whispered to herself, closing her eyes.

Unbidden, everything came rushing to the surface of Sarah's mind, and she couldn't stop herself from crying even harder. It was all too much—the frustration with herself; her bitter anger with Jareth; the sadness that came with that anger slowly ebbing away even though, for some reason, she wanted to cling onto it; and, finally, the terror at possibly loving something beside herself, because what if it all went wrong? It always did.

Frankly, she found she didn't fucking care if she cried or not. Why should she?

Through her tears, she managed to touch each feeling with a whisper of her own power, sweetly, gently.

In that moment, Sarah made a choice: she wasn't going to compromise on herself or the things she needed, not anymore. She wasn't going to hide, and she wasn't going to run. Instead, she was going to be closer to the strong-willed girl who bested the Labyrinth in the first place. There was no denying that she had changed—she had grown up, after all—or that he had changed, either, and that was the important part.

Sarah opened her eyes. She rubbed her wet eyes, and chuckled when she saw a lone, succulent peach sitting on a nearby stone.

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He was in his throne room when it happened. Perched, rigid, atop the titular throne, waiting. He held a crystal in the palm of his right hand, now gloved again, but he hadn't summoned an image of Sarah, much as he wanted to. He was waiting for something, though he couldn't reasonably say what for. It turned out to be her, of course.

"Jareth," she whispered. He looked down at the crystal in his hand and saw her there, standing in the castle gardens. He heard the wind outside rustle in the quiet, and to his astonishment, she looked up at him.

In a flash, the crystal and the man both disappeared.

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"Jareth."

Sarah didn't need to turn around to know he was there; though she could feel that he was wearing his pendant again, likely to prevent her further pain, she still felt him. His presence was unmistakable in the stillness. She clutched the peach in her palm a bit tighter.

"I knew you'd find me."

"I told you I would wait for you," he said quietly, moving closer to her. Slowly, she turned around to
face him. He wore the same black attire from earlier in the evening, but there was a marked difference in his appearance nonetheless—unlike before, he looked whole and healthy again. Sarah decided she liked him better that way; despite the fact that he was a creature of otherworldly beauty even when ailing.

She shrugged, quirking a rare half-smile.

"This place seems as good as any."

"Does it?" he asked, quirking an eyebrow. His eyes danced with mirth and hesitation.

She nodded. He took another step closer to her.

"Do you hate me, Sarah?" he asked. His blatant question caught her off-guard. The mirth in his eyes was gone; instead, for the first time since she had met him, his eyes seemed naked to her—open, vulnerable. She supposed after being forced into showing her everything, there was no use hiding any more.

"No."

"No?" he asked, trying to draw her out, "Even after all of that needless pain? Sarah, I-"

"I wanted to see," she said quickly, heat pooling in the pit of her stomach as she stepped closer to him, "It was my choice. It's my power, and I wanted to use it. If that was reckless of me, than that's what it was."

At that, Jareth went silent.

"Why don't you hate me?" she asked, not letting him pursue the topic any further. From the resulting look on his face, she could tell he didn't understand.

"Hate you?" he asked, puzzled, "Sarah, you've just finished experiencing my emotions, how could you possibly think—"

"Because of the pain, Jareth," Sarah interrupted, her voice holding an edge to it, "All of that pain. How? How couldn't you hate me, after that? You're right, I did feel it, and I can't understand how something like that—that bitter—didn't... didn't..." She trailed off.

He still didn't seem to understand her. In any case, he looked puzzled.

"I do not fault you for my suffering, Sarah, not truly," he said, his voice still hushed, "I have acted the opposite, I know. I am a vindictive creature. But I am made more selfish than vengeful, and it's been made clear to me that in order to get what I want, I must let go my feelings of bitterness. And so I have tried."

"Not easy, huh?" she asked.

Jareth frowned slightly.

"No true conviction of the heart ever is easy, Sarah."

Sarah nodded. They both fell silent.

"What if I had I never beaten the Labyrinth? Would you have loved me then?"

At that, Jareth chuckled wistfully, his eyes sad. He stepped even closer to her; they were only a few
"An impossible question, Sarah! I do not know. I've found I'm just as much a fool when it comes to this madness that's love as anyone else. Perhaps this is why those of my race abstain from it and deem it weak; perhaps this is why they abhor humans. For it is a uniquely human thing, to love so ardently. It shapes so much of who you are."

"And you?" Sarah asked, looking up at him. He took his time answering, curling a gloved fingertip around a tendril of her hair.

"And me."

Sarah sucked in a breath and held the peach out to him.

"I found this," she whispered. "It was waiting here for me."

"I know," he replied. Slowly, he took a bite of the peach. A little juice dribbled onto his lips, which he expertly licked clean, all the while staring at her more intensely than she ever thought possible. Then he offered it to her. Smirking, she accepted the peach, taking a bite.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! Sorry for this chapter taking forever...and it's weird, because it's a short little chapter. I do have reasons, though, promise! A lot, actually. I'll give you the short version: I got offered a job in Seattle, which is mighty far away from my current city of Chicago, and I accepted it, so there's been a lot of real-life legwork accepting the job, quitting my current job, subleasing my apartment, moving out of my apartment, buying a car to move with, etc. And it's not over yet! But I've tried to keep up...hopefully (and I think you will) you'll like this installment. Let me know by kindly leaving a comment. If I need to entice you further, my birthday was Friday. ;)

Also, am I getting notorious for cliffhangers? I swear I don't really mean to write them, they just kind of happen…

Again, no promises, but I'm going to try and crank out the next chapter (or more!) before I officially move, because that is an all-consuming thing for sure. I'm moving Labor Day weekend/week, so we'll see. Thanks to everyone for all of their support!
"I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter," replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Hey guys! Fast update if I do say so myself. Sorry it's coming so late at night, but I think you'll see soon why I couldn't help but post right away… Anyway, I really think I'm gonna be able to do at least one more chapter before my big move, and you're gonna be happy if I do, I think. I'll end the note there because this chapter, albeit short, is, well...just go read it! More author ramblings at the end. Enjoy!

As Sarah tasted the sweet, succulent peach on her tongue, the world melted away around them. Colors paled and burned around her, the wind howled, and she reached out for Jareth, but he wasn't there. Finally, everything stopped moving, and she was in a familiar dream.

"Everything's...dancing..." she murmured, blinking her eyes to try and stop her head spinning.

She was in a crystal ballroom, and all around her, people were dancing to a song that she...knew—
yes, yes, of course she knew it, but how did she again?—dressed in finery with the faces of goblins! No, no, they were only masks.

Briefly, Sarah glanced down at herself, and was hit with a wave of deja vu when she saw that she was dressed from head to toe in a very familiar white ball gown. Head still hazy, she slowly strode forward into the throng of masked dancers.

As people swirled around her, laughing and jeering, their faces hidden behind horned masks with black eyes, she couldn't help but stare back in slight awe. She felt woozy, uncertain; she instinctively knew she had been here before, but when, and how? She'd forgotten, and that wasn't good, no, no, she couldn't forget...it was too important. Something was too important. But what was the something?

As she moved, dream-like, through the endlessly twirling bodies, still somewhat dazed, she glanced around, turning on the spot, searching, but for what, she couldn't seem to remember. A distant memory, one of awe and beauty and the belief in fairytale princes echoed in the back of Sarah's mind, but then she shook her head, dispelling the echo, trying to focus her thoughts.

It was then that the music seemed to swell around her, and she spun around, slightly, and finally, she saw him.

Standing on a step higher than her, dressed in deep blue adorned with crystals, masked like the others—until he slowly lowered the mask obscuring his face. Their eyes met, and her mouth fell slightly open in what wasn't astonishment, but recognition.

Jareth, her mind whispered. And then it all came back.

_There's such a sad love_
_Deep in your eyes..._
_A kind of pale jewel_
_Open and closed within your eyes_

As they looked at each other, Sarah felt a familiar heat blossom in the pit of her stomach, and with a jolt, she remembered she had felt the same heat then, years ago, when this place and this dream of theirs had started as a trick; a guise designed to distract and deceive.

_I'll place the sky within your eyes..._

The song marched on, with her and Jareth still staring at one another, until quite suddenly, he moved sideways and seemed to vanish. Taken aback, she moved forward, searching again, now straining to reach out with her empathy for him, but curiously enough, nothing was there, not even from the others around them.

Still determined, she glided forward, still looking, but in vain, she knew now, he would come back. He always did.

_There's such a fooled heart_

She spun around, searching some more, and met a masked man who reached out to her, jollily accosting her with a fake snake poking out of a chest. Startled, she ignored the shrill laughter of those around her, turning away from them, still looking. She knew he was still here.

_Beating so fast_
_In search of new dreams_
_A love that will last_
Within your heart
I'll place the moon within your heart

Why had he left her? she wondered, growing more confused and dizzy as she circled the room, searching for him. Why this? Why again? What had she missed the last time?

As the pain sweeps through
Makes no sense for you
Every thrill is gone
Wasn’t too much fun at all
But I'll be there for you…
As the world falls down
Falling...falling in love

The dancers around her were growing bolder and louder. Sarah pushed her way through a couple, spinning around, trying to find the familiar face in the crowd of others.

I'll paint you mornings of gold
I'll spin you Valentine evenings
Though we're strangers till now...

She turned again, and suddenly, he was there, staring back at her. In that moment, her heart seemed to fall right into her stomach.

We're choosing the path between the stars
I'll leave my love...between the stars.

Before she could do anything else at all, let alone think, he strode towards her. Without thinking, she put a hand on his shoulder, and he took her other hand in his before they began to dance like the others, spinning slowly around the room, their eyes locked on each other. Sarah was incapable of thought in that moment. As he guided her, his lips moved along to the music:

As the pain sweeps through
Makes no sense for you
Every thrill is gone
Wasn’t too much fun at all
But I'll be there for you…
As the world falls down
Falling...falling in love

But soon enough, the words stalled, and Sarah's eyes found clarity even as she looked into Jareth’s. She understood why he had brought her here. And although she didn't flee—she wouldn't, not like last time, this wasn’t last time—she did speak.

"No," she said quietly, her eyes imploring Jareth.

His eyes widened in surprise, and they stopped spinning. Everything else around them stopped. Momentarily, Sarah tore her eyes to glance at the 13-hour clock—it seemed he had stopped time itself.

"No?" he asked, his voice rough with emotion. She grasped his hand tighter.
"No...not like this," she said carefully, meeting his eyes again.

The dark cloud that had threatened to steal over his features dissipated, and he gave her a wry smile.

"As you wish."

At that, he pulled her close to him. Sarah wrapped her arms around his torso and put her ear to his chest, watching as the world around them changed.

The dancers' and their laughter flickered away, and the crystal ballroom they stood in faded into nothingness. Sarah's hair fell loose, and her ball gown became a sleek, silky ebony gown that felt delicious on her skin. The brightness of the bubble they had been in dissipated, plunging them both into darkness. Sarah closed her eyes, squeezing Jareth tighter, and she felt his hand caress her hair.

"Look, Sarah."

She opened her eyes and gasped.

"Stars," she murmured.

All around them, everywhere, were stars. She imagined it was as real as standing amongst the actual cosmos. Lilu's cave was a pale imitation to this garden of starlight, where the lights actually burned bright all around the two of them, creating an endless array of color, sparkling in the deep blue that surrounded them.

She let go of Jareth, gazing around in wonder, but he held fast onto one of her hands. A smile broke across her face as she glanced back at him; the starlight and sky shining in the reflection of her eyes.

"I thought you said you move the stars for no one."

At that, the Goblin King smiled back; a true smile, one that was as dazzling as the landscape around them.

"I find no one usually means you, Sarah."

She laughed, and he pulled her back towards him, grasping her hands in his, his smile waning as his eyes grew serious.

"So this is where you hid them," she said slowly, her smile fading too as she saw the change in his eyes, "Where are we, anyway?"

"In a dream, of course," he said, "One of many I've made. It's for you, Sarah."

"Mine?" she asked.

"Yours," he said, nodding. He leaned in closer. She felt her cheeks grow hot.

"And you?" she whispered. Her heart seemed to be beating so loud that she was sure he heard it.

Jareth's eyebrows perked up, and his smile returned full-force. At that, he let go of her hands, and brought her even closer somehow, his hands on her waist. Her mind was a blur as she wrapped her arms around his neck, her breathing loud and clumsy in her own ears. Their eyes hadn't left each other for a moment; neither of them even dared blink. Slowly, painfully, he leaned into her, his lips coming within a hair of hers.

"Yours."
With that, his lips found hers, and her smile became a kiss.

Chapter End Notes

BAGH! Who else is excited as me? I subsist off of your feedback (namely in the form of reviews), so send them my way for a bigger shot at the next chapter before my move Labor Day weekend (which, I can promise, will continue where we left off -wink, wink-). To be honest, I wanted to write and deliver both chapters at once for obvious reasons (so again, this is not an intentional cliffhanger), but I felt weird keeping this chapter under wraps for any period of time with that ending. Hope you like! Thanks again to everyone for their support in the form of follows, favorites, and best of all, reviews! Have a great Sunday!
“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter Notes

Hello all! I'm gonna be completely honest—this itty bitty chapter is pretty much pure smut. That's all I'm gonna say right now. Enjoy. ~eyebrow waggle~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 15

I Belong to You

When these pillars get pulled down
It will be you who wears the crown
And I'll owe everything to you
How much pain has cracked your soul?
How much love would make you whole?
You're my guiding lightning strike
I can't find the words to say, they're overdue
I've traveled half the world to say
I belong to you
I can't find the words to say
When I'm confused
I've traveled half the world to say
You are my muse...
("Starlight", Black Holes and Revelations, Muse)

Sarah's mind was a whirlwind; anything resembling a rational thought was long gone. All she could do at the moment was feel—Jareth's hands tightening on her waist; the insistence of his lips on hers, warm and wanting more; the careening of her own heart inside her chest. And there was no denying it—she was kissing him back (and quite splendidly so).

After what felt like an eternity and somehow not nearly long enough, they broke apart for air. Blinking roughly, Sarah opened her eyes. She'd never been kissed like that before. She found she liked it very much.

Jareth was staring at her, eyes dancing with a mix of amusement and, uncannily enough, disbelief.

"What's wrong?" she asked, the words coming out breathlessly. She was having a hard time focusing; she couldn't seem to stop looking at his lips. With one kiss, it felt like her entire world had
changed. Oddly enough, she had never felt more human in her whole life.

"Nothing," he murmured, shaking his head. Slowly, he brought up a gloved fingertip to caress the curve of her neck. She shivered at his touch.

"Nothing at all."

"We should…go," Sarah stammered, her eyes fixated on his fingers.

"Of course," he said, a tinge of something different—disappointment?—coloring his features. When Sarah realized what he thought she meant, she panicked.

"No, no, I meant-" she mumbled, still distracted by his fingers softly brushing the skin of her exposed neck, "That we should…"

"Yes?" Jareth asked, confused. He started to pull his hand away, but Sarah grabbed it with her own and held it in place. Mustering up an enormous amount of willpower (and, admittedly, courage), she looked him straight in the eye.

"I want you to kiss me again, and then take me back to your room."

He didn't need to be told twice. For the briefest of moments, surprise flashed across his face, only to be replaced with a devilish grin before his mouth was on hers again. This time, his mouth covered hers with such force that she shook slightly, her knees embarrassingly growing weak in his embrace. It hardly mattered, however; at that point, Sarah's body was so intertwined with Jareth's that he had no problem keeping her steady.

When they inevitably had to pull apart again to breathe, Sarah was still seeing stars, despite the fact that they were suddenly standing in Jareth's dark bedroom. To her surprise, Jareth backed away from her a few paces, breathing roughly; his eyes almost manic in the dim light.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Sarah," he started, his voice coming out in a deep growl that he didn't seem to have much control over, "I can stop myself now, but I'm not sure how much longer I will be able to exert such control. I need to know that you truly want this before we proceed any further."

Sarah's voice caught in her throat as she stared at him, panting a few feet away from her.

"Yes," she exhaled.

At her words, he crossed back over to her in no time at all, gathering her into his arms. His lips found hers again, more unrelenting than ever. She kissed him back just as hurriedly, finding herself trying to grasp his shirt in her hands, wanting it gone. At that, his tongue pressed against her closed lips, and she opened her mouth in acceptance. His mouth was hot and hungry against hers, which only made the heat in the pit of her stomach seem to spread all over her body, kissing her all the way down to her fingertips and toes.

As Sarah's hands almost helplessly clawed at Jareth's clothes, his expert hands roamed her small body with devotion, as if he had already committed every curve to memory. Perhaps he had. Briefly, they broke apart again, and Jareth abandoned her lips for her neck, murmuring her name against her flesh. Sarah's skin was on fire. When Jareth gently bit her earlobe after making his way all along the smooth expanse of her white neck, she groaned with pleasure.

"Jareth."
He pulled away from her then, meeting her eye. His own eyes were dark with lust. Without a word, he kissed her again, though now the kisses were short and frequent as they stumbled over to his massive four-poster bed. When Sarah felt the back of her legs reach the mattress, she halted.

"Stop," she choked out. Slowly, Jareth's hands fled her body. Sarah looked up at him from her position of half-standing, half-sitting on the bed. Bravely, she stood up completely, and never breaking eye contact, picked up the end of her gown and lifted it over her head. The silky material slithered to the ground somewhere next to her. Goosebumps prickled her skin as she stood there, bold as brass, wearing only the lacy undergarments she had been given upon her arrival to the Underground.

Another low growl sounded in the back of Jareth's throat as his eyes roamed over every inch of her. He seemed frozen.

"You next," Sarah whispered. Cautiously, she took a step forward to meet him. He didn't move, but he let her push his blue, jeweled coat from his shoulders. His breathing was coming just as hard and fast as hers as she opened his shirt next, anxious to touch the smooth, perfect white skin of his bare chest. Staring down at his body, she bit her lip, then looked back up into his eyes.

He came back then, touching her bare shoulder with his gloved hand. She caught his hand before he could make his way any further down; before she lost all of her control over the situation.

"No gloves."

Jareth smiled, and removed the gloves slowly. On purpose, she thought.

She took his bare hand in hers, drawing circles on his palm. With his other hand, he cupped her cheek. She leaned into his touch, closing her eyes.

"Come now, Sarah, my love," he whispered. She opened her eyes again. "Tell me what it is you want."

Sarah's mind was hazy, but she quirked an impish half-smile at him nonetheless. She didn't bother speaking, she just grabbed his face with her hands and brought him as close as she could possibly get him, her lips covering his with fervor as she pulled him backwards onto his bed with her.

Once on the bed, it became quite clear that Jareth had no further interest in holding back. His hands covered every inch of her; her face, her hair, her breasts, her belly, the soft inside of her thighs. Had Sarah been at all self-aware during his caresses, she might've been embarrassed by the frequency and volume of the noises that came pouring out of her mouth. Then again, they were all muffled by Jareth's mouth, which was still on hers, breaking away only to let her breathe or to cover another part of her in devoted nips or kisses. The only problem was that his touch never lingered long enough; as a result, a deep ache had settled itself in between her legs, which were damp with wetness.

"Sarah," Jareth murmured, a hand brushing against one of her still covered nipples. Another hand was steadily snaking its way down her abdomen, too slowly.

"Sarah," Jareth murmured, a hand brushing against one of her still covered nipples. Another hand was steadily snaking its way down her abdomen, too slowly.

"Jareth," she groaned, "Touch me. Please."

He obliged her, deftly unclasping the undergarment covering her breasts. Her eyes were barely open; she felt nothing but the ache and an insatiable hunger for him, more of him, all of him. Despite her insistent moans, he continued to take his sweet time. His hands covered her breasts, softly at first, touching them gently, brushing an already hard nipple between two fingers while his mouth descended on the other.
Sarah's groan grew louder. Pleased at her response, Jareth paid the same attention to the other breast before stealthily kissing his way lower down her body. His fingers brushed between her legs, slowly, tantalizingly, sometimes adding enough pressure that Sarah pushed into him, wanton, and other times, so painfully light she held back cries of frustration. Soon, his head was between her legs, which were shaking in anticipation.

"You know you don't have to," she whispered, looking down at him.

Jareth smirked at her, his eyes burning.

"Oh, Sarah, love," he said softly, "There is nothing that would please me more."

Her hands gripped the sheets around them tightly. Carefully, she lifted her legs as he removed her last undergarment from around her hips and rear, tossing it aside. He slid down the bed even further, positioning himself so that his mouth was within a few inches of her. Just the feel of his breath on her down there made Sarah close to bursting. She whimpered.

Jareth hesitated, running his fingers along her wetness, kissing her thighs sweetly.

"Jareth," she begged.

At her command, he kissed her sex gently, causing another moan to ripple throughout the rest of Sarah's body. Greedily, he began lapping at her with his tongue, agonizingly switching back and forth between thrusting it inside of her and circling her clit. The tension inside of Sarah was rapidly coming to a head; the tightness in her belly was building so quickly that she feared she might die without release soon.

"Jareth," she panted, still clawing at the sheets as he moved against her, expertly sucking and licking in all of the most wonderful places, "I'm…close…I'm…oh, please, Jareth, I need you now, all of you, please, please…"

The Goblin King paused his ministrations, gripping Sarah's thighs slightly to pull himself up to look at her better. Her skin was flushed and she was breathing roughly, naked as the day she was born, hair tousled and breasts heaving, legs spread wide, ready for him—the most beautiful creature he'd ever laid eyes upon.

"Take your clothes off and take me now," she demanded, "I want you."

Gently, Jareth kissed her sex one last time, causing her to shudder slightly as he hastily removed the rest of his elaborate clothing. As he unlaced his breeches last, his stiff cock finally free, Sarah sucked in a breath. Grinning at her, he climbed back on top of her small body, careful not to put all of his weight on her.

He kissed her again then, this time softly, sweetly, caressing her face. His cock was pressed against her, making Sarah want to whimper some more, but he made no move to enter her yet. He pulled away then, his eyes imploring hers.

"Have you-"

"Yes," she interrupted him, her voice soft, "Once. Start slow, but please, Jareth…"

At that, he positioned himself at her entrance, rubbing his cock along the wet folds, causing Sarah to tremble in anticipation. She was murmuring the word 'please' over and over now, unable to stop herself.
Slowly, Jareth entered her with a grunt. She was both incredibly wet and tight. Sarah gave a tiny meow, gripping his shoulders. Sweat formed on his brow as his lips claimed hers again. He gave her a brief moment to adjust to the feeling of being filled.

"Jareth," she whispered. Slowly, he began to move, using all of his willpower not to drill into her as hard and as fast as he could, like some mindless beast.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh," Sarah cried, wrapping her long legs around his waist in an attempt to push him in deeper. He picked up the pace, finding a steady rhythm that caused Sarah to exude fluttering noises that only aroused him further.

"Harder, yes, oh yes, Jareth, harder, right there…oh god…"

"Sarah," he growled into her ear, his pleasure building into a knot inside his stomach, "My love."

"I'm so close," Sarah cried out, "I…I…oh god, I'm-I'm coming!"

Sarah swooned, clenching around him as she came, scraping his back with her fingernails, uncaring if she scratched him. Jareth nearly lost himself as she tightened around him, but somehow held himself back. He wanted her to come as many times as possible that night.

As she calmed, Jareth pulled out of her and flipped her over so she was on all fours in front of him before he entered her again from behind, able to penetrate her even deeper at this angle. Sarah whined with pleasure; it was all she could do to not collapse again as he continued to thrust into her, hot and hard, leaning over her back to cover her neck and ears with kisses and loving murmurs.

"I love you," he choked out, nearing his own release, "Sarah, just love me."

As he pounded into her, Sarah had no more words, only more cries of pleasure. She was nearing another climax as Jareth grasped her right hip tightly in one hand and tweaked a nipple in the other.

"Yes…yes…" she moaned.

"Come again for me now, Sarah, my love," Jareth growled, his movements becoming harried and frenzied as he began to lose control of himself.

"I-oh yes, oh god, I'm coming again!" Sarah cried out, reaching her peak just as Jareth came too, spilling his seed inside of her. As they came down from their climaxes together, Jareth thrust inside of her a few more times before pulling out entirely, his cock growing soft.

Uncaring that the sticky aftermath of their coupling was still between her thighs, Sarah keeled over next to Jareth on the bed, both of them breathing hard. After a few moments of silence apart from their blended breathing, Jareth pulled her body towards him, tucking her head underneath his chin and gently twirling her hair between his fingers.

"I love you."

At that, Sarah smiled, but she couldn't speak. Refusing to feel anything apart from sated and happy, she snuggled into him and closed her eyes, ready to fall into dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes
Well, I hope that was all right…this chapter was always planned for this story, but I have to say, while I'm experienced at reading detailed smut, I don't have a lot of experience writing it. My natural inclination would be to kind of imply sex, but there was no way I was gonna do that to you guys! Writing about sex is just so different from actually having sex, tbh. I wrote this on a flight back to see my boyfriend after two weeks apart while I was setting up our new home in Seattle, so it certainly got me a little hot and bothered, but that could totally be due to the circumstances. Rereading it for errors, I have to say, it's not my strong point, writing smut, so I hope it isn't too stilted or cheesy. Hopefully you guys think it was all right. Either way, I've finally earned that Explicit rating!

Happy Labor Day weekend!

~RebelRebel
Falling Away With You

Chapter Summary

"I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter," replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Chapter Notes

Hello fanfic friends, longtime no see! I know, I know, I suck. I am the worst for taking so long with this chapter, and compared to last chapter's smutty goodness, this one is likely not as...enticing. Not in that way, anyway. But I still hope you like it! Here's the deal: part of the reason why it's taken me so long to update is because, frankly, I am almost DONE with this story. And I've been dragging my feet the whole way, because I love it and I don't want it to end. :( I am halfway done writing next chapter, and after that it should only be chapters 18, 19, and maybe 20, including an epilogue. Depends on how it all pans out. My goal is to finish this story by Friday, or Halloween...maybe the weekend. Reason being: I associate this story and Labyrinth with Halloween for a multitude of reasons, and it just feels right, however lame it sounds. The momentum is building for me. So, if it's building for you too after you read this chapter, let me know—the more feedback I get (in all seriousness) the easier it will be to stay motivated and finish the story by Friday/this weekend! I'm both sad and excited for the imminent end, and I hope you are too. Anyway, without further ado...chapter 16:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 16

Falling Away With You

All of the love we left behind
Watching the flash backs intertwine
Memories I will never find
So I'll love whatever you become
And forget the reckless things we've done
I think our lives have just begun
I think our lives have just begun
And I'll feel my world crumbling
I'll feel my life crumbling
I'll feel my soul crumbling away
And falling away
Falling away with you
Staying awake to chase a dream
Tasting the air you're breathing in
I know I won't forget a thing
Promise to hold you close and pray
Watching the fantasies decay
Nothing will ever stay the same...
("Falling Away With You", Absolution, Muse)

Wherever Jareth was, it was dark. So dark, in fact, that even his sharp eyes couldn't perceive much in his surroundings. Slightly confused and more than suspicious, he began to stride forward, searching for anything in the darkness. He drew in a sharp breath—the air was thick; as thick as the darkness itself. Jareth exhaled, still striding forward when her voice called out to him.

"My King," rasped the voice of Queen Lilu. Jareth paused, resisting the urge to spin around to face the dark faerie. If she wasn't in front of him, she was behind him. He would have seen her in a darkness this dense and oppressive.

"Lilu," Jareth acknowledged her. He remained unmoving, waiting for her to come to him.

She did. Flickering like a firefly, she flew into his line of sight, bringing soft light with her, like a tiny rose-colored lantern. She came to rest a few feet in front of him, still dancing in midair.

"You've finally come," she said, smiling something wicked. Jareth said nothing, only arched an eyebrow in response. Around them, more light began to permeate the darkness as Lilu's subjects appeared, so small they seemed like stars flitting in and out of his peripheral vision. Jareth took care to watch them as they flickered closer and closer to them.

Lilu smiled again. Quickly, she pulled a silvery thread from her wing and held it out to him.

"Touch," she murmured.

At that, Jareth held out a naked hand, allowing Lilu to land there, carefully placing the thread so it mirrored the lifeline on his palm. As the thread touched his bare skin, pain so precise seared him like dragonfire, and he screamed.

At the sound of his own scream in his ears, Jareth jolted awake, heart racing. Slightly dazed, he sat up in bed and peered around in the early morning light. Thankfully, it seemed he hadn't actually cried out in his sleep. It had only been a…

"I thought you didn't dream," said a soft voice.

Jareth looked to his left, unbelieving for a moment until his mind returned to him and he remembered the previous night. A smile so bright that it could rival the sun burned its way onto his face as he looked at Sarah lying next to him in bed, hair tousled and barely covered by his sheets, a shy smile on her lips.

Without thinking, he swiftly rolled over to her, taking her face in his hands and kissing her thoroughly. She let him, kissing him back gently.

"I don't," Jareth said as he pulled away, his eyes alight with what could only be described as pure contentment.

"What was that, then?" asked Sarah curiously.

"Nothing to worry about," Jareth said placatingly, twirling a piece of Sarah's messy hair between his fingers. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yes," said Sarah sheepishly. A furious blush was blossoming on her cheeks, making Jareth even more keen for a repeat of the night before. "Did you?"
"Oh yes," Jareth smirked, "The best in recent memory."

Sarah's blush deepened, but her smile faded slightly.

"What is it?" asked Jareth. A thought occurred to him. "Sarah, last night you said you had…"

"Oh, it's nothing like that," she said, her face reddening further, "I have. I mean, once. This guy in college, er, university, I mean. Just him, though. His name was James. It was fine, he just wasn't very nice to me afterwards…Jareth, are you alright?" she asked, alarmed.

His body rigid with fury, Jareth forced himself to take a breath, trying to push away the sudden jealousy and pure, unadulterated hatred for a silly human boy he had never seen nor known that threatened to send him straight to the Aboveground to throttle the dimwitted ape.

"Not the best thing to tell you, got it," Sarah said quickly, "Anyway, I'm fine. Last night was…” she sighed contentedly. "It's just…I still can't believe we...we did that. I woke up ages ago, just thinking…"

"You seemed to enjoy yourself," Jareth said hesitantly, gently touching her cheek (thoughts of the rat-faced twit who had hurt Sarah were now stored safely in the back of his mind for a more prudent time).

"I did," said Sarah, her smile briefly returning, "Very, very much so. It's just...overwhelming, that's all. Where do we go from here?"

Jareth considered her, still quite unable to tear his eyes away from her face.

"I assumed that last night meant we move forward as I have already proposed," he said slowly, "I love you, Sarah. I want you, here with me always, as my Queen and as my wife."

The color seemed to drain from Sarah's face at his words, causing his heart to drop slightly, but he held his emotions in check. Briefly, he glanced down at chest—thankfully, Sarah hadn't removed his pendant the night before, so she didn't have full insight into his true feelings. He didn't want to scare her, or worse, hurt her ever again.

When he looked back up, Sarah had managed a weak smile.

"That's certainly a better proposal than last time," she said, chuckling nervously.

Jareth's smile fell away.

"Do you accept it?" he asked. She hesitated.

"I don't know," she said finally, "There's just so much to consider."

Slowly, Jareth removed himself from his position slightly on top of her, and back to his side of the bed. He took a few moments to respond, his heart churning in his chest as if it suddenly was having difficulty working.

"I do not understand you," Jareth started, his voice tremulous at best, "You have admitted that your life in the human world was less than satisfactory; worse, even, and yet you refuse to even entertain the idea of another life, no matter that it may be a better one. A life in which you have access to power; to magic. A life with me."

"That's not true," replied Sarah, "Last night wouldn't have happened if I hadn't considered it. I
Jareth nodded slowly, saying nothing. Sarah cleared her throat, bringing her knees into her chest.

"Last night was...wonderful. Right now, I'm happy. And...I know that I have to stay here, in the Underground." Sarah's voice started to tremble. Still, Jareth couldn't meet her eyes. What had gone unsaid between them—the missing words—still hung in the air, heavy; charged with the promise of undoing. It was a hard thing to ignore, much as they both tried.

"That's the part I'm having difficulty with," Sarah pressed on, "I...want to be here, with you, but what you're asking...you want me to abandon my life—to never see my family again, to not even say goodbye to them or tell them that I'm okay," she finished, finally looking away from him as her voice broke slightly.

It took an incredible amount of effort from Jareth to not continue to linger on what had not been said. He wouldn't dwell, not now. Instead, he met Sarah's eyes and focused on her.

"I understand," he said evenly. Hesitantly, he plunged forward despite every fiber of his being telling him that he shouldn't, but the pain in Sarah's eyes was something he couldn't ignore. He refused to cause her any more pain.

"Perhaps...we can resolve one of those things," he said carefully. Sarah's expression grew confused.

"What do you mean?"

"I could...take you back," Jareth explained, his voice quiet. A weighted stillness swept over the room between the two of them. It took Sarah a few moments before her voice broke through the tension, deceptively casual.

"You said I could never go back there."

"I said that if you did, you would inevitably succumb to madness," Jareth continued on. Each word was costing him more effort than saving Sarah from Lilu's thread.

"So I can go back, then?" Sarah asked, frowning, a noticeable edge to her voice. Jareth could tell she was desperately trying to stay calm and not become angry, and was slowly losing the battle within herself. Jareth turned on his side to face her, his eyes bright and his lips pale.

"You could," said Jareth, "With my assistance. But it would be up to you to return, Sarah. Once I take you back there, I cannot find you again unless you let me."

Sarah's eyes widened in realization. Before she could respond, Jareth turned away from her, swinging his legs over to his side of the bed.

"I cannot journey to the Aboveground without cause or summons, Sarah. You would be free of me. I would give this to you, if that is what you wish."

"You should have told me," she said, her voice brimming with anger. Jareth said nothing. He heard her sharp intake of breath as she paused, sensing her previous anger fade as she considered his words.

"...I would come back."

She spoke in a whisper, but it was a whisper that gave Jareth's heart just a little jolt; just a little less of the selfish burden that had weighed it down. He looked over his shoulder at her, a sad smile playing
"All I ask, Sarah, is that you take some time to consider your choice. You must be sure before I take you back there. I will not risk your health—your mind, any part of you—for anything less than certainty."

"Do I have your word that you'll take me no matter what I choose?" Sarah asked. Her full lips parted slightly before she closed them, her eyes uncertain; her anger now gone.

"You have my word," said Jareth solemnly, nodding. At that, he stood. Sarah blushed again at his nakedness, which considerably lightened his mood. Choosing to dwell on Sarah's imminent choice when she wasn't willingly naked in his bed, he smirked.

"Do you see something you like, Sarah?" he teased her, quirking an eyebrow. Sarah's face grew even redder, and she bit her lip, nodding. It seemed that she, too, wanted to forget their conversation for a little while. Slowly and purposefully, Jareth moved back towards the bed and the beautiful, blushing woman in it—he was more than happy to oblige.

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Later that day, Sarah sat alone in the castle library, cherishing the silence. After she had left Jareth that morning (she blushed at her own recollection, her stomach fluttering at her before she forced the anything-but-chaste memories out of her mind), she hadn't really known where to go or what to do with herself; she just knew that she needed to distract herself with something.

Fat chance of that, she thought miserably as she gave the stink-eye to the piles of books in front of her. She had summoned the set of tomes detailing the history of the Underground again, but was having a hell of a time focusing. Sighing dramatically, she mindlessly thumbed through the pages, casually reading but not truly absorbing any of it.

Her mind kept wandering back to the night prior—which, while undeniably pleasant to daydream about, inevitably forced her to remember the decision she had to make.

She didn't know why it was so hard. She knew what she had to do; it was what she had wanted for ages, and yet, she sat there motionless, suddenly unwilling to call Jareth and demand he take her home, despite the fact that she had been doing it for weeks.

Sighing loudly again, Sarah forced herself to actually read the words on the page in front of her. To her surprise, her own name jumped out at her in the last volume:

...until the fateful day that a human girl, Sarah, came to High Prince Jareth's Labyrinth after wishing her baby brother away. Though this human girl had no means of power other than her own wit and bravery, with the aid of friends she had made from inside the Labyrinth's very walls, she conquered the Goblin King by refusing his offer of her dreams. This was unprecedented—no human had ever refused the High Prince of the Seelie, the Keeper and Creator of dreams and of nightmares. The King and the Kingdom suffered great defeat.

Though never confirmed, it is widely believed by the residents of the Goblin Kingdom that Jareth had fallen in love with this child of the Aboveground, for after she had gone, he was not seen for 13 moons, and when he inevitably returned, he was rage and flame to behold.
Abruptly, Sarah tore her eyes away from the text, not wanting to read any further. For some reason, she was taken aback to find her own name in the Underground's history books. It wasn't what they said, really; it was all true, but just seeing her name in print, referenced and heralded in this world of impossible and fantastical things was just...surreal. She had a place here, much as she had tried to deny it. And she had carved that place out for herself.

Feeling a headache begin to set in, Sarah began massaging her temples, letting her eyes flutter shut as she tried to ease some of the tension in her head with her fingers.

Everything had changed in such a short span of time, and yet, nothing had. She had to go home, for herself, her family, and even for Jareth. If she didn't take the chance now, she wouldn't be able to live with herself—or with him.

By evening, Sarah was so firm in her decision that she had already changed back into her Aboveground clothes, ready to leave when she next saw Jareth for supper. She waited for him as they had previously agreed that morning in her room, sitting nervously on her four-poster bed.

He came promptly at half past five, coming inside her room after she answered his sharp knock with a tense, "Come in."

As soon as he stepped inside, Sarah stood awkwardly, grabbing the post at the end of the bed with one of her hands, looking at her feet.

"You've decided then, I take it," said Jareth, his voice carefully casual. Sarah looked back up at him, forcing a resigned smile.

"Yes, I think so." He nodded, stepping closer toward her.

"I see."

He looked down at her clothes, quirking an eyebrow.

"You are ready to leave now, then?"

She nodded.

"Hmm," he said slowly, "I wonder, Sarah, if you might consider postponing your trip just a little while longer?"

Sarah eyes narrowed slightly, suddenly suspicious. Jareth caught her look and smirked.

"This is no trick, I assure you. I simply hoped I could give you a gift before we depart."

"A gift?" Sarah asked, her voice no less skeptical, "It isn't another peach, is it?"

Jareth chuckled.

"No, no. Look in your wardrobe."

Still unsure, Sarah hesitantly made her way over to the wardrobe. Stopping in front of it, she looked
back at Jareth curiously. He responded only by gesturing for her to open it, a mysterious smile playing at his lips.

Sarah opened the doors and gasped.

"How did you-?" she started, turning back around to face Jareth. He glided over to her.

"I thought you might be more comfortable when you return if you had a few more of your own things," he said, nodding at the wardrobe full of her Aboveground clothes, "Ludie might be disappointed, of course, but she will learn to live. The finery she had made for you is in my room for now; we can hopefully combine the two sets together when you return."

"I...don't know what to say," Sarah finished lamely, her eyes searching his face, "Thank you."

"You're welcome," he murmured, circling his arms around her waist. Sarah involuntarily felt her eyes begin to close, happy to lean in for a kiss, when he spoke.

"Sarah," he said softly, brushing her cheek with gloved hand. Her eyes snapped open.

"Yes?"

"There's something else I'd like to give you, if you'll permit it," he said, "It would postpone us leaving until the morning."

"Until the morning? Why? What is it?" asked Sarah.

"I'd hoped to take you somewhere," Jareth continued softly, "Spend one last night with me, before you go."

"Jareth," Sarah said, "I'm going to come back."

He took a moment to respond, his face unreadable.

"Of course," he said, "But one night will not change much. Have you even told others that you're leaving?"

Sarah stepped back from him, nodding no.

"No, I haven't. I didn't think-"

"One more night," Jareth continued, "I have already told Rowan of the possibility of your plans; we will return tonight, and he can have your friends ready to see you off in the morning."

"Really?" Sarah asked.

"I promise," said Jareth. He held out a hand to her.

"Come," he said, smiling slightly, "I want to show you something."

Sarah accepted his outstretched hand and let herself be folded into his embrace. As he performed the transportation magic, she noticed that what had once felt like whirling, whipping winds full of color and light was now a refreshing breeze on her cheeks. Still, she closed her eyes to the dancing hues and shapes.

Sarah opened her eyes when their feet found solid ground and she felt what could only be the true wind circling around them.
They stood on the precipice of a cliff of black ash, overlooking a deep, circular crevice in the earth. While the walls of the crater-like valley were made of sparkling orange-red rock, the valley floor was as black as the ground they stood on.

"Wow," Sarah breathed, looking down into the valley in awe, "It's...beautiful."

"Indeed," said Jareth, one arm still wrapped around her waist. His was voice quiet. "Speak softly, Sarah."

"Why?" she asked, peering slightly over the edge, "What's down there?"

Jareth raised an eyebrow at her, his eyes twinkling.

"Dragons."

Sarah's mouth fell open despite herself.

"You're not..."

"Oh yes," said Jareth, his voice still slightly hushed, "Look, to the west."

He pointed with his free hand, and Sarah gasped upon seeing a gigantic, jet black creature unfurling itself out of a large cave that, had she not seen the dragon emerging from it, would have blended in completely amongst the red, rocky walls. The dragon was impossibly huge, with scaly, bat-like black wings, and terrifying orange eyes. Even so far away, Sarah felt a trickle of fear pass through her at the sight of the beast. Jareth seemed to sense this, as his arm tightened around her.

"Can it...can it see us?"

"She should pay us no mind," said Jareth placatingly, "Dragons rarely interact with my kind, or yours. They are solitary creatures."

"It's not close to dinner time for her?" asked Sarah, attempting a joke in order to soothe her own nerves.

Jareth chuckled.

"No, no; they don't have a taste for human flesh; nor for the tough meat of the Fae. Not enough fat on us," he said, his eyes dancing with mirth.

"What do they eat then?" asked Sarah, inching slightly away from Jareth now to get a better look at the dragon.

"Much of what we do. Cattle, the like."

Suddenly, Sarah froze. The dragon was looking at her, and a shiver of panic spread throughout her stomach, but it wasn't her own. The dragon had seen them; her vivid amber eyes not leaving Sarah's, despite being miles and miles apart.

"Sarah?"

"She knows we're here, Jareth. She sees us."

Swiftly, Jareth came to stand closer to her, laying a hand possessively on her shoulder. The dragon's eyes found him, and Sarah felt another trickle from her; one of trepidation.
"She's frightened of you," she said, somewhat incredulously. Jareth glanced at Sarah.

"As she should be," he said, sounding unconcerned.

"I don't think she wants to hurt us," Sarah said slowly, absentmindedly putting a hand to her heart. The dragon was looking back at her now, fear mounting inside of her, but she hadn't moved an inch since emerging from her cave. Hesitantly, Sarah reached out with her empathy, certain she wouldn't be able to reassure the beast—she was just so big—but to her surprise, she connected to her almost easily, trying to spread calm throughout her, trying to tell her, without words, that they meant her no harm.

After the space of a few breaths, the dragon inclined her long, scaly head, almost seeming to nod at Sarah. Then, without warning, she took off into the darkening sky. Sarah jumped slightly, and even Jareth seemed to startle, his grip on her shoulder tightening; but the dragon flew away from them, her powerful wings echoing in the great silence of the valley as she disappeared into the light of the setting sun.

Sarah let out a breath she hadn't known she was holding, chuckling in relief. Gently, Jareth brought her closer to him, taking his hand from her shoulder to around her waist and hugging her sideways.

"You never cease to amaze me, Sarah. To witness your power is true magic." Sarah looked sideways at him, both surprised and touched by his words.

"High praise, coming from you," she said softly. Jareth smirked.

"Yes," he said nodding, "And the truth."

"Thank you," said Sarah, "For that and for taking me here." Jareth smiled then.

"Before we go back," he said, grasping her chin between his fingers and pulling her to him. As they kissed, the world disappeared around them as he took them back home.


The next morning, Sarah stood with Jareth, Rowan, Hoggle, Ludo, Sir Didymus and her goblin attendants, Ludie and Fauna in the great hall behind Jareth's throne room. After eating breakfast, Rowan and the others had come to see Sarah and Jareth off.

Sarah hadn't touched much of her food; her insides were roiling. Part of her didn't want to go because she didn't want to leave; another part of her was aching to see Toby and her parents (even Karen) again; and yet another part of her was at a loss for how she could possibly explain the situation to them.

"You look ill, Sarah," Rowan said shrewdly. He stood between Ludo and Didymus, which looked rather funny considering their heights—if Hoggle had stood between Didymus and Rowan, they'd be an oddly matched Russian doll set. Instead, Hoggle was in a huddle with Ludie and Fauna, and he seemed to be eyeing Ludie with interest, causing Sarah to both chuckle inwardly and bat away at all of the emotions swirling within her that weren't her own. She was getting better at compartmentalizing them all, but with this many individual feelings around, it was no easy task. Somewhat thankfully, her own nerves were at the forefront.
"I'm just a bit nervous at seeing my parents again is all," admitted Sarah, glancing back at Jareth, who stood closely behind her, "I don't know how long it's been for them…"

"Ah, I see," said Rowan, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "I wish I could give you some advice, but your situation is...unique."

He gave a meaningful glance to his King, a hint of a smile appearing on his lips.

"Oh," said Sarah, her face flushing. She hadn't put a lot of thought into how she would tell her friends about how her...relationship with Jareth had changed, but it seemed Rowan knew a bit of it already. Her embarrassment didn't last too long, however; her anxiety at returning to the Aboveground was all that could really occupy her thoughts.

"How long do you think you'll be gone, my lady?" piped Didymus.

"I'm not sure," said Sarah, clasping her hands together and looking down at them, "Not too long, I'm sure. I just need to explain to them that...my place is here. I want them to know that I'm safe and all right."

"And you are, are you?" asked Hoggle, finally having torn his eyes away from Ludie. Instead, he was glancing back and forth between her and Jareth; Sarah could feel a trickle of hope mingled with uncertainty moving through him.

"Yes," said Sarah, smiling. She was surprised by the certainty and strength she heard in her own voice, and sensed rather than felt a surge of pride from Jareth behind her.

"Be sure not to bring back any more of those wretched human rags back with you," said Ludie sourly, crossing her little arms over her chest, "You've enough here already, thank you. And don't wander and take too long coming back!"

"I won't," said Sarah, holding back a chuckle.

"Promise, dearie," said Ludie. Fauna nodded in unison with her. "You don't have much of a track record when it comes to making good time."

Sarah knelt next to the little goblin and took her hand, all humor gone from her face.

"I promise, Ludie," she said, squeezing her tiny palm gently. Ludie beamed.

"All right then, Miss."

"Are you ready, Sarah?" asked Jareth behind her. Sarah stood, sighed, smiled at her friends, and nodded, turning to look back at him.

"Yes."

He held out his hand. Sarah looked back at the little motley crew of friends and companions she had made in the Underground, all smiling sadly at her as if they weren't sure she was coming back. She felt the same sadness, but she wasn't sure why. She was coming back, wasn't she?

_I'm coming back_, she told herself, _I'm coming back to see them. I promised._

"Goodbye for now, Sarah," said Rowan.

"Sawwah...friends!" groaned Ludo, waving merrily at her.

"Safe voyage, my lady!" cried Didymus. Ludie and Fauna waved, and Hoggle opened his mouth to
say something as she took hold of Jareth’s hand.

"If you need us..." called Hoggle.

"I know," said Sarah as Jareth pulled her close, "I'll call, I promise!"

And with that, they were whisked away, leaving nothing but the whistling wind behind them.

Chapter End Notes

That's it for now! Expect the next chapter tomorrow or Wednesday if all goes well!
Much love to you all, and thank you endlessly for your feedback and support, particularly for your reassurance about the quality of last chapter. I still don't love myself writing smut, but I really appreciated that you all thought it went okay! You guys rock!
Til tomorrow/Wednesday…

RebelRebel
"I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter," replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Chapter Notes

And here is chapter 17, as promised! I won't say anything else until the end of the chapter. Happy reading, hope you like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 17

**Sing for Absolution**

Lips are turning blue  
A kiss that can't renew  
I only dream of you  
My beautiful  
Tiptoe to your room  
A starlight in the gloom  
I only dream of you  
And you never knew  
Sing for absolution  
I will be singing  
And falling from your grace  
There's nowhere left to hide  
In no one to confide  
The truth burns deep inside  
And will never die…  
("Sing for Absolution", Absolution, *Muse*)

When their feet found ground, Sarah immediately felt unsteady. When she opened her eyes, it was worse, as the sun was so bright it hurt her eyes.

"Are you alright, Sarah?"

Hearing Jareth's voice had relief spreading through Sarah, something that still surprised her. Inwardly, she marveled at how quickly things could change.

"Sarah?" Jareth repeated himself, his voice holding a concerned edge to it now.

"I'm fine," she said, blinking as she tried to get her bearings. Though she still felt slightly unsteady on
her feet, she recognized where they were almost immediately—the park near her childhood home; the real one, no recreation of the Labyrinth this time. She looked up at the sky. It was a sunny day, to be sure, but the sky was blue, not purple. She glanced at Jareth, who still held her hand tightly, seemingly not wanting to let her go.

"Why here?" she asked.

"I cannot enter any home without a child to take," he said, his voice stiff, his eyes still looking intently at her, "This is where I first saw you."

"Ah," said Sarah, blushing slightly as she thought of Jareth watching her fifteen-year-old self play Labyrinth, "Yes."

Briefly, she glanced around at her surroundings again, noting the colors in the grass and the trees.

"It's fall," she said quietly, letting go of Jareth's hand, "It was fall when I left. Could it be that no time has passed?"

Jareth remained stoic, not answering her. She looked back at him. Oddly enough, he didn't look all that out of place in suburban Maine, despite his garb.

"Do you remember the way?" he asked, his voice still impossibly serious.

"Of course," she said, moving back toward him. Gently, she grasped his hand in hers, suddenly fearful—of what, she wasn't sure.

"Then I will leave you," he said, his voice tight, but he didn't move an inch.

"You can't come with me, can you?" she asked. All of a sudden, she didn't want to do it alone. It seemed easier to explain her disappearance to an otherworld if the Keeper of said otherworld was with her. That, or you just don't want him to leave, her mind whispered.

"No, I cannot," he said, "It is costing me much to be with you here, now. I'm sorry, Sarah, but I must go. If I could go with you there without it meaning taking a child, I would. Know that."

"I do," she said solemnly. He started to let go of her hand.

"Kiss me goodbye then."

At her plea, he grabbed her almost forcefully, pulling her to him with such fervor that her head swam as he covered her lips with his own. The kiss was immediate and needy and raw and wonderful—it made her ache all over in a way she couldn't describe. As they pulled away for air, Jareth spoke.

"Please come back," he whispered, his voice rough with emotion, "I cannot live without you, Sarah, no matter how hard I try to. How you turned my world...please. Don't leave me alone for eternity. I love you."

To her surprise, tears had sprung to Sarah's eyes. She grabbed his chin, forcing him to look at her.

"I promised," she said, giving him a small smile.

It took him a moment, but finally, he let her go, letting out a rattling breath that sounded close to a sigh of relief.

"Very well," he said, his voice returning to its customary controlled tone, "Call for me when you are
ready to return to the Labyrinth. I will be waiting for you, Sarah, my love."

At that, Sarah nodded, taking a step back from him, and, like wind, he vanished.

...

Upon returning to his Labyrinth, Jareth felt a heavy sense of fatigue wash over him, as well as an inexplicable swell of anger. A trip to the Aboveground was only easy when he went to retrieve a child; and though he could venture there in order to take Sarah back—she still counted as human, after all, and a human could be returned to their birthplace at any time with enough magical skill—it was still taxing.

And yet...despite his leaden body, Jareth did not make his way back to his castle. Instead, he found himself in front of the familiar door to the Dream Roads. A sense of foreboding had crept through him the moment he had left Sarah; he feared she would not come back to him, despite her best intentions. He believed she wanted to in the moment she said so, but he did not underestimate the power of the pull her own world held over her, despite it no longer being safe for her there.

Anger and anxiety coursed through his veins as he stared at the door that barred him from having his own dreams. He knew nothing lay beyond it say for hedge mazes he could easily navigate, and yet, he felt a pull to enter nonetheless.

*Something has changed,* he thought, *something in the air, in the Labyrinth.*

Making up his own mind, he grabbed the brass doorknob, pushing the door open. It groaned under his ministrations, but swung open easily. Without another thought, Jareth strode through.

As he emerged on the other side, the door groaning shut behind him, he was not too surprised to find himself in sudden darkness. He was no longer outdoors in the sunny hedge mazes. The sense of foreboding that had plagued him since he left Sarah increased slightly, but fear did not come easily to Jareth. He was High Prince of the Seelie and King of the Goblins; the Keeper and Creator of dreams. He created fear; he did make a habit of succumbing to it. He pressed on into the deep blackness.

It was so dark, in fact, that even his sharp eyes couldn't perceive much in his surroundings. Slightly confused and more than suspicious, he began to stride forward, searching for anything in the darkness. He drew in a sharp breath—the air was thick; as thick as the darkness itself. Jareth exhaled, still striding forward when her voice called out to him.

"My King," rasped the voice of Queen Lilu. Jareth paused, resisting the urge to spin around to face the dark faerie. If she wasn't in front of him, she was behind him. He would have seen her in a darkness this dense and oppressive.

His sense of foreboding was growing stronger, and yet he did nothing.

"Lilu," Jareth acknowledged her. He remained unmoving, waiting for her to come to him.

She did. Flickering like a firefly, she flew into his line of sight, bringing soft light with her, like a tiny rose-colored lantern. She came to rest a few feet in front of him, still dancing in midair.

"You've finally come," she said, smiling something wicked. Jareth said nothing, only arched an eyebrow in response. Around them, more light began to permeate the darkness as Lilu's subjects appeared, so small they seemed like stars flitting in and out of his peripheral vision. Jareth took care
to watch them as they flickered closer and closer to them.

Suddenly, he remembered—*he had dreamt this.*

Lilu smiled again. Quickly, she pulled a silvery thread from her wing and held it out to him.

"Touch," she murmured.

Though he knew what she wanted and what would happen if he gave it to her, Jareth did not flinch. What would come to pass was pre-ordained; he had no choice, the same as any of Lilu's little flies.

"This is a place one can only find if it is the right time," rasped Lilu, her voice echoing in the stillness, "You, Goblin King, seek relief from your loneliness and despair...but a prize such as this must be fought for, earned, never just given."

Slowly, Jareth removed the glove from his right hand.

"I can show you the way out," murmured the tiny Queen, her eyes glinting with ferocious glee in the dim light.

Finally, without hesitation, Jareth held out his naked hand, allowing Lilu to land there, carefully placing the thread so it mirrored the lifeline on his palm. As the thread touched his bare skin, pain so precise seared him like dragonfire, and this time, he really did scream.

...  

When Sarah reached the stoop of her parents' house, she paused. Her heart was racing; her palms sweaty. Finally, she managed to take a few wobbly steps up the porch steps and to the front door. She knocked loudly, peering around nervously. Hardly anyone was out and about; judging from the lack of passerby and the position of the sun, she guessed it was late afternoon on a school day.

She nearly jumped out of her skin when the door opened and her father stood in the doorframe staring back at her. From the shocked look on his face, she knew instantly that she had been gone from this world for longer than she had hoped.

"Sarah?" he croaked, looking at her as if she wasn't real, "Is that...you? Oh my god, oh my god, Sarah!"

He rushed forward, catching her in a tight hug that knocked the breath out of her. Sarah could hear more footsteps approaching from behind him, but she ignored them—instead, she closed her eyes, savoring the feeling of being back in her father's arms, smelling his achingly familiar scent, one of aftershave and laundry detergent.

"Sarah?" she heard Karen's incredulous voice from behind her father's back-breaking hug, followed by the sound of glass shattering. At that, her father let her go, tears swimming in his eyes. Sarah blinked away tears of her own and looked 'round at Karen, who still stood in the doorway, one hand at her heart and the other half-frozen towards the floor, where she had dropped an empty water glass.

"Sarah?" she asked weakly, her eyes wide and wet.

"It's her, Karen!" shouted her father, grabbing her hand and pulling her inside. Karen folded back as
he ushered Sarah into her childhood home. With difficulty, as her father was dragging her forward, Sarah somehow managed to avoid stepping on any broken glass as she allowed her father to pull her further into the hallway and then into the kitchen. Another eruption of noise sounded as she felt herself being pulled inside the brightly lit room; she looked up, and there was Toby, screaming (like any ten-year-old might) and bouncing up and down on worn sneakers.

"Sarah Sarah Sarah Sarah! You're home, I knew it!" he crowed.

In no time at all, Sarah was sitting at her kitchen table, a bit out of breath and perhaps a little deaf in one ear from Toby's screeching, but otherwise incandescently happy to be where she was. Only after everything and everyone (mostly Toby) had calmed down a little did the more difficult questions start getting asked.

"Where have you been, Sarah?" asked her father, his tone halfway between terse and desperate. Sarah had noticed that here, in the Aboveground, she couldn't feel her any of her family's emotions, but she didn't need to—their pain was quite clear without her power of empathy.

"Toby, maybe you should go upstairs for a while," suggested Karen, laying a hand on her son's shoulder. While her father sat across from her, Toby and Karen hovered near the kitchen counter.

"No way," said Toby petulantly. Her father wasn't paying them any attention; rather, he only had eyes for his daughter at that moment.

"Sarah," he said slowly, "Where were you?"

Sarah's breath caught in her throat, and she looked at her hands in her lap.

"I'm sorry, Daddy," she said quietly, "How long has it been?"

"How...long? What?" her father asked, sounding stupefied. Sarah looked back up. His eyes were red again; with anger or sadness, she couldn't tell—probably both. Off to the side of them, both Karen and Toby had fallen still. You could've cut the tension in the room with a knife.

Finally, Karen spoke.

"Sarah, it's been a year to the day since you were last seen," said Karen, her voice surprisingly gentle, "Where were you, sweetheart? It's okay, you can tell us. We're just happy you're safe."

A lump rose in Sarah's throat. She had rarely gotten along with Karen throughout the years she had lived with her, and had hardly spoken to her once she had moved away, but she was still incredibly touched by her clear concern.

"A whole year?" Sarah asked, her voice trembling. It was worse than she had feared.

"Sarah," her father began quietly, "We...we thought...you were gone." His voice broke, and he turned away from her.

"I'm so sorry," Sarah repeated herself, her words coming out in a desperate whisper. When neither her father or Karen spoke, she pressed on, every word taking tremendous effort.

"You're going to think I'm crazy," Sarah started, her voice still wavering, "But I...I have to tell you. I have to tell you, and then I have to go back."

"Go back where?" asked her father, his eyes back on her, searching her face, concerned. "You don't have to go anywhere, Sarah! What is it? Were you in a cult? Did someone take you; brainwash you?
What did they do to you? You don't have to go anywhere!"

"Calm down, Robert," said Karen soothingly, "Sarah, tell us what happened. Please, we promise to listen."

"I went...away," Sarah said lamely, "With a...friend."

"What friend?" asked her father, "You never mentioned any friends before, Sarah, least of all any you'd take off with without packing any bags or telling your parents!"

"Robert," warned Karen, but he ignored her.

"I didn't have a choice," said Sarah, raising her voice a little, becoming slightly hysterical, "I just—I came back! I couldn't come back at first, but I found a way to, because I had to try; I had to come back and try and explain it to you. I didn't want to leave at first, and things were complicated, they're still complicated, and I know how utterly nuts this all sounds, I do, I really do; but I have to go back—I can't stay here."

At her explanation, her father made a startling wounded noise and slammed his hands on the table in front of him as he rocketed upward from his seat. His abrupt outburst made Sarah jump back a little in her chair. She had never seen her father so angry.

"Who did this to you?" asked her father, seething.

"Robert, calm down," said Karen icily, "Sarah is clearly distraught. Sarah, we know this is difficult, but please...try to tell us what happened. Did someone take you? Did they hurt you? Honey, don't be afraid, we can go to the police—"

"No!" Sarah shouted, standing. The tears were flowing freely now; this was the hardest thing she'd ever done, harder than traveling any path in the Labyrinth; harder than seeing her dreams decay in front of her. This was real, and this was worse than anything.

"It's nothing like that," she said, slurring her words slightly through thick tears, "I swear, I just—I can't tell you. You would never believe me."

"I bet I know where you're going," piped up Toby.

The room froze.

"What, sweetie?" asked Karen distractedly, still trying to keep some semblance of calm, "Toby, you really should go upstairs and wait till we get this sorted-"

Toby paid his mother no attention, instead staring intently at Sarah. He quirked a familiar half-smile.

"You're going back there, aren't you, Sarah?"

"Back where?" asked Robert, looking between his daughter and son. Sarah stared at her little brother in shock. 
Does he...?

"Where, Toby?" she asked tremulously.

"To the goblins!" he said, grinning, his eyes twinkling, "I remember, they had crazy faces and the King had really, really blonde hair..." He frowned. "And there were a lot of stairs. They sort of went all over the place. That's where you went, isn't it?"
"What's he talking about, Sarah?" asked her father, his voice strained, albeit much calmer.

"Toby...how do you...?" trailed off Sarah, staring at him in wonder. He had been barely one that fateful night, which was now nearly ten years ago in the Aboveground. How could he have possibly remembered any of it? Was magic life-altering for him, too?

"You know, Mom, Dad," started Toby, looking at both of his parents with large, beguiling blue eyes, "Sarah probably really does have to go back. It's like that in all the stories; if she doesn't go back, who's going to rescue the King?"

"What?" asked her father, "What do you know about this, Toby?"

As Robert and Karen Williams began questioning their son, Sarah tuned them out. A sinking feeling was settling in the pit of her stomach at Toby's words. Something was wrong. Very, very wrong. A loud buzzing sounded in her ears; she felt as if she had forgotten something incredibly, undeniably important.

"Jareth," she whispered, closing her eyes, "Please find me. Take me back. Jareth, please."

She waited a moment, but nothing happened.

"Jareth," she said, more loudly, her voice clear as she took care to enunciate her words, "I wish the goblins would come and take me away right now!"

Again, nothing happened.

"I knew it," said Toby with a smirk, crossing his skinny arms over his chest in smug satisfaction.

"Sarah, what...?" asked her father, puzzled. Wild-eyed, Sarah pushed past her father in order to get to Toby.

"Toby, what else do you know?" she asked.

"Nothing, really," he shrugged, "It's really weird, because I was just reading the book in your room before you got here! And it says that without the Queen, the King dies. It's so obvious you're supposed to be the Queen, Sarah, you're in the book too, didn't you know? So are you going to go save the King now?" he asked excitedly.

Sarah didn't answer; instead she bolted from the room and made for the stairs, ignoring the confused shouts from her father and Karen. After reaching the top out of breath, she ran for her door, twisting the knob frantically until she burst into her old room. Thankfully, the room was largely untouched from the time she had lived there, and her old vanity and mirror still sat on the opposite wall. Sarah glanced at her bed and sure enough, the little red book titled *Labyrinth* lay open there, looking half-read.

Panting, she managed to gasp out, "Hoggle, I need you!"

She could hear her family hurriedly climbing the stairs behind her; they congregated in the doorway just as Hoggle appeared in the mirror. At the sight of him, Karen screamed, her father jumped back a foot, and Toby cackled with glee.

"Whoa!" squealed Toby in delight, "Look, Mom, look! It's a real goblin!"

"Hey now, I'm a dwarf, you little-" Hoggle started indignantly, but Sarah interrupted him.
"Ignore him, Hoggle," she said impatiently, "Where's Jareth?"

Hoggle turned his attention back to Sarah.

"I don't know," said Hoggle worriedly, "He's not still with you, is he?"

"No, he went back," Sarah said, her voice going up an octave, "Doesn't anyone there know where he is?"

"No," continued Hoggle, his eyes darting around her old bedroom nervously, as if hoping he would find the Goblin King lurking there, "Everyone's in a right state, too; there's a big ol' storm brewin' here, nothin' the likes any of us've seen, and no one can find damn Jareth, not even Rowan. And now you say he isn't with you-"

"You've got to get me back there, Hoggle," Sarah said firmly. Curiously enough, though she couldn't feel anything emanating from her family, she could feel the desperation swirling inside of Hoggle through the mirror somehow, though it was faint; like a tickle at her fingertips, impossible to itch.

She glanced back at her family, who, apart from Toby, were still looking shocked by the conversation she was holding with an otherworldly creature. She didn't really blame them.

"Sarah," her father said weakly, "You can't just leave us! You've got to explain this."

"Dad-" Sarah started.

"Sarah, I can't pull you through," interrupted Hoggle, his panic mounting. Sarah turned back to the dwarf.

"Why not?"

"I don't have that kind of power!" growled Hoggle.

"But Ludie said you could learn how to perform the transportation magic," insisted Sarah, "It's not just Jareth who can-"

"It isn't the same!" growled Hoggle, angry now, "I'm not Jareth and neither is Ludie; you're in the Aboveground, Sarah; not in the Labyrinth. The way between worlds isn't the same as going from the castle to the maze, especially for a human! I can't help you."

The room went quiet. Hoggle cast his eyes down, looking away from her. Sarah could feel his shame sit deeper in her stomach, but then….

She could feel it, so didn't that mean...?

"Hoggle, it's all right," she said quickly, "I can come there myself, god, I've been so stupid! Give me a moment."

"Sarah, what-?" Hoggle started, confused, but Sarah shushed him and turned back to her family.

"I have to go," Sarah said calmly, "I'm sorry. I love you all, so much. Just know...know that I don't want it to be like this; that I wish I could come back and see you, but if I did, well...I wouldn't be me anymore. But I have to go now, they need me; he needs me."

Her father and Karen both looked at her as if they wanted to dissuade her; stop her; at least say something, but they were both at a loss. Sarah took advantage of their silence by rushing forward to give them each a tight squeeze. Then, she took a step back, and bent forward slightly so she was
eye-level with Toby.

"You don't know how much you've helped me, Toby," she said quietly, trying very hard to keep the quaver out of her voice. She wanted him to remember her as the brave Queen from the story.

"Thanks, sis," he said, his grin fading, "So you really can't come back?"

"No," said Sarah softly, "I'm afraid not."

"I'll miss you," said Toby, who started to blink furiously, clearly trying not to cry himself, "I can try talking to you in that mirror, can't I?"

"Of course," said Sarah, smiling—she couldn't help it; hot tears were rolling down her cheeks and she grabbed Toby and hugged him so tight she heard his sharp intake of breath.

"I love you so much, Toby, so much that I'd solve the Labyrinth and save you from the goblins every damn day," she said.

"They don't seem too bad," Toby replied, his voice muffled by her hair. Sarah chuckled as she reluctantly let him go. She glanced back at Hoggle, who was still waiting for her, and said,

"No, they really aren't." She looked back up at her parents, her eyes watery. They seemed to have realized that there was no use stopping her; or perhaps convinced they were dreaming.

"Goodbye," said Sarah simply, her voice cracking. She turned to go when her father spoke, his voice small.

"Sarah...who needs you this much?"

She reached the mirror and Hoggle, holding out a hand towards the surface of the glass, but paused before her fingertips could touch it. She looked back at her father, giving him a sad little smile.

"The Goblin King, of course."

At that, Sarah turned away, touching her fingertips to the mirror—or would have, anyway, if she hadn't passed through it entirely; walking from world to world as easily as a ghost, a madcap of colors and lights and sounds circling her as she stepped through to other side.

Chapter End Notes

Told you stuff was going to go down! Seriously, thanks to everyone for their support as we press onward, nearly to the finale!
"I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter," replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Sarah emerged from the Aboveground smoothly, ending up the same as she had last time, in her little bathroom in Jareth's castle. Fleetingly, she looked back at the mirror behind her; there was no
evidence she had just passed between worlds; her parents and Toby were not staring at her from the other side.

Shaking herself—she didn't have time to dwell, not now—she left the bathroom and entered her small room, pausing to look outside her window. Sarah's eyes widened considerably as she took in the rapidly darkening sky, howling winds, and torrential rain hammering down on the now deserted Goblin City.

Steeling herself, she darted from the room in a light sprint. She had to find Jareth, and quickly.

Thanking her lucky stars that she had gotten considerably better at navigating the castle since her arrival, Sarah made it to Jareth's crowded throne room within a few minutes, though slightly out of breath. The room was so packed that smaller goblins were spilling out of the edges; what was more incredible, however, was the sheer level of noise. As soon as she entered, the goblins cried out in desperate happiness.

"The Queen!" they chorused, "The Queen has returned!"

Sarah felt her heart jump at her—the sheer onslaught of emotions of so many living, breathing souls nearly made her knees buckle, but without even thinking she pushed them all away; burying them deep inside of her chest where they could stay, but not distract or deter her. There was no time.

Regaining control, Sarah blinked and spotted her crowd of friends—all of them; Hoggle, Ludie, Fauna, Didymus, Ludo, and Rowan—congregated together next to the set of doors she knew led to the Great Hall. Hastily, she made her way over to them, ready to force any goblin out of her way. She didn't need to—all moved aside for her, wearing reverent (and relieved) smiles.

"Sarah!" called Rowan, his face etched with worry as he beckoned her over to them. As she got closer, Sarah took his outstretched hand, allowing him to pull her into their group.

"The King, Miss!" cried Ludie, her face wet from rain, or perhaps from tears, "Hoggle has told us he isn't with you; he's missing, Miss-"

"I know," said Sarah, her voice forcibly calm; the little goblin was nearly hysterical with worry. When Ludie's lower lip continued to tremble, Fauna wrapped her little arms around her, and Hoggle patted her on the back.

"He didn't come back to the castle?" asked Sarah, looking to Rowan. He shook his head no.

"No," he said, his voice steady; but Sarah could feel the worry deep in his (and her) gut. "Jareth comes and goes as he pleases, of course, but this is different. The goblins have an awareness for their king, and his very presence is missing, unable to protect any of us. I don't believe he could have gotten detained in the Aboveground; and this storm indicates-"

"That he's here somewhere," said Sarah shortly, cutting him off. Her eyes darted around the room quickly before she turned back to him.

"If he's here, he's in the Labyrinth...I just have to find him." She turned to go, but to her surprise, Rowan grabbed her arm and yanked her back, his kind features alight with stern disapproval.

"No, Sarah! Look at that gale out there! I cannot let you wander the Labyrinth alone when it is this dangerous, and with Jareth gone. I will go-"

"You heard them," Sarah cut him off tersely, "I'm their Queen, and there's no way I'm not looking for the King. I solved the Labyrinth once, and I can do it again. Besides, I think I know where he is."
Rowan gave her a calculating look, relaxing his grip on her arm.

"Where?"

Sarah shook his arm off of her, starting for the exit.

"Follow me."

Unwilling to waste any more time, Sarah ran all the way back to her bedroom, Rowan hot on her heels. When they reached the still open door, they both paused, gasping slightly.

"Why...are we-?" Rowan started, but Sarah brushed right past him; barrelling through her bedroom and heading straight for the bathroom.

"Sarah, what-?" Rowan called, following her. He stopped as he saw her standing in front of the long, gilded mirror.

"Sarah, what are you doing?"

"Going to find Jareth," she said firmly, turning back around to face him. "And I know you want to come with me, Rowan, but I think you should go back down to the throne room and watch over everyone else. I have to do this alone."

Rowan gave her a knowing look, seeming to have realized that his previous attempt to stop her would hold no water—not this time; not after everything had changed.

"Why?" he asked. Sarah shrugged, raising the right side of her mouth into a tenuous, slight smile.

"That's the way it's done."

It took him a moment, but finally, Rowan nodded in agreement.

"As you wish...my Queen," he said, inclining his head to her. Sarah nodded back before turning back around to face the mirror when he spoke again.

"Where do you think he is?"

She glanced back at him.

"Someplace dark," she said, her tone troubled, "Dark, and dense. A place you put people to forget about them."

At that, Sarah turned away from him, stepping through the mirror. In the space of a breath, she emerged in the Labyrinth outside, her clothes and hair soaked within seconds from the raging storm. Shivering madly and blinking rapidly from the waves of her own hair hitting her face, she looked around herself to see that she came out exactly where she had expected to; the courtyard with the pool and peach trees. Her eyes found her own reflection in the pool, and her heart skipped a beat—her reflection was her but not her again; it was the Shadow Sarah, and she was smiling. This time, however, her smile was serene rather than mocking, and her eyes lacked the edge to them that had been there before.

"You've come a long way," echoed the Shadow Sarah. Despite the wailing wind, Sarah could hear her(self?) perfectly.

"Yes!" shouted the real Sarah over the wind, "Now, show me the way!"
Her shadow nodded in agreement, still smiling, and then, to Sarah's amazement, her shadow self slunk from the pool and onto the ground, losing its likeness of her to a black outline, but still moving without her. Sarah followed it, and together, they streaked through the Labyrinth as quick as ghosts, forging new paths as needed in the stone until they reached the hedge mazes, and then, a familiar wooden door.

"This is where I leave you," said Sarah's shadow.

"Thank you," said Sarah, though she wasn't sure whether or not her shadow had heard her, as it flickered and vanished in the gloom. Soaked to her skin now, Sarah shook violently as she ran at the door to the Dream Roads. Her long hair clung to the wet clothes at her back as she turned the great brass handle. As she struggled to push the large door open using her entire body, it groaned under her full weight. Finally, it yielded, swinging open into darkness.

Sarah paused, a trickle of fear passing through her as she tried to see what lay beyond the door; but the rain was too heavy and the way ahead too dark. Thinking of Jareth, she walked through.

As Sarah stepped bravely forward into the pitch black, her feet found no ground to stand on and she fell, spiraling faster and faster towards the earth, screaming her head off. She fell faster than she could slam her eyes shut; then, with a splash, she plummeted into bitterly cold water.

The water wasn't deep, though there was a slight current; Sarah's feet brushed the bottom when she fell, but she still panicked, frantically kicking towards the earth, screaming her head off. She fell faster than she could slam her eyes shut; then, with a splash, she plummeted into bitterly cold water.

Still gasping and treading water, Sarah blinked more water out of her eyes and took in her surroundings the best she could, though it was still nearly as dark as night. She was in the center of a small river situated in one of the Labyrinth's forests, surrounded by the sparkling, twisted trees she had grown used to seeing within the Labyrinth. Here, the rain fell more lightly, but seemed colder on her skin as she began to swim to the riverbank to her right. Thankfully, the current wasn't too strong —Sarah had never prided herself on her swimming abilities.

As Sarah began to paddle more vigorously toward the riverbank, she heard a soft, slithering hiss on the water to her left. Her heart seized when she looked over to see a purplish red snake gliding across the relatively smooth surface, heading straight toward her. Stupidly, Sarah froze, a scream dying in her throat—she was terrified of snakes and had been since she was a child. In the split-second she was immobile, more and more snakes of varying sizes and colors emerged from the depths of the water, swimming toward her with unmatched speed.

Sarah's adrenaline kicked in just before the mind-numbing terror could take over; kicking wildly, she half-swam, half-ran her way to the riverbank. The river became more snakes than water; she felt a few brush her sides with their cool, reptilian skin, and she shuddered violently at the contact. She was nearer to the bank now; roughly 5 or 6 feet away from solid dirt, but the distance might as well have been miles—the snakes were closing in around her.

"Queen Sarah!" thundered a rasping, snarling chorus of voices. Sarah tore her eyes away from the space of solid ground she had been focusing on to look further down the riverbank, and saw the pack of one running towards her; all seven of them, gleaming yellow eyes and all. Before she knew it, wolves were jumping into the water around her, barking and growling, say for two who grabbed her by her clothes with their teeth and dragged her to the solid ground. When they released her, much as Sarah wanted to lay there and regain her composure, she didn't—insteasd, she bolted, hearing a cacophony of the sounds of smashing, shrieking death behind her.
"Run, our Queen, run!" called the pack of one as they ripped apart any snake that emerged from the river. "Don't look back!"

Sarah didn't. She ran full out, the cold almost aiding her as she ran faster than she ever thought possible towards a way out; *towards Jareth.*

In what seemed like no time at all, she reached the edge of the forest, coming face-to-face with the beginning of the maze of trash. Only then did she halt in order to catch her breath, bending over as she wheezed life back into her lungs. The rain had stopped for now, but the wind still roared like an angry lion and the sky was growing darker; endless lightning flashing across the deep blue. As soon as she could move without feeling dizzy—whether from the still-paralyzing fear threatening to take over or from lack of oxygen—she pressed forward into the maze of junk at a light jog.

Craning her neck in an attempt to see over or around the piles and piles of trash, Sarah began to despair. She had been sure that the Dream Roads would lead her straight to Jareth, so why was she still traversing other parts of the Labyrinth?

*Or was she?*

Suddenly, somewhere nearby, Sarah heard a strange sound—a shrill, cawing noise that made the hair on the back of her neck stand straight up. She halted, heart beating impossibly loud in her chest, straining her ears to listen. Whatever the sound was, it was moving closer.

Growingly increasingly terrified, she looked around. Some twenty or thirty feet in the distance straight ahead, she spotted something odd: what looked like the entrance to a small, stone grotto growing moss off in the distance. Sarah took a cautious step forward, then broke into another run towards the shelter.

As soon as she began running, the cawing grew louder; so loud it was in her ears. Sarah looked up, only to see another vision from her nightmares: the dreaded harpie, circling her like prey. The beast, a gargantuan bird with the face of a black-eyed hag, followed her stride for stride, her great wings beating powerfully at her sides as she dipped lower and lower towards Sarah.

*I'm being hunted,* thought Sarah wildly, almost jogging backwards now, afraid to take her eyes off of the beast; its shrill cawing growing louder and louder. She peered around desperately amidst the piles of trash, looking for something; anything to defend herself with, finding nothing. As the avian beast circled nearer and nearer, Sarah fell back, landing hard on her bottom as she tried to keep eyes on the creature. At that, the harpy cackled at her.

"The little human witch will be dinner, I think!" she cawed; her voice a high-pitched shriek that Sarah thought might actually break glass. Sarah tried to reach out to the beast with her empathy; tried to do as she had done with the pack of one and make the harpy her ally, but just as she reached out with tendrils of calm, she heard the distinct sound of slithering over the ground. Frozen with further panic, she struggled to her feet and dared to look behind her, taking her eyes off of the harpy.

To her intense relief, it was the Rat King approaching from behind her, just off to the left; his immense, layered body squirming and writhing its way toward her. Sarah never thought she would have been happy to see such a creature again.

"My Queen!" he called, his scratching and slithering voice made of thousands of tongues carrying a warning, "Watch out!"

Sarah barely turned back toward the harpy in time. Having been distracted by the Rat King's approach, she hadn't heard the harpy's sharp descent. She dove for the ground with a split-second to
spare, and let out a strangled cry of pain when the harpy's claws grazed her left shoulder. She hit the ground hard on her right side as the harpy emitted a shrill, angry howl at missing her throat. Hot tears stung Sarah's eyes as blood covered her left arm.

As the harpy raced back towards the darkening sky, Sarah let go of her still bleeding shoulder, ignoring it completely as she pushed herself back up to her feet. Slightly dizzy, she took a second to find her footing, putting a hand back over her shoulder to stem the blood flow as much as she could.

"Queen Sarah!" called the Rat King, finally meeting her where she stood, "Get behind me, my Queen, quickly!"

"Why?" asked Sarah, still somewhat dizzy, wincing with throbbing pain in her shoulder. She stood in a slight crouch, eyes still following the circling harpy; attempting to ready herself for the next attack.

"You're right to think she will attack again," rumbled and squeaked the Rat King, its thousands upon thousands of eyes rolling in the rats' heads, "Get behind me, and she will have no choice to take on both of us."

"But-" started Sarah, still not removing her eyes from the creature overhead, who seemed to be beating her wings more forcefully, getting ready for the next plunge.

"There is no time, Queen Sarah—now move behind me!"

Sarah did as she was told, taking her eyes off of the harpy one last time as she almost spun her way behind the Rat King. Behind him, she couldn't see the harpy coming. The only comfort she had was feeling a sense of pride emanating from the Rat King in front of her.

"She comes," said the Rat King, a smile in his voice.

"What are we going to do?!" shouted Sarah, frightened, but she stayed put behind the shield he had given to her.

"Eat," said the Rat King calmly; menacingly, "Run to the cave when I count to three. One. ...Two. ...

Sarah's heart seized before the last word.

"...Three."

Sarah ran, not daring to look back, but she could still hear them: the clashing sounds of feather meeting flesh; the death shrieks of rats dying, being torn apart by sharp beak and claw; but then, the shrieks were coming from the harpy, she thought, those sounds were...too deep to be rodents.

She reached the entrance to the stone grotto and allowed herself to briefly glance back, only to be horrified by what she saw. The Rat King was no longer whole; swarms of rats covered the harpy, eating her alive as she screamed. Feeling bile rise in her throat, Sarah ran into the cave, away from the horrors behind her.

Sarah didn't know how long she ran deeper into the grotto; or cave, it seemed, before she stumbled and fell to her knees, catching herself with her bloody right hand. She tried to push herself back up, shook violently, and then retched on the dirty ground in front of her.

When she finished, Sarah wiped her mouth with her uninjured arm and staggered back to her feet. If anything, despite her wounds, she was only more angry—and more determined. Clapping her right
hand back over her shoulder, which had mostly ceased bleeding at this point but still ached, Sarah pressed onward into the growing darkness. The cave itself was new to her, a deep black trench whose stone seemed to spiral all around her, but she had a feeling she knew where it might lead to as she walked on.

When the cave seemed to grow oppressive in its darkness, she knew she had been right, and again, she broke into a run, bursting forward into an enormous cavern full of dancing light. Sarah gasped and halted upon entering, her eyes again stinging with the threat of tears.

Thousands of glittering, flying faeries held Jareth's body suspended in the air, unconscious with his head lolling to one side, consumed by and wrapped up in hundreds of thousands of glittering, light-filled threads like a gigantic spider web. The threads of light pierced his body as well, causing an eerie, bluish glow to cover his perfect skin. As the faeries danced through the air, swinging Jareth softly as they did so, Sarah found her voice.

"Let him go!" she called, her voice coming out strained and desperate as she sprinted forward, closer to the swarm that had captured Jareth.

"My darling human," rasped another lone voice. Sarah tried to pick Lilu out from the thousands, but couldn't until the tiny dark faerie soared forward to meet her, her eyes alight with pure glee, "You've come!"

"Let. Him. Go." said Sarah, her voice steady and her eyes narrow with pure, unadulterated hatred. Lilu stayed silent, wearing a curious smile and looking down at her from up high.

"This is a place one can only find if it is the right time," rasped Lilu, "Is your dance done, little Sarah?"

"Let him go, you little faerie bitch!" Sarah shouted, advancing on Lilu, uncaring that she had no means or ideas on how to stop her. She hadn't come this far and she hadn't learned so much to be stopped now; let alone, allow Jareth, who had always been seemingly untouchable, to be hurt.

All I want is for Jareth to be safe; for everything to be how it's supposed to.

It took Lilu a maddeningly long amount of time to respond, but eventually, she spoke, her black eyes piercing in the dim light.

"Say your right words," Lilu said softly, "And I will give you the King."

Sarah's eyes widened, and then, without even thinking, she knew what to say. Her words were those of a true Queen; words her 15-year-old self would have been proud of.

"Give me the King," Sarah started, her voice calm and commanding, "Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered, I have fought my way here to take back the man that you have stolen, the man that I love. For my will is as strong as yours, and my kingdom is as great...and you have no power over either of us."

At her words, glittering wind surged through the cavern, unwinding Jareth from his puppet strings; his body floated gently to the floor of the cave like a rag doll, and the magic piercing his insides spilled from his eyes and open mouth like light-filled, blue, gushing blood. The faeries themselves got blown away by the sparkling wind, emitting musical cries as their delicate wings got pushed and pulled by the air. Lilu, however, remained where she was.

Sarah ignored her, sprinting over to Jareth's still body on the ground just as he started to cough himself awake. He was drenched in cold sweat, his normally perfectly coiffed mane slick around his
pale face; his breathing shallow. She kneeled next to him just as he blinked open his eyes, seeing her.

"Sarah," he said, his voice so weak it nearly broke Sarah's heart, "You came back."

"Of course," Sarah said, again unable to hold back the salty tears running down her cheeks as she bent to kiss him lightly on the forehead, "Of course I did! I made a promise. And, I love you, you know."

At her words, Jareth smiled, and he didn't seem quite so worse for the wear for a moment. Sarah touched his cheek with her unbloodied hand, and then leaned into him, pressing her own smile to his in a kiss.

As they pulled away from each other, Lilu's voice echoed around them.

"The King lives," called Lilu, flying a bit closer to the pair. Sarah exchanged a look with Jareth, running a hand through his damp hair, before turning to look directly into the little faerie's eyes.

"Leave now, or I'll catch you and kill you myself."

At that, Lilu smiled at her; a true smile, one of pure delight, and she bowed at Sarah before disappearing into the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

-Sigh- I'm not upset that this is basically the end...promise! -wipes tears off her face hastily- Seriously, there are gonna be more two more Epilogue chapters, so I should stop blubbering. Even though I didn't get this chapter uploaded on Friday, I can't be mad because it was just so important to get it right and I'm happy with what I ended up with.

Again, I want to thank everyone for their support in the form of kudos and comments. Seriously, you guys have helped me so much with your encouragement...I really appreciate it and hope I will hear more from you before and after the epilogue(s) as well. I'm really proud of how this story turned out/is turning out, so much so that it has inspired me to write original stuff I've been working on for ages. In fact, I'm even planning on taking some of the same fantasy elements and incorporating them into that stuff because I'm so happy with how this has turned out...now if only I could write original characters as compelling as Jareth and Sarah! ;) Anyway, again, thank you thank you thank you! You're the best, and I hope you liked it. :)}
"I'm afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter," replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse."

Well, here's Part 1. I won't say much more (saving most of the author's notes and thanks for the end of Part 1), except that this epilogue (both parts) have been planned since the very beginning. I really hope you guys like it. :) Thanks for reading!

"'Say your right words', said the faerie queen. And at that, Sarah knew what to do. Calmly, commandingly, she spoke: 'Give me the King. Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered, I have fought my way here to take back the man that you have stolen, the man that I love. For my will is as strong as yours, and my kingdom is as great...and you have no power over either of us.'"

As Toby paused in his reading, a collective gasp rippled through his class of 12th graders.

"At Sarah's words, a glittering wind blew through the cavern, unwinding the King from his puppet strings. And with one last grin, Queen Lilu let him go."

Toby took another (rather self-indulgent) pause.

"...The end."

Toby chuckled as groans burst forth from numerous students; many others looked confused, and some, downright cheated.
"What?!" blurted Robbie Colt, the class clown—who, despite initial protests, had been quite absorbed by the story, "Is that it?"

"I warned you guys that it's a bit of an...unconventional fairy tale," said Toby, chuckling.

"But what happened to them?" persisted Robbie.

"Yeah, Mr. Williams," Alyssa Schmidt chimed in from the back of the room, "Did Sarah and the Goblin King get a happily ever after? You can't just leave it there."

"I bet they at least get married," said Hallie Warner from the left side of the classroom, "I mean, Sarah probably can't legally become Queen without marrying the King."

"How romantic, Hallie," said Katie Thompson sarcastically, rolling her eyes.

"It could be worse," interjected Phillip Bell, who sat next to Katie in the front row. "I mean, it could've ended with Sarah waking up from one really long dream, and we find out none of it happened."

"Is that really the end, Mr. Williams?" asked Katie, ignoring Phillip.

"Afraid so," said Toby, circling back to the front of the classroom. Casually, he leaned back against his desk, surveying his students with keen blue eyes, still holding the battered red book.

"Some endings don't satisfy the way we'd like," he continued, "Even so, they can still teach us. Does it matter if Sarah ever marries her King? We know they're together in the end, after all. Isn't it enough that she came into her own, and still fell in love?"

At that, the class stayed silent, considering his words. Toby smiled.

"I wanted to read this to you guys today because yes, it's Halloween and it has goblins and faeries and monsters in it—not to mention, I think we'd all agree we needed a break from Moby Dick—but, also because it's a wonderful coming-of-age story. While the Goblin King is a charismatic, effortless kind of character, we expect that of him, and therefore, he isn't truly all that extraordinary—he's magical, after all."

"He's plenty magical, all right," interrupted Hallie with a suggestive giggle. Toby smiled slightly but pressed on.

"Right, but Sarah—Sarah is who we see ourselves in; the girl that goes from being angry and scared about her lost little brother, to saving him and conquering the Labyrinth in one fell swoop; and then, eventually, becoming Queen of it all! Not to mention finding love along the way."

"Girl power!" grinned Alyssa. Half the class laughed at her exclamation, while the other half remained silent, still musing over their teacher's opinion on the story's end.

"You got it, sister," said Toby, grinning. As the class settled, Robbie raised his hand (for once).

"Yes, Robbie?"

"I see what you're saying," he started, strangely hesitant, "I get it, but there's something still...bugging me about Sarah."

"Oh?" asked Toby, "What's that?"

Robbie's words came out in a surprisingly heated rush.
"How could she just leave her family like that? I mean, I know she couldn't really stay and all, but couldn't she have gone back again and explained? And what about the mirror? Does the book say if she ever used it to talk to them?"

Caught off-guard, Toby stared at the 17-year-old with wide eyes, his grin fading. Desperately, he tried to organize his thoughts as the class stared back at him, but all he could bring to mind was her face...

_so close to his, with large, sad green eyes looking back at him as she said goodbye_

Without warning, the last bell rang, causing Toby to jump slightly. Shaking his head, he focused on the class in front of him, who were now looking at him even more expectantly.

"You're dismissed," he said, his voice sounding strange to his ears, "We'll pick back up on Monday, everybody. Happy Halloween! Be safe."

At his dismissal, the 20-odd students of his last class picked up their things and filed out in groups, chatting about their plans for the evening. Once they had all gone, Toby looked back down at the book in his hands.

"Good questions, Robbie," he muttered, running his fingertips over the crimson cover, "Good questions."

Sighing loudly in the now-quiet classroom, Toby placed the book back on his desk before stretching his arms above his head. His back was killing him, likely from many nights slumped over a desk grading papers. Just as he started for his desk to begin packing up his things to leave for the day, a loud knock on the classroom door caused him to jump a second time.

"Come in," he said, his voice embarrassingly wobbly with surprise.

The door opened slowly, revealing a tall, well-dressed blonde woman Toby had never met before on the other side. Toby raised an eyebrow at her as she shuffled nervously inside his classroom wearing an apologetic smile.

"Um, hello," he said as she didn't say anything, reaching out his hand for a handshake, "You are…?"

"Oh, hello!" the woman said, her voice high-pitched and anxious, "I'm sorry, uh, you're Mr. Williams, correct? Toby Williams?"

"Yes," confirmed Toby.

"I thought so," the woman continued, looking him up and down briefly before glancing around the room, "My daughter, Sophie, is in your sophomore AP class. Sophie Bennett?"

"Ah, yes, Sophie," said Toby, bringing to mind the quiet 15-year-old—she was a favorite student of his; a sweet, smart girl with a love of stories similar to his own. In truth, though they looked nothing alike, she reminded him of...

"Mrs. Bennett then, I presume?"

"Yes," she said, "But you can call me Emily."

"Nice to meet you, Emily," said Toby, "Typically, though, I either schedule time with parents on an as-needed basis, or we discuss their child's progress at parent-teacher conferences. The next one is actually in a few weeks before the holiday season-"
"No, I know," said Emily quickly, cutting him off mid-sentence, "I'm...not exactly here to discuss Sophie. Though, just so you know, you're her favorite teacher."

"Oh, well, that's always nice to hear," said Toby, confused, "But if you're not here to discuss Sophie, what is it I can help you with today?"

"Well," started Emily, her words seeming to stall in her throat as she glanced at him again. Abruptly, she started to wander around the room, avoiding eye contact and holding the fancy purse she was carrying tight against her rib cage.

"You see, it's a bit strange, actually," she started up again, her voice somehow even higher than it had been, "Yesterday, Sophie came home and started telling me about her class with you—she had your class yesterday, right?"

"Right…" said Toby, nodding. Emily nodded back at him, still circling aimlessly around the small room.

"Right, so yesterday afternoon, when she got home, she started talking about...about a story you read as a sort of Halloween treat...about a girl named Sarah."

All of the color drained from Toby's face. His whole body stiffened.

"That's accurate," said Toby, his tone polite but clipped. Emily stopped pacing around the room, halting in front of him but maintaining a respectable distance between them.

"When she told me, I got a strange...feeling. So I looked you up," she said. Toby began to frown, becoming confused again, and she held up a hand, her eyes both somehow worried and reassuring.

"Don't worry! Nothing weird, I promise, I just—I had to find out if you were...her brother or not. Williams is such a common last name, and don't get me started on the name 'Sarah'."

There was a long, awkward pause in which they looked at each other, both at a loss for what to say.

"What I mean is…" Emily said, her voice cracking slightly, "I knew her. Your sister, Sarah. Sarah Williams, right? We were...we were roommates, at Boston U. A long time ago…"

"Oh," said Toby, even more surprised.

"Yeah," said Emily. It was her turn to look at her feet.

"I'm...I'm sorry about what happened," she said slowly, her voice slightly muffled now that her head was facing downward, "Did...did anyone ever find out what happened to her?"

"No," said Toby icily, finding her question rather inappropriate. At his tone, Emily looked back up, her eyes regretful.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly. "It was...really, really horrible. When she went missing, that is. A lot of people that went to school with her felt...responsible, or something. I had graduated by then, but—"

"Responsible?" Toby asked, his brows furrowing in confusion again. So far, this whole encounter was confusing.

"Well, yes, something like that," said Emily, flustered, "Sarah, well, she wasn't very...she was quiet, kind of kept to herself, but people still weren't very nice to her. And it's not like there weren't other bad things that happened on campus, but in those days, that kind of stuff was less common. Not to
mention, the circumstances of Sarah's disappearance-

She gulped when she caught the muscles in his face tighten further, but continued.

"Were so strange, that, well...everyone kind of heard about it. Anyway...I was really sorry to hear about what happened to her, and when I realized you were her brother, and Sophie's teacher...it was just odd, you know? A strange sort of coincidence."

Toby let out a breath he hadn't known he had been holding in a soft, low hiss.

"Yeah," he said dully, still trying to process her words. Numbly, he ran a hand through his shaggy blonde curls. "A coincidence."

In the space of a breath, Toby attempted to regain some of his composure by focusing on Emily and trying to conjure a sad smile. Upon looking at her—really, truly focusing on her face—he was surprised to see that she still looked more anxious than him. Her eyes were wide and scared, but of what, he didn't know—it seemed there was something else she wasn't saying. His attempt at a smile forgotten, he spoke.

"What is it?"

Emily tore her eyes away from his. They landed on something behind him.

"The story you told Sophie yesterday. Sarah's in it, isn't she?"

Toby took a moment to respond, trying to think of a reasonable answer he could give.

"Another coincidence, really," he said, trying to sound casual. To improve his false nonchalance, he turned toward the desk and reached for the little red book easily, turning back to face her again with a fake grin plastered on his face. "Like you said, it's a pretty common name."

"Right," said Emily slowly, her eyes never leaving the book, "Sophie didn't tell me the whole story, but, you know, just parts of it."

"Just a silly fairy tale," said Toby. If he was being honest, he wasn't sure who he was trying to reassure—her, or himself.

"Full of goblins and other things?" asked Emily, smiling slightly, though it didn't reach her eyes.

"Oh yeah," said Toby, chuckling awkwardly, "And magic...Kings, mazes. That kind of stuff."

To his surprise, his words seemed to do bring the opposite of comfort—if anything, she looked even more unnerved.

"Magic, hmm?" she asked quietly. "Like...spells and stuff?"

"Sort of," Toby answered slowly. The hair on the back of his neck was prickling, but he resolutely ignored it. *It's just a story*, he thought to himself. *She wants to know that it's just a story.*

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the magic in *Labyrinth* is likely inspired by many classic fairy tales and folklore, mostly originating in Europe, particularly regions in the United Kingdom," Toby rattled off, sounding like a talking encyclopedia, "The power of words...and names, for instance."

"Aren't spells just words?" Emily asked, frowning, her eyes still fixated on the book in his hand.
Toby shrugged.

"I guess. You could say that."

"I think I know what you mean," Emily said slowly, her voice still rather quiet, "Doesn't Sarah—I mean, the girl in the story, that is—doesn't she wish her brother away by saying the right words?"

"Yup, that's right," confirmed Toby.

Emily looked up at him then, her eyes a bit calmer. Her lips perked up into a tiny smile.

"That is a bit silly," she said, sounding relieved. Toby chuckled.

"That's why these kinds of stories are considered fantasy," he said, feeling some of the tension in his shoulders subside.

"Yeah, I suppose you're right," said Emily, dissolving into laughter, "It's not like anything would actually happen if I said 'I wish the goblins would come take me away right now!'"

As the words fell from her lips, Toby felt his stomach twist painfully as overwhelming panic kicked in. Around them, the room shuddered and the lights flickered until they were suddenly extinguished; cackles of glee that seemingly came from nowhere echoed in the sudden darkness, and before she could open her mouth to say a word, Emily vanished, eyes wide and fearful.

"No," Toby gasped, reaching for the woman that was no longer there. The copy of *Labyrinth* fell to the floor with a thud.

Another ripple of sickeningly euphoric laughter fell over the room, and Toby heard the distinct scurrying of small, invisible creatures. Feeling both terrified and crazy, Toby spun in a mad circle, endlessly searching for the source of the noises, even though he knew, instinctively, that he wouldn't ever find them. The memory of large red eyes in the faces of monsters suddenly came flashing back, and it felt as if all the air had been sucked straight out of his lungs. He fell forward onto the carpet, landing roughly on his hands and knees, dizzy and gasping for air as his fit subsided, only to come face-to-face with a pair of shiny ebony boots.

Unbelieving, Toby looked up, still coughing roughly as his breathing returned to normal.

"Oh, if it isn't you."

"You," he rasped, "You're him, aren't you? You're the Goblin King."

Chapter End Notes

So I know I said I would post both Parts 1 and 2 of the epilogue at the same time, but I feel guilty sitting on Part 1 while it's finished! It just feels wrong. Don't worry, I am steadily working on Part 2, and I hope to have it posted very soon. Like, hopefully in the next few days, so it definitely won't take as long as this one did. Sorry it took so long to post any part of the promised epilogue(s)...to be honest, I just didn't want it to end! :( Selfish, I know.

Anyway, thanks again to everyone for their continued interest and support...you guys are the best! Hopefully, you guys like it.
Underground

Chapter Summary

“I’m afraid, Sarah, dear, that you have no choice in the matter,” replied Jareth, eyes twinkling. He lounged back in his armchair and casually pulled a crystal from thin air. It danced between his fingertips. "The Labyrinth—and I—have chosen you. You are, in every sense of the word, our muse.”

Chapter Notes

Well, friends, this is it. I’m sorry it took so long. Without further ado...epilogue part 2, and the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Epilogue Two

Underground

No one can blame you for walking away
Too much rejection
No love injection
Life can be easy
It's not always swell
Don't tell me truth hurts, little girl
'Cause it hurts like hell
But down in the Underground
You'll find someone true
Down in the Underground
A land serene
A crystal moon, ah, ah
It's only forever
Not long at all
Lost and lonely
That's Underground
Underground
("Underground", David Bowie, Labyrinth)

"Oh, if it isn't you."

"You," Toby rasped, "You're him, aren't you? You're the Goblin King."

As he looked up at the man standing over him, Toby had no doubt in his mind. The man towered over him; lithe and hard-lined, he was clothed entirely in black, including a heavy cloak that seemed to swirl around him. His face was all hard lines and impossible angles, giving him terrible beauty, with feral eyes—one dark, and one light. His lips were curled into an amused smirk.
"Bring her back," said Toby, his voice returning. Slowly, he staggered to his feet. To his own surprise, he was only a few inches shorter than the Goblin King, though he felt a lot smaller.

"What's said is said," said the King mysteriously, "The woman has wished herself away to me."

"She didn't know what she was saying!" Toby shouted, sudden anger causing his face to flush. His hands curled into fists and unconsciously, he took a step forward.

The Goblin King merely cocked an eyebrow.

"Oh, she didn't?" he asked slyly, clearly amused. His casual indifference only made Toby angrier.

"I won't let you take her," he said furiously, "Not—not again."

The Goblin King's smirk turned into a wide, satisfied smile.

"You know very well where she is."

"Bring her back," said Toby icily.

The Goblin King laughed; a high, cold laugh that chilled Toby down to his bones. Still laughing, the King began to circle him.

"Lively little chap, aren't you?"

Toby scowled, but didn't say anything.

"I don't often let those who utter no words of meaning into my Labyrinth to reclaim those they've clearly lost," drawled the King, sounding utterly bored, "But in your case...well."

He stopped circling him then, halting directly in front of Toby so their eyes met—the look the King wore reminded Toby of an owl circling a mouse.

"I think I could make an exception."

Abruptly, the Goblin King grabbed hold of Toby's arm, but despite trying to jerk away, Toby couldn't—the King's grip was like an iron manacle around his forearm. In the space of a few seconds, the world turned upside down, causing his stomach to do flip flops and his previous dizziness to return full-force. Gritting his teeth, he shut his eyes until the spinning stopped.

It was over in mere moments. The King let go of him, and he blinked his eyes open. Breathing rapidly, he looked down onto a sight he had imagined nearly every day since childhood, but in seeing it now, realized his imagination could've never really done it justice: an endless, unsolvable maze that stretched for miles and miles. In its center near the horizon was a castle, which, from this far away, was dwarfed by the setting sun.

"She's there, in my castle," murmured the Goblin King to his left, pointing and startling Toby so much he swore he felt his heart jump in his ribcage. "Do you still want to look for her?"

"That's the castle beyond the Goblin City," Toby said quietly, his tone stony. He turned to look at the Goblin King again.

"Where is she?" he asked coolly, his eyes searching the King's for any hint.

"Foolish boy," chided the King, though his voice was still brimming with amusement, "I've just told you."
"Not Emily," said Toby curtly. The King's wicked grin widened further.

"Time is short," said the Goblin King, ignoring Toby's question. With a wave of his hand, a large, ornate clock with a face of thirteen appeared, floating in midair. "You have 13 hours in which to solve the Labyrinth before your friend becomes one of us...forever."

The Goblin King turned, seemingly to walk away, but then, to Toby's surprise, looked back over his shoulder at him wearing a roguish smirk.

"Oh, and Toby—remember, should you get lost, you can always...look to the stars."

"What?" Toby asked, puzzled, but the King only laughed again before vanishing into thin air.

Toby swore loudly, causing a harsh break in the stillness that surrounded him. Running another hand through his curly blonde hair, he tried to figure out a game plan. If he somehow managed to overlook the realization that the Labyrinth was real and that he now knew he wasn't a choice candidate for the madhouse (assuming, of course, that this all wasn't just a major delusion), then he had to figure out how the hell he was going to get through the Labyrinth and save Emily.

And...find Sarah.

She has to be here, he thought desperately, if the Labyrinth is real, Sarah is in it...somewhere.

He had to believe it. This place; his being here was the proof. All those years ago, he had seen her leave them, had felt her salty tears on his own chubby, childish cheeks, and had understood her reasoning. In the moment, it had all made sense. She needed to leave them to travel to the world of myths and magic to save the King, of course. She'd said goodbye, a real one, one with finality, but he'd still thought that she'd find a way to see him—a child's foolish wish, perhaps, but he'd believed that; he'd believed all of it. How couldn't he?

But, of course, as the years passed, he had grown up. He'd been forced to, in many ways—his parents, after all, denied that Sarah had ever come home at all, and had even made him see a shrink for a while to ensure that he didn't hold onto the fantasy. According to them, that day hadn't happened. They chose to believe in the logical, reasonable explanation—that their daughter had tragically gone missing in her youth, and was now...well, gone.

For a long time, he had hated them for it; internalizing his anger at them for their stubbornness and close-mindedness and only letting any of it out in other stories, other ways of escape. As he grew up, though, he learned to let it go. Sometimes, he thought he saw glimpses of what they all knew the truth was on their faces, itching to be realized. In those moments—moments where the pain and the disbelief somehow seeped through his parents' hardened denial—he could understand why they chose to be ignorant.

He supposed that they did it, in part, for him; in an effort to find a way back to normal, if that existed at all. Either way, he had learned that for some people, the truth was just too hard. As Toby gazed down at the sweeping Labyrinth before him, trying to formulate some semblance of a plan, he supposed he couldn't really blame them. It was a daunting truth.

Sighing, Toby closed his eyes, trying to calm the swell of panic that still threatened to take over him. He had to remember that he at least had an advantage in this 13-hour game: he knew the story of this place, and of the only girl who had ever beaten it. Perhaps he could use that knowledge to get through it and rectify his own foolish mistake.

His resolve hardening, Toby picked his way down the mossy brown hill towards the entrance to the
Labyrinth; two large, stone doors that glittered in the growing dusk.

Upon reaching the entrance, Toby suddenly felt small again. From atop the hill, the Labyrinth had seemed massive and (in some ways) impenetrable. Now, standing so close, he was even more intimidated. Carefully, he brushed a few fingertips across the rough-hewn stone before pushing against it. The doors didn't budge. Unsurprised, he put both hands on the dusty stone, preparing to push, when he heard a rustle off to his left.

"Who's there?" grumbled an oddly familiar voice that belonged to a creature Toby couldn't yet see. Another voice joined the first, this one more high-pitched; clearly feminine.

"Did you hear someone, dearie?"

"I thought so," said the first voice slowly.

Panicking, Toby pushed against the double doors hard. To his relief, they swung open, and he bolted inside, immediately darting toward a path that took him right.

"Wait!" called the first voice from behind him, but Toby ignored it as he ran full-out on what seemed to be a straight passage. He ran until his lungs and legs were screaming, pure panic spurring him onward. When he finally felt safe enough to stop and look behind him, no one was there.

Breathing hard, Toby bent over, placing his hands on his knees.

"I…am out…of shape," he wheezed, his voice echoing slightly.

"You look alright to me, Mister!"

Toby nearly jumped out of his own skin. His heart still pounding (whether from running or the scare), he spun around in a circle, trying to locate the owner of the voice.

I'm losing it, he thought, there's no one-

"Oi! Down here!"

Toby looked down. Perched on a small outcropping of stone in the wall to his left sat a fat, fuzzy blue worm who was waving at him.

"'Ello!" called the worm. He wore a tiny red scarf around his neck and a congenial smile.

"Um, hello," Toby replied, still a bit stunned. Slowly, he sunk to his knees next to where the worm sat.

"You're…" he started, still trying to catch his breath, "A worm. A talking worm."

"That's right!" agreed the worm, nodding vigorously, "Whatcha runnin' for? There's no need to be scared of the gardener, you know."

"The…gardener?" asked Toby, glancing back the way he had come, "Was that the-?"

As a sudden realization hit him, he stood back up and swore again, kicking the opposite stone wall with his foot only to subsequently howl in pain.

"Whatcha do that for?" asked the worm curiously as Toby hopped on one foot.
"I'm so stupid!" growled Toby, "I panicked; I wasn't thinking... that must've been Hoggle—the dwarf back there! Right? And you, you're the worm!"

"That's right," corrected the worm, "And I 'spect that was Hoggle, seeing as he's the gardener. How'd you know us, then?"

"I'm... well, trying to get to the center of the Labyrinth, to the Goblin King's castle," said Toby, leaning against the opposite wall to massage his throbbing foot, "And I... well, I've heard of you before. Well, read about you, really. From another runner."

"Another runner, eh?" asked the worm, "Hmm, that is somethin'."

"Her name was Sarah," said Toby cautiously, unsure of how much to tell the little worm. Stupidly, he had run away from a known friend of Sarah's—at least, according to his childhood memory and his copy of the book. Truth be told, he wasn't sure how much stock he could put into either. What if things had changed, or it was a trick? For so long, he had unquestionably believed that if the Labyrinth was real, Sarah was alive and well there, ruling it alongside the King. Still, if that were true, wouldn't she have come to take Emily too?

The worm looked him up and down for a moment before speaking.

"Sarah, eh? Hmm. Sounds a wee familiar, I 'spose. Either way, you're going the wrong way. To get to the castle, you've got to go that way"- The worm pointed to Toby's left. "And you can't just keep ignoring openings, either, y'know."

"Openings?" Toby asked.

"Sure!" said the worm, "There's one right across there!" Again, the worm pointed toward a stretch of wall down a ways from Toby that, to the naked eye, seemed rather solid. Upon looking closer, Toby thought he could see the illusion. He jogged to where the worm pointed, and even though the wall there looked menacingly solid, he stretched his hands out in front of him and tried to walk through. Sure enough, he felt nothing but open air as he stepped forward into another passage.

"Wow, thanks!" Toby called back to the little worm as he peered down the new path.

"Come inside for a nice cup 'o' tea and meet the Missus," the worm called back. Toby turned back for a moment and smiled at the little worm.

"I'm sorry, I can't—I've got to get a move on. Thanks for your help!"

He waved goodbye, and as he turned back toward the new path, he thought he heard the little worm sigh and mutter something, but he didn't have time to spare, so he jogged onward.

What felt like hours later, after getting stalled by many wrong turns and dead ends, Toby finally noticed a change in the Labyrinth walls—instead of dark, glittering gray stone that towered over him, he had emerged into shorter maze walls made yellow-gold by the dim sunlight that could now permeate the shadowy passages. Feeling restless but slightly more confident despite his dwindling time, Toby slowed his jog to a stroll, allowing himself to catch his breath a little.

Absentmindedly, he stuffed his hands into his pockets as he peered around another corner. Abruptly, he pulled his right hand back out of his trouser pocket—something sharp had pierced his palm. Curious, he fished back inside his right pocket and pulled out a pencil he must've squirreled away there earlier that day. Reeling slightly from thoughts of just how much his day had changed in mere moments, he had an idea as he stared at the pencil.
Casting furtive looks around him to ensure that he was alone, Toby quickly bent down toward the ground and made a small, scratchy mark on the stone.

"Breadcrumbs," he murmured to himself. Smugly, he jolted back up and stuffed the pencil back in his pocket as he walked onward. He continued to mark his way as he pushed forward through the many twists and turns of the Labyrinth, always squatting secretly along the paths he took. He highly doubted that if the Goblin King or any of his more loyal subjects knew of his activity, they wouldn't be pleased. The notion that he could hardly have been the first person to try it had occurred to him, of course, but he had to at least try to help himself a little.

After perhaps another hour of slow going (particularly because of his new need to stop fairly often), Toby's ears pricked at the distant sound of voices on the other side of a wall up ahead.

"-of course, of course-" said one voice, though it was hard to tell from the distance—their speech was muffled. Toby paused to listen to them as he drew a little closer on the other side of the wall. One, he could barely hear moving at all, but the other had a slower, heavy gait that seemed to rumble over the stone.

"Yes, yes!" piped up what Toby thought must be the smaller of the two creatures, "It is my duty to Milady, as you well know-"

The other voice gave a throaty, almost growling chuckle that sounded like it would've been alarming up close. As the voices continued to fade, Toby realized they were moving further and further away from him in another direction within the Labyrinth. Idly, he wondered if he should approach them, but thought better of it, and continued on the way he had intended.

Still thinking on the voices he had heard—for some reason, they seemed to nag at him like bothersome flies—he turned a corner and emerged in a path that led into a small cave of sorts. Cautiously, he entered the cave, feeling that the path had to continue through it. After taking only a few short strides inside, he was startled again by a sudden shout.

"Turn back!" called a deep, thunderous voice. Toby jumped for what felt like the millionth time that day, and turned to look behind him. Nothing was there. He took a step forward.

"Beeeeewaaaaaaare!" called another voice menacingly. It took Toby a moment, but finally he stopped looking down the passage and at the stone walls themselves—the walls were made of stone faces.

"Huh," Toby said.

"Look out, human!" cried one of the long stone faces, this one on his right. Getting annoyed, Toby paused in front of him.

"Does that mean I'm getting closer to the castle?" he asked pointedly.

"Well, I-" started the stone face in a deep baritone. Funnily enough, he actually seemed flustered. Toby didn't wait for him to finish; instead waving his hand at the whole lot of them in annoyance and trudging onward.

"I'm getting closer!" he called out to no one in particular as he found the cave's exit, finding sunlight again. It took all of his composure not to call out a gibe to the Goblin King himself, but he wasn't that foolish—after all, he didn't know how much time he actually had left. Having no real way to measure his progress irked him to no end, but he knew he had to keep his cool if he was going to make it all the way to the castle and find Emily.
And see Sarah.

At that thought, Toby walked onward, pausing every now and then to mark his progress on the stone below him. As he walked, he thought he caught the occasional errant noise—a twitch, a scrape, a shuffle—but he shook them off, not wanting to make himself more paranoid than he likely already was. Once, he thought he heard a little giggle, which forced him to stop and stare behind him.

No one was there. Even so, he took a few steps back the way he had come, searching. Cautiously, he peered around another corner, but again, no one and nothing was there. Sighing nervously, Toby ran a hand through his hair and looked toward the ground. He couldn't afford to lose focus, he had to keep-

Looking at the ground, Toby froze as his eyes surveyed the textured but unblemished stone.

His mark was gone.

Panicking slightly, Toby knelt and touched the stone floor, running his hands over the unmarked stone frantically. He had been marking every five stones for a while now, yet this one was unmarked.

"Someone's been...!" Toby spluttered, so frustrated by now that he couldn't finish his own sentence, "This place is so, so-

"Unfair?"

A chorus of cackles sounded behind him. Toby spun around at the clamor, only to see two matching ornate doors that hadn't been there before. While the doors themselves were tall and beautifully carved with the faces of goblins, it was those guarding the double doors that commanded attention—two tall, two-headed, gangly goblins giggling at him from behind armored shields, one head peeking out from the top and the other from the bottom. The guards on the right wore blue, while the guards on the left wore red. Shaking his head both to be sure he was seeing correctly and to dispel the disquiet building inside his chest—they had seen him already, anyhow—he strode toward them.

"I remember you!" Toby suddenly exclaimed, recognizing the foursome (of sorts) from Sarah's story. His mood taking a drastic turn, he grinned excitedly, stepping closer to them. They flinched in unison.

"Pardon me," huffed the bottom blue guard, "But we've never met!"

"Well, no," said Toby, "But my sister, Sarah, she, uh...told me about you. Sort of."

All four guards looked at each other with raised eyebrows, then back at him, their faces suddenly impassive.

"Cat got your tongue?" Toby asked shrewdly, stepping even closer to them. He had dared to mention Sarah, and it seemed to catch them off guard (no pun intended). The top red guard huffed at him.

"Reverence is as reverence does," he said vaguely, "Behind these doors is what you seek, though we're not sure it's right thing!"

At that, all four guards burst into laughter again.

"How do you know what I'm looking for?"
"Every runner is looking for the same thing," scoffed the bottom blue guard. "One of them leads to the castle at the center of the Labyrinth, and the other one leads to…"

"Buh-buh-buh-buuuuuum-" cried the top blue guard.

"...Certain death!" finished the bottom blue guard, looking up at his partner. "I wanted to make the noise this time!"

"Oh, shut it," scoffed the top blue guard.

The red guards on the left snickered at that until Toby cleared his throat to get all of their attention.

"Right, I remember this bit," Toby started smugly. "Only you two—" he pointed to the top guards, "Can tell me which door is which, and I can only ask one of you. Oh, and one of you always tells the truth, and one of you always lies. That pretty much sum it up?"

At his quick appraisal, the foursome stared back at him, slightly aghast, but not unfriendly.

"Pretty much," shrugged the bottom red guard, chuckling again. He looked to his comrades, who all started to laugh.

"You weren't lying, were you?" asked the bottom blue guard, "You do know a little thing or two about this place!"

"No, I wasn't," said Toby seriously.

"Still, lad, you shouldn't take too much for granted," said the bottom blue guard wisely.

Toby frowned at that, and chose to nod gracefully at the advice, but said nothing. He turned back to the top two guards, looking between red and blue, before finally settling on the guard on the right; the one adorned in blue.

"You," he started, "My name is Toby. What is my name?"

The guard looked at him for a moment before answering.

"Your name is Toby," he said simply, his face impassive.

"So, you're the one who tells the truth," surmised Toby, "Which door leads to the castle, and which door leads to certain death?"

"My door leads to the castle," said the blue guard easily, "And the other door...to death!" He cackled, the others following suit.

At that, Toby smiled brightly, almost bounding forward to door on the right.

"Thanks!" he said to all four of them as the blue guards moved aside. Cautiously, he turned the handle on the door and peered forward. He remembered this part of Sarah's story well—then, she had fallen down a shaft of moving statue hands, but when he opened the door, he didn't see a hole to fall down, or even a true continuation of the path. Instead, he opened the door onto a dimly lit forest path, its trees glittering in the growing dusk.

"Wow," he murmured.

"Go on, lad," said one of the guards softly behind him. Toby listened, stepping forward onto the forest ground, and heard the door behind him close with a thud.
As he started to weave his way through the forest, he felt as if a hush had settled over the world of the Labyrinth, and over him. This forest was quiet, but a comfortable, comforting quiet that settled into his bones. He felt serene and with a sense of purpose as he walked on, surveying the flora and fauna with curiosity and awe. The trees and plants here felt more alive somehow; it wasn't hard, here of all places, for him to remember where he was.

He was jarred from his dreamlike pace at the terrifying sound of low growls.

Toby froze, the hair standing on the back of his neck, and slowly, carefully, turned his head to the left, towards the noise. He couldn't help it; he gasped.

Sarah was there—unchanged; not a day older than he had last seen her; wearing a gown made of starlight that glittered at him in the gloom. Around her, guarding her, were seven wolves—the pack of one, Toby realized—with keen, horrifying yellow eyes, their hackles raised.

Look to the stars, echoed Jareth's voice in his head.

Sarah was looking at him, judging his expression, her own pure green eyes staring at him with a mix of uncertainty and disbelief.

"It's you," he breathed, his voice coming out in barely more than a whisper.

There was a long moment between them. Then, suddenly, she shook her head slightly, and the wolves surrounding her relaxed, falling back into a semicircle flanking her.

"Toby?" she asked quietly. Her voice was music. In the moment that her words fell on his ears, Toby realized he had been wrong—though she may not have aged; though she may have looked the same in the ways a human could comprehend, she was different. It was obvious, now that he been clued in—she was of this world, not his. You could hear it in her voice.

"Yes," he whispered, and he felt as if he was the 10-year-old kid who had cried saying goodbye to her all over again.

Her face broke into a heartbreaking, breathtaking smile.

"No," she said quietly herself, tears coming to her eyes, "It can't be you. I'm dreaming."

"It is," he said more fervently, his voice taking on a childish stubbornness he would have normally been ashamed of, "It's me, Sarah! I know I shouldn't have come here, I know, but Emily—this woman I know, actually you know—she said she was your college roommate; anyway, it's a long story, but she wished herself away, and I-"

"Hush," Sarah said calmly, commandingly. If she was surprised at his explanation, she didn't show it. He felt his words slip away from him, as if she had control over his lips.

She walked toward him then, seeming to float more than stride. Though she came closer, the pack of one remained still and silent where she had stood. When she reached him, she grasped his hands in hers and looked up at him, her face serious. He went to speak, but then didn't, his words stalling in his throat. He marveled slightly at how small she was, standing this close to him—he was so much taller than her now.

"We can talk soon," she quietly, "I promise. Until then, I have something I have to do first."

"Okay," Toby said, his voice quavering slightly, "What do you have to do?"
Sarah smiled gently.

"See your heart," she said simply. Toby frowned, confused.

"Trust me," she said. She put a delicate hand on his chest, right on top of his heart, and he thought he felt a trickle of warmth enter there at her touch.

"Were you looking for me, Toby?" Sarah asked softly. Though her tone was gentle, her eyes held steel in them; he couldn't seem to look away.

"Yes, of course," he whispered, placing his much larger hand over hers on his chest, "I missed you, Sarah."

Something in Sarah's eyes seemed to break open, but there was something else there, too. Frustration? Disappointment? He couldn't tell, not exactly, especially since so much of what was in her eyes seemed to be closer to pain.

"I know," she said so softly he had to strain to hear her, even though she was standing right in front of him. "I missed you too. But I'm not why you came to the Underground, Toby. You didn't come with the Goblin King only to find me, did you?"

"No..." Toby agreed slowly. "I came for Emily. I had to save her, Sarah, she had no idea what it would mean when she said those words. I didn't know what it would mean; well, I did, but I didn't completely believe it...until it happened."

At that, Sarah's face broke into a wide smile, and her whole demeanor changed—it wasn't just her smile; her whole face lit up and something of the old Sarah seemed to come back into her. She looked more real, more tangible, more human.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed, still grinning. At that, she dropped her hands from his chest and wrapped her arms around him in a back-breaking hug. Toby returned the embrace, grinning himself despite still being more than a little confused.

"What?" he asked as they broke apart from each other, "Was it something I said?"

"Yes...and no," Sarah said. Toby opened his mouth to speak again, but she waved away his words with an impatient air.

"We'll have more time to talk when we get to the castle," she explained as she grabbed his hand and began pulling him back towards the pack of one.

"What?" he started, glancing at the stoic wolves warily. Sarah glanced back at him, frowning slightly, and then seemed to realize the reason for his discomposure.

"They won't hurt you," she said gently as they reached the seven. As they approached, the wolves spoke in perfect unison in a high, keening, feminine voice.

"Will you go, our Queen?"

"Yes," Sarah said, "For now." She sighed and let go of Toby's hand so she could pat each wolf on their head, rubbing the soft fur of their ears. Toby watched in silence, both amazed and somewhat alarmed, until she grabbed his hand again and pulled him onward, past the pack of one and deeper into the forest.

They didn't travel very far; stopping abruptly when they reached a break in the trees, which opened
up into a clearing. In its center was a small pool of impossibly black water that seemed to gleam at them in the dim light.

"Come with me," Sarah said.

"What are we doing?" Toby asked as they reached the edge of the pool. At that, Sarah squeezed his hand in hers.

"Trust me," she said again.

He looked at her, wondering for a second if he hadn't just fallen asleep back in his classroom and was dreaming all of this. After a brief moment, he nodded his agreement.

Sarah nodded back and then began to walk into the depths of the pool, pulling him with her. He hesitated, but then followed. Amazingly, as soon as his feet touched the wet, the world changed again, similarly to when the Goblin King had taken him here: a maddening array of colors and wind whipped around his face; somehow, he was in a tunnel of anything and everything imaginable—until he stepped through to the something else, to another side of somewhere.

Despite his profession in literature, if asked to describe the sensation, Toby felt it would've been impossible—particularly since it only seemed to last mere moments once he actually had emerged on the other side.

They came to in a small but brightly lit stone corridor. Or, at least, that was how it looked to Toby as he tried to recover from the journey, which had his head spinning.

"Are you alright?" Sarah asked, concerned. Toby took a moment, waiting for the dizziness to subside a little more, and then focused on her face. He nodded firmly, rubbing his right temple.

"It can be a bit...difficult, the first few times," Sarah said.

"How did we...?" Toby asked, his voice trailing off. Sarah nodded her head to something behind him and he turned sharply, causing the dizziness to come back for a moment as he viewed a full-length, sparkling mirror on the wall directly behind them.

"The mirror?" he asked, turning back around.

"The mirror," Sarah murmured. She grabbed his arm, looping it through hers.

"Come," she said, her lips curling into a tight, tense grin, "Time to meet a King."

Toby gulped, and continued to let her pull him onward. They passed through corridor after corridor and passage after passage, with numerous dizzying staircases in between. Finally, after descending one final staircase, they emerged into a hall much larger than the others. A swell of noise so loud that it seemed to shake the foundation of the castle was coming from the end of hallway. Toby gulped, but Sarah did nothing by lead him on.

They reached the end of the hallway and turned right into a large, open archway that lead straight into the Goblin King's throne room. Toby barely had a moment to register what he was seeing as he saw it; the explosion of sound was far too distracting.

Toby blinked rapidly, surveying the room of heavy gray stone, unsure where to look—it was jam-packed full of goblins. Real goblins; goblins jumping, dancing, laughing, jeering...if he wasn't mistaken, he even saw a few here and there hanging off of the walls, the rafters, and even out of a large, open window overlooking the city. It was a scene he vaguely remembered, like a dream just
after being jolted awake, but instead of feeling frightened or uneasy as he might've expected, instead, he felt a strange sense of nostalgia.

"The Queen!" chorused hundreds—no, thousands—of voices great and small.

"My dear Sarah," purred a low, amused voice, "Have you brought me a gift?"

Toby's head snapped up. There, at the back of the large room sat the Goblin King, lounging with casual grace on a throne set above the rest of them. There was another throne next to his as well, though it was empty. Toby looked at Sarah, and was surprised to see that she looked quite angry—it was a strange sight; seeing his sister's sweet face full of so much indignation.

"No," she said, her voice calm and cold. Her eyes left the King's in favor of the crowd of goblins below him, who, in the space of a breath, had all gone silent.

"The runner is pure of heart, and intention," she called out, her voice ringing with command, "Go now, friends. You may return to your homes."

At her words, the goblins—every single one of them—moved toward them. At first, Toby was confused, afraid they were going to maul them until the first bunch moved past them, out of the hall and toward the double doors that led out of the castle itself. They were obeying her.

It took a long while for all of the goblin citizens to noisily leave the hall; each, in turn, seemed to stall slightly as they passed him, their burgundy and black eyes bright and curious. All the while, the King said nothing, only sat in his throne with an air so effortlessly relaxed that Toby couldn't help but be a bit unnerved.

Finally, the last of the little goblins had cleared out of the hall, and the three of them were alone—one human, one Fae, and one...well, something else entirely. Unique. New.

"You claim, Sarah, that this boy is pure of heart," said the King, finally, his voice echoing across the now empty room of stone, "I ask, my Queen, for proof."

At the King's speech, Sarah strode forward across the empty space so abruptly that she had no trouble pulling Toby with her. They made it together a few paces before he unlooped his arm from hers, taking a step back. She stood in the middle of throne room, her body set like a coil about to spring; rigid with tension.

"How dare you," she said quietly. Despite the low volume of her speech, her words pierced the air.

"He's my brother," she said slowly, precisely; as if she meant to charge them with some hidden meaning, "You knew this, Jareth, and you didn't tell me. You gave me no warning of who this runner was."

The King's eyes narrowed. Quickly, he glanced at Toby, who hadn't missed the name Sarah had let slip.

Jareth, he thought, the name of the Goblin King.

"Sarah," Jareth began, his features returning to the impassive mask he usually wore, "Brother or not, he made his choice. You know the laws I am bound by."

A storm seemed to pass through Sarah's body at Jareth's rebuttal. In the space of a few breaths, her shoulders went from even tighter to trembling to casual, though you couldn't say she suddenly seemed relaxed. Toby walked a few paces forward in order to stand next to her and see her face.
Once there, she smiled at him; a sad but reassuring smile. Then, she turned back to the King.

"I ask again," continued Jareth, his voice surprisingly much more gentle. His eyes were different too—no longer impassive, they held concern and hesitation. That, and it seemed he was only seeing Sarah.

"You say this boy, Toby, is pure of heart. Show it to me, my love, and I will release her."

Slowly, Sarah nodded. Surprised, Toby opened his mouth to protest, but Sarah curtly shook her head at him. He fell silent. What she did next was nothing short of—well, to Toby—magical.

Without a word, Sarah pressed her own palm over her chest, and took a deep breath in, closing her eyes. After a moment, she opened her eyes and removed her hand, holding her open palm out for them to see. In it, she held a tiny wisp of something that caused Toby's jaw to literally drop.

The wisp in Sarah's hand was like a tiny golden lantern, but no; it wasn't solid, was it? It dodged and danced through the air too much to be truly corporeal; it was as if Sarah had managed to catch a sliver of sunbeam or a speck of star and hold it in the palm of her hand.

"I took a piece of it." Sarah murmured softly, "A tiny, shining, scrap of a piece of Toby's soul for proof of the truth of his heart. To be returned to you, of course," she added, nodding respectfully at Toby, whose mouth was still wide open in shock and awe.

"That's part of my...my..." Toby started to say, but he lost his question before he could really start it.

Sarah smiled beautifully at him.

"Yes," she said softly. She looked back up at Jareth.

"If seeing this isn't enough proof for you, you only have to hear it to know the truth of it," she finished seriously. At that, she tapped the wisp of light and luminescence gently with her forefinger, and it sang a note that was so indescribably lovely, that, years and years later, Toby could only ever recall it while dreaming.

As the note faded away, Toby managed to tear his eyes away from the wisp of soul in Sarah's hand to look up at Jareth. The King's face was no longer hesitant or concerned; instead, he was beaming, and for the first time ever, Toby felt that he might be able to really understand why humans in stories always fell victim to the charm of the Fae, despite their better intuition—they were just too beautiful.

Still smiling, Jareth stood and abandoned his throne, moving with startling speed and grace down to the two of them. He drew closer to Sarah, placing a gloved hand on either side of her waist, and bowed his head to hers as they both peered down at the flickering wisp together.

"Your gift is true magic, Sarah, my love," Jareth said softly. Sarah looked up at him, smiling, and he bent down to kiss her lightly, careful to avoid touching the still dancing wisp in her hand. When they broke apart, the look that passed between them was so intimate that Toby immediately felt uncomfortable looking at them, much more so than when they had kissed. He cleared his throat loudly.

Thankfully, he got their attention. Both Sarah and Jareth tore their eyes away from each other, looking at Toby instead. Jareth removed his hands from Sarah's waist and took a step back. He inclined his head to Toby, then to Sarah, but said nothing more.

"You've proven your heart, Toby," said Sarah, smiling again. She held the wisp of light in her hand out to him. "Here—it's yours."
"What do I…?"

"All you need to do is hold it, and it will come back to you," Sarah explained softly.

Cautiously, Toby reached toward Sarah, holding out his hand. At that, the flickering wisp seemed to jump towards him, as if being pulled by a magnet, and in the space of a second, it came to rest in his palm, feeling like a faint, warm heartbeat fluttering against his skin. Mesmerized, Toby inhaled a deep breath, and the light seemed to sink into his skin then, warming him all over.

Toby shook his head, unsure what had happened. The light in his palm was gone, and the warmth was fading.

"What happened?" he asked, looking up the Sarah, "Did it—has it gone back inside of me?"

"Yes," she said, her tone still gentle. Looking at her face—full of concern and somehow, trepidation—Toby felt a mix of feelings stir in his chest.

"You have to know," he started, his voice feeling heavy in his throat, "I didn't come here just to save Emily. I came looking for you, too."

Toby's eyes flickered to Jareth's, but the Goblin King's face remained an impassive mask.

"We know that, Toby," Sarah said, "But you've also shown us that you had every intention of saving her, too. I can't...I can't explain it in any words you might understand, but—"

"Why?" Toby asked hotly, anger rising swiftly inside of him, "Because I'm human, I couldn't understand? I could, you know. I'm not a child. Years have past for me, Sarah, many long years."

Toby laughed humorlessly, running another hand through his hair and looking at the floor, as if that might help stopper his frustration; his hurt.

"I know," whispered Sarah, her voice small. The sound of it made Toby both regretful, and somehow even angrier. He looked back up at her, glaring.

"Why didn't you ever try to talk to me, Sarah? I must've sat in front of that mirror for hours and hours while Mom and Dad thought I was in my room or off somewhere else, just waiting. I knew you'd try. You had promised me. I asked you if I could try talking to you in the mirror, and you said, of course. Why didn't you?"

By then, Sarah's face was wet with tears. Toby almost—almost—wanted to take the words back, but he couldn't. They had been inside of him too long now to go unsaid at his only chance. Even though his eyes were fixed on Sarah, demanding an explanation, he could feel the fury radiating off of the Goblin King, still standing silent as a statue near them, but he didn't care. This was between him, and Sarah.

"I tried, Toby," said Sarah, her voice still soft, but so rough it made the regret pulse through Toby like an angry bout of illness, "I promise you, I tried. The way between worlds is not so easy. It was enough for me to come back here because I had become a part of this place, and then, it needed me. To go back home another time..."

"Why can't you go back?" he asked pointedly. "Just tell me why. Please."

Sarah opened her mouth to speak, but stopped, looking at a loss for the right words. At that, Jareth took a small step in front of her, blocking her slightly from Toby.
"Enough," he said coldly, his tone bright and terrifying. His eyes were glacial. "Have you come here only to inflict pain, boy?"

"Jareth," said Sarah, all trace of sadness gone from her. Instead, she seemed...not angry, no, but forceful nonetheless. At her tone, Jareth glanced over his shoulder to look at her before stepping away again. Once he was no longer between them, Sarah moved toward Toby, grasping his hands in hers once more.

"Toby," she started, her voice calm as she looked up into his eyes, "I'm sorry. I wish I had been able to find a way. You don't-" her voice shook, but her eyes remained locked on his, "You don't know how much it hurts me, every day, knowing that your life goes on, and I'm here, without you. I won't lie to you. I belong here; was meant to be here, but that doesn't make leaving you, or Dad, or Karen any easier. But it's the way it is."

Toby let out a long, rattling sigh. The sincerity shining out of Sarah's eyes alone made his anger ebb away, much as part of him wanted to hold onto it.

"I love you, you know," he said softly, squeezing her hands fondly, "Even though you're here, far away, I still love you. And I always believed you."

Sarah bit her lip, her eyes sparkling with the threat of tears again.

"I love you too."

A moment passed between them before Sarah let go of his hands, looking down and wiping her eyes.

"Jareth," she said, "Where is she?"

"Of course," said the King, his tone regal. Casually, he conjured a crystal out of thin air. It danced between his fingertips. He smirked at Toby, and held out the crystal.

"She's in a dream," he said softly. "Stand back, and I will bring her here."

Toby obeyed the King's command. Sarah did also, again looping her arm through Toby's. He couldn't make out much as it happened—there was a bright, blinding light, and an earsplitting sound like breaking glass, and then, as the light faded, he could see Emily standing near the King, looking unharmed and terrified.

As soon as she saw Toby, she ran forward and nearly jumped into his arms, sobbing onto his shirt. Sarah untangled herself from him and went to stand with Jareth, letting the woman have a little space.

"It's...it's real," she gasped through sobs, "I never thought...I mean, I did but...how it could be...this place...him...I just..."

As her sobs subsided slightly and her breathing calmed, Emily looked up at Toby standing there somewhat awkwardly.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she blubivered, letting go of him and putting a safe distance between the two of them, "I know I barely know you and I got you into this mess, I just-"

"I came to find you," Toby said gently, interrupting her. He reached out for her hand. She took it, tears still running down her face, but she quieted some.
"I knew you would," she whispered, smiling slightly, "I knew you would know what to do. Sophie has always said you were the best teacher she's ever had, and my daughter is never wrong. Thank you."

"You're welcome," he said, smiling.

She let go his hand, and then slowly turned to face the royal couple behind her.

"Sarah?" she asked breathlessly, seeming surprised to see Sarah standing there, who, despite having been the same age as her in school, looked no older than the last time she had seen her nearly 15 years ago.

"Is that really…?"

Sarah smiled at her, and inclined her head. Thunderstruck, Emily glanced back at Toby, and then back to the King and Queen.

"Well," she said slowly, placing a hand over her heart, "Isn't that something."

At that, Jareth took a step forward, causing Emily to take a frightened step back. He raised an eyebrow, and spoke to both of them.

"Be mindful of your words," he said, his eyes bright and mischievous, "Particularly when reading stories—you never know who might be listening."

He looked back at a large, ornate clock with a face of thirteen that Toby hadn't noticed was there, and then at Sarah.

"Time is short. You must say your goodbyes, my love."

Sarah rushed forward, catching Toby in a tight hug. He hugged her back just as tightly.

"Goodbye," she said, her voice cracking.

"I don't care what he says," Toby whispered, "I'll tell the story, Sarah...a story about the Queen who wore the stars, who leads the good-hearted to victory. Your story. I promise."

He heard her chuckle slightly against his chest. After a moment, they broke away from each other, and Sarah smiled at Emily next to him before stepping back from the pair, holding an unsteady hand to cover her mouth.

Jareth stepped forward, holding another crystal in his palm.

"Take hold of each other's hands," he instructed. Toby and Emily obeyed him, glancing at each other.

He held out the crystal to Toby.

"A crystal, nothing more. But if you turn it this way..."

He grinned wickedly.

Toby reached out to take it, but then paused. His eyes found Sarah's.

"Sarah," he said, quietly, "Are you...are you happy?"
The smile that Sarah gave to then him was so beautiful, it matched Jareth's easily; in fact, it outstripped his by leaps and bounds.

"Oh yes," Sarah replied, her eyes wet, "Oh yes."

And at that, Toby smiled, and took hold of the offered crystal. Hand in hand with Emily, he was whisked away, back to the world of the waking.

_The End_

Chapter End Notes

Well, that’s it. I’m sad that’s it over, really. For me, this has been a years-long idea, and to see it come to an end is both extremely gratifying, as well as sad. But, I’m just happy that there are people out there who also enjoyed it as much as me. I thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for reading, following, kudos-ing, and leaving me such fantastic feedback in the form of comments. As writers yourselves, I’m sure you know how much this means, so again, thank you.

The one thing I’ll say about this ending is that it was hard to write. To be honest, part of me wanted to leave it at part 1, but I had to continue. I had to let you guys know what Sarah had become, because to me, it’s too important to who she is and her journey as a woman.

If anyone has questions about the ending, I will gladly answer them. Again, thank you all! It’s been a wonderful ride. :)

End Notes

Thanks for reading!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://www.archiveofourown.org) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!