How to Catch a Goblin King

by ViciouslyWitty

Summary

What happens when Sarah accidentally crashes a goblin royal wedding and inadvertently proposes to the groom?
What happens when the groom accepts?

They're bound of course.

After all, what's said is said. You are cordially invited to an Underground wedding.

Notes

Credit: The prompt of interrupted/accidental marriage was 100 percent inspired by the first chapter of the fic Wedding Bells by whythokylo (OpalElephant). It's an awesome(!) WIP in the Star Wars fandom (Reylo). Seriously go read it if you like that pairing. Or even if you don't, read it anyway. I really, really hope she finishes it.
I've never done this before (borrowed someone else's idea) so when I got this plot bunny to adapt it for Labyrinth I immediately reached out to the author, who was most gracious and lent me her permission (many thanks!). This chapter mirrors her first chapter in plot. Credit needs to go to her for that idea.
The rest of the story will veer away sharply (and be wholly mine) but damned if this scenario was just TOO fun to write. I had to explore this trope with our dynamic duo.
• Inspired by *Wedding Bells* by whythokylo (OpalElephant)
The Wedding

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"In olden times, sacrifices were made at the altar, a practice which is still very much practiced."

Helen Rowland

It was all Hoggle's fault.

Or at least that's what Sarah would tell herself later. A balm to soothe her wounded pride.

It was his fault she'd even been in the Underground, she reasoned. His fault she'd gotten turned around. For a caretaker he really was abysmal with directions. His fault she'd opened the door the wrong way. Again.

And most assuredly his fault for not warning her what was happening on the other side. *If you open it this way...*

As Sarah stepped through the door she gracelessly tripped over the uneven flag stone and swore.

The first indication that she was decidedly NOT in the Goblin Market, was the fact that her creative profanity echoed rather spectacularly. The second indication that she was not amongst the lower denizens of the Labyrinth, ready to barter and trade their wares, was the sudden hushed silence followed by exclamations of surprise and indignation.

The third and final, most damning, indication was the realization that she was clearly crashing some sort of ceremony.

"Oh... Fuck," Sarah breathed. It echoed just as loudly in what appeared to be a great hall.

Two hundred odd faces peered back at her - their expressions a cross between amusement and censure. The beautiful guests were quite lavishly dressed for what was evidently a celebration. A further scan suggested a wedding. The hall itself, whose tall walls were intricately carved, had no roof, so that the skies in every shade of azure and crimson was its canopy. It was breathtaking, Sarah would admit later when she'd had time to reflect, had it not been festooned with flowers, candles, crystals, and gaudy accents of chartreuse.

She immediately turned around to flee but the door she'd just come through - the one that *should* have led to the Goblin Market stalls had she opened it the right way - was, because of course, gone.

The couple-to-be were kneeling facing a stone, rather archaic looking, altar. The priest, or whatever kind of officiant he was, held a braided cord and a rather lethal looking dagger. He was obviously on the cusp of binding the bride and groom. In fact he looked just as surprised as Sarah - their faces almost comically mirrored - until his cleared into another expression altogether. One that might have alarmed her had she thought about it long enough. He looked expectantly towards the bride.

The hitherto silent crowd began to murmur. The hush rising to something almost alive with anticipation. There was a spike of energy in the air that even Sarah felt. It made the hair on her neck prickle.
She was keenly aware that everyone was looking at her and then back at the bride. Keenly aware that she was underdressed and uninvited. Keenly aware that she was mortal in a room full of magical beings.

Two things happened at once.

A small, knightly voice, said, "My Lady?" and the bride leapt to her feet with a shrill shriek of indignation. Sarah only had a moment to register that the speaker was Sir Didymus, and that he was staring at her rather hopefully, dressed in the most ridiculous page boy outfit she'd ever seen, before the bride was running full tilt down the aisle towards her. Belatedly she realized that the bride must have snatched the ceremonial blade and was brandishing it like she'd very much like to gut Sarah with it.

Sarah could well-understand her being upset that she'd interrupted her wedding, but murder seemed a bit of an overreaction. Before the bride could close the distance, Sir Didymus, who'd clearly leapt into knightly action and followed the murderous bride, tossed his spear gallantly to Sarah. Sarah caught it after it smacked into her face. Sarah braced herself, eyes wide and nose throbbing. None of the other guests seem invested in stopping either Sarah or the bride, but were content to watch the inevitable battle. With a sinking sense of impending doom, she realized she was entirely on her own.

And the Doom did come, though not in the way she had expected.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that one should never run with sharp things. All creatures know that.

The bride, her pinched face a mask of fury, had clearly forgotten. The uneven flagstone of the hall found its second victim. She went down in a flurry of silk and skirts. There was a grunt, a rather disgusting squelching sound and then a moan. The woman rolled onto her back, her face now pinched in pain and disbelief, as she clutched her side. The gilded hilt of the dagger protruded from the chartreuse dress - now slowly staining red.

Sarah gaped at her, her own disbelief patent. All she had wanted to do was find her ring. The one she'd given to the Wiseman so many years ago. The one Hoggle had sworn he'd seen for sale amongst the baubles and trinkets. Maybe pick up some goblin tchotchkes for Toby.

But instead bloodshed.

She mouthed a sorry at the bride, though later she would consider it rather charitable of her. The bride would certainly not have apologized for impaling her. Still, she reasoned that though she was having a no good, very bad day, the bride was probably having a worse one - first an interrupted wedding and now a nasty knife wound, albeit self-inflicted. Not exactly every girl's dream.

Add salt to the wound that the groom didn't seem overly concerned neither by the interruption nor by his wife-to-be's injury. She looked up right into the mismatched eyes of an approaching Goblin King.

Sarah swore for the third time, this time uncaring of her breach in decorum. She immediately opened her mouth to apologize, though unsure what she'd say beyond, hey, long time no see. What's it been? Like 10 years? Sorry for ruining your wedding. Congratulations. Oh and double sorry for indirectly causing your wife to stab herself. We should grab coffee sometime.

Of course she didn't get a chance to say of it.

The Goblin King, eyes locked on Sarah's face with an expression that was part amusement, part
something altogether more intense, extended a hand and said, "I accept."

His words echoed far louder than any of Sarah's epithets. The crowd exhaled collectively, like they'd been holding their breath in anticipation of how everything played out.

Distantly, she caught whispers of, 'the Champion', and 'the girl who ate the peach', and 'I'm so glad I came today after all, I love a good stabbing'.

Before she could return more than a brief look of confusion, he took her hand and folded it into his own, recognizing that she was apparently not going to touch him willingly.

Sarah jerked as though stabbed herself. He was not wearing his usual gloves, and his hand was strong and surprisingly warm around hers. Something like electricity sparked against her skin.

It jolted her into awareness. "Wait... accept what?" She tugged on her hand, but his grip was implacable.

"Your offer of marriage," he replied evenly.

Sarah stopped pulling altogether. "... excuse me... MY WHAT?"

Jareth ignored her outburst and flicked his hand imperiously at the officiant. The be-robed man jumped into action and began hurrying down the aisle.

Sarah looked to the guests for confirmation that their monarch was certifiable.

Nothing. Not one flicker of surprise.

She shook her head and hissed, "I'm not sure what's going on here but I most certainly did not ask you to marry me."

Jareth's lip curled just enough to rankle even more. "Oh, but you did."

Despite what the current predicament suggested, Sarah was, in fact, not stupid. It occurred to her that marriages worked differently in the underground. It would have been easy for her to misstep during such a foreign ceremony. Literally. As the fallen, and stabbed, bride proved.

Sarah forced a calm she decidedly did not feel into her voice. "Supposing I INADVERTANTLY AND UNINTENTIONALLY, somehow asked you to," she swallowed the overwhelming sense of panic, "marry me. It was an accident and I take it back."

Jareth's mouth formed a full smile that did nothing to relax her. "Oh, but you did."

Sarah nodded vigorously.

Thin lips twitched and Sarah anticipated he was going to enjoy what he said next. "What's said is said."

"Not that again," she pulled a face. "And I literally said nothing."

"Actually your language thus far has been fairly... colourful. But true. You said nothing. Nothing needed to be spoken. Your actions are what matters. You stopped a very ancient Underground rite at," he finished with relish, "the precise time it could be stopped."

"An a-c-c-ident."
"As you say," he agreed cordially. "But the fact remains you accidentally challenged the bride for the right to wed the king. A very sacred honour and one not to be undertaken lightly."

"It was undertaken accidentally!" Sarah protested, feeling like everything was spinning.

"Yes, you keep saying that like you expect it to change something. The point is you won." He leaned in so only she could hear the last, his breath fanning hotly on the shell of her ear in a way that made her nerves dance. "Again."

Sarah stopped her fight for a minute, both shell-shocked and acutely aware everyone in the hall was hanging on every word they exchanged.

Feeling her small submission, Jareth tightened his hold on her hand. "This time I'm far from angry. Consider me in your debt, precious." He eyed the fallen bride. "Arranged marriages are always a disappointment. Her blood spilling first marks her defeat."

"Aha! But she cut herself. I didn't even touch her!"

Jareth ignored her burst of enthusiasm. "And your victory demonstrates both your worthiness to take her place and, more importantly, your desire to do so." There was no mistaking the smug satisfaction in his words, nor the look he gave her. "I accept your offering."

Somewhere amongst the guests a voice sighed like it was the most romantic thing heard. Sarah realized it was Didymus.

Right then and there she decided she would absolutely kill Hoggle. Rend him limb from limb. The bog was far too good for him.

That would have to wait of course. The immediate threat was standing by her side - far too closely.

Her voice warbled only slightly when she spoke. "You must know I have no intention of marrying you."

If the victorious look he directed her felt like a slap in the face, the words he spoke next were an absolute cudgel.

"My dear, champion, you already did."

Chapter End Notes

Dun Dun Dun!
I love the arranged marriage/forced marriage trope. Here's the accidental one.
This will probably be borderline crack. Definitely lighter fare than the Goblin Market and the fic which shall not be named*. I should be working on that one but I've had this pressing on my brain for months and I needed to get it out. *breathes deeply and groans* That's better.
Thanks to LFFL for working as a sounding board for ceremony ideas. More on that later.
*I swear to GOD I am almost ready to post the next chap to Tanglewood. It's written - I'm just editing it because I keep changing my damn mind about order of events (whines pathetically).
"Marriage is an adventure, like going to war."

G. K. Chesterton

This time there was no echo.
None.
Instead his response shot like an arrow straight into her head. Her thoughts scattered - turned nebulous. Amorphous... pea soup like.
None of them were particularly helpful either.

...Run...
...Or maybe stand so still they won't notice you...

...At least Karen will finally be happy... and bonus - no drunken Uncle Tom with his infamous wedding toasts...

...Would not have chosen that colour but actually the flowers aren't that bad...

...Run...

...Would I be Mrs. ... Goblin Queen? Did he even have a last name? Not that she'd take it anyway. And he's a king so not Mrs. Anything actually...

...WHY AREN'T YOU RUNNING, YOU FOOL!

...No wait... say something first... something pithy or scathing. Anything. They are all staring at you, you idiot!

Someone cleared their throat.
Sarah's mind cleared enough to register that the priest was saying something to Jareth and gesturing between them. Jareth eyed her, his gaze calculating, and then nodded. And not in the, this was just all a prank don't you find it funny, reassuring kind of way.

Before she could do anything else the Goblin King thrust their joined hands forward.
The priest cleared his throat again, this time looking decidedly uncomfortable. Jareth's expression grew annoyed. Impatient.
Following suit the guests began to murmur again.
The priest towards her and whispered, "You don't happen to have a knife on you, do you miss?"
By rote, Sarah almost began to feel her pockets before she caught herself and hissed, "No, of course
I don't! This is NOT a real wedding."

"I'll admit it's a bit unorthodox but we'll set it all right" he tutted in a way she assumed was meant to be reassuring.

She turned her attention back to the figure holding her in place. "Let. Me. Go."

Jareth ignored her demand before looking down, and letting out a satisfied, "aha." He bent swiftly, half tugging Sarah with him, and used his free hand to grip the dagger still protruding from his ex-fiancée. "I fear I owe you more apologies, my dear. Though I'd wager you'd rather be free of this of anyway."

The woman gaped at him incredulously as he tugged. It made another awful squelching sound upon exiting. Jareth frowned at the blood-stained blade, eyes considering and then dismissing his impeccable wedding suit, before settling on the green dress. "Another apology for your collection."
He wiped it clean.

It was difficult to say if the bride or Sarah looked more appalled.

The Goblin King rose and proffered the blade hilt first to the priest.

Even though she knew what was about to happen, the first thing out of her mouth was not the requisite 'hell no', and instead, "That is incredibly unhygienic," in what she hoped was a suitably chiding tone. She glanced back down at the prostrate woman. "No offence."

The priest drew the dagger across Jareth's palm and then reached for Sarah's.

"Like hell!" she protested, guarding her hand. And then her expression lit up. "If I refuse this we're not really married, right?"

Jareth shot her a withering look. "This is a mere formality, Sarah. What's done is done. We are already married in every sense of the word."

Sarah looked to the priest for confirmation. He inclined his head. Bastard. "Well then if it's only a formality, I still refuse!"

"But don't you feel the sacred bond already?" The priest interjected, still clearly trying to be helpful. "The pull to be one?"

"I feel many things. None of them married. I feel angry," Sarah began counting fingers on her free hand, "disgusted, embarrassed, disappointed, and maybe just a little bit nauseous."


She let loose a sound of impotent rage.

"Ladies choice of course." Jareth demurred calmly, belied by the sly look in his eyes. "If you'd prefer we can do the more ancient version of the binding rite. It's largely fallen out of practice but I'm game if you are."

"What's the other version," she asked by rote, already suspecting she would in no way like the answer judging by the hopeful expressions beginning to litter the older - mostly male - guests' faces.

"Consummation on the sacred altar of course."

Her eyes locked on the stone dais with a sense of mounting mortification. He had to be joking. They
snapped back to the Goblin King when she realized he'd begun to undo his cravat, while tugging the collar of his shirt open.

There were several feminine - and male - exclamations of excitement from the crowd, as well as a rather jubilant, "Bloodshed and a show! What a wedding!"

"This. Is. Insane."

Another button popped open.

"Stop that!" Though her eyes kept trailing back to his long fingers and the pale skin they were slowly revealing. "This is so not happening."

"I understand your reluctance to disrobe in front of all the soot and sundry - we can work around that - but we have to give the guests some skin. It would be uncharitable otherwise." He winked at a nearby woman who promptly began fanning herself with her companion's beard.

In the distraction, Sarah failed to notice the Goblin King's subtle nod to the priest. Second to never running with sharp objects was always keep your eyes on the enemy. Preferably his face, Sarah would add later.

"Well I suppose we don't need this after all," the priest announced loudly and then made motions as though he were going to return the knife - literally - to the sheath of flesh from whence it had come.

Three things happened at once.

The ex-bride squealed in protest. Sarah shouted and instinctively bent to stop him. The priest twisted the knife at the last moment so that Sarah's hand closed about the blade instead of the hilt.

"Son of a bitch!" This time the echo was thundering.

The priest immediately looked affronted. "I'll have you know my mother was a very respectable ogress and not a mongrel!"

Jareth had stopped undressing much to the disappointment of at least half the congregation. He caught Sarah's injured hand up in his own - palm to palm. The contact stung painfully, but overlaying it was the sensation of something else altogether. Electricity danced up her arm like lightning.

Not one to waste her rare silence, the priest bound their hands together with a silken cord, tying it closed with an intricate knot. He then spoke words in a language Sarah didn't understand, though she suspected she wouldn't like. The cords glowed, almost blindingly, and then melted into their skin and disappeared.

There was a collective sigh as though everybody has released a breath at once. The priest beamed approvingly. Jareth looked caught between a mixture of relief and intense satisfaction.

Finally free Sarah began clawing at her skin. "What the hell was that?"

"It means the union has been accepted and blessed! It is now sacrosanct." Sarah turned murderous. "I thought you said it was only a formality?!"

"A slip of the tongue... wife."

His words were greeted with joyous applause. It looked like someone let off a glitter cannon. In the
meantime, the bride's family had finally come to collect her. Half of them looked ready to gut Sarah, and the other half looked relieved as though they'd been against the wedding in the first place. Sarah would wonder about that later.

Thankfully there didn't seem to be the convention of kissing expected. In fact, having released her Jareth was gleefully accepting congratulations from every angle and was paying little attention paid to her.

Sarah received a few well-meaning pats but when it became clear the guests were in danger of being bitten she was given space.

Sir Didymus appeared silently at her side. He bowed deeply. "My heartfelt congratulations, my lady. Or should I say, your majesty."

Sarah blinked, a frown curling her lips. "What did you just call me?"

"Er... it was a lovely wedding."

A look of disbelief.

"Well, I mean... it was a wedding."

Sarah snorted. "Certainly not the way I envisioned it." She scanned the hall for any type of available alcohol.

"Less bloodshed, my lady?"

"Less Chartreuse."

Didymus nodded, one paw brushing against his ridiculous page boy outfit self-consciously.

"Less bloodshed too. Less glitter. Less magic." She glanced at the Goblin King. "Less..." But trailed off because that wouldn't have been entirely true if she were being honest. A thought she did not want to explore further.

And then it occurred to her that she was, for the first time since she entered the hall, being largely ignored. She snagged the fox by the collar. "Act natural and follow me."

Sarah began backing towards the far end of the hall slowly, a Crest-worthy smile plastered on her face as she acknowledged any guest who happened to glance her way. For his part Sir-Didymus was surprisingly quiet, seemingly amendable towards whatever quest she had in mind. Or perhaps just eager to change his clothes.

When they reached the far alcove, Sarah ducked behind a pillar. "You must know of another way out."

"My lady?" he asked doubtfully.

"I'm getting out of here, Didymus. Right now."

"But-"

Sarah affected a pleading, guileless voice. "Should you need us..."

The fox sighed in resignation and then scowled. "You still owe me a game of Scrabble." He tugged her by the hand and led her to one of the tapestries adorning the high stone walls. A furtive glance in
all directions and then he lifted it, pushing her under with surprising strength

And then she was falling.

Again.

"Didymus!"

And then hands.

Everywhere.

Faces began to form. "Up or down?"

"Oh, god. Not you again!" Sarah squirmed in their grip.

"Us again?" one face asked.

Fingers conferred amongst themselves. "It's the girl."

"The Champion."

"Hoo, hoo, hoo. Bit more to her this time."

Sarah jerked in indignation. "Hey! Watch what you're touching there, buddy!"

"Up or down?" the first demanded again.

"We haven't got all day."

Tired and indignant, and most importantly, remembering what had happened the last time she'd been there, Sarah firmly answered, "Up. Definitely."

"Are you sure?" They crooned in unison.

"What? Why?!"

"Too late now!"

Sarah was propelled forcibly upwards with surprising speed and not a few gropes that she suspected were not entirely accidental. And then she jerked sideways, as though by an invisible cord.

Or a leash, she'd think later.

When Sarah emerged from what she could only describe as a reverse birth, it was straight back into the hall and right into the arms of a rather amused looking Goblin King.

"Going somewhere?"

"You have got to be kidding me," she groaned.

"Duties await," he tsked and then directed a rather pointed look at a cowering Didymus who wouldn't quite meet Sarah eyes.

Sarah pushed off him. "I was going somewhere actually. Out of here. Right now in fact."

To her surprise and what should have been much more suspicion, he inclined his head. "As you
wish. But maybe try the door."

The door had since reappeared. Frowning, she opened it.

And then immediately shut it again, pressing her back against it for extra measure.

If getting married in front of a bunch of otherworldly and preternaturally beautiful guests was mortifying, realizing that what must be the entire Goblin citizenry was waiting outside to congratulate them was worse. In the brief second she'd popped her head out of the door, there had been confused silence and then, almost in unison, a great cacophony of hoots, hollers, and cheers of jubilation.

Chickens were being released on cue like doves - although not released so much as tossed, which resulted in a rather short-lived flurry of feathers and then panicked descents punctuated by frantic clucking. The Fierys, obviously in attendance, had begun to throw body parts like confetti. Sarah felt the thud against the door behind her as an errant head narrowly missed her.

The day, it would seem, was getting worse.

So much for a hasty and secret escape before anyone knew.

Jareth was trying - not very hard, mind - to contain laughter. At her expense. Sarah decided in that moment she'd kill him first and get Hoggle later.

Mariticide and regicide for the price of one.

The inner guests had begun to congregate, obviously ready to begin the wedding procession and start whatever debauched revelry an Underground wedding entailed.

"I am NOT going out there."

"Come, come, Sarah. Since when are you such a coward?"

"Sorry to disappoint." Her voice turned sweet. "I'm sure we could arrange an annulment."

He smiled beatifically at her.

And then the door opened behind her the other way.

Worse than being thrust into a marriage she didn't want, forcibly leashed with some type of magic fuckery, and then groped by "helping" hands, was being spilled unceremoniously onto her bum in front of all the denizens of the Labyrinth while the Goblin King preened regally beside her.

"All hail the Goblin King Jareth!"

Jareth waved a gloved hand gracelessly.

"All hail the Goblin Queen Sarah!"

Sarah rose unsteadily, rubbing her bruised posterior.

Jareth slipped an arm about her waist. She jabbed him sharply in the ribs to no avail. "Smile prettily, darling, less they eat you alive."

"Figure of speech?"

The Goblin King grinned again. "There are some factions here who haven't quite forgiven you, Precious."
"Including you?" she rounded on him. "Is that what this is all about?"

Whatever he'd been about to say was drowned out by galloping hoof beats. The most otherworldly carriage Sarah had ever seen pulled up to the steps below them. The carriage itself was of highly polished dark wood, with finely wrought details and carved to look harrowing wings. The interior was lined in dark, intricately cut leather. It reminded her of his armour the first time she'd ever seen him. More impressive yet were the steeds. Sarah could only describe them as some unholy mix of dragon and war horse. Their ribs were prominent, their heads all sharp angles and hard lines like a dragon's. Their breath came out in steaming gusts suggesting smoke, and their eyes were obsidian black, almost obscured by thick, glossy manes. They shuffled impatiently, great hooves stamping while their wings - leathery like a bat's - stretched and flexed impressively. It looked like something Hades would have driven to steal Persephone.

Sarah's palm began to itch. Perhaps not far off.

Jareth took her momentary stillness to clasp her hand and whisk her into the carriage before she could protest. She imagined she made a rather ungainly site, tripping over her feet as she was mostly dumped onto a seat. Not to mention underdressed compared to almost everyone else, especially the groom. She stood, intending to jump right back out of the carriage and make another break for it, when the Goblin King whistled a command. The winged-beasts immediately surged forward, crowd parting both in deference and a sense of self-preservation.

Unprepared for the jolt of forward momentum, Sarah ended up in the Goblin King's lap. His arms settled heavily around her waist. There more hoots and hollers, now closer to catcalls and whistles, from the mixed crowd - fey and Goblin alike. As the carriage set an ungodly pace towards the castle, an untrained eye might have thought they looked the picture of romance.

A more discerning eye would have noticed that the groom appeared rather more smug than smitten, a half-smile bowing his lips as he calmly ignored the struggles of the blushing bride in his lap. And the bride herself was not so much blushing as turning red from her futile efforts while very loudly swearing to chop off his royal balls if he didn't let her go.

A waving goblin sniffed, wiping its eyes, and then nose, on his companion's shirt as they drove out of sight. "I do loves a good wedding."

Chapter End Notes

My work computer's search history now includes "what's it called when you kill your husband?" Mariticide. That's what it's called.
I can't believe the response to this fic so far. You guys are da best! I had a blast writing this chapter and I've already jumped ahead and written some future scenes I've got planned. Bring on the crack! And smut because I will never miss an opportunity to make these two smush (after much UST and cock-blocking). Next up... the reception! In the meantime I DID keep my promise to update Tanglewood. Finally.
"Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society."

**Mark Twain**

A combination of factors kept Sarah momentarily silent.

One, the carriage was flying at a breakneck pace. Two, the shock of how one wrong turn could result in a whiplash marriage was finally settling in. Three, she was seated ON the Goblin King's lap.

The Goblin King who was now her husband.

Even Alice couldn't have believed in such an impossible thing.

Though her eyes were glued to the road ahead, she still felt the smile behind her.

"Do you always get off on being this insufferable?"

His breath fanned warmly on her neck when he laughed. "I 'get off' on my many things, Sarah."

She froze.

"Oh, don't stop on my account."

"How about you stop enjoying this?"

"Then," this time his words teased the shell of her ear instead, "you'd have to stop squirming."

"Kindly let me go." She was pretty sure her attempt at sounding 'calm' and 'nice' was somewhat negated by the clenched teeth.

Surprisingly, he finally did.

And entirely without warning. So that in her strain to break his hold she ended up catapulting herself into the adjacent seat.

Righting herself with a scowl, she quickly discovered sitting beside him was really no better. His thigh, distractingly warm and firm, was pressed against hers thanks to the confines of the seat. And now, no longer quite so flustered, she had time to recognize much to her disdain just how good he smelled. And how impeccably dressed he was. Though she supposed irritably that when one intentionally got married, as opposed to tripping into it, one took care with one's appearance.

*Married.*

*To the Goblin King.*

She really needed a drink. And time to regroup. Form a strategy.

The castle, in all its goblin glory, crested over the horizon. It was exactly as she remembered it -
twisted spires and impossible angles. There was a certain irony in dreading their swift approach when once she'd been so desperate to find it. When she was a little girl she'd dreamt of living in a castle. Married to royalty. Childhood her really should have been more specific.

The sunset was rather spectacular, she owned. The last time she'd been in the Underground there'd been no time to appreciate its beauty. Outside the sprawling Labyrinth, rather than the wasteland Sarah remembered, they instead passed breathtaking gardens. Within them were topiary trees cut into the most imaginative of beasts. The carriage took yet another bend and then well-trimmed trees lined the road so that it almost looked like they were heading to an English estate in some Jane Austen novel.

Had it not been for the horses-cum-dragons.

Or the twisted Labyrinth and castle just beyond.

Or the fact that Mr. Darcy was the Goblin King.

"How are you enjoying my lands?"

Sarah started at the question. It was asked so nonchalantly; like he was just politely wondering how she liked her visit.

"It's..." she trailed off and rounded on him. "This is insane, you know?"

He gave her a long lazy look. "Indeed. Imagine my surprise to find the former champion of the Labyrinth vying for my hand in marriage."

"We both know that's not what happened. This is entirely your fault."

"So you keep saying. And yet, do note, Sarah, I didn't interrupt your wedding uninvited."

She didn't care for the sudden glint in his eye and pretended to find her nail beds interesting.

"Is that it? The cause of all these maidenly protestations. Is your pride wounded that I never came after you? That I never confessed undying love? Or perhaps," Sarah could tell he was enjoying himself, "perhaps that I didn't concoct some elaborate plan to trick you back here? Is that what you wanted?"

Sarah frowned, a betraying tick in her jaw. "I only came here to get my ring back." Only a partial lie. "I traded it, for what turned out to be rather useless information, and I want it back. That's all."

"Yes. You must be impatient to have it back," he grinned, "after ten years of doing without. Until today."

"It's not the first time I've been back."

"Then it sounds like you were the one who couldn't stay away."

Realizing she'd been cornered, Sarah lapsed back into mulish silence. How could she explain that it had started about a few months ago? That she'd, entirely on an innocent and largely nostalgic whim, reached out to Hoggle through her old mirror, and then was both stunned and relieved when he'd answered. Anything she said would betray Hoggle. Not that he didn't deserve it, considering. But after they'd been so careful to stay off the radar, she didn't relish implicating herself further.

Jareth reached out and closed her mouth with one finger. "Don't think I wasn't aware every time you
set foot here, Sarah."

She was still digesting his comment when they arrived at the Labyrinth's gates. Ceremonial guards flanked them and as the carriage approached, they flung the doors open and stood to attention. Once inside, rather than the twists and turns which had nearly foiled her last time, there was instead a direct path to the castle littered in rose petals. They too were a horrid shade of green.

Sarah was still considering throwing herself - or preferably him - under the wheels of the carriage when they entered the confines of the Goblin City. The inclination was all the more tempting when Sarah realized that even more inhabitants were lined up to cheer their arrival. Every goblin in existence.

More chickens flew through the air haphazardly. So did a few goblins.

The Goblin King looked entirely in his element, magnanimously accepting the effusive praise with a sanctimonious grin here and a nauseatingly pretentious nod there. Sarah felt sick. More literally so when she realized the sudden crunching sounds were the 'horses' snagging a few of the flying fowl mid-air and chomping on them like tossed carrots.

And then it got worse.

"You have got to be kidding me!"

There in the middle of the square, just beyond the throngs, was a sort of monument. Cast in burnished metal, it was clearly meant to commemorate the sacking of the Goblin city. Complete with an unmistakable rendition of herself. Unmistakable but not in the least flattering. Her nose was nowhere near that large. Nor were her eyes so close together. And nor had she ever bowed down to the Goblin King. The monument, however, showed a towering Jareth standing tall, arms extended benevolently in a way Sarah was fairly certain he had never done in his life, while the Sarah figure knelt at his feet, cowering and clearly humbled by defeat. A few Goblins were shown genuflecting in thanks to their saviour monarch.

To add insult to injury, just then one of the 'flying' chickens emptied its bowels on her likeness's head.

"You don't like it?"

Sarah snorted rudely.

"I rather think they captured my likeness quite well."

"Oh?" she asked, her voice deceptively sweet. "My recollection was more that you offered me everything and then still lost everything in the end."

"Look at you," he replied blandly. "Already sounding like a wife."

The carriage pulled up to the stone steps and Jareth stood, immaculate as ever whilst Sarah plucked feathers and possibly viscera from her hair. He extended a hands towards her. She immediately crossed her arms defensively and ignored him.

"I'm not going anywhere."

"Come, come, Sarah. What is this childish behaviour all about?"

"Childish? Are you serious?" Another snort. "I'm staying right here. You go on ahead."
"Darling," he chided. "This is really no way to start married life."

"I perfectly agree. Let's call it off."

"What's said is said."

"Aha! I never actually said anything! No I dos. Nothing. If I said anything it was no. No, no, no, no," she finger counted, "and what was it? NO."

Jareth calmly reached out and plucked a feather from her hair. Her rage spiked even further.

"Let me make this perfectly clear." She punctuated each word with a finger jab. "I reject this marriage. I reject you. And there's no way in hell I'm walking into that castle."

"On that final note we can agree. Traditions should always be respected."

Before Sarah could do more than look confused, he'd snared her arm and used it to toss her over his shoulder like a rag doll.

While she knew she was on the slim side, he did it without so much as a grunt of effort. Her world turned upside down in an instant and she found herself staring down at his rather firm looking arse.

A hand landed heavily across her thighs. "The queen and I offer our thanks!"

"Like hell," she squeaked.

"Let the celebrations begin! And," Jareth allowed for dramatic pause, "the very best Goblin ale from my personal cellar will freely flow until the last goblin standing."

The hordes went wild. Wild enough that it drowned out Sarah's creative and rather vulgar invectives demanding he put her down immediately.

Unsurprising to anyone, he didn't.

Ascending the stairs, Sarah was now able to see the goblins cheering as their king manhandled her like a sack of potatoes into the castle. From her vantage she was also able to see that one of the goblins had taken it upon themselves to use the chicken shit to paint a veil on her statue's head. She added that fellow to her list. Right below Jareth and Hoggle and the priest.

Just over the threshold, Jareth let her down...

,,in a slow inexorable slide down his body; an arm curling around her waist to hold her in place.

She aimed an elbow. "That was totally mortifying!"

He dodged. "That was tradition. You did say you wouldn't walk. Aren't brides carried over the threshold above ground too?"


"Then it seems our traditions differ more than I thought. Although there's some overlap."

"Doubtful."

And then he kissed her.
The kiss that didn't happen at the church.

The kiss she wasn't expecting so that her mouth was still open ever so slightly.

The kiss in front of all the goblins.

Distantly she thought she heard applause. And cat calls. And whistles. She might have wondered if it was her inner goddess, but knowing as she did that such a thing does not exist and was patently stupid, she instead recognized that it was all the inhabitants of the Labyrinth watching the Goblin King kiss her.

He'd dipped her back so dramatically that for a moment she was weightless. Her fists curled into the lapels of his coat out of self-preservation. His lips were firm and soft against hers, moving with confidence despite her lack of participation. His tongue teased the edge of her mouth, and then dipped in to taste her briefly, taking advantage of her stunned gasp of surprise.

Of course he broke the kiss before her sanity returned and she could bite him. Which she definitely tried.

Jareth acknowledged the crowds once more, a sort of indolent, self-satisfied conquering grin on his face that made Sarah want to smack it off, and then vanished them both.

Sarah reappeared alone in what turned out to be some type of lavishly appointed bathroom.

Only the Goblin King could have facilities so completely over the top. It looked like some type of hedonistic roman bathhouse. There was a sunken tub in the centre of the room that was approximately the same size as the swimming pool at Sarah's condo. The lining of it appeared to be cut from dark lapis - golden veins running through it. The floor was tiled in some type of iridescent crystal with more accents of lapis. The walls were arched and ornately carved, with lush couches set into the alcoves. Above them were mosaics of what Sarah could only suppose were sea nymphs frolicking... or maybe strippers doing the kinds of things you had to tip generously to see. The tall arched windows let in an abundance of diffused light so that everything glowed warmly.

Her solitariness lasted only so long.

A door, recessed and almost entirely obscured by gauzy fabrics, flew open and a succession of breathtakingly beautiful fey women glided in dressed in white Grecian style gowns. Behind them came another succession of goblin women carrying an assortment of vials and bottles and cloths and tools.

Without saying a word of greeting, they proceeded to maul Sarah. Maul is the only way she could describe it. Hands pulled at her shirt and pants, she lost a shoe before she even knew what had happened. It took her a moment to realize they were trying to undress and not kill her. That's when the slapping really started.

"What are you doing?!” Slap. "Stop that!" Another.

She felt her fly opened. As she tried to redo it, her shirt was unbuttoned in lightning speed.

There was a collective breath and the hands stilled for a moment. One of the women canted her head and then sharply poked Sarah in the breast.

"Hey!" It took her a moment to realize they were arrested by her bra. Apparently human undergarments were quite different from theirs.
Sarah clutched the folds of her shirt closed protectively. "What do you think you are doing?"

"Attending the queen of course," replied a lilting voice - far too sweetly to have come from the one that just tried for second base.

"By 'attending' do you mean forcibly stripping? And I'm not the queen."

Glances were exchanged and then another one reached out and patted Sarah on the arm patronizingly. "It's normal to be a bit confused and overwhelmed on your wedding day, your majesty."

Sarah removed the hand. "Please stop calling me that." She then slapped another hand. "And please stop trying to get into my pants!"

"But you need to bathe. Do mortals normally bathe in their clothes?" More exchanged glances. "Is that why you are all so disgusting?"

The earnestness with which it was asked made it still all the more. "No," Sarah replied defensively. "But neither do we need assistance to get undressed."

She was met with light laughter and then expectant stares.

"And neither do we have an audience while getting undressed."

"Is it because your bodies are so hideous you hide them in shame?" Even worse this time the question was asked by a goblin.

A vein began throbbing on Sarah's forehead. "I,, what... no! We are just fully capable of taking a bath alone."

More annoying bell-like laughter. "So are royalty. But why should they? His majesty enjoys the assistance."

"Oh I bet he does!" Sarah snorted. "Thank you, but I don't require a bath at this time." That wasn't entirely true. It was hard not to notice that she still had chicken feathers in her hair. Or that she was ever so slightly covered in dried sweat, either from her time exploring with Hoggle, or from nerves since she'd opened the door the wrong way. It was also hard not to notice that half the attendants were immaculately clean and perfumed by comparison.

"But you can't put on your gown..." the fey lady trailed off, "looking and smelling like that,"

"Wait, what? What gown?"

"For the wedding feast of course? His majesty said you'd want to change out of... of those," again there was a telling pause, "clothes."

"A feast. Of course!" Sarah relaxed marginally.

A few more exchanged glances. "Naturally What did you think we were bathing you for?"

"Well... nothing. Nothing."

"Oh!" exclaimed the one who had poked her in the boob. "You thought we were bathing you for the wedding night!" There were collective murmurs of understanding. "That's not until much later. Unless you wanted to skip the feast go straight to that?" She didn't wait for an answer and motioned to one of the goblins. "Go and inform his majesty that the queen requires consummation of the
marriage immediately."

Sarah dove for the goblin. "No, no, no, no! Feast is good."

The fey considered her doubtfully.

"I am very hungry. For food," she added quickly when it looked like they still might go and collect their king. When the attempt at undressing resumed, Sarah gave a withering sigh. "I can really do this myself. I'm sure you have other places to be."

"We were clearly instructed not to leave you alone. I believe his majesty's exact words were, 'I will throw you into bog of eternal stench if you let her out of your sight.'"

There were graceful nods of agreement.

"He also said she was 'a troublemaking little termagant and not to be trusted,'" added another helpfully. She curtsied like it might soften the blow.

"We can get the king to undress you if you prefer," offered the boob poker.

Sarah didn't like the calculating look in her eye. "That won't be necessary!"

They took that as permission and had her stripped to nothing in minutes. She was then summarily crowded her down the steps into the water. The pool was blessedly warm and had she not been trying to shield what was left of her modesty and retain the shreds of dignity, it might have been heaven.

"You're not really hideous at all," remarked a voice right behind her.

Sarah squealed and turned. Several of the women had followed her in, white - now largely transparent - dresses and all.

She was pretty sure she'd seen the start of a similar movie on Cinemax.

Before she could protest she was being doused in all manner of lotions and creams and sweet-smelling soaps. Hands were everywhere. She'd had less invasive physicals. And less enthusiastic dates.

Then came the forcible dunking. Her reflex was to struggle until she let herself relax, deciding that drowning would actually be an improvement.

To no avail, however, as they had her back up for more rubbing and pruning and ministrations she imagined most men would kill to watch.

She was bustled back out of the pool just as perfunctorily; a white robe wrapped around her which she clutched closed in a vice-like grip. Then she was pushed down onto a stool with surprising force considering their waif-like appearances.

Someone started dragging a comb through her hair, while another began rubbing yet more creams into every inch of exposed skin. Someone else began to dab at Sarah's face with pots of colour. The whole experience wasn't exactly unpleasant, but it was all a little too much. Too much touching, too much fussing... too much of a concession she was in no way willing to make.

"I still object to this marriage," she announced to no one in particular.

And then a hand pressed a glass of something sparkling and decidedly alcoholic into hers. For the
first time, Sarah allowed a sincere 'thank you' and downed it without really tasting a drop. She didn't even care about the ramifications of eating or drinking in the Underground. She'd already bitten a tainted peach and returned all in one piece she reasoned. Her glass was kept refilled without question or comment.

The female goblins, who'd been divested of their tonics and potions, returned with bundles of various coloured cloths. As they passed them over to the taller women, Sarah realized they were dresses. Gowns, really, in exquisite shades... and not one of them chartreuse.

It was a good thing Sarah, albeit reluctantly, found them all gorgeous because as it turned out she wasn't being given a choice. Add that to the theme of the day. One of the fey considered each in turn, head canting in thought while occasionally glancing back at Sarah appraisingly.

Several were in shades of white or nude and despite a few ethereal touches would have passed for an aboveground couture wedding gown. One had distinctive feathers arching off the bodice - feathers Sarah thought looked suspiciously familiar. Another could have been from a medieval fantasy with accents of cornflower blue. Another had delicate knot work on the bodice that made Sarah's hands itch in memory of the handfasting. There were appliqués of spun gold detailing on yet, another and a dropped shoulder gown that reminded Sarah of a more refined version of her sugar spun ball gown. There were long, flowing confections in lovely shades of peach - the colour not lost on her - and soft blushing pinks and romantic roses. Another was a deep rich green in a heavier lush fabric that would no doubt make her eyes shine.

There were gowns that would have befitted a fairy queen, in shades of lilac, fern, and crimson... and dresses of darkest black meant to seduce, cut in such a way to deliberately show hints of skin and décolletage, or give the illusion of such with nude underlays. Some looked like Goblin armour in their artistry. Another gown in an arresting midnight blue was fitted with a cape of shimmering stars. If some of the others screamed fairy queen, it screamed his queen. The fey woman paused on it before finally nodding at another.

The chosen gown looked to be made of silver moonlight. The entire front was elaborately embroidered in ornate patterns. Sarah was pulled to her feet, her robe removed and the gown dropped over her head in a heartbeat. Apparently undergarments were unheard of in the Underground.

The cut was otherwise modest compared to some of the others; just skimming her shoulders and collarbones, then and skimming down to her hips in a slim fit before flaring away gently. The arms were long and likewise fitted. It wasn't until Sarah saw herself in the tall mirror that she realized why they'd not put anything underneath. In the right light the unembroidered parts of the silvery fabric were ever so slightly translucent. Not as daring as some of the others, instead hinting where the others had suggested. The dress was almost completely backless until they added a long shimmering veil, wrought in the same silvery transparent fabric and fine embroidery. It was attached by two narrow point to either end of a half-silver circlet encrusted in sparkling crystals. When they'd fitted it to the back of Sarah's hair - left long with only the sides gently swept back - she could see that the veil's dip showcases her now shining hair and bare shoulder blades. It swept to the ground in an impressive train. Her makeup was light and tasteful, but they'd shaded her eyes with charcoal so the green of her irises popped. A light dusting of a shimmery powder made her cheekbones glint.

Sarah stared at her appearance for a long moment, roiling emotions conflicted. On the one hand she looked ethereal. Otherworldly. Regal in a way she'd never seen before.

On the other hand she rejected everything about this mess and had every intention of being the 'troublemaking little termagant' he'd warned about. The sooner she found a way out of it the better
and with as much damage done as possible. Last time she'd destroyed a city. This time the possibilities for destruction were endless. Sarah turned slightly, unconsciously admiring herself again. If she managed to leave with some of the dresses, she'd consider it due compensation for her troubles.

The fey nodded to themselves as though pleased, inclined their heads with deference they'd not shown beforehand, and then left without another word.

One of the goblins removed the flute from Sarah's hand and pressed a crystal into it before Sarah could bemoan the removal of the liquid courage. With a pop she reappeared outside a set of ornate doors. As though on cue, they opened inwardly to reveal the Goblin King. He'd apparently changed as well and was looking annoyingly refreshed and resplendent in shades of black and silver.

Jareth took a long moment to take in her new appearance. His eyes raked down her form, lingering in spots she thought she ought to hit him for, before returning to her face - which was somehow worse. There was the trace of a smile dancing on his lips and his eyes glittered in a way she thought might deserve a slap too. Sarah did her best to look annoyed and unimpressed.

"This means nothing." Her words lilted in a way that suggested she'd had too much champagne. It fueled her ire. "I want a divorce."

Jareth didn't even blink. "There's no such thing as divorce here. Thankfully, as you do look ravishing, Sarah." And then his eyes did that thing again and his lips curled into the inception of a smirk. "Speaking of ravishing. My goblins tell me you wanted to skip the feast and head straight to the bedding. I had no idea you were so... enthusiastic."

With mounting horror, Sarah realized that one of the other goblin attendants must have made it out. Her eyes narrowed dangerously, the liquid courage turning into liquid boldness. "You were misinformed. And on that note, let me ensure there are no further misunderstandings. You may have tripped me into this," she twirled a finger when she couldn't think of an appropriate invective, "but I certainly have no intention of ever consummating anything."

"And here I thought we were being clear," he remarked dryly.

"Was that not clear enough?" Later she'd blame everything on his perennially infuriating smirk and the liberal refilling of her glass. "I meant in no uncertain terms will I ever fuck you."

Jareth didn't so much as flinch at her crassness, though his lips twitched slightly before he pushed the door open wider to reveal what was behind him. "Duly noted. Allow me to introduce you to my family, Sarah."

Chapter End Notes

I lied about this chapter being the reception. What did you expect from someone who says things like "no, it won't take me over 4 years to finish a story... and "no, I won't wait six months to update again - so, yah, wedding feast next chapter. LFFL was very helpful in supplying wedding dress possibilities - more than 50 comments later and I say it's a popular consideration. And we may or may not have discussed bathtubs at one point. Important stuff.

I do promise Sarah will be able to hold her own soon and get an opportunity for some
Someone asked me how often/ quickly I'll be updating this. I won't say a timeframe as whenever I give myself a schedule I jinx myself. We'll leave it at fairly often (for me). Hopefully once a week or every two weeks? Definitely quicker than Tanglewood (I know, low bar). The chapters will stay shorter though comparatively (also asked). They are over 2,000 words (min) but I wouldn't expect them to go more than 5,000. This one is the longest yet. It means I can get them out faster and I feel like they better suit these shorter, lighter fare stories.

Have you seen Endgame yet? *bites knuckles* Happy Mother's Day to those who celebrated yesterday! I had a perfectly lovely day
"I think the family is the place where the most ridiculous and least respectable things in the world go on."

Ugo Betti

Sarah called his bluff and looked over the Goblin King's shoulder. She instantly paled.

All of the attendants' makeup efforts were undone in an instant. In fact, it was fair to say she'd never looked more corpse like. Of course if looks could kill, the one she shot Jareth meant he'd be joining her.

Her stomach did an uncomfortable kind of flip and she considered, very seriously, bending over and emptying its contents onto the king's polished boots.

As though aware of the danger he took a half-step back and to the side, and cupped her elbow smoothly. "May I present my bride and my queen, Sarah Williams."

She did not particularly care for the inflection he placed on 'my', one of which seemed entirely redundant and included for the sole purpose of rubbing it in. She did vaguely register that apparently she got to keep her last time. Not so for her dignity.

"Well, bring her forward, boy. Don't lurk in the shadows like some common goblin!" The imperious command made Sarah start. More so when she realized the boy in question referred to the Goblin King.

He sighed, sort of a pent up long-suffering sort that made Sarah feel marginally better than he might not escape unscathed either.

The voice's owner turned out to be a very stately looking fey woman who wouldn't entirely be out of place in an Austen novel as a Dowager Duchess. Her dark gown was long and fitted up to her slender neck. It looked better suited to a Gothic funeral. She sat, ramrod straight, with her hands perched delicately upon the head of an ornate cane-like walking stick. Her long hair was silvery and thick, and roped around her head in an impressive up-do. Her angular face was largely ageless and yet... not. The very air about her suggested someone very old indeed. Her eyes were a vibrant shade of blue and they were boring a hole right into Sarah's head. As was the raven perched upon her shoulder.

Those keen eyes swept up Sarah and down and then repeated the process before thin lips, very much like Jareth's, pursed. "Hmm," she said non-committally.

"Sarah, may I present my Great Aunt Morrigan." He places emphasis on the great. Whether out of deference or self-preservation, it wasn't clear.

There was a stilted silence.

Sarah wasn't sure if she was supposed to curtsy or bow or sacrifice a chicken, but it seemed something was expected of her. She finally held out a hand. "How do you do?"
Great Aunt Morrigan looked at the proffered hand and then back up at Sarah with a raised brow that suggested Sarah should have tried the chicken. "Hmmm."

Nonetheless she pressed a fine cup of tea into Sarah's hand. Sarah accepted it gratefully, the wine still buzzing in her head. She stopped short before taking a sip. The cup looked like it was filled with glitter. Sarah jiggled the cup and the contents sparkled ominously.

"Something the matter?" Morrigan watched her haughtily.

She was spared a response when she felt a hand tug at her dress, and glanced down into the face of a cherubic looking boy. He was tow-headed and fresh-faced, with arched brows and pointed ears that made him look almost Elfish. Perhaps 10 or 12 in human years, she nearly remarked that she had a brother around his age, but looks were often deceiving and he may have been a hundred for all Sarah knew. Until that moment she'd been apt to believe the fey just spawned fully-formed from the depths of hell to torment her.

"Erm, hello," she said politely.

"You're pretty. Is it true you're a mortal? I thought they were supposed to be rather revolting."

"Yes, that does seem to be a common misconception here."

"So you're dying then? Right now?" He asked it in such an infectious, excited way, Sarah almost felt bad for not dropping dead on the spot.

"Um, no, not unless I have a fatal disease I'm not aware of."

His eyes widened in delight. "Do you?"

"That's enough, Rook."

The boy pouted at the Goblin King. "But I've never met anyone dying before. It might have been my only chance to see it happen."

Sarah couldn't decide if she should be insulted or amused. The first friendly face and he was morbidly fixated upon her death. "I suppose you're right that mortals are all dying technically," she offered prosaically. "How about I invite you to my deathbed then? You have a standing invitation to watch."

His eyes widened. "Really? When?"

"Well, hopefully not for a long time," she laughed, only a little disturbed by his eagerness "You might have to wait 80 or so years."

Rather than look put out, he beamed. "That's not long at all!"

Sarah's smile wobbled slightly. Another dismissive wave from the Goblin King and the boy retreated.

"A cousin," Jareth offered.

"Charming," Sarah returned, and managed to stealthily ditch her tea untouched.

The next person to be introduced was a breathtaking woman. She too had long silvery hair, but hers didn't suggest age. And in opposition to the Great Aunt, the dressmakers clearly ran out of fabric when they'd crafted hers. A few bits of silk strands gave the impression she was covered in glittering
sea foam. She lounged on a low settee, her long legs stretched out artfully. She gave a small half-smile to Sarah, grey eyes gleaming beneath very long lashes.

"Well, aren't you an absolute treat?" Her voice had a breathy quality that instantly made Sarah think of sex. In fact, Sarah felt a flutter of something unexpected in response, her thighs quivering. It was a reaction she'd never had to a woman before, aside from maybe that one experimental night in college.

As though gauging her reaction, the fey woman's grin widened. Her teeth were alarmingly pointed.

"Reign it back, Calli," Jareth chided, although he too seemed to be studying Sarah's subtle response with calculated interest. "From the... ah, Greek side of the family," he added to her as though that explained everything.

Sarah's brow furrowed but she was being ferried onto the next person like a shiny new bauble.

The faces that greeted her fell onto the other side of the coin. There were no smiles, no hints of interest, and not a trace of warmth in the pair that lounged by the window. The couple, or at least they appeared to be bonded, regarded Sarah with cool disdain. As with the others they were impeccably dressed, this time in almost garish brocade. The woman had startling red hair and a buxom figure compared to most fey, while the man had auburn hair coiffed into a sort of foppish style no doubt meant to look breezy. Sarah decided he resembled a frizzy badger. Neither offered anything by way of greeting.

The Goblin King laughed outright at their expressions. "Don't mind Boudicca and Lugh. They hoped for a more advantageous match," he whispered loud enough for them to hear. "I'm afraid they aren't overly fond of the bride switch you pulled."

It was the red-haired woman's turn to laugh - a distinct coquettish sound that made Sarah bristle in memory. She could suddenly picture her with a horned mask, dress different but just as lavish. "You were there!" The ballroom. So many years ago.

Catching her meaning, the woman's smile twisted. "The girl who ate the peach. I knew you'd be trouble then. I warned him to keep his distance. Little did I know you'd prove this meddlesome. I'd applaud your strategy, netting him as you did, but make no mistake - this is far from over."

"I did not 'net' him," Sarah snapped back. "I tripped over a doorstep and it's been downhill since. If I could return him I would."

"Do stop, dearest, you're making me blush," Jareth admonished dryly.

"Don't mind, Bou, she'd rather had her heart set on the match. It's not everyday we're offered a Sidhe princess," Lugh's eyes flicked over her, "and instead ended up with you."

Sarah thought of the poor woman she'd inadvertently stabbed. Or rather who had inadvertently stabbed herself while trying to stab Sarah. A princess. She glanced around the room at her new in-laws. Boy had she lucked out by getting knifed instead.

Sarah was no longer feeling charitable. She'd stab herself right then if she could get out of it. She hoped that was conveyed in her expression. "It was an accident."

"So was the fall of Rome and look where you all are now." His tone suggested nowhere good.

"What is taking so long?" The sound of a staff hitting the floor echoed sharply. "Hurry up and introduce the mortal so we may eat." Morrigan punctuated it with another knock of her cane.
"Mortal?" asked an ancient, rather sleepy sounding voice. "I haven't had a good mortal for centuries. Lovely roasted with a wild blueberry glaze." A wet smacking sound followed. The owner was the oldest living thing Sarah had ever seen. He'd gone unnoticed before, having thought him a pile of mismatched throw pillows in the corner. She didn't even know fey could look old. His skin was so white it was translucent and papery thin. The 'pillows' turned out to a set of archaic robes, mottled with dust. A long, ornate pip dangled from his lips, poking out from an equally impressively long beard.

"Not eat, Dag, marry. Jareth m-a-r-r-i-e-d a mortal," Morrigan huffed impatiently.

"Marry?" the wizened voice sounded confused and not a little appalled, as though marriage was far more egregious than cannibalization. "In my day, we ate them like nature intended. Marry? Hmph. Younglings today."

"Don't mind grandfather," Jareth remarked calmly. "He lost his powers aeons ago, and when his magic came back it came back... well, a little wilder. He's forgotten how to appear young. Or he doesn't care."

"But he remembers mortals taste good with wild blueberry sauce?" Sarah asked pointedly.

"Everything tastes good with wild blueberry sauce, Sarah." She couldn't decide from his grin if he was being serious or not.

The next couple introduced resembled a pair of dominoes. Their outfits were matching patterns of white and black. The lady, resplendent in crisp white, regarded Sarah with polite disinterest. The lord, garbed in matching black, flanked her gravely. Rook quickly insinuated himself between them and Sarah gleaned they were his parents almost at the same time she realized they reminded her of chess pieces. The kind she used to make marry one another as a child.

After exchanging a few words, and after receiving a reminder from Rook to let him watch her die in a few decades, Jareth pressed Sarah onward with a hand splayed against her lower. Through the thin, semi-sheer material of the dress she could feel the heat of his palm and couldn't stop a small shiver.

"Theirs was the most scandalous marriage. The court gossip lasted for centuries." His breath fanned warmly on the shell of her ear as he whispered conspiratorially. "Until ours of course."

"Save it for the bedroom, if you weren't going to give us a show during the ceremony, don't bother teasing us now." Sarah felt Jareth stiffen, as though he'd not intended to acknowledge the speaker's existence at all.

The final figure was laid out almost as indolently as Calliope had been. He was long-legged, with muscular thighs displayed to advantage by his tight pants. His shirt was artfully open, revealing a toned chest lightly tanned by the sun. One hand rested on the head of a large wolf-hound like beast. His face was similar to Jareth's in markings, and just as handsome Sarah noticed reluctantly. His hair, by comparison, was dark and fell in soft glossy waves around a sharp jaw. His eyes were a vivid green and they were currently full of amusement.

Jareth's own narrowed. "Don't you have something to hunt or maim, Cern?"

Cern's lips, wide and generous, bowed into a smile. "And miss your wedding day? Especially after that performance? I'll kill something later." He held out a hand in greeting, the other still stroking the head of the animal in a way that could only be called suggestive. Sarah reached for it by rote and barely stifled a yelp when his long fingers closed round hers, tugging her forward until she stood between his splayed knees. She felt Jareth stiffen further at her side.
"What do we have here," he drawled, eyes sweeping over every inch on display. "You and I might agree for a change, Calli. Definitely a snack."

Sarah tugged backwards, her eyes immediately flying to the snoring Dagda and his penchant for blueberry sauce.

A warm, earthy chuckle answered. "My tastes run in different directions. Welcome to the family, cousin." He pressed an open mouthed kiss to Sarah's wrist, his eyes trained on her face before sliding to Jareth's with calculated precision.

"Yet another cousin?" Sarah asked, brow rising along with her pulse.

"More distantly removed and about to be removed entirely if he doesn't remember his manners. Let's not repeat Lughnasadh."

Lugh whistled from across the room.

There was a warning in Jareth's low tone and whether he heeded it or not, Cern released her with a wink. Her freedom was short-lived as Jareth immediately slipped his hand around hers.

"To the feast then." The Goblin King's eyes remained trained warningly on his cousin. Polite family play time was clearly over.

"Why not skip straight to the bedding?" Cern ignored the look. "I would."

"You'd swive a goblin."

Sarah wasn't sure if she was relieved or insulted.

"I do suppose you have to go and make nice. Since you may have plunged us all into a bloody war to wet your," his eyes flickered to his great aunt, "... riding crop." For a change the censorious tone seemed to be directed entirely at Jareth. As though the wedding were his fault and not hers as everyone seemed to believe.

"You're unmarried, Cern, why don't you go wed and bed her. Make nice for all of us."

Cern sobered instantly. "Oh no, dearest cousin. That was your sacrificial pyre to roast yourself upon. Besides," he eyed Sarah, who was vainly trying to extricate herself from Jareth's death grip. "I prefer a challenge. Something that puts up a fight, so to speak."

"Boys." The cane wrapped again. "Behave yourselves or I will put you over my knee as I did ages ago." Sarah admitted to herself that she'd very much like to see that. "You look like two feral mongrels fighting over a bone." The look she directed Sarah implied a bone would have been an improvement.

"I'll take the scraps," purred a siren voice, as Calli rose languidly and obediently trailed the grand dame out of the room.

They all filed out in turn, Rook and his parents stopping to collect the doddering Dagda. "Yes, papa, we'll ask the kitchens if there's any. With blueberry sauce, yes."

Sarah pulled a face. "Don't be offended but I'm happy that's the extent of your family." She noted to herself that his parents had not been amongst them.

"Don't be disappointed. That's the extent of the family I deemed fit to meet you." The Goblin King
rocked with silent laughter at her horrified expression.

The banquet was the most sumptuous thing she'd ever seen. If the ceremony had been over the top, the dinner was something else altogether. Candlelit chandeliers hung from great heights as though suspended by magic. They probably were. The banquet tables were long, covered in fine, layered linens and set with gleaming silver dishes and cut-crystal glasses. Huge silver candelabras dotted the tables, with all manner of beasts fashioned into their ornate bases. Unlike the garish arrangements in the church, the flowers on the table were dark burgundy roses whose petals looked like velvet. Crystals hung suspended in the air.

The room was full; lively with chatter and music, but everything ground to a halt when Sarah and Jareth crossed the threshold. Chairs scraped back as most of the guests rose. There was a collective silence and than a slow-building cheer that rose to deafening.

The exception were a few tables to the side of the room, many of the still-seated guests wearing a particularly lurid shade of green. It was not difficult to discern where their allegiances lay. The former bride in question glowered amongst them, looking patched up and none the worst for wear.

Sarah immediately tried to turn tail and leave again, but Jareth's arm snapped into place around her waist and after a brief struggle, he half-hauled her to their seats at the head table. "I'd suggest you not make more of a scene, Sarah. You're reputation can hardly handle it."

"My reputation? Embarrassed your 'bride' would rather run away?"

The Goblin King kicked out an ornate throne like chair and pressed her down into it. "Hardly." A lone finger brushed a strand of hair away from her ear. "It's tradition for the bride to struggle. Wouldn't be seemly for her to appear too eager to join another house. The more she fights the more she really wants the groom. I suppose I should thank you for going above and beyond really, but then you never did anything by halves, did you?"

Sarah looked up at him sharply, disbelief marring her brow. Then she considered the faces at the surrounding tables. A few looked faintly scandalized but perhaps not for the reasons she assumed. Others cast the pair dreamy looks, like it was the most romantic thing they'd ever seen.

Sarah reached for the wine.

Jareth offered a few words of welcome to the rapt crowd, mentioning the breaking of bread among friends as a sign of peace, a few comments about the loveliness of his bride which earned a snort both from Sarah and his ex-fiancé, and then clapped his hands. A parade of goblins, surprisingly well-dressed and behaved, paraded in carrying obscenely large trenchers of food. Sarah eyed the platters of meat suspiciously.

Much to her relief and discomfort, they were the only ones seated at the head table so she wasn't expected to make polite conversation. At all she decided, eying the Goblin King. His hair glowed in the candlelight in a very distracting way so she turned her attention back to the wine. She exhaled happily when she'd poured it into the low cup.

"Be still my heart. Was that a sound of contentment from my taciturn bride?"

Sarah ignored the goading. "No glitter."

"Naturally."

"There was glitter in the tea."
"Naturally."

Sarah shot him an annoyed look.

"Glitter has no place in alcohol, Sarah," he t'sked. "We're not savages."

She drained the cup in one go. He sighed, a trace of patient amusement in his expression.

"We're supposed to share that. It's the marriage cup." He nodded towards the two handles she'd entirely missed.

She set it down sharply. "I was thirsty."

He refilled it, picked it up, and then set his lips to the same place she'd placed hers. He drank deeply, watching her over the silver rim.

Though she did her best to ignore him, her mouth went decidedly dry. It was then that she noticed there was only one plate between them and no cutlery whatsoever.

Catching her focus, Jareth reached for one of the large platters and began selecting bits of meats, robust cheeses, fresh breads, and an assortment of ripe fruit. "For both of us." There was a touch of patronizing humour edging his tone, like he was warning a child to share.

"And they don't trust new couples with knives? Is this the kid's table?"

"Compared to several of the guests here, yes actually. And there have been incidents in the past that ended in bloodshed." She couldn't blame them.

She took another sip of wine, not noticing that she drank from his unfinished pour and missing the slight curve of satisfaction to his mouth. "Afraid I'll try to gut you?"

"After seeing what you did to my previous bride, consider me quaking." Sarah opened her mouth to protest. He popped a delicate sliver of fruit into it, stilling her tongue. "Oh, I know. It was all an accident. Save your teeth for the feast. Or at least for later. Perhaps I'll let you bite me until you feel better."

Sarah choked, wiping her mouth on a napkin. "Speaking of later-"

"The shared marriage cup, the shared marriage plate," he paused like he was going to savour saying the next, "the shared marriage bed. Prosperity in the trinity."

And there it was. She'd played nice long enough. Time to destroy a kingdom. Again. Her chair scraped back. "I'll stick with two, thanks. I'd hate to be greedy."

His hand landed heavily on her thigh before she could rise. "Running away so soon? Imagine the salacious gossip when I have to hunt you down and drag you back here kicking and screaming." His voice was light but Sarah couldn't tell if he was joking. She did notice the sudden hush fall across the room, all eyes on them like they were itching for her to do exactly that. Dinner and a show.

Reluctantly she sank back into her seat but glared at him mulishly. "Make no mistake, I'll find a way out of this. I've beaten you before, Goblin King. Let's just make it through this dinner." She grabbed a hunk of bread and stuffed it into his smug mouth before he could retort. "Quietly."

So naturally that's when the screaming started.
Dun, Dun, Dun...
People who put glitter in their drinks and food are savages. You know who you are. Monsters. All of you.

Hope you enjoyed meeting *some* of Jareth's family:

Great Aunt Morrigan is totally modelled after Dame Maggie Smith in Downton Abby. But I mean, she may also be the Celtic goddess of death. Who knows!

Calliope is one of the Greek Sirens. Jareth's family tree is storied and sexy.

Boudicca is a famous flame-haired, Celtic warrior queen. Historically she was pretty damn cool. I also loved the red-haired woman in the ballroom so why not smush them into one.

Lugh is another Celtic god, and is linked with the harvest festival of Lughnasadh.

Rook is just a precocious kid because I have a soft spot for them (when done right) and I liked the name. His parents are one hundred percent born of a recent shipping discussion where I admitted that as a kid I shipped the black king with the white queen (before I knew what shipping was). My proper British poppa would teach me chess, only to have me turn around and stage a wedding on the board.

Dagda is like the ultimate Celtic god. He's the daddy god, a druid, and is pretty dang important in Celtic mythology.

Cern or Cernunnos is kind of a mash of Cernunnos and Herne the hunter - both horned gods in Celtic lore. He's the Celtic god of fertility, life, animals, wealth, and the underworld... and yes, I intend to use him like a god-damned foil for Jareth.

I had to coach soccer in the rain tonight. For an hour. Two to three olds playing soccer. Do you know how that age plays soccer? They don't. It's called run around and pick grass and ask for snacks ever 2.5 minutes. Pray for me.
Did I mention glitter in food and drink is wrong? Don't do glitter, kids.
All chatter stopped and all eyes immediately searched for the source of the scream. Sarah half-expected someone to announce that it was Colonel Mustard in the Library with the candlestick. She immediately set down the communal cup and nudged it away. Clearly she’d had enough champagne.

She wasn’t the only one.

And the screamer, in fact, turned out to be headed straight for her.

Unsurprisingly to at least half the guest list it was the rejected bride herself, not quite ready to give up the fight. She was a ball of exquisite fury wrapped in a fresh exquisitely lurid dress. And she had murder writ large across her forehead.

A good number of guests rose, not so much to try and stop her but rather in search of a better view. A few of the bride’s family members made a half-hearted effort to restrain her but the bride didn’t seem particularly concerned with sparing her family violence, anymore than she was keen to spare herself further embarrassment.

Sarah glanced at Jareth nervously, who merely appeared bored. At her expectant expression he slid the serving fork towards her.

"I am NOT going to stab her."

"Again," he amended patiently.

"She stabbed herself!"

"Then perhaps you can hope she’ll trip again."

"Exactly! She tripped. I-"

As though on cue, down she indeed went again in an almost perfect re-enactment of the hall. No one who may have noticed the Lady Morrigan withdrawing her leg and adjusting her skirts a fraction of a second later dared call attention. The expression of imperious indifference on her face didn't as much as flicker.

The bride, righting herself with surprising agility, rose, turned towards the Grande dame accusingly, thought better of it, and continued the head table. Her carefully coiffed head snapped right and left, silencing snickers from the guests.

Her eyes, a particularly striking shade of indigo made all the more bright from drink, zeroed on the Goblin King. "I demand justice, as is my right."

Sarah immediately opened her mouth to offer to him back, but Jareth, ever one step ahead, shoved another sliver of fruit into it.
"Lady Rhiannon." He rose and offered a slight bow, with only a slight soupcon of mockery to the discerning eye. "How kind of you to come in all this haste to offer your felicitations personally."

"I most certainly do not offer anything of the sort. I was doing you a great service, Goblin King, by agreeing to such an unequal union. You've no concept of how much I've had to lower myself."

"Ah, but I do, dearest, to the very floor it seems. And that's today alone. I assure you her royal highness and I do not require that level of deference going forward."

Rhiannon's face turned apoplectic. It occurred to Sarah that she might not have to murder Jareth herself after all.

"You dare mock me?"

"No more that you dare play the fool at my wedding feast with this little display." His voice was calm, deceptively light even, but Sarah recognized the thread of warning in it.

"What a farce," Rhiannon declared, clearly undaunted. "You can paint her, anoint her, and glue jewels to her tits for all I care; it's a mockery to parade a pathetic mortal through these hallowed halls and you know it."

"A 'pathetic mortal' who bested you."

Sarah had no idea what possessed her to say it.

The champagne played a part. It was like sticking a hand in the tiger's cage, and the collective gasps from the guests didn't help. But it also felt good.

Rhiannon's reaction was pure malice. Far more disturbing was the toe-curling smile Jareth directed her way, however.

"An oversight I mean to correct."

Sarah stood and spread her hands. "By all means, take have him back."

If anything Rhiannon looked even more venomous. "You dare insult me with a pittance?"

"No, but I-"

"And do you stand for this complete rejection of our traditions?"

"Not at all," Jareth replied with mock severity. "I assure you I plan to punish her most thoroughly later tonight for this insolence." Sarah couldn't entirely tell if he was joking or not, but a glint in his eye and the timbre of his voice made her reach for the champagne again.

"A tournament then." Rhiannon smiled, showing far too many teeth. "Lughnasa seems only too fitting. But by all means enjoy your spoils tonight while you can." The way she said it suggested she meant spoiled food more than spoils of war. "I stake my right to combat. And trust me," her eyes flicked back to Sarah, "when I say I don't mean to trip again."

"Again!" Sarah gestured wildly to the Goblin King. "There! You see! She tripped! Don't you see that this has all been a misunderstanding?"

Without changing focus, Jareth deftly removed the cup of sloshing champagne from Sarah's flailing grip. "Rhiannon," his voice lowered to a tone meant only for their ears. "Why do you do this? We both know we would not have suited. This was machinated by others and now we are both free of
the promise. I understand your vanity and pride have been damaged today but allow my kingdom to make amends through an offering. Several. I can be generous." He produced a crystal and held it out. "Consider this the first taste."

Rhiannon's eyes widened at whatever she saw within, but she shook her head a moment later; painted lips curling. "And miss this chance? I don't want you anymore than you want me. We both know that. But," she pointed a well-manicured finger at Sarah, "You want her. That much is so painfully transparent you should be ashamed at showing your hand. Why should you get what you want and I nothing? That just won't do. I'll have your kingdom and see you a pauper by the end of this. And then perhaps I'll make a rug of her skin." She snatched up the promise cup and drained it, her eyes never leaving the Goblin King's. Slamming it down, she swept from the banquet.

Jareth tracked her exit in silence before snapping his fingers at the rapt musicians. "Well, play!"

The music resumed immediately, at an even livelier pace. Curling his hand around Sarah's wrist the Goblin King tugged her back down beside him. The chatter resumed.

"Tell me," Sarah folded her hands. "Did I just get challenged to a duel?"

"Essentially." Jareth refilled their cup.

"Over you?"

"Essentially." His lips twitched as he raised it towards his mouth.

Sarah snatched the cup and drained it.

It became easier, she found, to try and enjoy the night once she had to squint to properly see anything. Everything was so comfortably blurred that she could pretend she was at any event aboveground. The music, slightly Celtic sounding, could be a band at an Irish pub. The guests, all manner of species as they were, eventually just became a general buzz of laughter and festivity. A few well wishers had made their way towards the table, but most seemed interested only in speaking with the Goblin King. A few gave Sarah curious glances as she resolutely determined to drown herself in bubbly.

The excitement of the dramatic challenge had likewise blended into the general din. From what she was gathering, challenges to the death were just as much a part of Underground weddings as were stabbings apparently. Noteworthy, but no more so than an open bar with top shelf liquor in her world.

Jareth had lapsed into a thoughtful silence. In fact, she'd almost entirely forgotten he was even there until he spoke again.

"What?"

"I asked you to dance, Sarah. Impending death aside, it's a celebration after all."

Sarah squinted at his proffered hand, trying to determine how many he was actually holding out. The music had definitely taken on a more melodic and softer feel.

"I don't want to dance with you."

Not exactly a lie. Not exactly the truth. She didn't want to dance right now, before a room full of strangers - their sham of a wedding be damned. She had already provided the dinner and a show. She'd didn't want to celebrate. She also didn't trust herself to stand let alone do anything remotely
graceful like dancing. Her head had started to throb though Jareth at some point must have put the wine out of reach.

His face swam before hers for a moment as it lowered closer, and though she couldn't manage to focus on his features her nostrils flared slightly at his uniquely masculine smell.

"And what do you want, Sarah?"

Always a dangerous question.

More so when it was posed by the Goblin King.

Who was now her husband.

And she was, she was starting to realize, very, very drunk. More so than she'd intended.

The truth was she wanted so many things. She wanted it all to be a mistake. A dream. Not a bad one, exactly, but one of those that leaves you a bit breathless and confused when you wake. She wanted more wine, though she knew she'd surpassed 'that's a no good, bad idea' several refills ago. She also wanted to kill him. Maybe smell him again first but then kill him.

No Sarah!

She also wanted to take a little revenge herself. Get the upper hand for a change. Perhaps a much needed reminder she was apparently the Champion. It suddenly felt like a very long day indeed. And all a bit over the top. Absurd really.

"I want to go to bed."

Not the words she'd meant to speak. And not as coherently as she would have liked. I want to go home would have been more accurate. But it hadn't been a lie either.

Of course, she didn't need to be sober to know she'd made a grievous, completely amateur level misstep. She didn't need to see his expression to know it was cat-in-the-cream-pot smug.

The Goblin King stood, chair scraping back loudly enough that the music slowed and the conversation dimmed in expectation of an encore.

"It seems my lovely bride has decided she's had enough festivities for this evening and would rather go straight to bed."

His delivery was innocent enough, but the crowd was no more willing to let that one slide either. The cat calls and hoots started slowly but soon fell into time with the throbbing in her temple. There were shouts of lascivious advice to make a locker room blush. Most of it anatomically impossible for mortals, or at least not recommended without years of gymnastics training. Ideally in Russia.

Sarah stood, teetering only a little unsteadily, before righting herself, with every intention of making a break for it. A warm hand landed on the small of her back a fraction of a second later. Her legs wobbled again. She hoped the irritated look she shot him more than compensated.

The sly smile indicated it hadn't.

"As my lady commands."

To mortifying applause, he re-enacted the scene at the castle's steps, only this time scooping her up in proper bridal style. The world tilted again and a moment later he was kicking open a door.
"You know this is not what I meant." Her protest was slightly muted by how bonelessly she settled into his arms. Revenge could wait and walking really was overrated.

"Yes, it seems nothing it ever as you mean."

Her brow furrowed. "Did... did you just make a bad pun?"

Whatever he said in response was lost as she took in the room they’d entered.

High arched ceilings were hewn from carved stone. Interspersed were painted reliefs of a star-filled night sky. Bookshelves lined most of the walls, interspersed with an eclectic collection of artwork. A large fireplace in the shape of a sleeping dragon dominated one end of the room, with lush chairs in leather set before it. Animal pelts - some Sarah could not place at all - were layered over plush carpets in woven in dark, muted colours. The sort you could curl your toes into. Stone sconces in the shapes of hands held flickering torches of warm white fire.

The wall opposite was filled with high windows and glass doors leading to a balcony. The sky beyond them mirrored the ceiling - so that the entire room was filled with midnight sky and stars. A deep desk held a variety of papers and looked aesthetically dishevelled. Three sets of doors were recessed into alcoves about the room.

It was maddeningly over the top and yet somehow artfully tasteful. The colours and furnishings were decidedly his. She didn't need to address the elephant in the room to know whose bedroom it was. The elephant being the large bed dominating the space. It was on a raised dais of stone steps and dressed in the same hues. Suspected from the ceiling were thick folds of fabric suspended from the ceiling in a canopy. It was both absurd and dangerously seductive.

"Absolutely not," Sarah declared - not exactly sure to whom or what she was saying no. Finally finding her measure again, she struggled enough that he set her down.

Jareth looked entirely unapologetic. "You are the one who said you wanted to go to bed."

"Not in that. My bed."

He wisely chose not to remark that she was always alluring when angry, particularly with her cheeks flushed from alcohol and hair slowly escaping her pins. He didn't remark how her gown faintly glowed in the low light, body limned by fire through the deceptively sheer fabric.

Instead he inclined his head and crossed to one of the sets of recessed doors. When he opened them, Sarah couldn't help a frisson of disgust.

"That colour. Everywhere. Every ruffle, bow, rug, curtain, and scrap of fabric, was the same shade. No need to ask for whom the room had been prepared.

"That is not my bed. I am most definitely not sleeping here."

Jareth closed the doors again; his lips bowing into another smile Sarah didn't quite know what to do with.

"I somehow thought you'd say that. We finally agree." He steered her back towards his room.

"You know that's not what I meant either."
"Undoubtedly. I do wonder when you'll start saying what you do mean."

"This," she gestured between them, "is not real. I haven't figured out exactly what's going on here but I will." Her eyes strayed back to the imposing bed. "And we're... don't even think about it." She was certainly having trouble not thinking about it. "That's just not happening. Let's be clear. I am not sleeping with you. This is not a real marriage and I will find a way to fix this and go home."

Jareth patiently listened to her ever-so-slightly slurred speech and then began tugging his cravat free as he moved away.

Sarah watched him owlishly, her throat constricting just a little. "What are you doing?"

"Getting ready for bed. I don't know how you do it, be I prefer not to be fully clothed."

"Bu didn't you hear a word I said?"

"All of them yes. In the right order too, I believe. You said you're not sleeping with me, and far be it from me to behave in an ungentlemanly manner," his eyes slid over her as he undid another button, "but I have every intention of going to sleep in my bed."

When his hands moved to his fly, Sarah remembered to turn around.

"Wouldn't you prefer some privacy?"

"Sometimes nothing more. But as this is my room it would be rather rude of me if I asked you to leave. Not least because you are my wife. What's mine is yours now." There was a decided implication Sarah refused to acknowledge as she recognized the sound of pants dropping.

She really was going to kill Hoggle, who'd noticeably kept a low profile since her unfortunate wrong turn. Hands pressed to her temple. "Nothing is going as planned."

She hadn't realized she'd spoken aloud until she heard a low chuckle from the direction of the bed.

"It's not how I envisioned my wedding night either."

"That's not what I-"

"Meant." A touch of humour in his voice had Sarah turning with a scowl. He was already in the bed, his torso bare and pale amongst the dark fabric. The linens were pulled to his waist, so she supposed he was decent enough, but it was somehow all the more suggestive. She couldn't help wonder if he wore sleep pants or nothing at all.

And then she couldn't help but wonder what would have happened had she not interrupted the wedding. Would the Rhiannon have joined him? Or he her, in the adjoining suite. They didn't seem to care for one another but that was hardly a prerequisite to sex.

A politely cleared throat returned her to the present.

The Goblin King was watching her - the slight bowing of his mouth suggested her thoughts were more transparent than intended.

"I'm too drunk for this."

"I unfortunately agree."

Sarah looked at him sharply.
Jareth restively folded an arm behind his head, causing the sheet to dip slightly. The probability of pants decreased.

"I had every intention of seducing tonight, Sarah. You may be against this wedding, but I consider this fate. Make no mistake, you may try to sever the bond," his tone implied he was far from concerned, "but I have no such inclination. In fact I fully intend to convince you otherwise."

It occurred to Sarah that he was actually speaking plainly for a change.

"And how do you plan to do that?"

The crooked smile widened. "Why, anyway I see fit. I played fair last time." He held up a hand when Sarah made to interrupt. "Mostly. You were young. Innocent. Spoiled. The same rules no longer apply. I don't intend to lose again."

It felt like a promise, like a vow in the church.

Sarah frowned, trying to fully parse his words.

"But," and he almost sounded regretful, "I don't take advantage of drunk women."

She immediately pulled a face. "Don't pretend you have morals now."

"Oh, I don't. Nothing you'd recognize anyway. But when your defences fall, and they will, Sarah. I have no intention of letting you blame it on wine. Sleep well... wherever you so choose." He rolled over, presenting her with the equally unnerving sight of a well-sculpted back. Jesus wept.

Sarah wobbled drunkenly for a moment, trying to get her mouth and mind in sync for a change.

She marched to the adjoining doors. "Ye... well... don't rest too easily, Goblin King. Rhiannon's probably going to win anyway and then we'll see who's sleeping easy." With some difficulty, she slammed then behind her.

As a parting shot it was mediocre at best and collapsed under any kind of scrutiny. Rhiannon winning meant Sarah would lose just as dearly. She might be freed of him, but was likewise be freed of her mortal coil in the process. She didn't relish spending eternity as a rug.

Sarah leaned against the door and kicking her delicate heels off. She didn't particularly want to sleep in any room meant for another bride, but sleeping with another bride's groom wasn't any better. And she had no intention of giving him the satisfaction of awkwardly trying to share a bed. No sane person would ever do something so rife for shenanigans.

And then she yelped.

No quite a scream, not quite a shout, and ending in a sort of hiccough.

Seated by the fire were Great Aunt Morrigan and Calliope. Morrigan and her raven were staring into the flames. Calli was reclined on a settee, picking at a bowl of fruit diffidently.

"Oh, excuse me!" Sarah automatically turned to leave and then paused, hand on the doorknob. "Er... I think this is... well, my room, actually?"

Morrigan's eyes flicked towards her. Once again Sarah was struck with the feeling that despite appearances, the woman before her was both incredibly old and incredibly powerful.

"This room was intended for the Lady Rhiannon of the Tuatha Dé."
Calli snorted but was silenced by a look from her aunt.

Sarah swallowed nervously, wishing once again she'd not had so much to drink. "If you're here to tell me that I don't belong here, trust me I'm well aware. I've been trying to tell anyone who will listen that this was all a mistake."

The goddess looked around and then stood. "She really does have appalling taste." The bird on her shoulder watched Sarah unblinkingly. "You're drunk."

"Deliciously so." Calli winked.

"A little." She couldn't stop the slur. "A lot. Today was," there were so many words Sarah wanted to use, "a bit much."

"Indeed." Morrigan turned and approached, touching Sarah's head with finger before she could retreat. The sensation was like instant frostbite. Like death.

"Arghhh!" Sarah immediately doubled over in pain, her stomach roiling dangerously, and head throbbing so hard she thought it would split itself open. And then... nothing. She'd sobered in an instant, like a hangover on fast forward.

Morrigan watched her writhe impassively. "Now we may speak plainly." Her eyes swept over Sarah's dress and the untouched bed. "It's tradition for the bride's family to prepare you for the wedding night, but as yours aren't here we shall have to do the duty alone."

Calli waggled her brows. "I volunteered."

"Prepare?" Realization was slow to come and when it did, she wasn't sure if she wanted to cringe or laugh outright. "Oh my god. I'm no blushing virgin." She snapped a finger. "That's it. I'm NOT a virgin! That must mean I'm illegible, right? Have to call it all off now? Disgrace to the family honour and all that? Because I can give you names. I will give you all the names!"

Calli and Morrigan exchanged a puzzled glance and then the siren devolved into outright peels of laughter. "She thinks virginity is necessary! Oh, Hades! Probably imagines we hang the bloody sheets out the window like absolute savages. Imagine! Rhiannon a virgin! Oh, I can't wait to tell Cern."

Her aunt quelled the siren into silence with another glare. "If virginity were required most alliances would never taken place. Virginity? Stuff and nonsense mortals invented. No. As is ancient tradition, we are here to disarm you."

"Do you mean undress?"

Morgan's affronted expression suggested no one had ever dared correct her before. "I mean disarm."

"Oh." As though that answered it. "Do a lot of brides go to bed armed here?"

Calli rose from her supine position. "It's really just a formality." She waved a hand. "Symbolic of a trusting union, et cetera. But yes, actually. A fair bit. I'm really just here for the undressing bit. Thought we'd missed out when we didn't find you. Imagined Jareth hadn't wasted any time. He always was a rebel."

"No. Absolutely not. This entire wedding was a mistake. I have no intention of..." she waved a hand in the general direction of the adjoining door.
Calli considered Sarah's earnest expression and then laughed outright. "By Hades, I think you're serious. But you drank so much fertility wine!"

The queasiness returned.

"Um... what?"

"Tonight. At the feast. I assumed you had jitters as you didn't seem particularly fond of my cousin. You tossed back cup after cup after cup. The wine," Calli continued when Sarah looked confused. "It's a way... of smoothing things between couples. Most of these weddings are strategic alliances. Liquid courage... oils the chariot and all that. Wait, do mortals still use chariots?"

"Oh my god, I drank so much..."

Calli's eyes flashed perceptively. "Indeed. And yet, my cousin sleeps alone tonight. By all rights if you hated him, with the amount you drank you should have still been like a Cravling in heat... unless..." The goddess gave another peal of laughter. "Oh, this is even better!"

"What? What's even better?" She mentally added fertility wine to her growing list of grievances.

"Oh nothing, nothing." Calli's expression cleared. "Shall we?"

Sarah felt the same tingling pull she'd felt in the sitting room before. "Shall we what?"

Calliope reached for the ties on Sarah's dress. "As gorgeous as it is, we can't let you sleep in this now can we?"

Sarah sidestepped her reach. "I can undress myself." She wondered if she needed to get that tattooed on her forehead.

"But where's the fun in that. And it is tradition."

"Calli," Morrigan's imperious tone made the siren scowl petulantly. "I think we can skip this part. We've established she won't try and murder him in his sleep. Perish the thought," Sarah replied dryly but, cleared her throat awkwardly at a piercing glance from Morrigan.

"And since her family is not here to inspect the groom, it seems unnecessary. She's a mortal, there can be no glamour."

"Spoilsport."

"Inspect? Glamour?"

Morrigan huffed, clearly beyond irritated by mortal ignorance. "With magic, nothing is what it appears. You would want to make sure everyone is who they say they are, don't you? Imagine you think you've married a handsome kelpie only to find out it's actually just a horse glamoured. Tricksters by nature. The family of the groom therefore undresses the bride to make sure she's not using magic to fool her husband. And naturally your family, were they here, would do the same for the groom to make sure he's what he appears to be."

Calli scrunched her nose in a grin. "My father was the best at glamour."

"Are you... are you talking about Zeus-"
"Focus!" Morrigan rapped her staff.

Calli slid Sarah a knowing smile. "It's always best to use your hands to make sure everything's real."

Sarah couldn't stop the ridiculous image of Karen undressing Jareth, making sure everything was natural, while her father looked on.

"Or your teeth if you're feeling frisky," Calli continued undaunted. "Are you sure you don't want me to demonstrate? I promise not to bite unless you ask nicely."

"That won't be necessary, Calliope," Morrigan rapped her staff again. "We've done our duty to try and slap some legitimacy on this nightmare of a union. It will quell some of the tongues and I'll simply remove the rest if I have to. Come along. Let the unfortunate mortal sleep while she can. She'll likely be dead in a week." Morrigan vanished in a cloud of black smoke.

"Dead..."

"I think she likes you," Calli nodded kindly, and then gave Sarah a final disappointed look. "Are you sure you don't need help? Hmm, no? Such a pity." She leaned in and pressed a kiss to Sarah's cheek. "Welcome to the family, cousin." The siren smelled like salt and sun and sex and she felt her knees quiver just a little, despite being quite sober.

When Calli pulled back her expression was coy, like she knew something Sarah didn't. "Sweet dreams, little mortal."

Chapter End Notes

Credit:
So a reader very aptly and kindly pointed out that Calliope is a muse (the head muse in fact) in Greek mythology and sometimes called the mother of the sirens, but not a siren herself. I completely miffed that up but I'm playing fast and loose here with the mythologies I'm combining. Don't mind me. I'm going to keep her as is.

Rhiannon in Celtic mythology is a major figure in the Mabinogi, the medieval Welsh story collection, and is notable for being politically strategic and beautiful. Again, I'm playing pretty fast and loose here - much like Calli!

Lughnasa (or Lughnasadh) is a Gaelic festival marking the beginning of the harvest season. Usually associated/celebrated August 1st.

AN:
Sorry this took so long to get out. Work has been crazy and my brain melted. But see? An update. I haven't just been dicking around on LFFL and FB! Don't come for about that other story. I haven't forgotten about it, I'm just not returning its texts right now and I took my read receipt off. I'll beg its forgiveness later. I have restrained myself from starting a new summer camp romp fic though *pats self on back* as I'm already a WIP two-timer and I can't keep either of them satisfied. Hope everyone in this hemisphere is enjoying summer so far!
Sarah wasn't sure when she'd finally fallen asleep for good.

There had been much tossing and turning despite the fact that the bed was, she'd be loathe to admit, incredibly comfortable. Without help getting out of the dress had proven to be a logistical nightmare, though damned if she was going to ask Jareth anymore than she would have trusted Calli.

In the end she'd finally managed it, wincing just a little at the unmistakable sound of fabric rending.

Finding something to sleep in had proved just as frustrating. The large closet was well stocked, but not with anything Sarah remotely considered sleepwear. There were gowns, some even Sarah might call tasteful, and a few other odds and ends but none of them practical. Then there were the scraps of fabric suggesting they might be nightwear, but on closer inspection proved to be the kind of things one wore to bed when the intention was anything but sleep.

Sleeping nude didn't seem anymore advisable.

Rifling through the bits of lace, leather, and silk, Sarah eventually pulled out what could be called a nightgown if you squinted. From a distance. In heavy fog.

Though it was long, it was mostly transparent, with just a few artful bits of beading and embroidery to disguise the important bits. The two shoulder straps were little more than gossamer bows, and the neckline dipped down to her breastbone. The colour was an iridescent pearl, reminiscent of fairy wings. On closer inspection Sarah suspected it actually was made from what must be thousands of fairy wings. She felt a pang of guilt, though considering she still sported a surprisingly nasty scar from her last encounter with one, it was fleeting.

Catching herself in the wardrobe mirror, she almost opted for naked. It was somehow more scandalous. Provocative in a teasing, deceptively innocent sort of way, until you turned it this way...

Though she was shorter than the Rhiannon, the fit was fine. It was the sort of thing one wore while running through a castle by candlelight in some made for TV late night movie.

*Something she could actually now do if she wanted to...* 

The sort of thing that always ended in ripped bodices and an R rating...

*Something else she could... NO.*
She fiddled with the dress again and then finally crawled into bed, resolving that no one would see it anyway.

When she woke it was still full night. The preternatural feeling of being watched made her freeze, hands curling into the comforter reflexively. A light breeze from the open balcony ruffled the bed curtains gently.

And between them, perched on the balcony's railing beyond, was a white barn owl; its black eyes unblinking and trained unmistakably upon her.

She relaxed for a moment, body recognizing it wasn't a threat.

Until her mind caught up and reassessed.

"You god-damned pervert," she hissed, and then tossed a chintz pillow at the bird. It unfortunately missed by a wide margin.

Drawing upon her old softball days, Sarah picked up another pillow and palmed it. She pulled herself up into a kneeling position. Ready.

"Is this really how you get off? Watching girls sleep?" Aim.

"Let's see how you enjoy this little slice, you... you..." Aim

"... peeping pigeon!" Fire.

Direct owl and the pillow sailed over the balcony in an impressive explosion of feathers.

A politely cleared throat wiped the victorious grin from Sarah's face a scant second later.

Jareth leaned against the open doorway between their rooms. His arms were crossed across his bare chest. Low slung silk pants perilously clung narrow hips. His hair was artfully more dishevelled than normal and one brow was arched above sleepy eyes dancing with mirth.

"Vanquishing midnight demons?"

Sarah looked back to the window. "I thought..." A few feathers still hung in the air.

A low knowing chuckle. "That I have nothing better to do than spy on you in the middle of the night?"

Sarah sank back on her heels. "Well..."

"Because might I point out that were I so inclined there is a perfectly serviceable door," he patted the frame, "right here."

"Do you always get off on being so insufferably smug?"

"More so than I do on spying through windows."

"Noted," Sarah replied waspishly. "My mistake." Her eyed drifted back to the window. "Oh, but that poor little owl then!"

"Oh, don't fret much. That was no innocent owl; it just wasn't me. He still got an eyeful for his pains. Fetching dress by the way."
The next pillow hit the hastily closed door.

Unable to sleep again - partially because of lack of pillows - she'd finally given up altogether and pulled herself from the bed, both sweaty and frustrated. One of the doors in the bedroom was open, and from it a cool breeze was flowing. Upon closer inspection, it led to a set of stone steps. The door at the bottom opened into the lavish bathhouse from earlier. This time with no unwanted company. The place was fully dark, but the sconces flared to life invitingly when she crossed the threshold. The water in the dark pool was as still and clear as polished glass.

Sarah dipped a toe in it, breaking the surface slightly. It was refreshingly cool, but not cold. Perfect really. Her arms immediately broke out in goosebumps.

She scanned the room and then pulled the delicate gown over her head and dropped in on the edge. Rocking on her heels for a moment, she executed a perfectly flawless shallow dive. She broke the surface on her back, arms stretched out in a float. She hadn't noticed before, but the ceiling was entirely windows - displaying to full effect the expanse of stars above. She did a few lazy back strokes. The cooler air teasing the exposed skin of her front.

Through the muffling of the water round her head, she caught a faint sound. It was enough to make her arch up, legs kicking in a tread, as she looked around the pool.

And then she locked eyes with him.

He was propped against a far corner, submersed to his waist and arms spread on the stone, watching her.

Sarah sank down, leaving only her head above water and crossing one arm protectively across her chest. She wasn't sure she could accuse him of trespassing when it was his castle, so she said nothing, instead turning to swim towards the opposite side. When she got there, she realized there was no modest way to exit. No towels in reach and her gown across the pool.

A low chuckle danced across the surface. Near enough the she turned defensively. He was stopped only a few feet away. Close enough that she could see he was naked even in the low light. She looked back up to his face, her own flushing despite the cool water lapping at their skin.

Before she could speak, he reached out and tugged her arm free. Her nipples were already tightly furled from the pool but she felt them sharpen even more under his keen gaze. She kicked away when he reached out but felt the wall hit her back. Her feet caught on the submerged ledge skirting the edge of the pool. The stairs nowhere near. She turned, hands bracing on the edge to pull herself out when a warm arm snaked about her waist and she felt an equally warm body mold to her back. His hand slid up and cupped a full breast. Her breath studdered out brokenly. His weight pressed her up against the side and she could feel him, equally hard and hot, against her cheeks.

Fingers stroked the fullness of her wet breast before rolling the nipple between them. She inhaled sharply, neck arching. He brushed the damp hair away from her ear, and then lips pressed against her pulse, a tongue coming out to taste her salt slicked skin.

His feet found purchase on either side of hers and she could feel his cock dip for a moment between her thighs and nudge her folds. She was already slick even in the water. His other hand dropped from her neck to palm her other breast, this time his touch a little more aggressive. A little more unpolished. Her hands, still pressed to the tile, fist ed. He growled against her neck, mouth still hotly sucking along her jaw. One hand slid down between the wall and her body until his fingers splayed her folds and found the tiny bundle of nerves. There was no hesitation when he slid a finger in. She
jerked back, her ass pressing into him rhythmically.

His own breath caught, and for a moment his teeth sank into her skin. And then he gripped her hips and lifted so that she ended up half out, her upper body pressed into the cool stone of the pool's edge. He spread her legs from behind, the cool air hitting her exposed flesh. Water lapped against her thighs. One hand pressed her down into the stone, the other palmed the cheek of her ass roughly.

His breath fanned against her clit and then lips...

Sarah shot awake to a face staring down at her.

She squealed and almost flung herself from the bed.

"Hello." Rook watched her spastic reactions curiously.

Sarah coaxed her breathing back down, slaking off the last vestiges of sleep and a dream she couldn't quite remember. She was hot and sticky, and the bed sheets were tangled like she'd taken up origami in her sleep.

"Rook! You scared me half to death!" She pressed a hand to her clammy forehead. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm glad you kept your promise. I came because I thought I was too late."

"Rook, I can't begin to tell you how much I haven't had my coffee yet."

"Mother said you'd died. I thought you'd broken your promise and done it without me."

"I - what? Died?"

"She said you'd died of mortification. Or would die. Or you must have died. Something about the dinner."

Sarah collapsed back against the bed. "This is seriously too much."

"So I scared you half to death?" The boy canted his head, and studied her wan expression. "Are mortals really that fragile? Are you really half dead now?"

"Rook. While I find your morbid fixation on my death charming, unless you next words are, 'Here I've brought you coffee and annulment papers to sign', could we please continue this another time?"

"Okay," he sounded disappointed but undaunted, "just don't die 'til I see you next. Father says the Lady Rhiannon plans to make you into a carpet. Pretty neat, right?"

She pulled the covers fully over her head, her reply muffled. "Always a pleasure, Rook."

The boy must have exited the same way he arrived, for when she lowered the blankets again she was alone. Sun streamed in through the windows creating little prisms of colour everywhere. One burst refracted from a single crystal on the bedside table.

Sarah stared at it distrustfully for a moment. When it did nothing noteworthy she finally reached out and poked it.

With a flash it was replaced by a silver tray containing a still steaming urn of coffee, pot of cream, and small bowl of sugar. A single rose - the same rich colours as those at the banquet and in perfect
bloom - perched in a mercury glass vase.

The smell was divine and her stomach clenched in anticipation. It would be pointless, and really just mulish, to refuse she decided. The risk of fertility coffee did cross her mind but she shook that off as well. She'd happily jump a naval ship for java in the morning.

The first sip was nectar of the gods - and the not the misfit ones who'd been at her wedding. Nightmare of a marriage aside, the evening's horrors were muted by the morning's promise of defeating an enemy. At his own game.

Again.

The odds had been stacked against her before and she'd still prevailed. Hell, if she didn't leave the room, the whole thing might end up being a much needed break from work. She felt a slight pang wondering if her disappearance had yet been noted, and if so in what respect.

But coffee first.

She was on her second refill when she heard the unwanted knock at the door. Scowling in anticipation of whomever was on the other-side, she offered a curt, 'enter.'

A stout looking goblin guard hesitated in the doorway, wringing its hands in indecision.

"Your... Your majesty?"

Sarah looked around the room by rote and then remember the goblin was unfortunately addressing her.

"...yes?"

"I'm ah... here to escort you to breakfast. The king sends his regrets. He had business this morning."

Sarah immediately held up a hand. "Let me stop you right there. No, thank you. I won't be attending. Coffee is just fine. Not a big breakfast eater anyway."

The guard blinked at her. "You're er... saying no? To the king?"

Sarah smiled sweetly into her cup. "Repeatedly, emphatically, gleefully, and in every language I speak. Which is only two, maybe three if I'm a little drunk, but I think I've conveyed the gist."

The goblin scratched his head like he'd never heard anything so preposterous. "... And you want me to tell him that? 'No.'"

Sarah nodded slowly. "But feel free to be as creative as you like."

The guard swallowed deeply.

"And... ah... er... yer certain?"

Sarah used her hand to mime him walking back out the door.

A few minutes later the tray emptied, followed by the cup in her hand.

"Petty, Jareth. But I had enough anyway." She stretched in the plush bed. "Think I'll go back to sleep and pretend this is all just a nightmare."
An elegant card in thick, pressed paper appeared on the tray.

Staring at it didn't make it go away, so she picked it up, entirely resigned to the fact that it would not be divorce papers as wished. Her eyes narrowed.

"I wish I were divorced." Nothing happened.

The note - written in a bold and arrogantly messy style - read, "My thanks for the boost to my reputation. Staying in bed all day suggests I either wore you out completely last night or that there's nowhere you would rather be and eagerly await my return. Regardless, you've fed the gossip mill for years. J. p.s. Nice try."

It took Sarah less than five minutes to throw on clothes and stalk out of the room.

She was very much aware she was being manipulated, but she also knew the notes would continue. And eventually he would come himself. She wanted to be somewhere other than a bedroom when he did.

Another goblin guard was waiting outside, picking his nose. He immediately stood to attention when the door opened, snot dripping precariously from a finger.

Sarah considered him. "What happened to the other one? From before?"

"Bogged."

"Bogged?"

The guard nodded, wiping his hands on his trousers. "King is not a fan of no."

Sarah was fairly sure he'd meant it as a warning, but instead she just laughed.

Through the twists and turns of the castle, she was eventually shown to a bright sunny room, set for an intimate breakfast. If intimate included a rag tag of unwanted in-laws.

Rook, his parents, Cern, Calliope, Lugh, and Boudicca made up the rest of the table. Morrigan was notably absent.

Jareth rose when she entered, his eyes flashing with poorly concealed victory.

"Ah, the bride herself. Wedded and bedded," Lugh offered by way of greeting. Sarah was positive it was meant to embarrass her.

"He wed her, yes." Cern leaned back and slung a booted foot up on the table, his keen eyes assessing. "Doesn't much look like he bed her."

So breakfast was off to a good start.

The Goblin King ignored them both and pulled back a chair for Sarah. It was evident from his own untouched plate, that he had been otherwise engaged.

"You can stop pretending to be a gentleman," she whispered tartly when he poured her a cup of coffee without asking.

"And here I rather thought you preferred it that way. The confines of civility. By all means give me permission to forgo them."
She accepted the cup, china rattling ever so slightly, when his thumb brushed her wrist. Sarah turned her attention back to the room. "Where's the Lady Morrigan?" She didn't particularly care, in fact she felt more at ease when not being stared at by the raven, but she was eager to turn the attention away from herself.

"Oh, she's not one for mornings." Lugh answered from across the table with a dismissive wave.

"Too busy plucking out wagging tongues I believe," Calli added blithely. Sarah couldn't tell if she was joking and didn't really want to ask.

"Not worth her while anyway." Boudicca affected a pout. "Silly to be stuck in here when the wedding breakfast really should have been hosted in the great hall."

"I thought Sarah would prefer a little quiet this morning," Jareth replied evenly as he took his seat. "Something a touch less public."

Calli propped her head on her hands and sighed. "More intimate."

"It would have been far more intimate had he brought her breakfast in bed. I wonder why he didn't." Cern winked at Sarah provocingly. "Could it be he'd be more likely to wear it?"

She choked on a bit of toast.

"Get your boots off my table, Cern."

The horned god complied, but the grin remained. "Rough night, cousin?"

Jareth didn't deign to answer.

"And you? Sweet dreams, cousin?" It took Sarah a moment to realize Calli was directing the question to her. By that time everyone was staring at her expectantly. She'd been in the midst of cracking the top off the largest soft boiled egg she'd ever seen, trying very hard not to imagine from whence it had come.

"I-" a shadow of a memory made Sarah's nerves dance, her skin prickling and stomach clenching. She could feel the siren's canny eyes on her, so she forced the feeling down. "Fine. Just fine." She knocked the egg harder than she'd meant to and the top went sailing through the air.

Jareth, whose attention had turned to his own breakfast, caught it deftly. He glanced quizzically at Sarah and then at Calliope, eyes narrowing on his cousin's knowing smile.

The conversation settled into what Sarah imagined was the usual fare. Rook's parents, Reina and Reagan, began discussing trade between the Underground lands. From what she could follow it seemed Reina was in favour of flexible, aggressively dynamic, and multi-directional strategies. Reagan was more reticent to commit to more than one or two moves at a time.

Calli and Cern seemed to have a somewhat competitive relationship and both were intent on regaling her with tales of each other's foibles - the time Cern was caught by his own snare and nearly lost his manhood. The time Calli had tried to seduce an entire fleet only to discover they were a travelling band of deaf eunuchs.

Despite her decision not to let her guard down, Sarah found it was hard not to laugh.

"Lugh and I are off for a ride." Boudicca and Lugh rose in unison, interrupting another of Cern's tales. They inclined their head to Jareth and after a beat too long to quite qualify as polite, they did
the same for Sarah.

Rook and his parents excused themselves a few minutes later as well, but not before Rook reminded Sarah of her promise - this time receiving a gentle cuff in the head from his mother.

Calli and Cern, by contrast, appeared in no hurry to leave despite several meaningful looks from the Goblin King.

"Why are you kicking me under the table, cousin?" Cern grinned.

Sarah frowned between them and then pushed her half-finished plate forward.

"Appetite satiated?" the Siren purred. Cern tossed a roll at her head.

"I'm just happy the 'celebrations' are over." Sarah didn't add so that she could focus on immediately undoing the union. She just needed a library.

The ensuing silence was so heavily laden, Sarah almost dabbed at her mouth self-consciously.

"What..." And then she felt the crushing weight of understanding settle on her chest. "They aren't over, are they?"

Calli smothered a snort.

Cern poured himself another glass of what looked like beer. "Far from it. There are so few marriages of such importance, and this was to be a particularly momentous joining that the celebrations were to last a fortnight. Jareth here may have exchanged a bride, but his guests will still expect entertainment for their troubles. More so now, if anything."

"And last night wasn't enough?"

"Oh, you just whet their hunger for more."

"And when exactly will they be 'satiated'?" Sarah asked sourly.

"In general? Never. But the festivities were to last until," Cern paused briefly as though hesitant to finish, "Lughnasa. As is tradition." He shot her a pitying look that she supposed was meant to be kind but just made her all the more annoyed by the whole situation.

"Lovely. So I can spend the next week celebrating a marriage I didn't want - don't want - and then die horribly in a duel in which I stand no chance."

"I would never let you die, Sarah."

Jareth's quiet words cut across the table. They were softly spoken but blade sharp. He'd been hitherto silent, almost forgotten, but Sarah found herself unable to look away from his expression - a heady mix of fierce conviction and earnest vow.

"Then you'll be happy to help me get out of this duel then." And this marriage, she added to herself.

"Oh, there's no backing out of it." The Goblin King leaned back in his chair, managing to look regal even at breakfast. "It is her right."

"But, and stop me if I've said this before," Sarah intoned sarcastically, "this was all a misunderstanding. You have to see this. I'm not sure what you're endgame is - it's clear enough that you didn't want to marry her, nor she you - but there is no reason I must be pulled into this... this."
Jareth steepled his fingers. "Stop me if I'm wrong, Sarah, but do you find yourself in this *marriage,*" he added with emphasis, "because I dragged you kicking and screaming from your world into mine? Hmm? No? So how, one wonders, do you claim to have the moral high ground when you are the one trespassing on *my* lands?" When she didn't answer he continued thoughtfully. "Really, as a mortal trespassing in the Underground, I would be in *my* rights to do whatever I want to you."

Sarah threw down her napkin. "Is that a threat?"

"Are you frightened?"

"No." It was only a partial lie.

"Then it wasn't a threat. You'll know when it is."

Sarah's eyes flicked to the pair avidly listening. "Should we continue this conversation privately?"

"Oh, don't stop on our account. This is fascinating to watch," Calli replied, propping her silvery head on one hand and twirling a finger. "Go on. Now you say something cutting to him."

"Yes, make fun of his hair or something," Cern suggested eagerly.

"Leave us."

Jareth tone made Sarah wonder if she'd made a tactical error. Being alone meant no witnesses. She looked back the cousins beseechingly.

"I want to go kill something anyway," Cern sighed and pushed back from the table.

Calli followed suit. "He always was such a spoilsport. No wonder you won't sleep with him." She pulled a face at the Goblin King and flounced out of the room leaving behind the beguiling scent of sea and sex.

When they were alone Sarah counted to thirty before speaking again. "Look, I don't want to fight." Jareth snorted.

"Much. But can't you see? It was an accident. I wasn't meant to be at your wedding, I was trying to get to the Goblin Market."

"To find your ring."

"Yes! Exactly."

"A ring you've done without all this time." Jareth's tone had softened considerably, but it still did nothing to relax Sarah.

"Yes... but... Yes." She looked down. "I was feeling nostalgic. You see my mother just died and she'd given it right before she left. It," voice catching, "it meant something, something I didn't value at the time."

A comforting hand settled on her shoulder and stroked the edge of her clavicle. At some point he'd gotten up and crossed round the table. Fingers brushed the hair away from her ear, tracing the shell for a moment. The feeling was strangely familiar and she instantly flushed. When he spoke, breath fanned her cheek.

"I would offer my condolences." The words skated down her spine. "But we both know that your
mother is alive and well in Italy right now. You are a very good liar, Sarah, but not that good."

She slammed a hand down on the table. "Bastard."

Jareth laughed and moved away.

"She still gave it to me. And I do want it back. And I, well, I didn't meant to trespass."

"Sarah..."

"Well, I didn't mean for you to know I was."

"That's closer to the truth." He was standing by the tall casement windows.

"I'm not really sure you're in a position to call me a liar."

"Oh? And when have I lied to you."

Sarah stood, her hand curling round the back of the chair. "How about, 'you have thirteen hours to solve the Labyrinth'?"

"And I gave you 13 hours if I recall."

"Then took three away!"

"Semantics. And you were far too smug for someone so young."

His attention was still on the window and it was somehow all the more galling. She strode up to him, intent to make her point and unsure what she was most annoyed by. "I still beat you."

He turned then and Sarah realized too late she'd been drawn into a trap. He moved behind her like a shadow, one hand ghosting her waist. From her unhindered vantage she could see the chaos of the labyrinth and city below. Celebrations were still in full swing. Even from a distance she could see the banners and bunting and sparks of magic in the air.

He brushed her hair behind her ear again. She'd never considered her ears sensitive before but she couldn't stop another frisson dancing across her nerves.

"And now you have me." Lips touched her neck this time. "Is that not reward? Is that not fate?"

His words were the kind of arrogance Sarah normally made a habit of quashing outright. But it was hard to focus with his mouth moving so firmly against her pulse. Teeth scraped and her knees wobbled just a little.

"What are you doing?"

She felt his laugh against her neck. "Is it not obvious then? I thought I told you. Perhaps I need to be more clear." The hand at her waist turned her towards him and he dipped his head down swiftly. Sarah pulled back at the same time so that his lips landed at the corner of her mouth instead. She felt his smile.

"I don't intend to be seduced." She could feel her cheeks redden.

Jareth pulled back. "Where would the fun be if you did? But why the blushing virgin," a finger stroked her face. "I believe I heard tell of a list of names, was it?"
Sarah swatted at him. "I'm not pretending to be a blushing virgin."

His grin widened and her eyes trailed back to his mouth of their own accord. "All the better. It's just me who has this charming effect on you." He stood back and spread his arms. "By all means, feel free to seduce me."

Sarah folded her arms. "I prefer a challenge."

"Who says I'm easy? I'm not the one who keeps lists."

Her jaw dropped. Which naturally meant he took it as invitation to make a second attempt. This time his mouth landed squarely on the mark. Reflexively she pressed a hand on his chest to push him away, but then his tongue teased between her parted lips. She would tell herself later that it distracted her and that's why she didn't immediately end it. Not because his fingers had splayed across her back and curled into her skin like a brand. Or because his other hand had threaded through her hair to gently cradle her nape. His mouth was soft and firm and somehow demanding without being bruising. She inhaled deeply, trying hard not to think about how good he smelled. Like fresh linens and coffee and something uniquely him.

Uneven teeth caught her lip, tugging gently, and reminding her she'd been responding. Just as enthusiastically. Some of the playfulness of the kiss changed. Deepening. More starved. He made a sound against her mouth that triggered the thought of damp skin and water.

Her body's fierce reaction startled her. Enough that she would have broken the kiss had the knock on the door, followed by distinctive sounds of it opening, not made Jareth pull up sharply.

"What?"

The single word cut across the room like an arrow and pierced right into the goblin standing stunned in the doorway.

Jareth looked furiously savage and every bit the Goblin King.

The goblin looked pleadingly to Sarah, at the floor, at the now cold sausages. Everywhere but Jareth.

Sarah swallowed, licking her lips. She could still taste him. "Can't you see he's scared? It wasn't his fault." And in truth she was thankful for the cold dose of reality.

She felt Jareth tense, like he'd never been called out on his temper before. She could feel his eyes on her, but she had no intention of looking at him just yet.

"Yes? What did you want?" It didn't escape her notice that she sounded rather regal.

The goblin bowed, the fact that he was still shaking made his armour rattle. "Yer... yer majesties? The guests... the guests are waiting to do the presentations of the gifts." He immediately cowered like he expected to be bogged on the spot.

The Goblin King's expression suggested it was still a possibility.

Sarah smoothed a hand down her dress. "Oh." She glanced back at Jareth and then immediately looked away again. "Right. Lead the way." It was the last thing she wanted to do really, but staying in the room with him any longer was definitely counter productive to her escaping the sham union.

She stepped away to follow the guard but Jareth snagged her wrist.
"I'd be impressed that you are so eager to take up your royal duties if I didn't know better. You are running away, Sarah. I never took you for a coward."

She pulled back futilely. "I'm no coward. And you should know that no matter your tricks and your cheating, you're going to fail again. Spectacularly. I'll level the castle this time. You might as well give up now."

Eyes never leaving her face, he pressed an open-mouthed kiss to the skin of her wrist before releasing her. "Never."

Chapter End Notes

The naughty rating being the dream of course. I was never going to throw them in the sack that quick. *pshaw* Amateurs. I did feel weird about Rook being the first thing she saw after it, but eh, she forgot the dream... or did she? *waggles brows*

So there was a LOT of talking in this fic and not so much action (pun intended). Never fear! They will do stuff (pun also intended). Next chapter we get into the "gifts and some of the wedding celebration events. None that Sarah will find disturbing. No, none at all. Thanks for your patience and hope you are enjoying this weirdness. I wasn't going to finish this today (I still had the dream portion to complete) but then someone posted some sexy Labyrinth fanart and I was like, well shit, if you're going to just force my hand like that!

Further FYI, Calli is totally going to keep flirting with Sarah. As will Cern. Not because Sarah is some mythical perfect human that no being can resist but because it ruffles Jareth's balls and I am a big time fan of ruffling Jareth's balls. They are the cousins that you loved/hated growing up. The ship is definitely J/S and will always be J/S but there will be some temptation and minor shenanigans that's for sure. I don't think the fey are particularly sexually repressed beings.

True story: My H was once telling an awkward story and I was rather desperately kicking him under the table to get him to stop. He paused long enough to ask, "Why are you kicking me under the table?" That is a real thing that happened. The man I married (intentionally), folks.
When the doors opened to the throne room it was not to the one Sarah remembered.

For one the place was immaculately clean and dressed to an impressive degree with yet more flowers and crystal accents. Banners depicting what she assumed must the Goblin King's sigil - a barn owl in flight, talons holding a crystal, and set against a midnight blue backdrop of a triskele maze - hung from the high ceiling in rows.

And two the space was huge, which was fortunate considering the immense number of guests who turned expectantly at her entrance.

This was not the simple gift opening she'd been expecting.

Rather than the lone circular throne, dual thrones - joined together by an elaborately carved knot, were set on a small dais. Behind them great stone wings rose up and curved above them like a canopy.

Not usually shy, Sarah immediately balked; feet refusing to take another step. In her haste to escape her 'husband' she'd thrown herself from the frying pan right back into the fire.

It didn't help that so many of the eyes were trained on her as though they expected her to do something interesting.

Like stab someone.

Again.

When she continued to do nothing more than stand there, murmurs and whispers were exchanged behind cupped hands. Sarah had chosen a simple sheath dress – the most basic and easiest to get into that she could find in the borrowed wardrobe. She'd barely brushed her hair and had put on no makeup whatsoever in her haste to get down to breakfast. Against the guests' elaborate finery she imagined she looked even more out of place than she felt. And she absolutely hated that it even bothered her at all.

When she smoothed a sweaty palm over her hip instead of silk she felt thick velvety fabric. Sarah looked down and immediately inhaled sharply. What she saw was a gown of deep saturated crimson, draping in thick folds to the floor. From what little she could tell, the bodice was an even deeper oxblood red leather corset - almost armour-like. The sleeves were long and fitted, and laced down her arms and past her wrists like gauntlets. Had she had a mirror, she would have noticed that the
collar rose around her shoulders and neck like jagged horns, so that the whole effect was possibly more goblin than the Goblin King himself.

He'd joined her at her side and she eyed him surreptitiously. He too had been dressed comparatively modestly at breakfast. Now he wore a variation of the same armour he'd worn the night she'd made that cataclysmic wish. The one that had turned her world upside down and was apparently still intent on spinning her. The colour was mostly a stark black, but slashes of the same oxblood in her gown slashed in patterns across his breastplate.

The message was in no way subtle. Much like him.

When she made no move to take his proffered arm, he simply took hers and placed it upon his. A moment later they were in motion. When they ascended the steps, her mind finally fell in tune with her body and she hesitated a full beat before sitting down. Taking a place on the throne felt like too great a concession.

Unfortunately the only alternative was running away and that was too much like defeat. Plus it hadn't even worked last time. She was in no mood to cause another scene or act like a feckless child for their enjoyment. In the short time she'd gone from breakfast to the throne room she'd formulated a plan, and part of it involved playing along.

Until she no longer had to.

When she finally caved, she was rewarded with a look from Jareth that threatened to wreak havoc on her resolve. There was the expected smugness and satisfaction, ever present when he got his way, but also something entirely foreign and unnerving. Like she was the final piece of a puzzle he'd been searching for. His gloved hand settled on the shared arm of their thrones, fingers splayed towards hers.

She folded her own into her skirts.

The procession of gifts began almost immediately and though she dreaded any reminder of their unwanted union, she was happy for the distraction.

As it turned out the only thing the fey liked better than receiving lavish gifts was the absolutely ostentatious presentation of them. It was as much about showing off their largesse as it was about giving.

After a mere thirty minutes Sarah witnessed more jewels and precious metals pile at her feet than she could have possibly imagined. Not a gravy boat or questionably tasteful vase in sight. She reminded herself that none of it was meant for her. She was an imposter in the whole affair.

A scant few of the gift givers she at least recognized. Rook and his parents presented them with a lavish chess set inlaid with onyx and crystal.

When Ludo shuffled forward to gift them an impressive collection of rocks, Sarah broke into the first real sincere smile. And Jareth, to his credit, accepted it with the same grace as he had the costly treasures.

Sir Didymus likewise pledged an offer of knightly service to their honour. She highly doubted he would have done the same for Rhiannon.

The goblins, and there were a fair few of them, were not to be remiss when their monarch finally got hitched. They managed a stately (if you squinted) procession of every odd and sod you could imagine. Dented kettles. Socks - none of them matching. Fur pelts that didn't look quite dead yet.
And chickens. So many chickens…

As with her friends' humble but heartfelt offerings, Jareth accepted each gift with equal thanks, whether it was a half drowned rat (and they'd received three so far) or a diamond the size of a house cat.

The fairies presented them with folds and folds of fabric Sarah recognized as the same as her nightgown. Apparently they shed their wings like a snake its skin. To receive their weavings was itself a blessing.

Or so she was told.

The Goblin King kept a steady stream of helpful commentary throughout the proceedings. And it was appreciated, when she remembered to focus – somewhat difficult when his warm breath kept teasing her ear or when his hand would accidentally brush her wrist to get her attention.

And some of the gifts themselves were suggestive.

Ethereal forest nymphs performed an elaborate dance, birch leaves shimmering silver on their otherwise gloriously bare bodies.

Not to be outdone, Calliope led the sirens in a song that had half the crowd clawing at their clothes by the end. Thankfully Sarah had wisely stuck her fingers in her ears after the first note.

While a good number of the guests redressed themselves, the mountain ogres presented them with huge wheels of ripened cheese. Sarah thought it very industrious of the simple creatures, until Jareth cautioned that they used their own body secretions to make them. Of course he waited until she'd politely reached for a slice. As solicitous as he was being, he was clearly still intent on finding enjoyment at her expense.

When a rather striking couple ascended the steps and handed their baby to a horrified Sarah, he couldn't suppress a grin.

Blanching she took the bundle carefully. The couple looked at her expectantly.

"Er… thank you?"

Jareth snorted and then leaned in, stroking the child's downy head, "I steal the babies, Sarah. You just need to kiss them and tell the parents they are beautiful. Even when they aren't. You should probably return him now before you cause an incident with the colonials"

She flashed an apologetic and thoroughly embarrassed smile at the parents, kissed the baby's head and passed him back.

"You could have warned me," she hissed.

"Not to steal children?" he replied wryly. "And here I thought you were in the business of saving them."

"I thought… it was a strange custom to give children away or something." It somehow sounded even more inane spoken aloud.

"Hardly. We leave that to the spoiled little girls."

But then his hand settled on her wrist for a moment. His forefinger stroking the pulse at the edge of
her sleeve. "Besides, you blush when you're flustered."

"Also happens when I'm angry."

"Yes, I remember. I can't decide which I like more."

Her other hand closed around his, stilling the languid strokes that seemed to skate across her very nerves. To anyone else their entwined hands might have looked like a lover's embrace. "Why are you doing this? Going through with this charade? I don't belong here and you know it. These gifts are not even for me."

"Sarah." His tone was no longer quite so mocking. "Whether you admit it or not you've earned the right to sit by my side."

"And I told you it was an accident."

"We both know that's not what I meant. Not when I meant."

Her heart fluttered just a little. "Yet here I am in someone else's chair wearing someone else's dress." She was uncertain which rankled more – that she'd been forced into the debacle, or that it had all been meant for someone else.

"That was never her dress." His keen eyes traced each stitch across her body with interest. "You thought you looked out of place. You wanted something to fit the part. Something to feel powerful."

Her own dropped disbelievingly to the gown. The one that was so very goblin… so very him. "I made this happen?" They slid back to his own outfit – a perfect match.

…and I will be your slave.

Her throat was suddenly achingly dry. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because it matters to you."

She couldn't decide if his tone was wry or sincere. And then something caught her eye.

"You!"

It was only by the grace of god and a surprisingly strong Goblin King that Sarah didn't manage to physically launch herself down the dais and onto the now quivering gardener at its base.

Whether Hoggle had been planning on bestowing a gift or not, they would never know. True to form he took one look at the livid expression on Sarah's face, turned tail and ran.

"You've probably caused enough scandals in the last 24 hours," he murmured against her temple, having deftly turned her attempt at dwarficide into the appearance of an embrace. "As much as I'd personally enjoy watching you destroy Hogwart, perhaps it can wait?"

"Hoggle," Sarah replied by rote and then sniffed, because he was right. Which was just maddening in its own right and even more so because the deep inhalation had just reminded her how good he always smelled.

When she pushed back, he studied her wan face and seemingly made a decision.

"Family, friends, enemies, those that find themselves all three… We are positively overcome by your generosity. Alas it's so much, the queen is feeling faint from joy." He answered Sarah's scowl with a
sly grin. "I will be happy to continue to receive your adulation while the queen rests for this
evening's festivities."

There were murmurs of excitement amongst the guests. Enough that Sarah felt an uneasy foreboding
take root. Jareth's expression did nothing to mollify her, even as she recognized the reprieve for what
it was.

*I can be generous…*

As she made to descend the steps, he caught her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm. Had it been
from anyone else it might have been nothing more that a courtly gesture. Certainly she caught more
than a few sighs. But then his eyes narrowed and his smile slanted. "Try very hard not to run away,
Sarah. I'd hate to so thoroughly enjoy catching you."

She managed to make it out of the throne room with dignity mostly intact. Alone in the hallway she
sagged away the cool stone wall for a moment to regroup.

"Escaping?"

Sarah immediately straightened and turned.

Morrigan regarded her coolly. The goddess looked resplendent in shades of midnight.

"Not as such. I just needed… a break."

"Yes, presentations of the gifts are always so tedious. Useless trinkets by and large. Nobody even
bothers to offer a good sacrifice anymore."

Sarah couldn't tell if she was joking. She thought likely not.

"So my peacock of a nephew spared you, did he?" Sarah barely repressed a snicker, even if the jab
seemed affectionate. Morrigan was clearly rather fond of Jareth.

"Probably because I almost caused a scene."

"Again?" Morrigan's brows arched. "You are a feral little thing, aren't you?" Again, Sarah got the
impression the goddess didn't entirely disapprove.

"The gifts were really just for him anyway. *And Rhiannon.*"

"If you aren't prepared to stake your claim and seize your share, you'll never survive marriage."

"I think the odds are against me surviving this marriage as it is. Certainly if Lady Rhiannon has her
way."

"Wallowing in self-pity?" Morrigan tsked. "And before noon?"

The arrow found its mark. "I'm sorry. I'm probably keeping you. You must be here to present your
own gift to him?"

Morrigan studied Sarah for a moment; the bird on her shoulder's expression just as uncannily sharp.
"I've given my gift privately."

Sarah nodded politely and then offered an awkward sort of half-curtsy because it felt owed, before
turning to leave.
"I have not yet decided whether or not to give one to you."

Sarah paused, uncertain what kind of gift a goddess of death would bestow and if it was the sort of thing one even wanted.

"In the meantime I will answer one question."

A strange offer, but several questions immediately flitted through her head. How do I break this union? Is there a way to get rid of Rhiannon? How can I get home again? All questions Morrigan no doubt she asked instead was, "Where is the library?"

For the first time she noticed genuine surprise cross the goddess's face.

Sarah glanced up at the window, tracking the progress of the sun across the sky. Without a clock it was difficult to say how long she'd been in the library. Two hours at least, she'd wager. The mind boggled that Jareth might still be receiving gifts.

Or perhaps he'd finished and had other matters to attend to. She certainly wouldn't admit that part of her had expected him to seek her out immediately afterwards. They it was only to be expected really. When her eyes tracked to the doors, she resolutely shook her head.

Time is short.

Books lay open across the table before her. If she wanted to succeed, she needed to stay focused.

Find the right words.

When Morrigan had thrown open the doors to the space, Sarah had stifled a gasp. The Goblin King liked books. Or at the very least he collected them. The walls were lined two stories high with thick leather bound tomes in neat rows that belied the chaos just outside the walls. The room was panelled in a rich dark wood and outfitted with leather chairs and couches. A great stone fireplace took up one portion of the room, while tall glass windows dressed in thick brocade fabrics occupied another. Otherwise every inch was entirely devoted to the written word. A few tables were spaced throughout the centre of the room.

She'd despaired of even finding a library, now it seemed her task was to find the proverbial needle in the haystack.

Perhaps her expression said as much, because Morrigan had merely canted her head thoughtfully and then disappeared.

Sarah immediately began scanning the shelves nearest to her, stomach further sinking when she realized many were in languages she could not read. She pulled one at random and flipped it open, hoping there was some sort of magic translation spell in effect. She was staring at the page so intently, silently wishing the words to reform into something legible, she didn't hear the steps approaching until they were upon her.

"Ah, I see you've a keen interest in the mating rituals of swamp trolls."

Sarah looked up – and then down – into the bespectacled eyes of what should only surmise was the librarian. She thought he might have been have been a sort of goblin, though it was difficult to tell under all of his white hair. He reminded her a little of the Wiseman, though without the snarky hat. His long beard was laden with items he'd either dropped in it accidentally or had deliberately inserted for later use. A feathered quill here, a pot of ink there, a half eaten ham sandwich that was slowly
going mouldy. And something else seemed to be moving just below the surface.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"I said I see you've an interest in the sexual reproduction of swamp trolls." He nodded at the book in her hands. "Are you planning on breeding them? I can suggest some more technical sources."

Sarah blinked slowly and then looked down, refocusing on the page. What she'd initially overlooked as some type of cuneiform or hieroglyphics were in fact a series of illustrations. Rather graphic ones upon closer inspection that seemed to involve a lot of slime. At least she hoped it was slime. She shut the book and returned it to the shelf immediately.

"Uh, no. No, I'm not."

The librarian sighed. "No one ever is."

Sarah plastered her most winsome smile on her face. "I could use your assistance though, most gratefully in fact."

"Really?" He looked dubious. "But no one ever asks me for anything anymore."

"I'm looking for books on the laws of this land. Particularly as they apply to this kingdom. And really, to be specific, on... on marriage."

"Marriage?"

"Yes, you know, laws about getting married," Sarah's voice dropped, "laws about ending marriages. If possible, in English."

When the goblin continued to stare at her quizzically, she chewed her lip. "Or in Spanish? I could maybe manage Latin?"

He tapped his chin. "What a strange thing to ask for," he reached past her and pulled a book from the shelf, "especially when you could study the migratory patterns of rocks. Not to spoil the exciting conclusion, but they have none."

"Yes, while that does sound particularly gripping, if you could instead help me find those other books, I think I'd prefer to read about that. And even better if you'd not mention to anyone I asked for them."

The librarian looked around the empty library pointedly, and then polished his spectacles with his beard. "Who would be interested in knowing that the new queen, not more than a day after she brutally stabbed her predecessor-"

"She tripped actually. On the knife. Herself."

"Is," he continued meaningfully, "suddenly interested in researching marriage laws?"

Sarah's smile wobbled slightly. "Just a bit of light reading?"

In the end he obliged and left her to her own devices. She rather got the impression he was pleased to be of use. Sarah thanked him sincerely and profusely – having long ago learned that keeping librarians on your side was the real secret to success. When he left her he was fairly blushing and she thought she even caught faint purring from the recesses of his beard. Without being asked he'd also provided her with much needed paper and writing tools.
But that had felt like hours ago. Sarah paused again and scanned the large space—somehow both impossibly vast and yet entirely inviting—as only the very best libraries managed to be. It was perfect, she gratingly admitted.

She'd managed to fill several thick sheets of expensive-looking parchment. It was by no means a success but she felt more prepared than she'd been. She closed the final book in her small stack and approached the small desk tucked into the corner.

"Thank you again." She set them down carefully.

The librarian replied fondly, "Do come back again soon."

Sarah didn't have the heart to tell him that was highly unlikely.

"Tell me," she started to ask before she thought better of it, "does Jar—does the king come here often?"

A shrew look flashed in the old goblin's eyes. "His Highness is an avid reader indeed. Seeing how he is one of the few literate fulltime residents in the castle, I'd say he's been my sole companions over the years. Until you of course."

An image of the Goblin King reclined on one of the couches rose unbidden. "And what does he like to read?"

"Everything."

Sarah scanned the extensive shelves again. "Everything?"

"He's read it all and so the collection keeps growing. Naturally, I expect I will see less of him now that he's settled down and will be otherwise engaged. Or perhaps I will now see you both. From time to time."

Once back in the empty hallway it struck her again that Jareth was either still occupied with gifts or, more likely, he was not in any hurry to seek her out.

She should be relieved.

She wasn't.

Hadn't he vowed to seduce her? *Fully intended to convince her otherwise.* Or something like pretended not to remember the exact wording.

Was it wrong to feel *just a little* disappointed even if she fully intended to reject him and thwart his plans again?

By sheer luck, she managed to find her way through the castle and back to the master suites. As she approached the ornate doors leading to her room, the Goblin King's opened on their own.

Sarah steeled herself for an encounter with the king and instead came face to face with the Lady Rhiannon.

She immediately tensed defensively but the fey lady offered her nothing more than a delighted smile. One hand trailed across the neckline of her robe—deliberately Sarah would later consider—drawing attention to the fact that she was dressed in little more than a robe.

"You must wonder what I am doing here." Rhiannon's saccharine tone suggested she very much
hoped Sarah was wondering just that. "Of course these were intended to be my rooms, weren't they?"

When Sarah refused the bait, Rhiannon affected a rather unconvincing contrite mien. "Pardon my brief intrusion, I was merely checking to see if my personal gift had been received and appreciated. Certainly appears to have been. I was going to give it as a troth to my husband last night, but then… well. Seemed a shame to return to it." Rhiannon inclined her head and brushed past Sarah before she could collect herself to respond.

Frowning she took a few hesitant steps into the room and then wished she hadn't.

Lying in the middle of the great bed was a naked woman.

The woman was asleep, long limbs tangled in the rumpled sheets. Her full breasts rose and fell with even breaths. Her smooth skin was littered in marks.

From teeth, Sarah recognized.

Her eyes tracked down involuntarily. She was completely bare between her thighs. Sarah could see the slickness drying against her folds.

More by her mouth.

Sarah backed out of the room, closing the door quietly behind her. She numbly walked to the doors leading to her own rooms. Inside, she dropped her notes on a table and then caught her reflection in the tall mirror.

A Goblin Queen indeed. She began tugging at the elaborate bodice to remove it.

"Did you know there is a naked woman in your husband's bed?"

Sarah spun and swallowed back a scream. Calli was sprawled across her bed, head propped in her hands, like she'd been invited to a sleepover.

"As a matter of fact I did. And you and I really need to talk about boundaries and personal space"

"Oh, did you put her there?"

"I most certainly did not." Sarah pulled a face. "It would seem she's a gift from the Lady Rhiannon."

"What a thoughtful gift considering she hates him and wants to turn you into a rug. And all I gave you was a song."

Sarah tugged again angrily at the bindings on her dress.

Calli sat up, her head tilting thoughtfully. "You're jealous."

"Am not."

The siren snorted. The delicate sound was like waves cresting. "You are! Oh, this is just delicious."

Sarah finally managed to extricate herself from the dress and started to pull it down. "Do you mind?"

Call smiled beatifically. "Not at all."

Huffing, Sarah stepped out of the heavy gown and moved to the wardrobe in her shift. When she
threw open the doors it was empty.

Clearly Rhiannon had done more than drop a naked woman in the Goblin King's bed.

"And now I have no clothes." They weren't hers anyway and most of them were hideous, but still.

"Such a pity." The Siren sounded anything but sympathetic. "I suppose it's a good thing my cousin thought you might like your own." She pointed a delicate finger at a stack of boxes. "But please don't feel the need to get dressed on my account. Clothing is very overrated."

Sarah's grudging relief was evident as she examined the stash. The first lid revealed an absolutely ethereal looking gown in midnight blue. It had a shimmering overlay of crystals such that when worn it no doubt gave the illusion of a night sky. They were other gowns, equally stunning, in hues and cuts Sarah had to admit were appealing. A fine cloak lined in the softest silver fur. More simple garments, but just as finely made, in silks and cotton. Another box revealed a pair of leather trousers – the hide so smooth it felt like butter. A sleeveless leather vest accompanied it, cut asymmetrically and embossed with ornate spirals. A fawn shirt completed the set.

She pulled the items from the last box, stared pointedly at Calli – who naturally ignored the message – and then ducked behind a decorative screen. The pants laced up the legs so that they hugged her form impeccably. The vest, while not as tight as a corset, managed to accentuate her narrow waist and lifted her breasts to their best advantage. The sleeves of the fawn shirt tightened on her wrists and then flared out over her palm in points. She considered herself in the mirror.

"You see? What a thoughtful spouse. I'm certain he'd much rather keep you naked."

"He has naked ladies to spare these days, it would seem."

"Careful, Sarah, your jealousy is showing." Calli's reflection circled her face. "Just here."

Sarah pressed a hand to her head and turned. "I'm not jealous. Not the way you think. And I am fully aware of how hypocritical I sound right now. It's been... a trying twenty four hours." God how had it been only 24 hours? "I'm also not an idiot. I know Rhiannon was trying to rile me." Too bad it had semi-worked. "And... it wouldn't really be my business what he does with his... his gifts anyway." Not when she was fully planning to return to her life above. "I'm just concerned for the poor girl, that's all."

"The girl is a nymph from one of the pleasure houses and I guarantee she's been more than compensated for her expert skills. But you absolutely are an idiot if you think he did anything with her." When Sarah merely stared at her dubiously, the Siren sighed. "Now I'm bored and I think I've done enough of my duty to my cousin for the day. Even I only like him so much." She rose from the bed and stretched gracefully. "You run along and find your errant husband. I do recommend you cloak your jealously though. He'd enjoy it and you seem determined not to give him any pleasure. In the meantime I'll do you a favour and graciously take care of the naked woman in his bed before he even needs know about it." Calliope backed through the adjoining doors and winked salaciously before closing them.

The spiteful part of Sarah wanted to do anything but find Jareth. The curious part of her wanted to know what exactly had him preoccupied, hopefully so much so that he had not been back to his bedroom.

The latter part won the battle and after asking a few guards, she found herself in the lower levels of the castle before a set of simple doors. She pressed an ear to them and upon hearing a confusing
muddle of grunts and clanging, she opened one enough to peer inside.

Jareth and Cern were fighting.

Or to be more precise, they appeared to be duelling and had been for some time if their flushed skin was anything to go by. And there was a startling amount of it on display.

Without thought, Sarah slipped into the room. The stone walls were lined with all manner of weapons, while several practice dummies stood out of the way in a corner. The space was clearly meant for sparring. Several well-dressed wedding guests sat on the benches skirting the periphery. They seemed to be placing bets – gold coins changing hands periodically and wine flowing liberally.

Still unnoticed, Sarah kept to the shadows, conveniently obscured by a rack of lethal looking swords.

Not that she was paying any attention to the fine weapons.

They both moved almost too fast to follow. Their feet and hands so in tune it was almost a choreographed dance. Their blades connected and then arced away again. Attach. Parry. Thrust. She was no expert in fencing, but she gleaned they were evenly matched enough to make it a show. Their movements were precise and circumspect. No display of flashy bravado, just pure skill and raw talent.

Cern had discarded his shirt completely and was dressed only in buckskin trousers and boots. He was larger and more muscled than Jareth, though still on the lean side. The tanned skin of his torso was covered in archaic tattoos of stylized animals. Sweat beaded across his chest and his dark hair clung to his neck and shoulders.

The Goblin king looked only a touch less wild. He still wore his white linen shirt but it was hanging open in loose folds. It clung to his skin in patches, nearly transparent. His black trousers sat low on his hips and without meaning to Sarah tracked a bead of sweat as it slid beneath the waistband. His skin was paler and his muscles more lithe, but it was no less impressive to watch him move.

Both looked entirely focused on winning. As their blades connected, narrowly missing their exposed flesh, it was almost terrifying to watch. Periodically one or the other or both would break into a grin, as though pummelling the hell out of each other was fun.

Cern feinted, spun and then lunged towards the Goblin King's core. Jareth, clearly anticipating his cousin's move, arched backwards, the blade just nigh of skinning his chest. He snapped back up and went straight on the attack, dropping his sword from his right to left hand and bringing it flush against his cousin's heart.

Both stilled, panting heavily.

"Your point," Cern grated. "You've been practicing."

"You've gotten lazy. Beasts don't put up as much of a fight."

"They talk less though. That's in their favour. Next point wins?"

The Goblin King lowered his sword. "So quick to end this? Growing tired of losing, old man?"

"Hardly. But not all of us need to relieve pent up sexual frustration. You might save some energy for tonight's hunt if you're smart. Though I'd say either way you are looking forward to another cold bed and colder cheek from your wife."
"And I've heard tell it's only the sheep keeping you company these days, Cern."

The hunter gave a mock bow. "I've no complaints. Let me know if you want me to try and warm her up for you."

That did it apparently.

Cern barely had time to raise his sword to deflect the next blow. His boots scraped across the floor as he skidded back. He feinted again and recovered in a crouch. As he shifted to attack he locked eyes with Sarah, grinned briefly in pleased acknowledgement before trying to make her a widow.

Jareth and Cern's bodies collided as they each gripped the other's sword arm.

There were several murmurs of appreciation from the audience. She told herself she was only admiring their skill. Clinically.

"Say, what was the name of that dark-haired beauty you won in our last duel?" Cern asked through gritted teeth. "If I recall correctly you could barely walk the next morning. Looked quite a bit like Sarah now that I think about it. Perhaps you should pay her a visit if your bride continues to reject you."

The strange change in topic caught Jareth off guard and his grip faltered. Cern used it to his advantage and twisted free, slashing the blade a hair's breadth from the Goblin King's throat.

Sarah reflexively gasped; hands flying to her mouth.

Jareth deftly sidestepped the beheading but hearing her reaction, he turned, eyes finding her startled face.

Cern seized the opening and ducked behind the Goblin King, bringing his blade back around to his throat. "That's my point, I believe, cousin. And the match."

Jareth kept his gaze locked on Sarah, even as he knocked the blade away. "I suppose it's only fair you win one now and again."

The crowd applauded, coins passing hands with more than a few grumblings.

Cern laughed and stepped away. He bowed first to the guests and then, eyeing Jareth, approached Sarah and took her hand in his. "I dedicate my victory to the loveliest woman in the room." With a grin at his now thunderous looking cousin, he pressed a kiss to her hand. "He'll probably try to actually kill me the next time but it's worth it," he whispered jovially.

The Goblin King made a brief hand motion and the onlookers dutifully filed out, a few slapping Cern on his back in congratulations. The hunter looked like he might try to remain until Jareth shot him a particularly dark look.

Only when silence filled the room did Sarah manage to drag her eyes back to him.

She opened her mouth and closed it, watching as he picked up a towel and mopped his brow. The sword was still loosely clasped in his left hand.

Jareth set the cloth down again and considered her. His expression was inscrutable.

"You fight well," she said finally. The silence was so much worse.

He inclined his head. "And I would have won."
She wasn’t sure if it was a point of pride or a statement of fact.

"Yes, sorry about that."

He took a step forward. "Sorry you were concerned for my safety?"

"It… just startled me."

"Liar," he laughed gruffly and then his lips twitched. "Did you enjoy the library?"

Sarah's mouth snapped shut, before opening again. "Spying on me?"

He took another step forward. "You'll find I know most everything that goes on in my castle."

Considering how sweaty he was he should have smelled like a locker room. Instead all she could detect was the unique scent that was his – magnified if anything – and it enraged her. She canted her head defiantly. "Then yes, I did. Almost as much as I did the naked woman in your bed."

"A naked woman, you say?" If he was surprised she couldn't tell, and she'd been looking. Studying his face for so much as a flicker.

Sarah folded her arms and affected a nonchalant attitude. "Mhm. A nymph from one of the pleasure houses I believe? She looked thoroughly exhausted."

His lips twitched again as he took another step forward. "Well then. Let's hope she's had time to rest."

Sarah stepped back and motioned to the door. "In that case don't let me keep you."

"I had no idea you'd be such a generous wife." And then he chucked her under the chin.

She wasn't sure if it was the lack of sleep, the forced marriage, the naked woman, the idea he was enjoying her discomfort, that she was hungry, or the fact he might actually expect that kind of arrangement from a wife. Any wife.

It was probably the chuck under the chin though.

"Go fuck yourself," she snapped sourly.

"Fuck me yourself, you coward."

And then he deftly tossed a sword into her startled hands.

Chapter End Notes

Credit: I cannot take credit for the final two lines. Saw it in a meme and I hads to have it, Precioussss. Shit, I plan to use that in real life!
Just some light reading is an obvious shout out to Hermione.

AN: Sorry for the wait. Hope you are all still hanging in there with this! I'm super looking forward to the next big festivity next chapter… *rubbs hands gleefully*
Of course I needed to get Cern and Jareth half-naked and make them sword-fight. That's how I roll.
Another update for another story in the works. No, no, for real this time!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!