To Serve Her Purpose

by Ptolomeia

Summary

Sarah comes back from University for Spring Break a year after her Father's death. But what she doesn't know is that the Labyrinth wants her for a Queen and isn't taking no for an answer. She now has to balance a Goblin King, school and a large group of friends. Fortunately for her, Katara and the rest of their friends are very understanding of the strange blond man who keeps randomly appearing in her life--and they are NOTHING like Zuko and Katara, thank you very much!

Notes

A/N: Some authors will talk about how they are the Goblin King’s scribe. I, though, am not. If I were, I'm sure he would have it take WAY less long for her to end up intentionally in his arms. Nor am I Sarah's scribe. There are probably some things in this story that she'd want changed too. If anything, I'm the Labyrinth's scribe, and she is a harsh and demanding muse, but that's not quite right either. If it were her story she'd have a queen in far less time than it actually took. They say there are three sides to every story: yours, theirs and the truth. Well, this story has five sides: Sarah’s, Jareth’s, the Labyrinth’s, the Truth’s and Mine. This is my version of what happened seven years after that fateful night where a wish was spoken in haste and changed the life of everyone involved.
See the end of the work for more notes.
The Labyrinth looked around Sarah's room. While it was hard to leave her body like this, to visit her Champion, it was possible. Sarah's room had changed over the past seven years. Gone were the teddy bears and dolls that had filled it when Sarah had been a child—she'd given them to Toby years ago, though she'd never given up the fantastical as most adult humans seemed to. There were a few posters of famous paintings but most of the space was taken up with book shelves. Books of all flavors filled those shelves, books on history, fantasy, politics, geography, agriculture, great works of fiction, hardcovers bound up very princely looking, and thin paperbacks that seemed to have had many owners: all sorts were represented on these shelves. Her Champion's pursuit of politics and the liberal arts led Sarah to have many books indeed, mused the Labyrinth, many of which were strange bedfellows. Next to Sarah's vanity was a small bookshelf with her favorite books: The Odyssey; Plato’s The Republic; Machiavelli’s The Prince; the complete works of England's great Bard, William Shakespeare, with a small separate copy of The Tempest; a small volume of Yeats’ poems; a small volume, a thoroughly thumbed and annotated copy of Rossetti’s “Goblin Market;” and finally a small red book with the title printed in gold on the cover. The bed, vanity and dresser still belonged to the same set she'd had when the Labyrinth had first met her. The Labyrinth knew that when the stepmother had asked if Sarah wanted a new set she'd said she simply couldn't bear to leave them. The real reason, thought the Labyrinth smugly, was the friends she'd made one beautiful night when she was fifteen years old and had made a glorious wish. The mirror on her vanity was the only one through which her friends could cross into the Above, as it was owned by Sarah and Sarah alone.

Sarah opened the door and walked in. The Labyrinth observed her. She had changed much in the last seven years. Now she was clearly a woman and not a child on the cusp of womanhood. She had a groundedness about her that hadn't been there before. Even in the previous year, when the Labyrinth had caught a glimpse of her during that last wish, she had changed. Her hair was shorter now, her eyes a little duller.

The Labyrinth was done with waiting, though. It had been a full year since She-Who-Should-Be-Queen had called on her and the Champion had not shown any sign of calling on her again. Thousands upon thousands of years old she may have been, but she only had so much patience. So, the Labyrinth returned to the Underground leaving the merest hint of a suggestion of a wish.

* * *

Sarah looked around her room and shuddered. She could have sworn she felt someone watching her. But the mirror was empty. She brushed aside the feeling and sat down at her vanity and thought of what it was like to be home. Two years ago spring break was one of Sarah’s favorite times of the year. She got to see her family without the big hullaballoo of getting everyone together for Christmas, just a quiet week of herself and her family. Well, not that quiet, for Toby had the inherent energy that all 7-year-olds seemed to have, constantly wanting her to play with him or tell him stories. Normally Sarah was happy to oblige. She couldn’t imagine something so different from her routine at school and the break was nice. As soon as Sarah would ring the doorbell Toby would come charging out, insisting on a hug—though normally it resembled more of a tackle—before trying to help bring in her bags. After the first year he’d done that she’d made sure to pack a few small bags suitable for a boy to carry, leaving her father and the taxi driver to deal with the large one.

This year it was different though. This year Sarah was not greeted by a smiling, screaming ball of energy. This time it was Sarah who helped the taxi driver get her bags up to the door, even the smaller ones she’d packed just in case. There she was met by a Toby who wasn’t smiling, but who had tears in his eyes, who wrapped her in a hug, not a tackle, and who murmured into her stomach:
“I miss him,”

Her brother’s actions brought the tears to her eyes that she’d been trying so hard to repress. “I know, Tobes,” she whispered, voice hoarse. “Me too.” Tomorrow was, after all, the anniversary.

She’d been called inside right after by Karen, who looked like she was holding it together by a thread.

“Come on in, supper’s almost ready. Bring your bags up to your room and then come help set the table, please,” she directed her stepdaughter. Sarah enveloped her stepmother in a quick hug before doing as she was bid. Her father’s death had forced them closer together and both were happier for it.

Dinner passed quickly, most of it filled with Sarah talking about her classes, though not mentioning her Celtic Studies class to avoid conflict with Karen. They might have grown closer, but Sarah’s tendencies to paint Karen as an evil stepmother in the first few years of their relationship had caused lasting tension when Sarah would bring up her obsession with the fantastical. Sarah couldn’t blame Karen for her discomfort—it was Sarah’s fault, after all. She would tell Toby all about that class and the stories they studied. It was his favorite part of her coming home. He got to hear all the new stories she learned.

When Sarah mentioned her roommate’s budding relationship with a jerk named Jet—“and seriously, what kind of name is Jet”—she noticed her stepmother fingering a bracelet she hadn’t seen before. It was something her father hadn’t gotten for her and something a little too pricey for Karen to have bought on her own. It had obviously been a gift. After a little more conversation, and a few more questions about her classes and her trip, Sarah and Karen put Toby to bed. While they were cleaning the kitchen Sarah asked Karen about the bracelet she noticed earlier.

“That’s a nice bracelet,” she said “Where did you get it?”

“Oh,” Karen replied, looking flustered for a moment. “A friend gave it to me.”

Sarah knew that wasn’t the truth, and while this topic made her kind of uncomfortable, she plowed on. Karen needed to know this before tomorrow.

“Karen, your birthday’s in the fall, you didn’t get it at Christmas and if you got it before that you would have worn it with your Christmas dress because it would have looked amazing. Karen,” Sarah started after carefully taking the bowl out of her stepmother’s hands, “are you seeing someone?”

Karen turned back to the sink to pick up another dish. “Nonsense, Sarah. Even after all these years I still don’t know where your mind goes sometimes. Me? Seeing someone? Preposterous!” Though the comment on Sarah’s flights of fancy stung, as it had been at the root of many of their arguments when she was younger, and especially as Karen was now the only one who didn’t know the truth—she’d told Toby of the goblins countless times and even introduced him to her friends—she plowed on regardless. Karen needed this right now.

“He would want you to, you know,” she said, putting the bowl away and taking another dish from her stepmother who now stood perfectly still. There was no need to specify which ‘he’ she meant. “He’d want you to see people, to move on, to be happy.” She grabbed the last dish and dried it as she spoke. “He wouldn’t want you to mourn forever. It’s been long enough. If you’re seeing someone, he’d be happy for you. I’d be happy for you.” She put the last dish in its place. “And if Toby has a problem with it, I’ll help you deal with him.” She paused. “I should go unpack. Good night, Karen. I’ll see you tomorrow.” And with that she slipped out of the kitchen, leaving the
woman who’d helped raise her alone with her thoughts.

After unpacking for the break and changing into her pajamas, though, she had nothing left to distract
her from the grief that she’d been keeping at bay all day. Tears crept into her eyes as she sat down at
her vanity.

“Hoggle, Sir Didymus, Ludo, I need you.” They didn’t always answer when she called—they had
lives and duties of their own—but tonight, they would. They knew what day tomorrow was. In her
mirror they appeared sitting on her bed, all looking concerned but understanding at the tears in her
eyes. She turned around and threw herself at Ludo, who wrapped her up in a large hug. “Sawah
sad,” he crooned softly, holding her as she sobbed.

“There there, my lady,” Sir Didymus said, patting her on the back.

“We’re here for you,” Hoggle muttered, wringing his hands. When the tears had slowed somewhat,
she looked around at her friends. Hoggle handed her a slightly dirty handkerchief. “Thanks,
Hoggle,” she sniffed. “I just miss him so much.”

“He was your dad,” Hoggle offered, looking away at the praise. “Of course you miss him,”

“A most valiant man,” added Sir Didymus.

“Wobet Good” was Ludo’s contribution.

“He was.” Sarah gave them all a watery smile. “The way he put up with me back when I was such a
brat. I remember once…” and the rest of the night was spent with Sarah telling stories and crying,
surrounded by her three oldest friends. Eventually she cried herself to sleep and the friends retreated
through the mirror to their home, first Ludo, then Sir Didymus and finally Hoggle. But before he
stepped though the mirror, he looked back at the first friend he’d ever had and muttered

“I wish there was more Jareth could do than just let us see her.”

But what no one knew, (although by now they really should have) was that everyone’s words have
power, even those of a dwarf, especially when those words served a purpose. The Labyrinth smiled
to herself. Really, Hoggle should have known better by then.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

What's this? What's this, you say? An early chapter update? Why yes, YES I say, for many reasons. The first, I have just acquired new Bowie (and Phantom of the Opera) sheet music. (If you don't know why these two sets of music go together, go check out Pika-la-Cynique's fancomic "Girls Next Door" on Deviantart. Although, if you managed to find this fic, before finding her, you're doing fandom wrong ;P) This makes me happy, and what makes me happy, makes me update faster. You know what else makes me happy? REVIEWS, REVIEWS make me happy. What makes me sad, is that my beta is having a bad week. As you can see from my tags, she loves Iroh (seriously, it's kinda scary) and what makes her happy, makes me happy, and gets this story beta'd quicker, so really, it's in your interest to send her Iroh fic (and possibly tea), through me, of course. (Seriously, please do this, it would make her very happy, and she's had a really crummy week.)

In other news, you know how I said in my first author's note, INTENTIONALLY in his arms? Well.... Enjoy!

When Sarah woke up the next morning she found herself wrapped around a warm, solid body. She snuggled closer, enjoying the smooth bare chest against her cheek and under her hand. Jake may have had his downsides, but this certainly wasn't one of them, she thought to herself. She took a deep breath, relishing his smell. Funny, she thought, he smells different. I wonder if he started using a new soap. As her brain started to come more and more awake, more details started to trickle in, little things that didn't quite make sense. While Jake had been fit, he wasn't this well muscled. His chest had been hairier, his skin rougher, and while the smell was familiar it wasn't quite right.

That was when her brain decided to remind her that she and Jake had broken up months ago, just before he left on an exchange semester to England. Therefore the man she was curled up against could not be Jake. Finally, her nose placed that smell. It made her think of long dark hallways, dances in crystal rooms and insanely tight pants. It smelled like lightning, like cardamom and cinnamon, like magic. There was only one creature who smelled like that that Sarah had ever encountered and she was presently snuggled around him, feeling his very naked—very nice, some part of her added—chest, in a bed.

Sarah sat up and shrieked, struggling away from him. Jareth's eyes snapped open at the sound and he sat up, eyes searching his room for the noise. If his Goblins had come into his chambers again to wake him with that kind of racket, bogging would only be the start of it. What met his eyes instead was a much more pleasant though far more confusing sight. A woman was struggling to get out of his bed, squawking the entire time. Odd, he couldn't recall inviting a woman to sleep with him and he hadn't been intoxicated enough to not remember inviting a woman. He groaned, realizing what this probably was, and threw himself back on his pillows. Closing his eyes, he spoke.

“While your dedication to your mistress is commendable, we already discussed this option and realized even me sleeping with another woman would not manage to get us out of this. Especially if it were only a servant. And you'd be better pressed to convince someone you actually spent the night
with me if you were less clothed, yes? Besides, everyone knows I haven't—” which was when the pillow smacked him in the face.

“And why the hell, Goblin King,”—he knew that voice, he hadn't heard it in a year but he knew it, “would I want any one to think I slept with you!” Another pillow came and hit him again. He sat up sharply and turned to look into pools of liquid green fire. Many things had changed over the years—the length of her hair; the shape of her body, filling out a little more; the shape of her face as it lost all the baby fat—but not her eyes. They were still exactly as they had been all those years ago. Exactly as he remembered them. He breathed her name.

“Sarah.” He shook his head and caught the next incoming pillow. “What are you doing here?”

Sarah paused as she armed her next weapon. It seemed she was moving up, it being a vase rather than a pillow. “I was about to ask you the same thing,” she said, eyeing him warily.

He raise an eyebrow at her. “You mean to tell me you don't know? What, no carelessly said, 'I didn't mean it' wishes spoken this time?” His eyes narrowed as he watched her, feeling her with his magic for the first time in years. “No,” he said, slipping out of the bed to move towards her. He noticed her eyes flick down as he slid from the covers, and some part of the back of his brain smiled in satisfaction, even if she did look relieved to see he was wearing loose silk sleeping pants. “It wasn’t you who made the wish.” He knew the feeling of the magic that had brought her here. “You’ve been wished away!” He threw back his head and laughed. The irony was just too much.

But some things weren’t right. If she had been wished away then why hadn’t he been summoned to offer the wisher their dreams? For that matter, how had she ended up in his bed? That was not the normal place a wished away appeared. Besides, he had no power over her. He wouldn’t have been able to take her away even if the right words had been spoken, which they had not been. He heard them every time. So what could have… His gaze snapped to the window, eyes fierce. There was only one creature that had the power to bring someone to his kingdom without his knowledge.

"I’ve been wished away?” said a voice quiet with shock and horror. He turned back to look at Sarah. She was shaking her head, eyes wide with denial. “No, impossible. Who would know the right words? You did this, Goblin King!” she accused.

“Still so quick to paint me the villain?” he asked, voice hard. It was a role he did not want to play. “I had nothing to do with this, believe me.”

“Then send me back!”

“I can’t, don’t you see that I can’t?” he taunted, recalling her long ago words. She flinched to hear them. “I have no power over you Sarah.” He turned to the window and strode towards it.

“Just where do you think you're going?” Sarah called after him as he approached the window. He looked back at her, eyes blazing with anger, but not anger at her.

“To get some answers and find out which flea-brained idiot wished you here so I can get to them before your 13 hours are up.” He smiled, but not entirely pleasantly. “And you become one of us, forever. Or don’t you ever want to see your family again? I know how much they mean to you,” and without another word he jumped from the window, transformed and flew off. Sarah crept to the window and followed the owl’s flight until she noticed how high the sun was. It was, she realized, the day after she'd gotten home. His words made her remember what day it was, what had happened a year ago. The owl’s flight was lost as her vision blurred with tears.

* * *
In a house in another world, a seven-year-old boy pushed open the door to his older sister's room only to find her bed empty, the smell of magic heavy in the air. He gulped. He had feared something like this might happen for a very long time. He knew what he had to do. He sat on the chair in front of the vanity and called out softly, “Hoggle, I need you.” The bumpy face of the old gardener appeared in the mirror.

“Sarah's missing,” he told the dwarf quietly, “and her room smells like magic.”

Hoggle's eyes widened as he remembered some carelessly spoken words from the night before.

“It looks like you know something. I'll keep mom busy. You go find her,” Toby said before slipping off the chair and running out of the room. Hoggle turned away from the pond he had used as the closest reflective surface before muttering something he never thought he'd have to say again after what had happened the previous year.

“Damn, you Jareth,” he said, turning towards the castle at the center of the Labyrinth and starting to run. “And damn me too.”

Chapter End Notes

The opening scene of this fic was in part inspired by Pika-la-Cynique's fancomic. Go read. You will thank me later.
Chapter 3

An Early hello again. Why this time? Did i get more sheet music? No, but thank you for asking. This time I got a COMMENT! It's bright, and shiny and right at the bottom of the page where you can read it! In that vain, thanks again LynyrdLionHeart. Yes, yes you can have some more. Also in that vain, thanks to everyone who gave me kudos. They make me feel happy and appreciated and write more. And the more I write, the more you get to read! So, enjoy chapter 3!

To Serve Her Purpose

Jareth flew straight to the center of the labyrinth where he landed smoothly in his human form, now fully clothed.

“Labyrinth!” he called, his voice commanding. “I need to speak with you!”

“What is it, my lord?” the reply filled the air. Her voice was rich and feminine, and filled with power.

“Labyrinth,” Jareth replied. He addressed her properly; he needed answers from her and she could choose not to reply. He was, after all, only her lord. “Why was the Champion in my bed this morning?”

“We need a queen,” came the reply. It sounded rather exasperated. Her lord knew of her needs and knew her preferences.

“And you’re getting one,” he said, trodding out his reply of the last nine months and pinching the bridge of his nose.

“She is unwanted. We want the Champion. We need the Champion” Somehow the “we” this time was more inclusive.

“Well she doesn’t want us,” Jareth reminded her. “Either of us. And it’s not like I can force her to stay here. I have no power over her, remember?”

“False,” was the labyrinth’s only reply. Jareth’s head snapped up.

“False? What do you mean, ‘False’?”

“A wish was made. You now have some power when it comes to the Champion. It is why we could bring her here.”

“What wish? Was spoken by whom?” Jareth asked the not-so-empty air. Hoggle’s voice filled the clearing: “I wish there was more Jareth could do than just let us see her.”

“You have some power over the Champion now,” the Labyrinth said. “You still cannot force her to do anything, but you may speak to her, see her, appear before her in order to comfort her.”

“Why those restrictions?” Jareth asked, brows drawn down. “Don’t you want her here?”
“That is the spirit in which the wish was made. And besides, we want a queen, Lord Jareth. She will do us no good if she is dead.”

“You think I would kill her?” Jareth asked, fury rising in his tone.

“We know how you long for her, Goblin King. It is not inconceivable, not beyond imagining that you would force her to stay here. If she were forced to remain against her will, cut off from those she loves, the Champion would die, only the mortal remaining. We need the Champion, Goblin King. And with only the limited powers we gave you, you have already done harm.” The Labyrinth sounded harsh as it bit out the last words. Jareth blinked in surprise, both at the news of the need not for Sarah, but for the Champion and at the idea that, in their less than five minutes of conversation, he had caused her harm.

“What do you mean, I caused her harm?” he asked indignantly. They'd spoken for all of five minutes.

“She weeps, Goblin King. She weeps.” Jareth scoffed at the idea. Sarah was not one to cry. Scream, rage, tear down castles, destroy crystal dreams and break a man's heart without beating an eyelash, but not cry.

“And why, pray tell, would she be weeping?”

“It is exactly one year since she last called on us,” the Labyrinth said. The ‘you little twit’ was only implied. After all, the Labyrinth did need Jareth to work with them if she was going to get what they wanted.

Jareth paled as he recalled the circumstances under which Sarah had last called on the Underground, the one and only time she had made a wish in the last seven years. He hadn’t been able to do anything for the man. He cursed himself. He had reminded her of her love of her family just before he left. He turned, then paused, and called up a crystal. He looked into it at Sarah’s shoulders, shaking as she cried, and spoke.

“I assume Hoggle is already on his way to the castle?” he asked quietly.

“He is.”

“Give me some time with her.”

“Of course, my lord,” the Labyrinth replied softly as he vanished, a cloud of slowly descending glitter the only sign he had ever been there. The Labyrinth smiled softly to herself as she receded into the walls that formed her. Their plan was working.

* * *

Sarah had no idea that Jareth had returned until he bent down and scooped her up, bridal style. She was shocked at first. That lasted the time it took him to walk from the corner she had curled up in over to his bed, where he sat down, still holding her close. Her anger started and she started to hit him, beating her fists against his chest. He did nothing, just kept holding her close. Eventually the violence broke back into sobbing again and she buried her head in her shirt, weeping for her dead father. Jareth started to rub small circles on her back and rock her back and forth. He sang to her softly, not of mornings of gold or valentine evenings but the songs his mother had sang to him when he was a child in need of comfort. What he held in his arms now was exactly that. Right now she was not the Champion of the Labyrinth, or the woman who was skillfully balancing two majors and a large group of friends. Right now she was a child mourning the loss of a father she would never see again.
He held her and rocked her for more than an hour as she broke down in a way she hadn’t been able to in front of her friends. Eventually the tears stopped and she just rested there, head against his chest as he continued to rock her and sing to her. Finally, when he paused between two songs, she looked up at him.

“Jareth?” she said quietly.

His breath hitched as he heard her say his name for the first time.

“Yes?” he replied softly, looking into puffy bloodshot red eyes that somehow still managed to be beautiful.

“Thank you,” she said, looking at him with eyes filled with, not anger, not hate, not fear, but, for once, with gratitude. “For just now, and for last year.” She tilted her head against him so her face was buried once more in his chest. “Maybe you can be generous,” she said, almost too quiet to hear. Before he could reply his magic informed him of a commotion in the throne room. He watched as Sarah vanished from his lap. His arms tightened reflexively around the space she had just filled. He sighed and straightened, brushing himself down. He took a deep breath before going and dealing with the dwarf that was causing him such problems. Her smell still lingered in the air.
Chapter Notes

A/N: Hi folks. I hope you are enjoying this story. I know I am enjoying writing it. Please review to tell me what you like, what you don't, should there be more chickens, etc. I'd love to hear your thoughts!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To Serve Her Purpose

Jareth appeared in his throne and took a moment to survey the scene. In the middle of the throne room, just before the sunken pillow pit, Hoggle was screaming, cursing and trying to fight off Jareth’s brighter goblins who were trying to protect their king. And since it was not normal for any goblin to give up a good fight, the less bright ones had started fighting each other and, he looked again to double check, yes, one poor sod, WAS fighting a chicken. It seemed the chicken was winning, too.

“ENOUGH!” Jareth snapped out and suddenly the entire throne room became completely and utterly still as all eyes turned to the Goblin King, even if the look Hoggle gave him was murderous.

“Now, Higgle—"

“Oh! It's HOGGLE!” the Dwarf not named anything aside from Hoggle, despite what his king seemed to think, cried.

“Yes, now why, exactly, did you come into my throne room, screaming threats at the top of your lungs, hm?” He threw his leg over the side of his throne and started tapping it with a riding crop that hadn't been there seconds before.

“You took her!” Jareth held up a finger and stopped Hoggle in his tracks.

“You should know that what's said is said. You spoke, the Labyrinth heard and brought a delightfully warm Sarah into my bed. I suppose I should thank you for that.” He leered, and Hoggle shifted uncomfortably. The rest of the goblins had backed up, watching the two wrestle without a single blow being exchanged.

“You shouldn't have taken her! It's the anniversary of—” Jareth held up a finger and stopped Hoggle in his tracks.
“Hoggle, I expected better of you. You take things for granted.” That gave Hoggle pause. The King had used his name. He only ever did that when things there was something truly important to pay attention to, like when he offered to make Hoggle the Prince of the Land of Stench. He thought back over their conversation. His eyes widened when he realized his mistake.

“You didn't take her at all,” he whispered. “The Labyrinth did.” Jareth looked down at Hoggle, eyes dead serious.

“Yes, she did. It seems she has decided to take a direct hand in this affair.”

“God and Goddess protect us,” Hoggle said quietly.

All in all, Jareth could only agree.

* * *

Sarah appeared in the front hall of her house, feeling somewhat slightly dazed, eyes red from crying and still in her pajamas. They still smelled of him slightly. Sighing softly at the strangeness that had occurred in the last few hours, Sarah shuffled to the kitchen, determined to have some coffee. She opened the door to find a worried Karen questioning her son thoroughly. Toby's eyes flicked to where Sarah was standing in the door. Karen spun around to see Sarah standing there.

“Really, Sarah.” Suddenly Sarah was 15 years old again, running in from the rain an hour late. “You leave early in the morning, no note, still in your pajamas, it seems, letting the rest of us worry! What were you thinking?” Sarah knew Karen was overly emotional because of the day it was, and normally, she probably would have snapped back, but she had a strange sense of stillness at her centre. As if she had cried the storm away and was left feeling slightly at peace. Behind Karen, Toby mouthed, 'Sorry.' “Well,” Karen snapped in the face of Sarah's continued silence, “will you at least tell me where you've been?”

Sarah's mouth opened, then closed again. Then it repeated the motion a few times. What was she supposed to say? “I was wished away by someone, not sure who, to the Goblin King, but not directly. I woke up in his bed where we argued, then he flew off, I started crying, he flew back and comforted me for a while until I disappeared for apparently no reason at all.” Somehow, she doubted Karen would find that a useful explanation. Sarah sighed. She hadn't had enough coffee yet to deal with this. She took a deep breath and looked Karen in the eye.

“You know,” she ran a hand through her hair. “I really don't know.”

Karen threw her hands in the air. “I wish somebody could give me some answers around here.” she cried.

“You know what Karen?” Sarah said softly. “Me too.”

“Oh Sarah,” Karen said, throwing her arms around her step-daughter who, after a moment, hugged her back. “I'm just glad you're okay.”

“Don't worry, Karen,” Sarah said, patting the woman who'd helped raise her on the back. “I'm fine. I'm really fine.” 'Mostly' she added to herself privately.

Karen did not know yet the power of wishes. Sarah, on the other hand, should have known better. When, after coffee had restored some of her wits, she returned to her room to change for the to visit her father's grave, she found Jareth sprawled out on her bed, one eyebrow raised.

“Tell me, Sarah,” he asked in his crisp English accent. “Just what did you wish for this time?”
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Please review!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

B/N: SHE'S A VAMPIRE! A VAMPIRE I TELL YOU! AN ENERGY SUCKING VAMPIRE!

A/N: Hehehe... Yeah... Editing today may have left my poor sister slightly traumatized.... I'm in extrovert who was sick an all alone for two days. She's a tired introvert.... It was fun to see her again!

B/N: If by fun you mean traumatic...

A/N: You exagerate. I wasn't that bad.

B/N: Shudders

A/N: Ok, so it was. BUT ANYWAY! On to the stuff the readers actually care about. HAPPY EARLY UPDATE!!! WOO WOO!!! The reason for this weeks early update is the huge! (Huge being more than one, I'm really not that hard to impress) number of reviews I got over on Fanfiction.net. Since I had all the pretty reviews I decided to post there early, and it hardly seemed fair to give it to them and not you. Yes, another site was in charge of getting you your HUGE update early this week but fear not! You too have to power to get the author to post early. How you ask? It's quite simple! Just leave a contribution in the little box! Enjoy the update!

To Serve Her Purpose

Sarah closed her eyes. 'Maybe,' she thought, 'when I open them he'll be—'

“I'm still right here, precious,” said a voice directly in front of her. Sarah slowly opened her eyes to stare into a set of mismatched blue eyes that were WAY too close to her face. She took a quick step back, establishing a safer distance between them. “If you would be so kind as to tell me why I'm still here...?” he trailed off one eyebrow up.

“I don't know,” Sarah stammered, pushing past him. She walked to her closet, where she had hung up a few of the clothes she'd brought back, including the black dress she was planning to wear to visit her father. “Now,” she said, holding up the black dress, “can you please poof off to your castle so I can change and get on with my life?” It seemed the morning’s tears and comfort were, temporarily at least, forgotten.

“No,” he replied sharply, “I can not 'poof' as you so put it, off to my castle. You made a wish, and I have to grant it before I can go back to the Underground and get back to ruling my kingdom. If you would be so kind as to inform me of that wish?” Sarah paused and thought back, but for the life of her she could not remember wishing for anything.

“I didn't wish for anything! We went over this already, Goblin King, I don't make wishes anymore!”

“Well, obviously you did or I wouldn't be stuck here.” They stood there, glaring at each other for a minute, until Karen's voice drifted up the stairs.
“Sarah, are you ready? It's time to leave.” At the reminder, the anger that had filled her eyes was replaced by a deep sadness.

“Goblin King,” she said. “Would you just—turn around, I have to get changed. We'll deal with this when I get back.” He gave her one last glare before turning his back. It was, after all, the anniversary of her father's death. He listened to the rustle of clothing behind him and resisted the urge to turn around.

“So, Sarah,” he asked in an attempt to distract himself from the mental images that the sounds created, “Just where are you and your family off to?” There was a pause in the sounds before they resumed. “My dad's grave.”

“Ah.” There was the sound of a zipper being done up.

“You can turn around now.” Jareth turned to see Sarah in a conservative black dress, her eyes dulled with sorrow.

Knowing he'd rather have her mad at him then in tears again, Jareth summoned a crystal.

“I've a gift for you, Sarah,” he said, holding it out just as he had in their first meeting.

“What is it?” Sarah asked warily. Jareth merely smirked and tossed it to her. Instinctively she caught it. It transformed into, not a snake, a scarf or a roofied peach, but a bouquet of Zannias and Pink carnations with a sprig of Cypress nestled between the flowers.

“Just a bouquet, nothing more,” he laughed. “Now hurry off. They're waiting for you. We'll discuss why we keep appearing in each other's bedrooms when you return.” With one last look at the Goblin King, she turned and fled. Jareth had just turned away from the door shaking his head when Sarah stuck her head back into her room.

“And no snooping!” she said. Jareth merely smiled back. She rolled her eyes before running downstairs to join her family. Jareth looked around the room and smiled slyly—it could hardly be called snooping if it was looking at what she had left out in the open. His eyes caught on where her drawers had not been completely closed. He made a mental note to investigate that later. But he had something to do before he could examine Sarah's room. He went to her window and opened it before summoning a crystal. He was pleased that, even though he had been cut off from his kingdom, he still had his magic. He concentrated for a moment then blew on it, watching it float away on a non-existent breeze. He turned back to the room, determined to learn what secrets it would yield up about the woman who had been missing from his life for the past 7 years.

* * *

Sarah sat in the car, cheek pressed against the window, thinking about the visit to her father's grave. Both she and Karen had had bouquets, hers the one Jareth had given her, Karen's one of periwinkle and michaelmas daisies, also with a sprig of cypress. Toby had walked between them, silent as—ha — the grave. When they had arrived at the grave, they saw that someone had been there before them. The grave had been swept free of snow, and someone had left a bellflower, a heather flower and a lemon blossom on the headstone. They didn't know who would have been there to leave those flowers. Sarah had her suspicions as, while neither Toby nor Karen noticed this, Sarah saw that theirs were the only footprints to mark the snow coming up to the headstone.

They had all cried some, each saying goodbye again in their own way, and then Sarah and Karen had laid down their bouquets and Karen and Toby had started to head back to the car. Sarah had said she'd stay back for a few minutes to say a few words.
“Hey dad,” she'd started. “It's been a while.” She'd gone on to tell her dad a little about her life at University, how she was still rooming with Katara, still hanging out with the same gang of friends. She told him she'd kept up her grades and kept her scholarship. She told him all about her Celtic studies class. He had always found some time for the fantastic that so fascinated her. She told him about how well Toby was doing in school and how much she wished she could be home more often. She finished with, “Dad, a long time ago, I wished Toby away to the goblins. I'm sorry. I got him back though! But now the King of the Goblins is back in my life and I'm not sure what to do. I'll keep an eye on Toby, like always, don't worry on that front. Magic might be back in my life, but Toby will always come first. I promised you that last year and I promised myself that, seven years ago. I love you dad. I know you're happy Karen's moving on and finding someone. I miss you, so much daddy,” tears had started to fall again. “I wish you were here.” She'd rubbed the headstone, then turned and fled to the car.

They pulled into the driveway and got out of the car, a sad and sullen group. They trudged into the kitchen and ate a light lunch before drifting away to their own parts of the house. Sarah paused before the door of her room, checked to make sure Toby was safe in his room, took a deep breath, and opened the door. Jareth was sitting on her bed reading. “What is it with him being in a bed every time I run into him?” part of her wondered. Another part promptly spoke up. “Well, beds are good for plenty of things. Or really, plenty of one—” Sarah cut herself off before she could finish that thought, blushing nonetheless. The Goblin King had looked up when she entered the room. He took in her blush and wondered what had caused it. “It probably has something to do with the fact you're out of your loose sleep clothes and back in your normal clothes,” a voice at the back of his brain answered with a sly smile. Jareth felt that smile creep onto his face and did nothing to stop it. He noticed her blush grow darker. He held up the book he had been reading.

“Interesting reading for a person living in a democracy,” he said. It was Machiavelli’s The Prince. “Any plans to join a monarchy, precious? Though I must say, you are missing some of the requisite parts to be a 'Prince'—” he let his eyes travel down her body and rest on the place where, in his opinion, a certain requisite bit of anatomy was missing, much to his delight—“if not to be a ruler. Any interest in becoming a queen?” Sarah's blush deepened but her eyes grew angry.

“That book is widely studied in the Aboveground, I'll have you know.” She said, marching forward and snatching the book out of his hands. “You could probably learn a thing or two from it.” The Goblin King bristled at the insult to his prowess as a king, sitting from where he had been reclining on her pillows and glaring at her.

“And what do you think this book could advise that would improve the way I rule the Goblin Kingdom?”

“Oh,” Sarah said, stepping closer to him. It was much easier to be angry at him then sad about her father. “I don't know, maybe don't randomly kick people out of the castle via the windows, or throw them in the bog or, hell, why not, not arbitrarily setting the cleaners on someone?” She was still annoyed about her near death by cleaners.

“It is better to be feared than loved,” he snapped, leaning towards her.

“Only if you can't be both!”

Jareth let out a harsh laugh, one that bespoke a great deal of pain.

“What?” he asked, looking her straight in the eye. His eyes held a strange mix of anger, pain and resentment. “Fear me, love me, do as I say? We both know how well that works.” He fell back on the bed. The words sounded familiar to Sarah, but she couldn't quite place them. Had they been in the book?
“Still, trying to get your subjects to show more devotion to you, maybe performing fewer random acts of violence, can only be a good thing.”

“Machiavelli disagreed,” Jareth replied, still not looking at her. “And tell me Sarah, where do you get such reports on my kingship? Who tells you how terrible and fearsome a king I am? Or do you still persist in painting me as just. A. Villain.”

Sarah thought about the reports she had received from her friends in the Labyrinth. Sir Didymus refused to speak badly of his King, Ludo was, well, Ludo and she couldn't really get a lot of information out of him, although he did make a great teddy bear in times of need. Hoggle had been the only one to speak badly of the Goblin King, but even his negativity towards he-in-the-way-too-tight-pants had trickled off in the past year. Suddenly, Sarah's brain caught up with something the Goblin King had said.

“What do you mean, disagreed? Surely you mean disagrees?” The Goblin King turned his head to look at her.

“Sarah, I may be a fae creature older than you can imagine but that does not mean I cannot speak the English language properly. I meant exactly what I said. Disagreed.”

“That suggests that you've actually spoken with him on the matter.” He gave her a look, clearly saying, 'And your point is...?'

“Hold up, Goblin King, do you—”

“Jareth,” he interrupted her.

“What?” Sarah asked, confused.

He raised himself on his elbows and gave her a look. Sarah's eyes were drawn to where his shirt lay open to his waist, noticing the way his muscles moved underneath his skin.

“If I'm going to be stuck here until you remember what you wished for, you might as well refer to me as Jareth.” It had annoyed him that she had stopped using his name and reverted once more to his title. He wanted to hear her say his name again.

“Okay then, Jareth. Do you mean to tell me that you have actually spoken with Niccolo Machiavelli?”

“Yes.” Jareth said still looking at her. “He was a very interesting chap to talk to. Glad to see his work still studied centuries later.” He switched his gaze back to the book.

Sarah stood there stunned for a moment. She knew Jareth was old, having figured out he was fae from the stories, but it was one thing to know something as fact and quite another to realize that the person you were speaking to was old enough to have spoken to Machiavelli.

“Just how old are you?” she breathed, her green eyes wide. Jareth looked over at her and his breath stopped for just a moment. Her expression had been so close to the one she had worn in the crystal ballroom before the other dancers had gotten to her and that blasted clock chimed. He regained his composure before Sarah could see anything but a flicker of something she couldn't name in his eyes. He raised an eyebrow at her.

“Very,” was his only reply.

At that moment, Toby's head appeared around the door saying “Sarah, will you tell me...” his voice
trickled off as he noticed the other person in the room. Sarah's gaze flicked between the Goblin King and the once wished-away boy. Toby walked into the room, kicking the door closed behind him and went to stand next to his sister. “You're him, aren't you? You're the Goblin King!” Jareth smiled as Sarah winced at her brother's repeat of her words.

“Yes, I am,” Jareth said, standing up and coming to kneel before Toby. He summoned a crystal from the air. “Here, I've brought you a gift.”

“What is it?” Toby asked, not reaching for it. His sister had told him stories of the Goblin King for as long as he could remember.

“It's a crystal, nothing more,” Jareth said as he smirked and looked up at Sarah. “But if you turn it this way,” He extended his hand towards Toby.

“Oh no you don't,” Sarah said, stepping between them. Jareth drew his hand back, his eyes sparkling as he gazed at Sarah.

“Come now Sarah,” he said, standing again. “This isn't a gift for an ordinary boy. It's rather special. And one that I think he'll enjoy at that. I promise I mean him no harm in this gift.”

Sarah thought for a moment. The fae were bound to their words, but they were also masters of weaving them in such a way that they got exactly what they wanted. “Do you promise not to take him to the underground? That this gift will not change or harm him in any way?” she asked, giving him a suspicious look.

“I promise that I will not try to take Toby Underground without your permission. This is a non-magical gift. Now, if I may,” once again he held out the crystal. Sarah eyed him warily, but couldn't see how the gift would harm him between the two of his promises. Sarah reluctantly stepped from between the two and watched as Toby accepted the crystal. As soon as his fingers touched it, it transformed into a small wooden sword. Toby's eye's lit up at he examined the sword. He swished it back and forth a few times, a huge smile spreading across his face.

“What do we say to the Goblin King?” Sarah asked, more as a force of habit than anything else.

"You have no power over me?” said Toby, sounding slightly confused.

"Um—yeah, but not what I meant. He just gave you a gift, so you say?"

"But it's not food..." he said imploringly.

Sarah pinched the bridge of her nose, as Jareth raised his eyebrows and watched the interaction. "What would you say if it wasn't the Goblin King? —or any other mythological creature?"

Toby's eyes lit with understanding. “Thank you!” he cried, running over and throwing his arms around Jareth's legs. Jareth looked down at him bemusedly before patting him on the head and replying.

“You're welcome, Toby.” Perhaps being loved was not quite so bad after all. Toby started swinging the weapon around with reckless abandon once more.

“Really, Jareth,” Sarah groaned as she watched in horror. “You had to give him a weapon?”

“Come now,” he replied, “it's not a real weapon, it's not like he can do much damage with it.”

Toby took this as a cue to knock the china figurine of the Goblin King from Sarah's vanity where it
promptly fell to the floor and smashed. Jareth winced as Sarah turned to glare at him.

“You were saying?” she asked. She turned back to her brother who was staring at her with wide eyes.

“I'm sorry, Sarah,” he said, his voice starting to waver.

“Oh Tobes,” Sarah said, bending down to hug her younger brother. “It's ok. I'll just sweep it up. Come on, let's get you away from those shards.” Carefully, as she was in bare feet as well, she lifted her brother up and stepped away from the broken bits of statue. “Let's go get the broom and get this all cleaned up, ok?” She turned, still holding her brother, who was now wrapped around her hip like a monkey with sword still in hand, to the door to go get what she needed to clean up the mess.

“There's no need for that,” Jareth said, conjuring yet another crystal. He threw it at the mess on the floor. The mess promptly disappeared and there was, once again, a small statue of the Goblin King—now entirely proportionately correct, Sarah couldn't help but notice—standing on Sarah's vanity. “But perhaps it would be wise for Toby to play with his new toy somewhere with fewer fragile things?” He suggested.

Sarah let Toby back onto the ground, now there were no more pottery shards for him to hurt his feet on. Putting his latest gift on the chest at the bottom of Sarah's bed, Toby turned to his older sister.

“Will you read me a story Sarah, PLEASE,” he said. Sarah looked down at his bright blue eyes and couldn't say no.

“Alright, but just one for now. I know just the one to read.” Sarah went over to the bookshelf by her vanity and pulled out a book. She jumped on her bed and patted the space next to her so Toby would climb up. He did and snuggled close to his sister, so he could see the pictures in the book. Jareth took a seat in the chair at the vanity and picked up the discarded copy of The Prince. He snorted when he saw the cover of the book: “Goblin Market.” Sarah simply gave him a look, checked her brother was ready, and started to read

“Morning and evening,
Maids heard the goblins cry:
Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:”

Jareth had planned to keep reading Machiavelli, for truly he missed his old friend, but he found himself captivated by the story Sarah was telling. Of course he knew it, he’d heard it many times before, but this time was different. Sarah had the voice of a true story teller. Her words conjured the images of the story until he could almost see the goblins bearing the plates of fruit. He could see all the fruit as well: the apples, the melons, the blackberries and, of course, the peaches. He saw her look at him as she spoke the lines

“We must not look at the goblin men,
We must not eat their fruit,”

He smirked, catching her slight change of the original poem. More appropriate for her story though, and for the warning she obviously meant this to be for Toby. After all, she had not bought the fruit he’d sent her, though she had paid for it. They both had, really. He settled back and listened as the poem wove on, telling the stories of the sisters and coming to its inevitable, irksome ending. Jareth had never liked the end of the poem, though only in the last few years had he decided how it should have ended. Laura should have returned with the goblins the first night she ever saw them. She should have followed them to their orchards where she could have gouged on the fruit to her heart's
content, and never have even thought of returning home to her sibling.

And then there was Lizzie’s part in all this. She resisted temptation to save her sibling, turning her back on the goblins and all they offered. It really was a truly terrible poem and not one Sarah should be reading to such young and impressionable people as Toby. He grew more and more sour as the poem dragged on, particularly at the part where Lizzie ran from the goblin men and all the delights their fruit had to offer. But still he listened, watching the story her words conjured in the air. Her voice grew softer and softer towards the end and she glanced at him again, her eyes giving him a quick glance under her lashes before turning firmly back to the book as she spoke the lines:

“Their fruits like honey to the throat,
But poison in the blood,”

But then she turned back to her brother and spoke the last six lines of the poem with him:

“For there is no friend like a sister,
In calm or stormy weather
To cheer one on the tedious way
To fetch one if one goes astray
To lift on if one totters down
To strengthen when one stands.”

Sarah pulled her brother close. “I love you, Toby,” she said her voice muffled in his hair. “And if you’re in trouble I’ll always come for you,”

“Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered,” Jareth muttered under his breath. Not quite quietly enough, though, judging by the glare Sarah shot him.

“And what is the moral of the story?” she asked her brother, pulling out of the hug so she could look him in the eye.

“Say no to any mythical creature offering me food.” Toby recited promptly.

“Exactly,” Sarah said. Toby smiled, happy to get it right this time.

“What?” Jareth asked at her glare. “Beware Goblins bearing fruit?”

“No,” Sarah said firmly, surprising Jareth momentarily. “Not be wary of. Say no to. Important difference.” Ah, that explained it.

“Sarah,” Karen’s voice drifted up the stairs. “Can you come downstairs and help with dinner?”

“Coming, Karen,” Sarah called back. “Toby, why don’t you go play outside till dinner?” Toby’s eyes widened in delight and he raced out of the room. Sarah raised three fingers and then lowered them. 3, 2, 1—Toby burst back into the room, grabbed his sword, flung a “Thank you, Mr. Goblin King,” at Jareth and ran out again. Sarah smiled fondly at her brother’s retreating back before turning to the Goblin King, whose stomach promptly growled.

Sarah looked at his stomach and frowned slightly. She’d forgotten that he hadn’t eaten all day. She couldn’t get some food from the kitchen, not with Karen in there. She didn’t have her private store of emergency chocolate here, either. Suddenly, she realized she was staring at the stomach and partially uncovered chest of the Goblin King. She blushed a little and moved her gaze up to look at his face which clearly was asking her if she liked what she saw. She looked away quickly looking for something else—anything else—to look at, rather than the Goblin King standing before her in clothing that left far too little to the imagination. Her eyes fell on her tote bag which she had taken
with her on the train yesterday. She went over to it and pulled out a few sticks of jerky, a bag of trail mix, a half finished bag of chips, a chocolate bar and a mostly full water bottle. She eyed her meagre food offering. ‘Not exactly fit for a king,’” she thought. She looked over and saw how hungrily Jareth was watching the food in her hands. ‘but I think it will do.” She quickly opened all her food packages and spread them out on the desk for the Goblin King to choose from.

“I’ll bring you a plate of real food when we finish supper,” she promised, “But this will have to do for now.”

“Thank you, Sarah,” he said, moving to survey the food before him. Sarah’s breath caught, both at the fact he had thanked her and at the way his voice caressed her name. He was the only person to ever speak it like that, as if he were reluctant to let it go. Sarah shook herself and headed downstairs to help her step mother prepare dinner.

* * *

The three Williams sat at the table together to share Robert’s favourite meal, a roast chicken with roasted vegetables, mashed potatoes and gravy. Karen served everyone before sitting down. The waited a minute in silence before eating, reflecting on their experiences with the man who was no longer with them in anything but spirit. Finally, they started to eat. Karen broke the silence by asking Sarah a very unexpected question.

“How is your Celtic studies class going?” Sarah froze for a moment before answering.

“…Good?” Fantasy had been a topic neither of them had breached by some unspoken mutual accord.

“What are you studying again? The mythology right?”

“Um, that and ancient traditions and such.” At this point Sarah was floored. Maybe Karen was trying to move past all the trouble fantasy used to cause them.

“Tell me about your favourite myth,” Karen enquired. And so Sarah did, starting tentatively but building into it as she went along. Karen nodded, obviously listening carefully.

“So,” Karen concluded at the end of the tale, looking relieved. Sarah guessed she was glad it was over. “You’re interested in the fae.” Sarah’s mind conjured a picture of the fae that was presently munching on snacks in her bedroom. She cut it off before her back brain could get too excited at the combination of “him” and “bedroom”.

“You could say that,” Sarah replied tentatively.

“You’ll have to tell me more about them some time,” she said, giving her stepdaughter a sincere look before turning to her son. “Toby, use a napkin, not your sleeve,” and the dinner continued as normal, as though the conversation about the fantastic had never happened. Sarah decided to treat it like the olive branch it probably was and not bring up the topic again unless Karen did.

After dinner, Karen took Toby up to bed before coming downstairs to help Sarah in the kitchen. Sarah took one look at her stepmother and promptly turned her around and sent her upstairs to bed. The woman had had a rough day and, while Sarah had as well, she had had the Goblin King in her Bedroom Problem to keep her distracted from thoughts of her father, something Karen obviously hadn’t. Sarah bustled about the kitchen for about 15 minutes, giving Karen time to get ready and settled in bed before sneaking upstairs. She opened the door to her room to find Jareth in her bed – again— and gestured for him to be quiet and follow her. Intrigued, he put down his book and, silent
as an owl in flight, her mind couldn’t help the simile, followed her. When they got to the kitchen
Sarah gestured to where the food was sitting on the counter with a plate, fork and knife and a glass of
wine she had set out before bringing him downstairs.

“Dig in,” She said before pulling on her rubber gloves and starting on the pile of dishes in the sink.
Jareth ignored the food and moved past Sarah to start opening cupboards. He worked his way
through every one of them, carefully examining the content before moving on to the next cupboard.
In this systematic fashion he made his way through the entire kitchen, even checking all of the
drawers. Then he came and stood behind Sarah staring over her shoulder at the sink full of dishes.
Sarah waited for him to do something for a minute. When he just kept staring at the dishes she was
washing she snapped:

“What, going to tell me that I can't do this either? You were wrong then too!”

Jareth just breathed a laugh before whispering in her ear

“It's dirtier than you think, and soap is short.” She shivered and closed her eyes as his breath tickled
her ear. He reached around her and dropped a crystal into the sink. She opened her eyes when she
smelled the magic. The sink was empty and sparkling. Sarah blinked in surprise. She looked around
and saw the counters were sparkling as well. Sarah felt the warm presence at her back move away
and turned around.

“Um, thanks,” she said, not really sure what else to say. Jareth merely inclined his head and gestured
to the counter where the food still was.

“Join me,” Jareth said, raising an eyebrow, head cocked to the side just so. It was half way between a
question and a statement.

“I'll have some tea while you eat,” Sarah said, her back still to the counter. Again Jareth nodded and
reached past her head to get a mug out of the cupboard. The positions were so similar for a moment
Sarah could almost hear him asking what she thought of his Labyrinth. He brought the mug down
between them and raised an eyebrow at her expression. She shook her head, took the mug and
ducked around him, going to go fish some tea out of the cupboard. She shook some of the loose
leaves out of their container and into a tea ball before putting some water in the kettle and turning it
on.

While Sarah was dealing with the kettle Jareth had walked over to her mug to sniff the tea leaves.

“This smells quite good. What is it?” he asked.

Sarah turned around to see him smelling the mug. “Oh,” she said, “It's a special blend my friend's
uncle gave me. He has a teashop near my university's campus. Do you want some?”

“Perhaps another time. For now, I think I will eat.” With that he quickly speared some food with his
fork, filling up his plate before going to the table and sitting down. Sarah poured the boiling water
into her mug, checked her watch and went to join him.

They sat in silence for a few minutes and Jareth started to eat the first real food he had had all day.
He observed Sarah as he ate. The longer he stayed silent, the sadder she seemed to become. Well, he
wasn't about to let that continue.

“The food is delicious,” he commented, breaking her from her reverie. It was true. The food was
very good.

“Karen's a good cook,” Sarah said, still looking sad. “It was my dad's favourite meal.”
Alright, so food wasn't a good topic of conversation. What else was there.

“You mentioned a friend whose uncle owns a teashop? What's she like?” Reminded, Sarah checked her watch. The tea was finished steeping. She got up and went to grab it. Jareth's eyes followed her the entire way.

“He,” Sarah said, absentmindedly, inhaling the steam off her tea.

“Pardon?” Jareth asked, continuing to eat.

“The friend whose uncle owns a tea shop. He's a guy, not a girl.”

“Alright then, tell me about him.”

“You want to know about Zuko?”

Jareth raised an eyebrow. “I did ask, didn't I?”

“Right,” Sarah said, pulling herself together. It seemed he had successfully managed to distract her completely from thoughts of her father. He settled down to listen. “Well, Zuko and I have been the same politics course for years. We enrolled at U of F at the same time and have been in a lot of the same classes over the years. He lives in res but works with his Uncle at his teashop. He's a good student, smarter than he thinks he is, but he has a temper.”

“What's his last name?” Jareth asked, though he had his suspicions.

“Sozin,” Sarah replied, eyebrows raised in enquiry.

“Oh,” was all Jareth would say—he seemed to have been expecting the answer—before returning to the earlier topic. “You mentioned you had classes together. Is that how you became friends?”

“Well, sort of,” Sarah said, frowning. “We were kind of friends by the end of last year, some of my other friends had a problem with him but last summer they all went on a field trip and came back fast friends. I decided not to risk asking questions in case it broke the spell.” Jareth smiled at the metaphor. Sarah noticed his plate was clean and that his eyes were drifting back to the chicken. She got up and refilled his plate as he asked her another question.

“Tell me about the rest of your friends.” He nodded his thanks as he took back his plate and continued eating.

“Well, there's Katara, she's my roommate. She's totally the group mom, though has a temper to match Zuko's. Those two...” She shook her head. “Not that anything will come of it. Katara is dating this asshole named Jet and I'm pretty sure Zuko doesn't think he'd have a chance even if Katara broke up with Jet because of Aang. Aang is this pretty happy go lucky kid, full of energy and always bouncing off the walls. He's studying religions from around the worlds and can actually be pretty intimidating and authoritative when he manages to stand still and focus for a while. He hates people getting hurt and doubly so if it's Katara. She, Aang and Sokka, her brother, knew each other before they came to university and Aang's had a crush on Katara for as long as I can remember. Katara is totally clueless and isn't interested at all, which is kind of sad. I don't think Zuko's realized she isn't interested in Aang and even then she'd still have to break up with Jet. I think she should, he's kind of an asshole, but I wouldn't tell her that.

“Then there's Toph, she's small, petite even, with a delicate body and a personality that doesn't match it at all. She's a firecracker that doesn't take back talk from anybody with a penchant for breaking the rules. She's completely blind too, not that you could really tell.”
At this Jareth perked up. “Toph Bei Fong, by chance?” he asked her.

“Yeah,” said Sarah. Jareth smiled a small, triumphant smile. Realizing he wasn't in a mood to share, Sarah didn't even bother asking, just continued with her monologue. “She has an incredible sense of space and spatial memory and between that and her guide dog, Badger, people often forget she's blind. Especially Sokka.

“Sokka's a mad genius. He's always coming up with ideas, is extremely sarcastic and really loves meat. He's also the de facto team leader. That actually pretty much sums him up.” Sarah pulled up at that last sentence stopped by a yawn. Mentally, she went over the monologue she had just given Jareth about her friends.

“I'm sorry,” she said, before yawning again. “That must have been very confusing.”

“Not at all,” he murmured. It was true. It probably would have been very confusing if her Underground friends hadn't been giving him updates on her life since she had left the Labyrinth but since they had, it made perfect sense. “I think it might be time to retire.” Sarah nodded, got up, put his dishes in the dishwasher and headed for the door to the basement. “Should I bring more food upstairs for tomorrow?” Jareth called down the stairs after her.

“No,” Sarah said, rummaging around. “Karen's working tomorrow and I'm looking after Toby and doing homework. You'll be able to eat tomorrow no problem.” Sarah found what she was looking for, pulled them out and started walking back up the stairs to where Jareth was waiting for her. “Come on,” she said before walking back up to her room. Jareth followed silently behind her.

Once there, Sarah laid out the air mattress and sleeping bag she'd pulled out of the basement. “Don't step on this until I say so, ok?” Sarah said, unscrewing the cap that would allow the mattress to fill with air. She grabbed her pyjamas from the end of the bed and looked over at the Goblin King in his, very not practical for sleeping in, clothes. “Um, do you need me to find you something to sleep in? I think I have—” she was cut off by Jareth summoning up a crystal and dropping it at his feet. The next moment he was standing in the silk sleeping pants she had seen him in earlier. Sarah blushed at the sight of the Goblin King, in all his half naked glory, before muttering something and fleeing to the bathroom to change and brush her teeth.

When she came back, the air mattress was full and she closed the valve. “Ok,” she said. “I've only got one bed, and there isn't enough room for two people,” oh there totally is, interjected her back brain, “so one of us sleeps on the air mattress one night while the other sleeps on the bed. We switch every night. After all, that's only,” she sneered, “fair.” Jareth chuckled at her words. “I'll take the floor tonight—”

“Nonsense,” Jareth interrupted.

“What do you mean, nonsense?” Sarah asked indignant. It was apparently her fault he was stuck here and, until she could remember why, that made him her guest, however reluctant on both their parts. “Jareth, if you think—”

“Sarah,” he interrupted, his voice caressing her name again in a way that always managed to shut her up. “You have had a long and hard day. Tonight, you will take the bed,” if I have to pin you there till you fall asleep myself, Jareth added mentally and then had to work hard not to focus on the mental images such a turn of phrase conjured. “And I will sleep on the floor. Tomorrow, we will switch. It is only, as you say, fair.” Sarah looked at him in a delightfully confused way. He wanted to hold her close and let her smell fill him as she stood before him in just her sleepwear, but he made himself stay still. Now was not the time. Eventually she nodded, and curled up under the covers. Jareth sank into the sleeping bag on the air mattress, which was not too uncomfortable. Sarah reached over to her
bedside table and turned off the light.

“Good night, Jareth,” she murmured, turning over.

“Good night, precious,” he replied, smiling at the ceiling at her use of his name. He didn't think he would ever get over the tiny thrill her saying his name caused him. He hoped it would. He was, after all, to marry another woman. Wishing it weren't so, he settled down to sleep.

* * *

When Sarah woke in the early hours of the morning crying, Jareth was there to hold her and comfort her.
Jareth woke up with Sarah in his arms. 'I could get used to waking up this way,' he thought. She had fallen asleep in his arms when her tears had stopped the night before, just after asking him to stay, and so stay he had. He'd held her as she slept until he'd drifted off to sleep himself. He pulled her still sleeping body a little tighter against him. She murmured something in her sleep before shifting slightly and moving closer to him. She was on her side and he was behind her, an arm wrapped around her waist. She smelled of laughter, fire, and the air after a storm. He could drown in that scent. It wasn't that he didn't enjoy arguing with her, teasing her, listening to her talk and all that came with having Sarah in his life instead of been forced to view her through second-hand reports that may have been edited in concern for perceived risk to her continued life Aboveground, but very few things came close to the feeling of her willingly near him, of her having decided, no matter how unconsciously, that he could be trusted enough to sleep next to her. After seven years alone it felt like flying. He'd do almost anything to spend the rest of his life waking up this way.

That thought brought him up short. Disgusted with himself, he rolled over, careful not to wake Sarah. Yes, he would make Sarah his Queen given half a chance, not that he was sure she'd give him one, but he couldn't. Arrangements had been made and he had to live with them. The Labyrinth was preparing herself to have a new Queen, everyone in the Underground could feel it. Jareth knew who he wanted as Queen, who the Labyrinth wanted as Queen but there was just one small problem. He had no power over her. If he couldn't communicate with her, never mind appear before her, how was he to get her to come Underground and marry him? As he had shown interest in no other candidate for the Queen of the Labyrinth the choice had been made for him. Klio. He couldn't fault the High Council for the choice; they'd been friends since childhood and for an arranged match it was a fairly good one. While not overly interested in the political scene Klio was well aware of her responsibilities and would do what she had to to take care of the Labyrinth. And while a political marriage meant that they would be free to pursue relationships on the side there was still the matter of producing an heir. Jareth shuddered at the thought. It would be bad enough for him, more like sleeping with a sister than anything else. For her, it would arguably be even worse—at least he was attracted to the opposite sex. He really did not want to have to do that to her, or with her. It had been quite some time since he had wanted to do that with anyone at all except a woman with dark hair and bright green eyes who smelled like the air after a storm. He closed his eyes at the thought and felt a moan start low in his throat. He stomped it down quickly. Now was neither the time nor the place for such thoughts. He glanced back at the sleeping woman in the bed.

That was part of the problem though. He didn't simply want to bed Sarah, he wanted to wed her. He would never be happy having her in his life simply as a mistress and he didn't really think she'd settle for that either. He wanted to be able to announce his love for her publicly and have the entire Underground see and admire her. She deserved that much. If he kept Sarah in his life he'd end up coming to hate Klio, which was entirely unfair to his future wife and old friend, even if she was already seeing someone on the side. He was the only person who even knew that relationship existed. They still had til Summer Solstice to figure out a way out of the marriage but their prospects were looking grimmer and grimmer. He wanted to fight, truly he did, but part of him had given up and resigned himself to marrying her.

Sarah stirred on the bed, turning her face towards him. He reached out and brushed some hair out of her face. She moved her face into his touch, rubbing her cheek against his bare hand. He shuddered at the sensation and moved his hand to her shoulder, preparing to wake her up. He was interrupted
by a soft sound: a moan. He froze and watched as her breathing became shallower and her back
arched, moving her closer to him. He would have thought it to be a nightmare if it hadn’t been for the
moan. That wasn’t a sound of fear or pain, that was a sound of—

Green eyes snapped open, their pupils dilated. She caught him staring at her in fascinated wonder
and glared back. She shrugged off his hand and sat up.

“Stay out of my dreams, you pervert!” she growled. Jareth looked at her blankly for a moment before
grinning—a grin which quickly transformed into a full blown smirk, hint of canines and all.

“Sarah,” he purred. She shivered as he said her name just as he had in her dream. She was still way
too filled with hormones to deal with this. “I have no power over you. I was not in your dream, nor
had I any power in directing it. Your dreams are entirely your own. Though, precious,” he said,
leaning closer as Sarah scrambled out of the bed and started backing away from it. Jareth merely
walked through it, following her step for step. “I do have to wonder what your dream was about for
you to grant me such an epithet.” He kept moving forward. Sarah kept backing up. Her back brain
noted the way his muscles moved under his skin as he walked towards her, like a panther, stalking its
prey. ‘Yep,’ she decided as she moved backwards, ‘still WAY too hormonal to be dealing with the
Goblin King in such a predatory and shirtless mood. Oh shit’—her back had hit the wall and the
Goblin King showed no signs of stopping his advance until, Sarah guessed, he’d press her against the
wall, his body firmly pressed against her own... ‘Bloody hormones,’ Sarah thought. Instead he came
to a stop before her not even one foot away and placed his arms on either side of her, effectively
trapping her there.

“I’ve heard humans say that dreams are what the heart wishes for but the mind denies wanting.” He
leaned in to whisper into her ear. “Could your dream have been telling you what you wished for,
what you”—his voice dropped about an octave as he whispered—“want?” She could feel his breath
on her, and the warmth from his body.

“Because, if the sounds you made as you slept”—oh god she had made sounds—“were any
indication, I’d be happy to grant your wish, repeatedly, if that was what was desired.” Sarah brought
her hands up to his chest to push him away. As soon as her hands made contact, he froze and Sarah
remembered he was shirtless. She felt all the muscles in his chest tense suddenly under his smooth
skin. It felt like velvet over steel.

It was taking all of Jareth’s willpower not to grab Sarah and kiss her senseless before moving things
more towards the bed. Or the desk. Or the vanity. Really anything fairly sturdy would do. Even the
bookshelves had some interesting possibilities. However he was not going to force himself upon her.
‘More than you already have?’ some part of him asked. He had hoped her wish was the one her
dream suggested and waited for her to tell him so. Then, she put her hands on his chest. That nearly
broke through his resolve. If she moved, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to stop himself. Sarah didn’t
move though. She licked her lips. His eyes immediately zeroed in on her mouth. She very carefully
did not swallow.

“This isn’t what I wished for, Goblin King.” Her use of his title brought him up short, but he quickly
regained his smirk.

“Then what did you wish for?” he purred, looking her in the eye. “What is your deepest desire?”
Again, his voice caressed the word, and he leaned in to breathe his next words against her neck.
“Which of your fantasies can I fulfill?” Sarah’s breath had grown ragged and she was firmly fighting
off her back brain that was telling her in no uncertain terms, with an accompanying slide show—with
soundtrack—that, if she didn’t know what she wished for, she should at least try this out, and if it
didn’t work, maybe some of the
details were wrong and she should try again, in a different way, and keep that up until they’d worn out the possibilities.

“Sarah,” Karen’s voice called from the hall, completely shattering the moment between her and the Goblin King. “Are you up?”

“I’m up,” Sarah called, not breaking eye contact with Jareth.

“I’m off to work at the Boutique. I fed Toby breakfast, but I just wanted to let you know I was leaving.”

“Thanks, Karen. See you when you get back. I’ll have dinner ready.” Still she looked at the Goblin King.

“Alright, have a good day.”

“You too,” and with those words, the words so similar to the ones that had gotten her into this predicament, she remembered what she'd wished for. She waited till she heard Karen walking down the stairs before removing her hands from Jareth’s bare chest, much to her body’s dismay. He stepped back as she did.

“I remembered what I wished for,” she told him quietly. “I wished for answers.” And before he could say anything else she had fled the room, grabbing a change of clothes on the way out and muttering something about very, very, cold showers. Jareth stared at the door which Sarah had closed behind her for a minute before shaking himself and sinking down on her bed. What had he been thinking? Or perhaps his blood had been too occupied elsewhere to provide enough brainpower to think. Literally seconds before the entire thing had started he had been thinking about how getting close to Sarah was a bad idea, how he owed it to Klio to not come to hate her and Sarah to not claim her and keep her away from a man who could actually marry her. Apparently all that thought had been useless, to be completely undone by one small, soft moan and green eyes darkened by lust. He would have to have better control over himself in future. He would stop sleeping with her in his arms anymore. for a start. That was obviously bad for his self control. The thing that had stopped things from tipping over board though, and descending into the seas of lust that had so obviously captured them both was her addressing him by his title, not his name. When—Should he woo her, he wanted her to see him as Jareth, not the Goblin King.

He resolved to be on his best behaviour from hence forth, giving her a chance to come to know Jareth, the fae and not the Goblin King. Perhaps by the time she got her answers—after all, he was in control of them—she would allow him closer than she had today. Perhaps if he could be with her, if only for a moment, if only for a kiss, life with Klio would be more bearable. Perhaps a taste of her would sate him. He shivered at the idea of it. Her voice echoed through his head at the thought: “Their fruits like honey to the throat, but poison in the blood.” No, he suspected if he tasted her he, like Laura, would never be sated. And unlike Laura he had no sister to save him. “Though,” some back part of his brain couldn’t help but think, “she was saved by tasting the fruit again. Sarah’s the heroic type. Perhaps she’d be willing to give that a try.” He snorted. Somehow, he doubted it.

* * *

The day passed uneventfully, neither Sarah nor Jareth mentioning what had happened that morning or the night before. Jareth and Sarah played with Toby, fed him and then Sarah made supper while Jareth started teaching Toby a little on how to use his sword under Sarah’s watchful if sporadic eye. Jareth told Sarah about how both his father and his uncle were expert swordsmen and had trained him from an early age until he could fight well enough to beat almost any opponent with either hand. Sarah couldn’t help but smile as she watched Toby fall and Jareth help him up, correcting and
encouraging as needed. He made a pretty good teacher. In fact, he’d make a pretty good—she stopped herself from finishing the thought.

She was making soup for supper and gave Jareth a bowl to take up to her room before Karen arrived home. She heard the door to her room close as Karen opened the front door. She hung up her coat before turning towards the kitchen.

“What did you make? It smells delicious.”

“Leek and potato soup,” Sarah called from the kitchen. “Come on, the table’s already set.”

The three family members sat around the table and listened to Karen talk about her day, telling stories of strange customers who had come in and one woman who was dressed entirely in clashing shades of orange and purple. That had been interesting to deal with. When Karen asked the Williams children how their day was, Sarah said that they had played and then Toby had listened to her tell stories while she made supper. Sarah had made it very clear to Toby that he was not to mention the Goblin King to his mother.

After dinner, Karen put Toby to bed and then she and Sarah worked to clean the kitchen. Sarah had cleaned as she cooked, so there wasn’t much left to deal with. Once they had settled into the routine they had established the previous summer Karen spoke up.

“Sarah. I know that you’re leaving Saturday but I was—A friend of mine is in town on Friday and I was hoping to go out to dinner with them. Would you mind terribly watching Toby Friday night? If you want me to stay in so we can have one last night together I completely understand it’s just my friend is very busy now and I don’t get to see them often…” She trailed off and looked at her stepdaughter. Sarah nearly laughed, once more asked to stay in on a Friday night to look after Toby. She’d long since stopped minding though. She grinned at her stepmother.

“Oh course I don’t mind you going out with your… friend.” She teasingly added a pause before the word. “And putting Toby to bed won’t be a problem at all. It’ll be just like old times.” She smiled to herself, thinking, ‘Goblin King and all, even if there is no wish this time.’ “Will you be coming home first or…?”

“No, my friend is picking me up at work.”

“Do I bother waiting up?” Sarah smirked.

“Sarah!” Karen cried indignantly waving her drying cloth at her stepdaughter. Sarah only laughed and together they finished cleaning the kitchen. Sarah waited for Karen to close her door before taking a deep breath and opening her own. It would be the first time she and Jareth were alone since this morning. Jareth was, for once, not in her bed but sitting by her vanity. The bowl and spoon were sitting next to him and he was reading a new book. He looked up when she walked in.

“Karen’s gone to bed across the hall so we have to stay quiet,” Sarah whispered. “I’m going to go get ready for bed,” and she grabbed her pajamas and walked down the hall to the bathroom to change. Jareth summoned two crystals. The first he tossed at the bowl, spoon and glass on the vanity, which promptly disappeared and reappeared, spotless, in their proper places in the kitchen. The other he threw into the air which simply vanished in a cloud of softly expanding glitter. The air now smelled of magic. Sarah came back into the room in the shorts and t-shirt she slept in. The shirt only hinted at the delicious curves he knew lay underneath and the shorts showed off the long smooth expanse of her legs as they only came to her mid-thigh. He longed to take off his gloves and feel her skin, to kiss her, to hold her close, but he restrained himself. Now was not the time.
Sarah raised her eyebrows at the smell of magic that permeated the air.

“A sound blocking spell. No one outside this room will be able to hear us speak,” he explained “I believe you wanted answers. What are the questions you wanted to ask?” Sarah paused. Jareth actually willing to answer questions was something to be grabbed onto and not let go of. Sarah’s back-brain heartily agreed. The only thing was, where to start?

“You said I was wished away. Who wished me away?” Sarah's back-brain groaned. This was not what it had meant by 'where to start.'

“Hoggle.”

“Hoggle?!? You're joking.”

“I'm not. I don't think the outcome that occurred was the one he had hoped for, not judging by the way he stormed into my throne room that morning.”

Sarah stormed over to her vanity and glared at the mirror. “Hoggle, I need you to get your sorry butt up here this instant!” The mirror remained empty.

“He can't come,” Jareth said quietly. Sarah whipped around and looked at him in horror.

“What did you do to him?” she whispered. Jareth glared back at her at her words.

“What will it take, Sarah,” his voice when he said her name this time was a dangerous hiss, “for you to stop painting me as a villain? I did nothing to him. He cannot come to you because I cannot open a portal between the Above and Underground as I am trapped here by your wish!” He snapped. Sarah blinked at him for a moment.

“So every time I called my friends for the past seven years, you've opened a portal?”

“Yes,” he ground out.

“I appreciate what you've done for me, but, why?” Jareth considered not answering, he truly did, but something compelled him to tell the truth. He suspected the Labyrinth's power in play.

“Because I didn't want you to forget.” 'Me,' he added in the privacy of his head.

“Oh,” Sarah said, something in her eyes that he couldn't quite read. “I don't think I could have if I tried,” she said, answering what was unsaid, partial confession for partial confession.

“Just what did Hoggle wish for?”

“That I could do more than just let you see them. It was enough to let me see you, speak to you.”

“You haven't been able to in all this time?”

“I have no power over you, remember?” A strange emotion flickered in his eyes. “Or, at least, I had no power over you.”

“Just what kind of power do you have now?” Sarah asked, starting to be nervous. Jareth laughed.

“Not to worry precious. I can only talk to you, look at you, appear before you. I can't whisk you away to the Underground or some such thing against your will. I only have some power now.”

“Good.”
Sarah paused and tried to think of another question. “I have my answers,” she said. “Can you poof off home now?”

Jareth focused and tried to transport himself, but the magic wouldn't come. “Apparently not,” he huffed. “Can you think of no other questions for me?”

Sarah paused and looked within herself. There was a big dark knot tied around the centre of her chest. She thought that that might be what she needed resolved but she couldn't think of a way to put it into words. She shook her head. “Not now. I'll try to come up with something for tomorrow. Let's pass out for now.” She moved towards the sleeping bag on the floor. Jareth eyed the bed warily. He could smell her scent on it from over here. He didn't think he could spend the night wrapped in her scent like that and come out sane.

“I'll take the floor again tonight,” he said, hastily moving forward to place himself between Sarah and the sleeping bag. “After all, I did spend most of the night in the bed.” Sarah just gave him a look.

“Jareth, it's my turn to take the floor. We are being fair about this. Now, go to sleep.”

“But—”

“My will is as strong as yours, Jareth. Don't push me. I'm tired.” She moved around him and slipped into the sleeping bag. He focused and was in his sleeping pants.

“Hey,” Sarah murmured from where she was curled up in the sleeping bag. “Why can you magic your clothes up here but not Hoggle? Those are the same pants you wore when I appeared in your bed.”

“The pants aren't living. I seem to be able to transport nonliving things I am familiar with and nothing else.”

“Oh,” she mumbled sleepily. Apparently she was tired. Jareth climbed warily into the bed and rolled over. Her scent surrounded him. There was no way he was falling asleep like this. Thinking carefully, he divided his magic. With one part he took off the sound proofing spell, with the other he cut off his sense of smell. It would last until he fell asleep. It wasn't exactly pleasant to be unable to smell but it was the only way he was going to sleep that night. He rolled onto his back and closed his eyes.

“Jareth?” Sarah's sleepy voice came from the floor by the bed.

“Yes?”

“Good night,” she yawned.

“Good night, Precious.” Eyes still closed, Jareth smiled and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Just what Jareth had planned with that bookcase, I don't know. He wouldn't tell me. Apparently, I wouldn't be able to write for a week if he did. If I failed to write for an entire week by brother would probably kill me (or worse, get me expelled,) and then the Labyrinth wouldn't have her scribe and would be PISSED and would drag Sarah into it and Jareth really doesn't want to deal with that. Sigh. I leave it up to your excellent
imaginations. Did you like the UST? Did you like the World Building? Did you like the Plot? Do you have suggestions for what I could do better? I don't know! But you could let me know by leaving a contribution in the little box!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Hey! This chapter goes out to all my readers who are in different time zones for me and so normally only get my Tuesday update, (my extremely late Tuesday update. Sorry guys, I only get home really late on Tuesdays) and normally get it a day later. So, to all of you who normally get it on Wednesdays, this chapters for you.

On a more serious note, this Chapter is Tagged for discussion of Death and Miscarriages. Proceed with caution.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of March break passed in much the same fashion. Sarah showed Jareth how to use the shower (a combination her back brain was very happy with) and got most of her homework done. Jareth, on the other hand, was just as fascinated with the idea of Sarah in combination with the shower. There had been one incident where Sarah had left Toby alone with Jareth to finish some reading and come downstairs to find him eating a peach. Jareth not being in sight, Sarah gave Toby a once over and asked him if everything was dancing and demanded to know where he got the peach. Toby had just given her a weird look before replying that he'd gotten it from the fridge with all the other peaches that Karen had bought during that week's groceries. Jareth had come in for the end of this and had given Sarah a look. Sarah decided to read Toby the myth of Hades and Persephone just to ram home the lesson. The moral of that one was not to eat anything when in a mythical environment. Jareth sat through the story with wry amusement. He neglected to point out that, by that myth's laws, Sarah would have to return to the underground. Every night before bed Jareth would ask her if she knew the question. Every night she would shake her head. They switched sleeping arrangements every night. Sarah noted that both the sleeping bag and the bed had started to smell of Jareth. For some reason, the mornings after he had the bed he would leave as soon as Karen was gone and take a shower. A long one at that. Sarah just brushed it off. The fae could be strange.

Things changed though, that Friday. Sarah had spent the day packing while Jareth had tutored Toby in more swordsmanship. In some ways having Jareth here had been a blessing. He would entertain Toby when she needed to do homework or cook, would help her clean up using his magic, but would let her go out and play with Toby in the snow, just the two of them. He'd stay in and read as she got some quality sibling time with her brother. That night, Jareth joined them at the dinner table. Sarah listened as Toby told her all of the cool things Jareth had taught him. As he started to trail off Jareth added, “However...” Toby looked up at him and continued as if repeating something he had heard many times.

“A real sword is not a toy. A real sword can do a lot of damage and should be treated with respect. What I have now is a sword and I can play with it but I should never play with a real sword.” His voice quieted for the next bit, “I should only ever pull a real sword if I am willing to use it to hurt somebody, and I should only ever be willing to do that to protect myself or someone else.” He finished before looking at Jareth. “Did I forget anything?”
Jareth smiled at him, before reaching over and tousling his hair. “Not at all. Well remembered.” Sarah looked at the pair, surprised. Jareth’s had been a look of almost fatherly affection. She was also surprised that Jareth had bothered to give Toby such a lecture, apparently repeatedly, when all Toby had was a toy sword.

“I first started learning swordsmanship at around his age. My father gave me the same lecture many times. It is an important one. One every person who holds a sword should know,” Jareth told Sarah, taking in her surprised look. “And you, Sarah, how is your essay going?”

Sarah’s head dropped to the table. “Don't remind me,” she muttered into the wood.

“Come, come,” Jareth said, eyes teasing. “It can hardly be worse than the cleaners.” That brought Sarah’s head up fast.

“At least the cleaners only lasted a few minutes and I didn’t have to dread them randomly appearing all of a sudden afterwords with a failing mark attached.”

“Well, is the subject matter at least interesting?” Jareth asked, looking at her curiously.

“I’m writing on Tennyson’s The Lady of Shallot. Today I mostly focused on how he addressed the reversing of the male gaze and his reestablishment of it,” Sarah replied looking right back.

“Oh, yes, I can see how that could be tedious. The poem itself is lovely though:

‘On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye
That clothe the wold and meet the sky
And through the fields the road runs by
To many-towered Camelot.’”

The words flowed like silk from his mouth as he recited the first stanza. His voice caressed each sound to the point where Sarah could almost taste it before letting it go to find its place in the line.

“Downer ending though,” Sarah pointed out after shaking herself from the reverie his voice had caused.

“I suppose you would think that,” he replied. At this point, Toby, who was tired of having the adults talking about things he couldn't understand asked for dessert. Sarah had made cookies earlier in the day during a break from essay writing. She had seen both boys eyeing them longingly and promised them as dessert. Sarah laughed and went and got the plate of cookies from where she had hid them in a cupboard. She snagged a few extra glasses and the milk. She sat down and told them they could each have two and there would be more tomorrow. Jareth raised an eye at her at the limit. While Toby was intent on gobbling down the cookies Sarah mouthed, 'after he's asleep'. The Goblin King’s eyes lit up at the prospect of more cookies and he demurely ate his two, daintily dipping them in the milk. Sarah suppressed a laugh at the incongruousness of “Goblin King” and “dainty.” After the two official cookies were duly eaten Sarah followed Toby upstairs where he changed, brushed his teeth, and followed her to her room for a story. Jareth sat on the end of the bed and watched as Sarah led Toby over to her shelf of child-appropriate fantasy. He had noticed that she had some child-non-appropriate fantasy and had quite enjoyed flipping through that. He was surprised at some of the content though. A few of the scenes he had enjoyed rereading a few times while Sarah was out playing with her brother. He particularly enjoyed the scene in one book where the villain got the girl, though that was a rare theme in Sarah's books.

Sarah asked Toby what he wanted to hear as she perused the bookshelves for possible suggestions.
should he not know.


“You read him that one?” he asked, looking incredulously at Sarah.

“It's a good poem,” She defended herself before turning back to her brother. “Not tonight, Tobes, ok?” She glanced at Jareth. “I don't think I should read that one tonight.”

Toby's expression hardened. “I want to hear that one.”

“Not tonight Tobes,” Sarah said again, again looking at Jareth.

“But you're leaving tomorrow and I wanna hear it!” Toby said, starting to turn red. Jareth was now understanding the “two cookies rule”. He could see that neither sibling was willing to budge on this—apparently Toby had his sister's will—and so he chose to end the argument before it could go further. Besides, he wanted more cookies. He took a deep breath and began.

“Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water rats,”

Sarah turned to him, her mouth open. Then she noticed how Toby had quieted and remained still.

“There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berrys
And of reddest stolen cherries.”

As Jareth spoke the next words Toby made his way over to where Jareth was sitting on the bed and climbed into his lap.

“Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.”

Jareth looked down in surprise at the boy in his lap but continued reciting the poem. It was one of his favorites, and he knew it very well.

“Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim gray sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances—”

He looked up at Sarah.

“—Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And anxious in its sleep.”
He started to stroke Toby's hair as the boy snuggled closer, resting his face in Jareth's shirt.

“Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

“Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.”

He looked at Sarah during the next part of the stanza, for all that he held Toby close and still stroked his hair.

“Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.”

Jareth turned back to look down at the boy snuggled comfortably in his arms.

“He comes with us
The solemn eye'd
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal chest.
For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than he can understand.”

He whispered the last four lines to the child now sleeping in his lap. Sarah opened her mouth but he gestured for her to be silent. Carefully, so as not to wake the sleeping boy, Jareth scooped him up and carried him to the open door. Sarah followed as Jareth made his way down the hall to Toby's room. Once there, Sarah pulled down the covers so that Jareth could lay him down. Once he had, Sarah tucked him in and planted a kiss on his forehead. She moved to the door before looking back at Jareth, who was still standing by Toby's bed. Jareth swept Toby's bangs out of his face and muttered something over him. Sarah was moved by the tenderness in both the gesture and the words, though she could not understand them. After one last look at the sleeping boy that had caused their acquaintance, they moved silently downstairs to devour more cookies.

“You know,” Sarah said, breaking the silence as she dipped her cookie in her milk, “That's probably the first time a man has read Toby to sleep since Dad died.”
Jareth's cookie paused on the way to his mouth. “He was wrong you know,"

“Who?” Sarah asked, confused at this sudden non sequitur.

“Yeats,” Jareth said before taking a drink of milk and continuing. “He thought our world had less weeping than yours. He was wrong. We, too, weep. Just for different reasons.” Sarah stayed silent, inviting him to continue. “It is very rare for a fae to die, so that isn't something we have to weep for very often—although due to its rarity, when it does happen, it often hits harder. It is not natural for us to die. We cannot take consolation in that— instead we weep for those not born.” Jareth cut himself off and took another swig of milk. He seemed to wish it was something stronger. It did feel odd to Sarah, discussing death with the Goblin King over cookies and milk. The setting was too innocent, for such characters and topics. Nonetheless, at her continued silence Jareth continued speaking. “It is widely known, even in the Above I believe, that the fae don't have many children. From what I understand, the reason you humans have decided for this is that our females are fairly infertile. That's not quite right. A female fae is only able to bear a child once every hundred years. Even then, when a pregnancy starts, it often ends before the child has come to term. You weep for those you knew who have passed, for the most part. We mourn those we never knew. The number of times I found my mother crying with my father comforting her—” He cut himself off, fists clenching. Sarah pushed the plate of cookies towards him. She wasn't sure what else to do. Jareth picked one up and considered it for a moment before speaking. “In some ways, I think you are luckier than us.”

“I don't know,” Sarah said softly. “You lose them before you can know what you're missing.”

Silence reigned at the table as they each had another cookie, taking comfort in the sugar and each other's presence. Finished with the cookies Sarah put them away, and started to clean up from supper. Jareth merely tossed a crystal at the mess causing it to vanish before she had finished getting her rubber gloves on.

“Why?” Sarah asked, not turning away from the sink.

“Why what?” Jareth asked, looking up from examining the cookie crumbs in his glass of milk.

“How did this happen? Why are you back in my life? Why did Hoggle make that wish? Why didn't you know he had? Just, just why?” she asked, turning to face him. Jareth sighed. He had suspected this was what he would have to explain before he could leave but he had waited till Sarah had asked. He hadn't wanted to rush home.

“This may take some explaining.” Sarah merely nodded and watched him. “The first thing you must know is that the Labyrinth isn't an it, she's a she. She's the one who answered Higsworth's—”

“—Hoggle's—”

“—Yes, his wish.” Sarah looked at him and he could see the question still in her eyes, “Why?” “The next thing you should know.” He looked away from her, “Is that I am engaged to be married.” Sarah blinked in shock as something—regret? sorrow?— passed through her eyes.

“Who's the lucky woman?” she asked quietly.

“Her name is Klio and we have been friends since childhood,” he stated. “We've been desperately trying to get out of the relationship for months. It's true that the Labyrinth has been preparing herself for a queen for a little over a year now but the High Council doesn't seem to grasp that she absolutely refuses to accept Klio. Forcing Klio to become Queen of the Labyrinth will only end in disaster but the High Council and King do not seem to believe us when we tell them, and so we search for a way
out of this cursed engagement.”

“What?” Sarah asked. “Surely marrying your best friend since childhood can't be that bad.”

“No, I suppose there are worse fates than marrying someone, having to produce an heir with someone, that you see as a sister. Tell me, how would you feel about being forced to marry Toby?” Sarah ignored the last jibe and tried to move on with the conversation.

“Well, how does Klio feel about all of this?” she asked.

“From what I understand it would be far worse for her than it would be for me. For her, not only would it be like wedding and bedding her brother but I am not her,” he gestured to his ridiculously tight pants, “type.”

“Oh...” Sarah said, understanding his meaning immediately. One thing still confused her though. “Ok, even if both of you are dead set against the marriage, what does the Labyrinth have against Klio?” Jareth paused and carefully considered how to answer that question.

“The reason the Labyrinth refuses to accept Klio as her Queen is that she had already chosen the woman who is to be Queen. This woman has proven herself far more capable and worthy of the title of Queen of the Labyrinth than any other woman for a very long time.”

“Well, why doesn't the High Council, or the High King, or whatever, just make her marry you instead of Klio?”

Again, Jareth paused.

“They have no power over this woman. No fae does, including, alas, myself. No one can make her do anything she doesn't want to, for her will is word-shatteringly great, and no one can stand in her way when she sets her mind to accomplishing something.”

“Why does the Labyrinth want her so much?”

Jareth looked to the ceiling and ran his hand through his wild hair before replying.

“She ran the Labyrinth, Sarah,” he sighed. “Even the Lord of the Labyrinth's best efforts could do nothing to stop her. In under thirteen hours she managed what should have been impossible. She won back the child I had taken. She made the words unsaid. She proved to be as changing and capable of adapting as the Labyrinth and showed no fear when faced with the Goblin King. She declared herself his equal in every way. The Labyrinth was very impressed by the kindred spirit she found. And besides,” he looked away from Sarah who was starting to get a weird feeling in the pit of her stomach. “there was what no one knew.” Then and there, Sarah couldn't remember what no one knew but she suspected it was very important, if she could only remember.

“Jareth, just who is this woman?”

Jareth looked at Sarah, looked as hard as he could. He took in her fire-bright green eyes, her dark hair that framed her pale face, her expression, the way she stood. Suddenly, that wasn't enough. With a supernatural speed he closed the distance between them and held her close. He took in her smell, the feel of her body pressed against his, her surprised breath against his chest. He took a deep breath trying to remember it all. After all, it would have to last a lifetime. There was no way out of this marriage. This was the last time he could ever see her, without coming to hate Klio, and allowing Sarah to have a normal life. He wanted her to be happy, after all. He bent down and kissed her forehead.
“You, precious,” he muttered into her hair, “you. Goodbye Sarah.” He paused, his voice catching. “Forever.” And he vanished, trying to convince himself that maybe forever really wouldn’t be too long at all. Sarah stumbled forward at his sudden disappearance. She looked around the kitchen blindly for a moment, his scent still heavy in the air. Suddenly, she sank to the floor and started to cry as, all of a sudden, still with the feeling of his lips pressed against her forehead, what no one knew came back to her.

What no one knew was that the Goblin King had fallen in love with the girl.

It was all too much. This time, as she cried, the Goblin King did not come to comfort her.

Chapter End Notes

THE END!

Seriously. The end. No more. Nada. Zip. Not a single other word in this story. Jareth goes off and marries Klio (much to their mutual despair) and Sarah becomes the first female president of the United States. Really. That’s totally what happens.

But Meia! You cry. You’ve tagged the Gaang and they haven’t appeared yet. And what about University? And Iroh (B/N: Seriously, more Iroh)? And Zutara? We were promised Zutara? How can the story finish here?

Oh. You have a point. I guess I will keep writing and posting. Sigh. I swear, I’m exhausted keeping all of my promises to you. (Please excuse the bad paraphrase)

Tune in next week for more To Serve Her Purpose and we hope you enjoyed the chapter! Contributions below!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Ladies! Gentlemen! People of non-binary genders! Welcome to this week’s chapter of TO SERVE HER PURPOSE. Last week was quite the cliff hanger that left many readers wondering. Will Jareth get his head out of his rear? Will we finally meet the mysterious Klio? What are Sarah's friends like at university? Stay tuned and find out in this week's instalment of TO SERVE HER PURPOSE. *Cues theme song*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sarah sat in the train, her cheek pressed against the cool glass as the train pulled out of the last station before hers. Last night had been...difficult. She had managed to pull herself together and drift off before Karen had returned home. The next day had almost been worse though, when Toby had burst into her room the first thing the next morning only to find Jareth gone. He had demanded to know where Jareth was, and Sarah had been forced to explain that he had gone very far away and they wouldn’t be seeing him again.

Sarah could have slapped Jareth for the expression that crossed her brother's face when he had asked, “Does that mean Jareth's dead too?”

Sarah had just held him close for a while as they commiserated over the loss of the Goblin King. There hadn't been much time for that though, as Sarah was to catch a train back to U of F at noon. Karen had been slightly tired (Sarah wondered how late she had gotten home) but had helped her finished packing and had given her a ride with Toby to the station. After a quick round of hugs and goodbyes Sarah had left for her life at university, one filled with classes, friends and, aside from the occasional conversation grabbed with her Underground friends when Katara was out or at classes, completely devoid of magic. She spent the hours on the train trying to forget about Jareth, how empty her room had felt without him, how his scent caused her to have the most embarrassing dreams (she'd stopped accusing him after the first morning's debacle) the feel of his lips on her forehead—but if there was one thing the Goblin King was, it was unforgettable. And so she sat, forehead to the window, hoping the glass would rub away the feeling, as the train moved across the countryside.

The train pulled into the station and Sarah saw all her friends waiting on the platform. She was relieved to see Katara without Jet though, she didn't think she could put up with the git after the week she’d had. She stepped off the train and dropped her bags, falling into Katara's welcoming hug. Next came Toph's punch on the arm, then Aang's enthusiastic wave and Zuko's awkward one.

“Welcome back,” said Sokka, with his goofy grin and his hair tied up in his familiar though still slightly goofy pony—wolf tail. Everyone grabbed a bag and they headed towards the street, where Iroh's van was waiting to take them home.

The next few hours passed in a bit of a blur for Sarah. The gang got her bags to her room and then whisked her away to the Jasmine Dragon, where they had a private back room all to themselves. She told them a severely edited version of her break. While she was speaking, she noticed that members of the gang kept trying to tell her a story only to be interrupted by Zuko or Sokka. These interruptions got more and more elaborate culminating in Zuko spilling tea—made by Iroh, Sarah
had checked, they all knew about Zuko's tea—all over Aang and giving the rest of them such a glare that was so fierce it seemed they might all spontaneously combust. Even Toph, who was blind and therefore immune to such looks, went silent on the topic after that. It only made Sarah even more determined to get the story out of Katara later that night.

After Aang—with some help from Zuko, after a look from his uncle—had gotten cleaned up, the rest of the evening passed uneventfully, or as uneventfully as anything ever passed with the entire gang involved. Finally all the food had been eaten and the tea drunk and everyone gathered to head back to res. While everyone was putting on their coats, Iroh pulled her aside.

"Is there anything that happened over the break that you do not wish to discuss in front of the others?" he asked her. She shook her head firmly. She didn't want to discuss what had happened over the break with anyone. 'Besides,' she thought, 'it's not like they'd believe me.' Although, if anyone would, it would be Iroh. He had always had this weird air about him. Probably something to do with all the tea. Tea and mysticism seemed to go hand in hand. Iroh simply nodded, folded his hands over his ample stomach and said he was there with tea if there was ever anything she wanted to talk about. And something about spring flowers and late frosts but she hadn't really understood that bit. She grabbed her coat and the six friends made their way over to res.

Once she and Katara got to their room they quickly went through their nighttime rituals.

"How was your march break?" Sarah asked, sitting on her bed and brushing her hair as Katara removed the little makeup she wore in their tiny bathroom. "Did you finish that paper Pakku assigned?"

"Yep," Katara said, starting to undo her braid. "All twenty pages of it. And you'll never guess what happened over the break!"

"Is this what Zuko and Sokka didn't want discussed?"

"Yep!"

"Do tell!"

"Sokka met someone."

"That doesn't seem like something that they wouldn't want discussed, and why would Zuko care?" Sarah asked, her train of thought pulling into many homo-erotic stations.

"Well, it's not so much that he met someone and more how..." Katara said, returning to her bed, eyes bright with mirth at her brother's and friend's antics.

"Well? What happened?" Sarah asked, impatient to hear the story already.

"Okay, so her name is Suki and she's a firefighter. She and Sokka met after she and her team put out a fire Zuko and Sokka managed to start." Sarah started reversing the direction of her train of thought.

"Oh god, not the lab again?"

"Better!" Katara said, almost cackling with glee, "they managed to set fire to her fire house!"

Sarah just blinked at her roommate.

"How?"
“Well, Zuko was helping Sokka carry some flammable liquid or something like that and Sokka stumbled and dropped his can right in front of the station. Zuko, in his usual irritating fashion”—Sarah smirked—“started yelling at Sokka and stomping around. Unfortunately, he had a tack under his boot and one of his stomps caused a spark and well... to use one of the firefighter's words 'BOOM'. Oh,” she added, “they're both okay, except Zuko burned his back tackling Sokka out of the way.” Sarah smiled at her roommate's concerned expression. The sparks that would fly between those two sometimes reminded her of... no one at all. “Apparently Suki sat both boys down after they made sure they were okay, and gave them a long, loud talking to about 'the appropriate methods of transporting hazardous materials.' Zuko said you could practically see the hearts in Sokka's eyes.” Both woman giggled at the image. “And when she asked if they had any questions he asked for her number. She stormed off, but apparently this other firefighter—I think her name was Ty Lee—told him to come back in a few days with flowers once she'd calmed down. I think he's going tomorrow. I also think he's having Zuko help him with his asking out speech. Want to get popcorn and watch?” Again, both women giggled at the epic fail that that combination would come up with. They fell silent and Katara looked over at Sarah, large blue eyes filled with concern.

“What about you? You didn't talk a lot about your break. Was everything okay?” Katara knew what it was like to lose a mother. She and Sokka, as well as Zuko, had all lost a parent at an early age. It was different for them though. Katara had barely been old enough to remember her mother, Sokka only a few years older. Zuko had been old enough to remember, but had had twelve years to come to terms with his mother's disappearance. Toph alone had not understood what it felt like to lose a parent, having run away to university. She had done what she could though, when she heard the news. Sarah suspected she was the reason all of her teachers had offered her extensions via phone call before she'd even gotten the chance to tell them, but Toph denied it and the rest of the gang stayed silent on the subject. She considered telling Katara about her march break. She opened her mouth.

“Well, the antagonist from my teens who I accidentally wished my brother away to in a fit of brattishness that only a teenager can pull off reentered my life. Anyway, when I was fifteen I spent ten hours in his magic kingdom beating everything he threw at me, including a roofied peach crystal ball thing where we danced, in order to win back my brother. I did, just in time, and so I declared he had no power over me. He then disappeared from my life for the next seven years except possibly saving Karen's life after the car crash but I never asked if that was him. Anyway, the day before the anniversary one of my friends from his magic Labyrinth—oh did I mention I made friends there?—accidentally wished me away to him so I woke up in his bed and then he comforted me and then I ended up back in my house where I accidentally wished him away to me, er, ish. Anyway, he spent the next week sleeping in my room while I had the most amazing, no, not amazing, amazing is the wrong word, sex dreams about him and there was some extreme sexual tension but he comforted me because it was so hard losing my dad. He was surprisingly good with Toby though. I swear him keeping Toby busy was the only thing that let me finish my MOUNTAINS of homework, why did I think a double major was a good idea? Why? Anyway, turns out all this happened because his magic Labyrinth is sentient and wants me for her queen instead of this woman he's supposed to marry. I'm really not sure how I feel about that to be totally honest. Oh and did I mention that apparently he loves me?” She did not say.

“It was hard. I really miss my dad,” she said. Katara's eyes were full of understanding as she reached over and patted Sarah on the arm.

“I know,” Katara said. “Let me know if there's anything I can do, okay?”

“Sure thing, Kat,” Sarah said, looking away from her friend. “I'm pretty tired. Can we just pass out?” Katara nodded and both girls lay down, Sarah turning to face the wall. Katara turned out the light.
“Good night,” she whispered.

“‘Night,” Sarah said, silently resolving not to cry.

That night, she didn’t. The tears came the next day when she called her friends and none of them came. Perhaps this really was forever after all.

* * *

Jareth sat in his throne looking over the emptied room. When he had returned four days ago he had ordered everyone “OUT!” and proceeded to bog anyone who strayed too close. He knew he would have to appear for court tomorrow but for now he would continue brooding. He let a crystal roll over his hands as he sprawled over the throne, one leg thrown over the side. For the thousandth time he considered watching Sarah, or letting her friends go to her. She called on them every day, although each day there was less and less hope in her voice as she said the words. Oh, yes, he heard them loud and clear now. No longer did one of the three’s own magic tell him when they were wanted, he could now here her voice as she called to them. It was quickly becoming the most exquisite torture he had ever known.

He did not open the portal though, even when the three had come to demand why. He had just sent them away with a crystal and a threat. After all, if he couldn’t have her, why should they?

“Sarah,” he breathed at his crystal. Vague images started to form but Jareth threw it against the wall, shattering it before they could become clear. He was thoroughly disgusted by his own weakness. He stared at the fragments of crystal on the floor, where they joined countless other crystals that had been shattered over the course of the four days, sighed, and started to form a new one. He was distracted by a knock at the door.

“Leave me,” he called, loudly enough so whoever was banging on the door would hear.

“Jareth,” drifted a voice through the barred doors. “Open the door!”

Jareth pinched the bridge of his nose. He really and truly did not feel like dealing with Klio at the moment. At least not until he’d had more of a chance to settle his emotions.

“Leave me!” he called again, voice firmer this time.

“Jareth.” Klio’s voice was dangerously sweet. “If you don’t open this door in the next ten seconds, God and Goddess help me, I will go and get your mother.”

Both of Jareth’s feet hit the floor and he glared daggers at the door.

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me,” she said. Jareth remained still for a moment until he heard, “Alright we’ll play it your way,” in a low voice and then, louder, “10, 9, 8, 7—”

Jareth waved a hand and the doors flew open to reveal his oldest friend, standing with her hands on her hips and a dangerous glint in her eye. Jareth took a moment to be thankful he’d opened the doors. It appeared she was dead serious about getting his mother and that was the last thing he needed, or worse, his father.

Klio walked in. Her eyes, normally blue, were as dark as the sky after Pompeii, her hair blazed behind her like a stream of flame. (Jareth wondered if he should be worried that his metaphors were so violent.) She looked at the mess of crystals that littered the floor of the throne room and marched forward, stopping just before the pillow pit.
“Well,” Jareth asked, irritated. “What do you want?”

“All three of her friends, all three of them, came to find me. Apparently you disappeared for five days after something happened, Hoggle was really unclear on what, and got back only to completely cut off contact between her and them. What happened, Jareth?”

“It's none of your concern, Klio,” Jareth growled, throwing himself back in his throne.

“Of course it isn't,” she said, smiling sweetly and baring her teeth at the same time, “My best friend, one who has stood by me through some of the worst experiences of my life, who I'm supposed to get married to in a little over three months, is having his worst crisis since the Lady Sarah, Champion of the Labyrinth...” She paused, and her eyes lit with understanding. “She's back!” She cried, a wide smile splitting across her face. “I have to meet her, the only person to best you in how many centuries? Oh God and Goddess, the stories I could tell her.” She cackled, then looked at her friend's much darker expression. “But, no, that can't be right. You wouldn't be in this mood if she were back and besides, you—”

“Have no power over her,” Jareth finished. “You don't need to remind me.” Klio walked around the pillow pit and marched up to her friend, putting both hands on the arms of his throne and leaning to look her friend in the eye. She took a deep breath through her nose.

“God and Goddess, I can practically smell her on you. What happened?” She breathed, looking him in the eye.

“You swear to the gods far too much for a noblewoman, you know that?” Jareth asked his friend.

“Yes, well, I've never been the ideal fae noblewoman, have I? And stop trying to change the subject.” She stood up straight and gave him a look. “Tell. Me. What. Happened.” Jareth considered his options. He could not tell her, but then she probably would get his parents involved. Which meant... Sighing deeply, Jareth sat up straight and began.

When he had finished the story, Klio stood staring at him in stunned amazement.

“So, you can talk to her now, and the Labyrinth has stated she wants her has a queen?” she asked, double checking what were to her the most important parts of the story. “Then what are you doing down here and not in the Above wooing her socks off?”

Jareth looked at her, stunned. “Because I'm marrying you in three months?” he said, slowly and uncertainly. Klio sighed in impatience.

“Look, just because we haven't found a way to get of this agreement yet does not mean there isn't a way out of it. Especially not with the Champion of the Labyrinth, She-Who-Can-Make-The-Words-Unsaid, in the mix. And now you'll be really trying to find a way out as well.” Jareth looked affronted, though hopeful, at her words.

“I don't know what you mean.”

“We both know that I've been trying harder to get us out of this engagement. I understand your reluctance. I was the best of a bunch of bad choices and at least we can get along. I don't really blame you for not wanting to marry one of the other noblewomen. Even I am not interested in our noblewomen, but still, you haven't had as much as an interest in getting out of this as I have. Now you do!” She smiled brightly, then frowned again. “Although, if you disappeared like you said you did, then cut her friends out of her life, you have a lot to make up to her. I suggest you get to work, Goblin King. I'm already late to see my lady. Think you can manage this on your own?” When the
Goblin King looked at her there was a gleam in his eye.

“Yes,” he replied. “Best of luck in your courting, Klio.”

“And you in yours,” Klio said, smiling right back, before leaving the throne room and transporting herself to meet the lady of her heart.

When she had left, Jareth waved his arm and all the crystal shards disappeared and the doors closed. He needed quiet for a little while longer to plan this. He smiled to himself as he draped himself over his throne one leg up over the arm, summoned his favourite riding crop, started tapping it on his thigh and got down to what he did best: Plotting.

Chapter End Notes

Before I close this week’s show I would like to shout out a special set of thanks to my Beta!Sister for staying up to help me with this and my younger Brother for not killing me when I showed in this chapter. Next week on TO SERVE HER PURPOSE: Sarah at Uni! Did the author survive the host of angry readers long enough to post! Tune in next week and find out! If you enjoy TO SERVE HER PURPOSE please leave what you can in the little box! All contributions welcome! TO SERVE HER PURPOSE is brought to your by reviewers like you!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes


B/N: My sister, Frederick George the Fifth—A/N: throws napkin at beta—hereafter referred interchangeably as 'Ptolomeia', 'Meia', and 'the author', wishes to express her most sincere and heartfelt apologies about her almost inexcusable—A/N: throws placemat at beta—offense, that is, failing to deliver what she had—A/N: raises pincushion threateningly—ahem. That is, my sister (your author) has been kind of ridiculously busy getting her outfit ready for a con (A/N: Ty Lee! Woowoo!) and preparing for school, and because of this our schedules haven't really lined up in a place where we could edit. She is really, really sorry, and, as recompense—

A/N: I will be posting on Sunday. This will also be in celebration of two months of strangers on the internet reading my conversations with other people's imaginary friends.... I mean, 2 month of Serving Her Purpose. Without further ado, Enjoy the next chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sarah walked in to her Celtic studies class Thursday morning and took her regular seat, near the front surrounded by her friends—well, most of them. She waved at Merlin, seated in the back of the class, as she and the neckerchiefed man had become over the course of the class. She was in the front row with Toph, Katara and Zuko, Aang and Sokka sitting behind them. Professor Tania looked up from where she was arranging her notes on her desk, eyes darting around counting heads, then cleared her throat. The entire class fell silent.

“Good morning, everyone,” she said, her brows going up as she watched students. Her lips quirked. “I hope you had a pleasant break. Frolicking—” she paused and smirked “—frolicking—whatever you young 'uns get up to these days.”

Sarah fought down a blush. Katara, one seat over, raised a curious eyebrow. Sarah waved her off. While she might have technically slept with the Goblin King, it really wasn't what it sounded like.

“Good morning, everyone,” she said, her brows going up as she watched students. Her lips quirked. “I hope you had a pleasant break. Frolicking—” she paused and smirked “—frolicking—whatever you young ‘uns get up to these days.”

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“Now you're back to good old U of F and classes. And classes, as every university student knows, means work. Don't bother groaning,” she added, cutting off a few stifled groans towards the back of the room. “You'll actually enjoy this. Today we start work on your final which, as you'll all remember from when you read your course outline,” she said, emphasizing the last few words with the glare of a teacher who knew just how little that actually happened, “at the beginning of the semester, is holding a Beltane celebration and accompanying Medieval festival for the university. Now everyone will be in charge of an activity except for the King and Queen of Spring. During the festival and fair they will initiate all events and act regal and so on and so forth. They will NOT, however, get out of the hard work. Everyone is expected to hand in a paper on their booth, the activities they ran, the origin of the activities they ran, etc. You find details in these handouts.” She gave them to the person on the end of the front row who began to pass it down. She handed Toph a special copy written in braille. “You may work in groups of no more than four on your booths, and
your team must submit a proposal for all activities you plan to do at your booth to me and to the head of this Fair. Individual papers must be handed in at the end of the fair. No duplicates will be accepted and, as always, plagiarism will get you a zero and probably kicked out of the college. The head of the festival has a different job. Their sole responsibility will be organizing the fair—well, that and helping any students who need help. Being the Head of the Fair is no light work. Today we will be picking the Head of the Fair and the King and Queen of Spring. The rest of you have your booth proposal's due next week. The King and Queen will have to hand in a proposal on traditional Beltane activities they want to run. Now, the King and Queen will be selected randomly.” She held up two bags, one with all the names of the girls in the class, one with all the names of the boys. “If you get selected and don't want the job, say so and we'll pick someone else. But before that, let's select the Head of this shindig. Does anyone have any suggestions as to who would make a good leader for this project?” She paused, eyes scanning the room and waiting for an answer.

Sarah’s names, sometimes just her first name, sometimes her last, sometimes both, chorused out from at least five different places around the room, although one voice yelled out “Merlin!” and a couple of others yelled out different names. Sarah looked around in surprise.

Professor Tania looked amused. “All in favour of Sarah Williams as Head of the Fair?” Hands shot up all around the room, and she scanned the room, counting. “And with a clear majority, Sarah Williams has been selected Head of the Fair.” Sarah blinked in surprise, and slightly in disappointment. She had been looking forward to running a booth at the fair. She'd been doing research on traditional Fair activities and Beltane celebrations all semester. Well, at least she'd get to see what other people came up with, and at least this way she wouldn't have to redo any of the research. “Now it's time to select the King and Queen of Spring.” She lifted the first bag. “For the Queen of Spring we have—” she rummaged her hand in a bag and pulled out a folded piece of paper. She put down the bag and opened the slip.

“Katara Arnook!” Sarah turned to smile at her friend who was smiling brightly in turn as polite applause scattered through the room. The rest of the group congratulated her in their own quiet way. “And now for the King of Spring.” She raised the other bag and pulled out another slip of paper. Everyone was expecting Aang to be chosen, he always was for things like this. He didn't always enjoy it, but he did always get picked. When she had unfolded it this time she said:

“Zuko Sozin,” she said, sounding surprised. The entire gang turned to Zuko, whose right eye was wide with shock, left, as wide as the scars would let him. He blinked a few times in stunned silence. The gang murmured surprised congratulations, as shocked applause slowly made its way around the room.

“Moving on to today's actual content, who can tell me what Beltane is?” Hands went up around the room, Merlin's going up almost as fast as Sarah's, and so class went on.

When class ended, the gang made its way to the caf to grab lunch. As they walked down the hall, Aang turned to Sarah, Zuko, and Katara. “Congratulations on getting big roles in the Fair guys,” he said cheerfully.

“How does it feel to be so high and mighty, your majesties and Headship?” Sokka asked, mockingly bowing to them. Katara glared at him.

“ Weird,” Zuko said. “I'm not used to being chosen for stuff like this. I thought for sure it would be Aang.” The gang nodded as one.

“I honestly didn't expect to be elected Head of the Fair,” Sarah said, her eyebrows drawing down. At least it would keep her busy, she thought, keep her mind off—no. she wasn't going to finish that thought.
Toph stopped in the middle of the hallway and started guffawing.

“Oh, Queeney,” she laughed. Sarah winced at the nickname as she always did. “That's funny. That's really funny. You? Not be in charge of this? Who else were they going to put in charge? Sokka?” She wheezed out between laughs. (“Hey!” Sokka said, more out of habit than any actual offense.) “Have you ever gotten anything below an A+ on anything you handed in for that class?” Toph asked as she finished her laughing fit and they started walking again, Badger in the lead.

“No,” Sarah admitted sheepishly.

“Besides,” Sokka added, having seemingly forgotten Toph's insult, “you'll be doing what you do best! Ordering people around, getting things done. Getting people to do what you need them to do so you can do your job. It's perfect for you.” He paused and gave her a considering look. “Maybe you should have been Queen...” he trailed off and shrugged as she shook her head vehemently.

“I'd rather leave that to your sister,” she said as they entered the caf and got in line for food, Sokka at the head of the line as always when food was involved. “That reminds me. Congratulations!” She called over her shoulder to Katara and Zuko, right behind her in line.

“Thanks,” Katara said as she gathered her plate of food. “I guess being King and Queen of Spring is a bit of a big deal.”

“It is,” Sarah agreed as they took their plates full of food over to their usual table, “but that's not what I was talking about.”

“What were you talking about, then?” Katara asked, eyes a little suspicious.

“What?” she asked innocently as Sokka and Zuko took a sip of their drinks. “You didn't know that you and Zuko are getting married?” Sokka's and Zuko's drinks sprayed across the table. Katara worriedly watched her brother choke as Toph patted Zuko on the back.

“WHAT?” Zuko asked as soon as he had his breath back.

“Well,” Sarah continued, taking deep pleasure in the look of horror on her friends' faces. “Technically you'll be being handfasted. But that's about equivalent to a modern marriage for them. So,” she said gleefully. “Congratulations on your soon-to-be marriage. I'm sure your hypothetical children will be very beautiful.” Katara, Zuko and Aang all gave her dirty looks as she and Toph high-fived. Katara finished up the last of her meal before standing to go.

“I've got to go meet Jet,” she said. “My boyfriend. The guy I am romantically attached to. The one who I am not cheating on and will not be marrying someone else while I am dating.” Sokka rolled his eyes as Toph blew her hair angrily out her sightless eyes.

“Don't worry,” Sarah said, giving her roommate an affectionately exasperated look, “It doesn't count as a real marriage. It's not like we'll be getting a priest or priestess to officiate it or anything. Go and see your boyfriend.” Katara grabbed her bag and, waving goodbye to her friends, left.

“So,” Sarah asked, turning back to the gang, “What are you guys thinking of for your booths?”

“Play sword-fighting,” said Sokka.

“Maybe teaching some dances?” Aang offered.

“I'm gonna see if this festival or the Royal Court needs a Jester or two,” Toph said, smiling evilly.
“Two?” Zuko asked.

“Me and Fred Weasley,” she said, matter-of-factly.

“Who?” Aang asked.

“Fred Weasley. You know, he has a twin studying over at UofH. He's helped me pull some of my greatest stunts,” she said smugly.

“Wait, was he your extra set of hands for the 'behind the Quad' incident last year?” Sokka asked. Toph's smile only widened.

“You mean he helped you with the cake?

“And the fireworks?”

“And Zuko's tea?” Everyone at the table but Zuko shuddered collectively.

“It's not that bad!” he cried in defense of his tea.

“Sorry, Sparky,” Toph said—while Sparky-Sparky-Boom-Man, the nickname being passed around the fire house for him, was great, it just took too long to say—“but it really really is.” Aang, Sokka and Sarah nodded in unison. Zuko was good at many things. He was a great chef, he never over- or undercooked anything. He was good in Kendo. He was surprisingly good at mixing drinks. (They had found that out that one night that none of them now remembered, nor, judging by the way they woke up, wanted to). Of his many talents though, tea making was not one of them. Iroh would serve Zuko's tea only to the customers that he really really didn't like.

“The Lady likes it,” Zuko said sulkily to himself. The gang paused and nodded in agreement. None of them were really sure who The Lady was. Iroh seemed to know, but as usual, he wasn't telling. She wouldn't give her name when asked so they all just referred to her as “The Lady”. She came once a year, every year and was, as far as the gang knew, the only person on the entire planet, aside from Zuko himself, who actually enjoyed Zuko's tea.

Sarah used her roll to finish the last of the sauce on her plate, finished the last of her drink, grabbed her tray and got up.

“I'm gonna go study for my classics course. See you all later.” She turned as the gang waved and headed back towards her room.

When she got there she picked up her copy of the Republic and started to reread it.

It was a couple of hours later that Katara came back, a strange look on her face. Sarah sat up from where she'd been reading, lying on her bed to face her friend.

“How was Jet?” she asked, wondering at the look on her friend's face.

“Fine,” Katar said distractedly before shaking her head and looking at Sarah. “The strangest thing happened on my way back to the dorm though.” Sarah made a do-tell gesture. “A guy came up to me as I was crossing the Quad and gave me this.” She held out a sprig of small blue flowers. “He asked me to give them to you...” Sarah took the flowers and stared at them in astonishment before asking her friend:

“Can you describe the guy who gave these to you?”
“Um,” Katara said, looking up obviously thinking. “He was a little older than us; blond, kind of wild hair; intense, mismatched blue eyes; and he was wearing the tightest pants I've ever seen.”

Sarah fell back on the bed, a loud sigh leaving her as she landed.

“You know this guy?” Katara asked, slightly confused by her friend's reaction.

“ Barely,” Sarah said. “We met a few times and, well, it's complicated...” She checked the clock. “Don't you have class now?” she asked her concerned roommate. Katara checked the time, swore a little under her breath grabbed her books and ran for the door. At the door, she paused and looked at Sarah, who was lying back on her bed.

“You' ll tell me about him later, right?” she asked. Sarah just nodded and waved her friend away. She'd think of something to tell Katara about Jareth later. She didn't think her roommate would believe the truth, not that she could blame her.

She should be angry at Jareth. She knew she should for pulling this kind of stunt, for disappearing and taking her friends with him, for making her life such a confusing mess but, as she clutched the forget-me-nots he had sent to her chest, she couldn't stop the smile spreading across her face.

He was coming back.

When she called on her friends later that day, all three of them appeared.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Howdy again folks, I just wanted to explain a thing to my wonderful readers. See, two weeks ago, when I was really mean to my readers, I got more than twice as many reviews as normal! Then, when I posted the start of the resolution, I got far fewer reviews than normal. This tells me that my dear readers love it when I do mean things to my characters. (Yes I know some of those were death threats by peaches. I'm a Zutarian. Death threats are a sign of love). As everything I do I do for you, (except getting ready for Con. Sorry guys, that's for me) I have no choice but to start being meaner to my characters. So, my dear readers, my question to you is this: Which character should I kill off next? ^_^
March 21st, Sarah's twenty-third birthday, dawnd bright and clear, if still cold with the remnants of winter's dying breath. Katara had swimming practice that morning and as soon she left Sarah sat in front of her mirror and called to her friends. They all showed up, their images superimposing on each other in her small mirror, and sung for her what was possibly the worst rendition “Happy Birthday” since Jareth banned the goblins from singing it on pain of the pain after the first time. What exactly the pain was, Sarah didn't know. Sir Didymus said it was much too offensive for the ears of his lady, Ludo would only say “The pain bad” (which was the only time Sarah had ever heard him use a definite article) and Hoggle would turn a combination of white, green and orange whenever Sarah would bring it up, and stay non-verbal until she changed the subject. Whatever the pain was, she assumed it was pretty horrifying. She spoke to her friends individually then. First was Ludo. Sarah asked him how he was, but he didn't have much to say, they'd all caught up for several hours the first day she got a flower.

“Gift fo Sawah,” he said, holding out his hand and tossing something at the mirror that separated them. A small beautiful green emerald fell onto her dresser with a small clatter. Sarah picked it up. It was exactly the same shade as her eyes and it sparkled in the sunlight.

“Oh Ludo,” she said, wanting to wrap him in a hug, “It's beautiful.”

“Sawah pwetty. Stone pwetty. Sawah nice. Stone nice,” Ludo said, smiling and nodding proudly at his flawless logic. Sarah smiled at him and slipped the stone into her small jewelry box, where she kept all of his such gifts. She had gathered quite the collection of precious and semi-precious stones over the years, not to mention all the other ones whose value were purely sentimental. Sarah would not have parted from any of them for either of the worlds.

Next came Sir Didymus. His gift for her was his yearly book of tales. Any person who wanted permission to cross his bridge in the Bog had to tell him a story of them or their people. Sarah had tales from all over both worlds. He knew she loved the stories he brought her every year and so would write out each and every story meticulously, in his clear, cursive, flowing hand, and give her that year's collection on her birthday. Sarah would read little else—that wasn't assigned, anyway—until she finished the volume. She'd read hundreds of new stories that way. She thanked him profusely for his gift and with a bow, he vanished. Finally, it was just her and Hoggle.

“Hiya Sarah,” he said. “Happy Birthday.” He threw through the mirror two objects. The first was
one he gave her every year. It was a bouquet of yellow roses and irises. Sarah picked it up and smelled it.

“You didn't have to you know,” she said, like she always did. Seven years later, he was still worried about being her friend. She’d refused to let him doubt verbally and so this was how he reaffirmed it every year, and, every year, she told him he didn't need to.

“Yeah, well,” he said gruffly. He still felt guilty about wishing her away, however accidentally. “I just thought your room could use some colour.”

“Oh of course.” Smiling at him, she put the flowers off to one side to pick up the other gift.

It was a simple necklace with a silver pendent on the end that had a spiral embossed into it.

“Thank you, Hoggle,” she said, picking it up and watching it spin before her eyes. She undid the clasp and put the necklace on. Eyes still looking at the desk, she asked a question that had been bothering her for a while.

“Hoggle,” she said, fingering the necklace. “Why did you wish me away? What happened?” “How could you do that to me? Was left unsaid.

“I, um, er, I...I...” Sarah looked up at her stuttering friend who was wringing his hands and looking very nervous. He never had been a very good liar.

“Jareth told me you wished me away,” she said.

“And you believed him?” Hoggle asked, looking for a way out.

“Yes,” Sarah said simply. He hadn't been lying when he told her that. “I did. Why, Hoggle?” Hoggle gave her a defeated look, his shoulders slumping.

“I didn't mean to,” he said sadly. “I just wished there was something more he could do for you than just let us through. I didn't think anything would come of it. And I knew he wouldn't hurt you after he helped save your step-mother last year. I didn't mean for nothing to happen.”

Sarah frowned in confusion.

“How did that wish end with me—” she stopped herself from saying 'in his bed' not wanting her friends to know that bit of the story “—in the Underground,” she finished.

“The Labyrinth interfered,” Hoggle said, looking a little worried. “That hasn't happened in a very, very long time...” he trailed off. “Honest, Sarah. I just wanted you to feel better and he was the only person I knew who I thought might have been able to help.”

Sarah considered her friend's words for a moment before reaching out and plucking a yellow iris from the bouquet he'd given her. She held it out and as soon as it touched the mirror it disappeared from her hand and reappeared in Hoggle's.

“Your friendship means a lot to me, Hoggle. Keep the flower to remember that.” Hoggle carefully, lovingly, tucked the flower into his vest.

“Thank you, Sarah,” he said, looking at the flower rather than her. He had never been very comfortable with open displays of emotion. “And happy birthday.” And just like that he was gone. Sarah sighed and picked up the book Sir Didymus had given her. She went over to her bed, sat back and started reading.
Around eleven, Katara came back and changed before grabbing her books and heading towards the library, waving to Sarah as she left. Sarah found her eyes flicking towards the clock as it started its count down to noon. 46 minutes. 33. 24. 13. 7. 3. Sarah put the book down. She was never late when she said she'd call and she never missed a call without calling before hand to reschedule. 56 seconds till noon. 30. 15. 3, 2, 1... The phone rang. Sarah grabbed it.

“Hello Kiddo,” her mother's voice came over the phone. “How’s my birthday girl?” Sarah smiled to hear her mother. They hadn’t talked since last month's phone call and it was great to hear her voice.

“Great! How’s England treating you?” she asked. Linda and Jeremy were spending the next six months in England doing a shoot for a new movie. She had been in the middle of packing for the move when she and Sarah had last spoken.

“Just fine, but it's not every day my only daughter turns twenty-three. Tell me more about your life, how are classes? You have any plans for tonight?” And so Sarah spent the next half hour happily updating her mother on her classes before getting around to her plans for that night.

“Me and my friends are going to go to open mic night at the Jasmine Dragon.”

“The tea shop? What, no going out for some wild parties? What's the use of going away to University if you don't go get horrifyingly drunk every once in a while while you're still young enough to recover from it?” Linda teased her daughter over the phone.

“No,” Sarah said, a little sadly. Her mother caught on to the tone immediately.

“Is there a boy you wished was attending?”

Sarah paused for a moment and thought that over. Wished was a strong word... and besides, she'd hardly call Jareth a boy.

“No,” she finally replied.

“Sarah Jane Williams, you may have been able to lie to your father when the need arose but you could never hide anything from me. Just who is this boy?”

“Well, I wouldn't really call him a boy...” Sarah trailed off weekly.

“Oh?” Linda mentally prepared to back up whatever her daughter decided to do and tell her she loved her no matter who she dated.


Sarah took a deep breath.

“We met during an event when I was fifteen then lost contact till March break where he showed up and helped me deal with the anniversary.” Linda gave her daughter a moment to collect herself, taking a moment to grieve herself, before continuing this line of conversation.
“Seven years and not a word and he shows up out of the blue?”

“Well,” Sarah said, trying to figure out how to phrase what happened in a way that wouldn’t have her mother calling the white coats. “He reentered my life through a mutual friend.”

“How long were you guys friends, when you were fifteen?”

“I wouldn’t call us...friends, exactly. About ten hours,” Sarah replied in an attempt to be casual.

“And you remembered him after seven years?” Linda asked, wondering what could have been so memorable.

“It was an intense ten hours. Besides, he’s a memorable guy,” Sarah defended herself.

“Intense, huh?” Sarah could just hear her mother's raised eyebrow. “Isn't fifteen a little young to be having any... intense activities? Particularly ones that last ten hours?”

“MOM!” Sarah cried indignant. “It's not like that! We were on opposite sides of a competition.”

Linda paused, waiting for her daughter to answer her unspoken question. “I won,” Sarah finally added.

“That's my girl!” Linda said, smiling proudly at her daughter's victory. “So, where is this guy now? And what's his name? I can't keep calling him 'this guy’”

“His name is Jareth and I don't know. He just kinda walked in and walked out and now...”

“Now?” Linda asked, curious about this man in her daughter's life.

“Well, I don't know. A few days ago he sent me flowers but I've heard nothing since...”

“Flowers? What kind?”

“Forget-me-nots.”

“Huh.” Linda paused and thought over what she knew. “Sounds to me like he's still interested. Wait and see what happens, I guess.” She switched the topic back to Sarah's birthday. “So, did my package arrive on time?” she asked. Sarah leaned over to grab the package she had picked up at the post office on Friday.

“Yes,” Linda said, sensing Sarah's unvoiced impatience. “You can finally open your present.”

“Yippee!” Sarah said gleefully. She ripped open the package as her mother chuckled at her childish glee. Inside lay a CD case. Sarah picked it up, wondering who her mother had picked out for her this time. She was normally pretty good at guessing what music Sarah would like. She’d been the one who introduced her to David Bowie who was by far Sarah's favourite artist. This was easy to tell by the many, many David Bowie posters that covered her wall. Sarah read the CD jacket.
"No way," she breathed, completely unable to believe that what she held in her hands was real. "NO WAY!" she yelled, holding David Bowie's soon-to-be-released album 'Black Tie White Noise' in her hand.

"I think she likes it," she heard Jeremy mutter to Linda.

"This isn't supposed to come out till next month!" Sarah cried, cradling the CD to her chest. "How did you get this?"

"A woman has her ways," her mother said mysteriously. "And it helps when you did a movie with the singer himself. It came out in '86, you remember? Oh, what was it called..."

"Maze?" Sarah asked, knowing the answer. She owned a copy of every single movie her mother had ever been in and watched all of them many times.

"That was it. Open the case." Sarah did as she was told and almost fainted. It was signed. With a message. "Happy birthday, Sarah, from David Bowie," was on the inside of the jacket. Her mother and Jeremy had signed underneath.

"Breathe, kiddo," Linda advised. Sarah took a breath and launched into a long stream of "Thank you,"s and "You're the best"s with some "BEST GIFT EVER"s thrown in for good measure. When she paused from breath her mother interrupted.

"You're welcome, kiddo. I'll leave you to listen to your new music before you explode with excitement. Happy Birthday. Have fun with your friends tonight. I'll talk to you Easter Sunday, ok?"

"Sure thing Mom. Talk to you then. Thanks again. Love you!"

"Love you too Kiddo," Linda said, smiling, before hanging up the phone. Sarah promptly slid the CD into her Walkman, put on her head phones and spent the next several hours listening and relistening to her new CD.

***

When Sarah returned from dinner, Katara was waiting in their room. She was wearing clothes that were better suited to going out for drinks than open mic at the Jasmine Dragon but Sarah couldn't really blame her. She didn't get to go out often, what with having to keep her grades up to keep her scholarship, so when she did, she often took the opportunity to get dressed up. Katara looked at her roommate in the mirror with a critical eye as she put the finishing touches on her make up.

"You going to get changed?" Katara asked. Sarah looked down at her loose blouse and faded jeans. They were a little under dressed for open mic night, but not overly so.

"I was just gonna go like this," she shrugged. Katara's eyes hardened and it took all of the courage that Sarah had needed to run the Labyrinth and then some not to run screaming there and then.

"Sarah," Katara said sweetly. "It's your 23rd birthday and you are going out with friends. Wear something nice."

Katara in dress up mode was not someone to mess with, even if it was Sarah's birthday. Sarah walked over to the closet and pulled out the green top with the silver clasp that rested just below her collar bone, the low back and the neckline low enough to hint at cleavage without being too much and a pair of skin tight black pants. She looked stunning in the outfit and knew it. It was also one she was comfortable in. Between the two qualities, Katara would not object. Sarah came out of the bathroom, put on some make up to complement her outfit and turned to look at her friend. Katara gave her the once over and nodded in approval. The women grabbed their coats and headed outside.
They left so quickly that neither one noticed the owl sitting in the tree outside their window. Once they'd left the owl took off on silent wings, hooting a hoot that, if one listened carefully, almost sounded like the word “soon”.

* * *

The weather had taken a sudden change for the worse and while earlier it had been clear and bright it was now heavily overcast and the wind was picking up something fierce. Sarah turned up her collar against the wind as they walked. As they turned onto the small university town's main street they saw Sokka disappear into the karaoke bar. Sarah turned to her roommate.

“Isn't he supposed to be meeting us at the Jasmine Dragon?” she asked. Katara wore a grim, slightly irked expression.

“Yes,” she growled. “He is. Come on, let's go grab him and then meet up with everyone else.” The wind howled as the two ran down the street. Sarah couldn't help but be reminded of a storm long ago. This one was so similar. A block down from the karaoke bar, the rain started to fall in a heavy downpour, unusual for the season. The girls sprinted the last few meters and ducked into the bar.

“Wait here. I'll go grab Sokka,” Katara said before disappearing into the crowd. Sarah looked around for as she waited for her friend to return with her wayward brother. She jumped when thunder crashed outside and all the lights in the bar when out. A sudden gush of wind blew open the door and someone yelped before shutting it. Sarah's heart was pounding—the storm, the lights, even the window for God's sake. 'Well,' she thought to herself, 'he always did have a flare for the dramatic.' Sarah held her breath and waited for what ever would happen next.

The opening chords of a song started to play, and after the introductory bars, a male voice filled the room.

“I know when to go out,” the voice—a voice she was very familiar with—said. “And when to stay in. Get things done,” The club's stage lights came on, lighting the figure of a man on the stage, less well lit figures standing in groups behind him. The music changed a little, the piano coming in. The lights came up more fully on the stage as Zuko started singing one of Sarah's favourite Bowie songs.

“I catch the paper boy,
But things don't really change,
I'm standing in the wind
But I never wave bye-bye”

On the strong beats the lights came up one at a time to light the back up singers. Toph and Aang stood at one mic, Sokka and Suki, who she'd met a few days ago at the Jasmine Dragon, at another, and Katara at a third. Sarah laughed in surprise and joy at their thoughtfulness, forgetting to be disappointed that it wasn't what she had hoped it was.

“But I try, I try,” Zuko continued to sing now with the gang joining in. He had a pretty steady voice that suited the song well, even with its characteristic rasp. He continued singing the next verse, starting to dance to the music with the rest of the gang and obviously fighting down a blush. When the chorus came along the rest of the gang started singing too

“Never gonna fall for,” sang Zuko.

“Modern Love,” sang the gang.

“Walks beside me”
“Modern love”
“Walks on by”
“Modern love”
“Gets me to the
“church on time,” they sang all together.

And so the song went on in a not terrible cover of David Bowie’s “Modern Love.” Sarah decided that in terms of quality it fell halfway between her Underground friends’ rendition of “Happy Birthday” and the beautiful harmonized version her mother and Jeremy had sung. When the large instrumental part of the song came up Zuko turned, grabbed Katara and pulled her forward to dance with him. At first Katara looked a little self conscious but in the few bars of instrumental they both lost the self consciousness they had been burdened with and seemed to really enjoy dancing. They almost seemed to forget the entire bar was watching them. Sarah smiled to see her friends dancing together happily.

Zuko visibly remembered where he was just in time to raise the mic and throw himself back into the song. Katara stayed beside him, using his mic to sing the chorus parts and with her by his side he seemed to completely lose any self consciousness and sang and danced the song through to its final chorus “Modern Love”

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY SARAH!” the gang chorused into the mic when the music had faded. The words were almost overwhelmed by the thunderous applause that filled the small bar. They bowed, even Zuko, who seemed to remember to be embarrassed, before trooping off stage and going to group hug Sarah. Sarah laughed and smiled in the middle of the huge hug and thanked her friends profusely before they all made their way over to the table they usually sat at when they came here.

“So,” Toph said, grinning like a loon, “enjoy your gift?”

“Yes, that was amazing,” Sarah said, smiling and laughing. “How did you convince Zuko to do that? What dirt do you have on him and what do I have to do to get some?” Zuko immediately said, “Toph,” in a tone of voice that was halfway between supplication and threat.

“Don't worry, Sparky!” Toph said, waving a hand reassuringly in his direction. “I remember our deal. Sorry Queeny, but nobody gets this dirt on Sparky. Part of the deal I had to make to get him up there.”

Sarah sighed mock-dejectedly, but nothing could stop her from smiling right then. It had been such an amazing gift. The practice that must have taken, and the lights that had performed with them—the entire performance had been just incredible. That reminded her...

“How did you guys manage to pull off the lights thing at the beginning of the show?” she asked.

Suki spoke up for the first time that night. “Ty Lee, a woman on my team at the firehouse, her little sister works the lights and sound here. All I had to do was ask and Team Rosa was on it. It was kind of scary watching all of them work together. They coached the singing, the dancing, figured out the lights, the works. There are seven of them who look practically identical.” She frowned for a sec before shaking her head and looking
around. “Who wants some drinks?” she asked.

“Me,” Toph said, loudly thumping her fist down on the table. “I'll cover the first two rounds.”

It was forty-five minutes later, when they were all on their second drinks when a female voice came over the sound system.

“Another song for our birthday girl! Let's have a round of applause Sarah Williams.” Applause started going around the bar as Sarah sipped her drink and the opening chords to “China Girl” came over the sound system. This person knew her taste in music, whoever they were. The quiet first few “ooooh, my little China girl”s came on. Sarah paused, tilting her head to listen a little better. That hadn't sounded like “China”...

Katara looked at the stage and her eyes widened.

“Sarah,” she said, grabbing her friend's arm. “That's him!” she cried, “The guy who gave me the flowers for you!” Sarah stopped breathing. Her heart started to pound. She couldn't believe it. Here? Now? After over a week of near silence? She wanted to turn around but couldn't quite bring herself to do that yet. She couldn't handle being wrong right now. She didn't want to turn around and have him not be there.

“This one's for you, precious,” a voice— she knew that voice— said before breaking into the song.

“I could escape this feeling,
With my Mortal girl,
I feel a feel a wreck without my
Little Mortal girl,”

Sarah could not believe he had just sung that out loud, in a public space. She looked at her friends, who didn't seem to notice anything strange about the lyrics he was singing. In fact, Katara seemed to be telling them about what she knew of this mysterious man. Sarah tuned them out and went back to focusing on Jareth, his hair, less wild than normal, wearing modern clothes (though the pants were far tighter than was presently fashionable, almost but not quite as bad as his usual fare) and looking directly at her.

“I hear her heart beating,” he gave her a knowing look,
“Loud as thunder,
Saw they stars crashing.

“I'm a mess without my
Little mortal girl,
Wake up in the morning,” He winked at her, the rat bastard! Muttering from the peanut gallery increased.

“Where's my
Little mortal girl.
I hear her heart's beating
loud as thunder
Saw they stars crashing down

“I feel a-tragic
like I'm Marlon Brando
When I look at my mortal girl
I could pretend that nothing really meant too much.” His eyes saddened there, and the for a moment he looked away from her.

“When I look at my Mortal girl
I stumble into town just like a sacred cow
Visions of Labyrinths in my head
Plots for everyone
It's in the white of my eyes.”

His eyes darkened and he looked at her with a smile that had more than a hint of threat behind it.

“My little Mortal girl
You shouldn't mess with me
I could ruin everything you are
I'll give you crystal ballrooms
I'll give you eyes of blue
I'll give you Fae who rules the Goblins

“And when I get excited
My little Mortal girl says”

He sang to her with lidded eyes.

“Oh baby just you shut your mouth
She says: sh-sh-shhh”

There was a moment of stunned silence at the excellent performance into which Jareth murmured,

“Happy birthday precious,”

That broke the spell and the bar was filled with applause at what had to be the best and most sexually charged performance of the night. Jareth left the stage and made his way over to Sarah's table. Sarah got up and went to meet him before he could come near her friends.

“You disappeared,” Sarah accused, coming to a stop before him.

“I did,” he said, holding out a sprig of purple Hyacinth.

“You said forever,” she continued, looking at him, not the flower, the apology that he would never say aloud.

“I was misinformed,” he allowed.

“You're engaged,” she said sadly, almost dejectedly.

“Not if the Labyrinth, Klio or I have anything to say about it,” he said determinedly. He waved the flower a little. “I will not leave you like that again, Sarah.” Again his voice caressed her name. “I promise you that for as long as the choice is mine to make.” He held her gaze fiercely and Sarah believed him. He would not abandon her again. Sarah reached out and took the flower from him. Jareth glanced over her shoulder to where her friends were sitting, all except for the petite woman with the dark hair and pale eyes looking at them.

“Will you introduce me to your friends?” Jareth asked. Sarah looked over her shoulder and winced to see them all looking at her and Jareth with curious gazes. She looked over at Jareth and saw that he
looked entirely too comfortable with the situation. She waved a finger at him.

“No funny business,” she said, glaring at him.

“King’s honour,” he said, with a small smirk. Trusting he meant it, Sarah turned to walk over to the table where her friends sat waiting. She could feel Jareth walking behind her, his presence was so strong. When she got to the table, everyone looked up at her expectantly, except Toph, who seemed to be searching her memory for something. Badger was growling under the table.

“Guys, let me introduce Jareth, an.... acquaintance of mine.”

“Now now, pet,” Jareth purred, coming up to stand directly behind her. She could feel the heat he was giving off. “I'd hardly call us mere acquaintances.”

Hearing his voice Toph jumped up and pointed in Jareth's general direction. “YOU!” She cried. “What are you doing here? You had better not be here to try to take me back, I don't care what wishes my parents made!”

Everyone stared at Toph confused, although, at the mention of her parents, they all tensed, ready to defend their friend if need be. Jareth merely threw back his head and laughed. “On the contrary, my dear Miss Bei Fong. I am delighted to see you got out of there. There is far too much potential in you to let waste away in that mansion. You can not guess how pleased I was when I heard you had befriended my Sarah.” Sarah wasn't too sure how she felt about being claimed in such a way but most of her was too busy reeling from the fact that Jareth and Toph knew each other to notice other emotions.

“Wait,” she said, “You know each other? But you didn't say anything,” Sarah turn to look accusingly at Jareth.

“At the time I didn't think it relevant,” he excused himself.

“But....how?” was all Sarah could manage.

“Her family has been dealing with my kind for many, many years,” he said. “Miss Bei Fong—”

“Toph,” she interrupted, raising a hand.

“Toph,” Jareth smiled slightly. “I assure you that I mean you no harm. My business here is purely with Sarah. We met several years ago when she... called on me. And have only recently been reacquainted.” Toph frowned for a moment before sitting down, grabbing Zuko's sleeve and leaning over. “I need to talk to Uncle,” she said quietly. “And soon.” Zuko gave her a concerned look, but said, “Sure.” The rest of the gang seemed to relax, seeing Toph no longer worried and Sarah's confused, but not concerned, body language.

“Alright,” Sokka said, standing up after getting a reassuring wave from Toph. “I am not nearly tipsy enough to be dealing with this. Who wants a drink?” Hands went up around the table. “Right. I'm going to be back with alcohol and we can all get to know each other a little better and learn how these two lovebirds,”—Sarah squawked indignantly, while Jareth smiled possessively— “met over a nice drink. For now, we celebrate Sarah's birthday. Hip Hip,”

“HURRAH!” chorused the rest of the gang. Sarah and Jareth took their seats at the table and enjoyed a night of talking and drinking with friends. No more was spoken of how Jareth and Toph knew each other, although she did blanch when Sarah was telling them about the competition that she had won.
“Only by 30 seconds, precious,” Jareth had said.

“Only cause you took time off. You broke the rules!” Sarah had accused.

“My game, my rules, pet,” Jareth had purred at her. Toph had taken a large swig of her drink and muttered into it, “I thought she liked her brother.” Sarah was too distracted to hear.

Finally it ended and they all started walking back to res, all a little tipsy. Sarah and Jareth walked a few steps behind the others in silence. When they got to the doors of res Katara looked back to see if her friend was coming.

“Go on,” Sarah said, gesturing at her friend. “I’ll be in in a few minutes.” With one last concerned look, Katara left Sarah and Jareth alone. When the door had closed behind Katara, Sarah turned to her old adversary and new friend.

“What changed?” she asked “Why are you back?”

“Your friends,” There was just a touch of a sneer on that word, “went and spoke to Klio who showed up and talked some sense into me. We are now both more determined than ever to see this engagement fall through. She has her lady,” he took her hand and raised it to his lips, brushing the back of her hand with them before speaking, never breaking eye contact, “and I mine. I told you I would not disappear again like that Sarah, and I meant it. I also promise to continue to send you your friends should I ever not be able to see you, as long as it is in my power to do so.” His mismatched blue eyes looked at her with such sincerity that Sarah couldn’t help but be moved.

“Promise?” she asked, voice soft but strong.

“Promise,” he assured her. He let go of her hand. “Ah,” he said, smiling, “I almost forgot.” He summoned a crystal and offered it to her. “Happy birthday.”

“Not my dreams this time, right? Cause there’s this really weird one I keep having with a duck that I REALLY do not need to relive.” Jareth snorted at the image.

“Not your dreams, not this time.” She held out her hands and he dropped the crystal into them. When it hit them it transformed into a necklace to match the one he was wearing even now, beneath his shirt. “I will always come for you when you call me wearing this. Call on me should you ever need me. It is also a connection to the Labyrinth. Wearing it you can wish yourself between worlds anytime you like. This way, if I don’t come, you can hunt me down.” He smirked. He rather liked the idea of Sarah hunting him down. He liked far more the idea of getting caught. He looked up at the sky. Seeing the position of the moon, he sighed.

“I fear I must leave. Good night, sweet Sarah.”

“Wait,” Sarah called, stopping him before he poofed off. “You’re forgetting something.”

“Am I?” He asked, eyebrow going up.

“Yep,” Sarah replied glibly before throwing herself at him. She wrapped him in a hug. He stood still for a moment, shocked, before responding in kind. Sarah held him close for a few minutes, taking in his scent, the feel of his body pressed against hers, the way his hair was just long enough to start to tickle her cheek. Finally, Sarah stepped back.

“Jareth,” she said.

“Yes?”
“Ever pull something like that again and so help me I will hunt you down and emasculate you with a toothpick.” She glared so fiercely and spoke with such confidence that, even after centuries of learning how to hide his emotions when the need arose, he had to fight the urge to swallow.

“I'll keep that in mind.”

“Good night, Jareth,” Sarah said warmly.

“Good night, Precious,” Jareth replied before disappearing again. It could have felt like the time in her kitchen when he had disappeared, but it didn't. This time was different, Sarah thought to herself as she fingered her new pendant. This time, there was hope.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hold on to your hats folks, this is going to be a long one.

First, I want to talk about my interpretation of Linda. Often in this fandom Linda is villainized like their is no tomorrow, or if not, made to seem very inattentive or incompetent. This drives me crazy (Sorry if you've written such a Linda). It's not a problem that it's a trope. It's a problem that it seems to be the only trope. I can count the number of fics I've seen where she's treated as a real person without taking my shoes off. Just because a marriage falls apart does not make EITHER of the parents evil. Just taking from the movie (I apologize if there is other evidence elsewhere but I'm just working from that) there is no evidence that she is a terrible mother or person. In my head canon (and so the canon of this fic) she wanted to be an actor, didn't get her break and so settled down. When she did, she found it wasn't quite for her, and so she kept a hand in in theatre. There she was discovered. She knew if she stayed and forsook the life she passionately desired she'd come to hate and resent both Sarah and Robert. Neither of them deserved that. And so she left to pursue her career. She left Sarah with Robert because she knew that she'd be moving constantly and that was no way to raise a child (in her opinion) constantly tearing her away from friends, never letting her had a stable home, always making her switch schools, and she didn't want to do that do her daughter. She insisted on a divorce so Robert could find someone else (she did want him to be happy, she just wasn't right for him or he for her) and Sarah had the chance of having a real mom who would live with her. She kept in regular contact with Sarah which had the unfortunate side effect of not letting Sarah move on and causing the animosity with Karen.

A similar situation in this fandom exists for Karen, though it's not nearly as bad. It also drives me crazy when I run across it too often (again, sorry if you have that kind of fic) and so my characterization of her was born.

Second, all flowers that appear in this story have meanings in the flower language. I leave their meanings up to your Google foo. I learned the meaning of the Hyacinth in a wonderful story called “Tokens of Affection” by Sinku. I HIGHLY recommend this story and links for both the story and the author can be found under my favourites. Do yourselves a favour and go read.

Third, I had considered other Bowie songs, particularly “Heroes” and “Days”. However, both were more problematic. “Heroes” because NO WAY is Jareth after
“Just for one day” he wants for ever and ever. He also strongly objects to the line “Nothing can keep us together”. I was told to pick another song on pain of Bog. When I suggested “Days” I was offered a first hand encounter with The Pain. I don’t know about you, but I REALLY don’t want to deal with that. Apparently, it wouldn’t do to have the King seen in such a weak position, no matter what Sarah would have liked to hear. (Sarah agreed it was a great choice, though. Unfortunately, she is no defence against The Pain, )which I suspect might have something to do with singing Goblins.}

On a side note, my sister is a wonderful person, but unfortunately, can’t sing Bowie to save her life. This lead to much giggling during the bits with the songs.

And finally, thanks again for sticking with me. I would like to give a shout out to my regular commenter Pendi. I love the comments. They make my day and make me smile every time I see you posted one! Thank you so much for the regular ego boosts (God, indeed :P) and thoughtful comments. Please keep it up. Thank you.

Please leave all thoughts on the story or my character interpretations in the little box right there. Come on. You know you want to ^_^

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

.....

Sorry guys....

Updates will now becoming irregularly, though still weekly and I will still be AIMING for Tuesdays. Unfortunately, I have terrible aim :P What with school and everything finding time to edit is proving VERY difficult and you guys deserve my best. So, until next week, enjoy! And Review! That Too! (Ooh, look! It rhymes!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next week passed fairly uneventfully, aside from Sarah getting used to Jareth showing up at random times. He'd never appear when she was with her friends, only when she was on her own. Once, Sarah had been trying to get a book from a shelf just out of her reach for one of her politics classes when a leather-clad hand had appeared from behind her and pulled it off the shelf. That had led to a discussion on democracy and personal space and how those two were completely different things. Another time, Sarah had been getting a cup of coffee at a café and trying to proofread an assignment before class when he had just pulled up a chair across from her and sat down. That had led to the explanation that, while grades were not necessarily representative of a person's abilities or probable future success she still needed to pass this course “so give me back my damn paper Jareth!” He only showed up a few times that week, and each was no more than an hour.

The odd thing was that she was suddenly spending a lot of time alone. The gang had something on its collective mind and it was something she wasn't privy to. There were a lot of hushed conversations that were suddenly cut off as soon as she came close. It was kind of annoying to have her friends keeping secrets from her but Sarah couldn't really blame them. After all, it wasn't like Sarah wasn't keeping certain secrets from them. It was Wednesday night that Sarah finally found out what was going on.

Katara came into the room that night as Sarah was just finishing another one of the stories in Sir Didymus' book. Her friend seemed nervous and Sarah looked away from her book, a little worried.

"Sarah," Katara said, not looking directly at her friend. “Can we talk about something?”

Sarah put her book down on the small table between their beds, frowning in concern and pulling her legs up to make room for her friend at the end of her bed.

"Of course," she said. “What's up?” Katara shook her head.

"Not here. The rest of the gang is waiting at the Jasmine Dragon. We can talk there.”

"Katara," Sarah said, slowly standing up. “What's going on?”

“I'll explain when we get there.” Katara said. She finally looked Sarah in the eye. “Please come?” she asked. Without another word Sarah grabbed her coat and followed her friend.

* * *

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“I'll explain when we get there.” Katara said. She finally looked Sarah in the eye. “Please come?” she asked. Without another word Sarah grabbed her coat and followed her friend.
When Sarah and Katara walked into the Jasmine Dragon, Iroh ushered them into the back room he rented out or kept for special occasions. When they opened the door Sarah saw all her friends sitting down around the table, a serious expression on even Aang's face. That more than anything had Sarah worried. Katara took a seat at the round table next to Toph leaving Sarah to take the last seat available between her roommate and Zuko. She sat down as Iroh bustled in, a small frown on his face which vanished as he flashed Sarah a reassuring smile, distributing tea before bustling out. Sarah looked at her friends, worried about what this might be about. Had they found out about that she had wished her brother away and were going to lecture her on it? Would they not want to be her friends anymore if they knew? No, that was ridiculous, there was no way they could know, and besides, they wouldn't abandon her. Was it something else? Had something happened? She sat still and waited for someone to start. Finally, Sokka spoke.

“Sarah, there's something, you need to know. You may find it hard to believe but trust us, we are not pulling a prank on you and we are telling the truth. Are you ready to hear this?” Sarah nodded, unsure where this was going. Sokka took a deep breath and continued.

“The Fae are real,” he said. Sarah's eyes went wide. They knew. How did they know? How could they know? Sokka took in her incredulous expression and, mistaking its cause, hurried on. “No, really, they are. And all those creatures you love to study and read about? They're real too. We've all had encounters with them. Seriously. Our mom,” he gestured to his sister, “was half Selkie.”

“Her family managed to get in trouble with a Fae family, who went to the Sozins,” Katara said quietly. “That's how she died.”

Zuko spoke up then. “My family is kinda the Underworld's mafia. They take care of humans that the Fae have a problem with. My d—Ozai runs the entire thing. Uncle walked away from it years ago,” he said, looking only at the table. “So did I.” Toph punched him lightly in the shoulder in reassurance.

“I'm a changeling,” Aang said. Sarah looked at him in surprise. She hadn't thought changelings were aware of what they were. “I found out on last summer's road trip.” Sarah blinked before frowning slightly. Just what HAD happened on that road trip, anyway?

“And my family's been trading with the Underground for centuries,” finished Toph. “Which is how I knew the Goblin King by his voice. That's right Queeny, the man who's in your life with, from what Katara and Suki tell me, VERY tight pants is a Fae and the King of the Goblins, Lord of the Labyrinth.”

“We know there's no way you'd wish Toby away. You love him WAY too much. Toph thought that might be it,” Sokka said, raising a placating hand at Toph, “but we all agreed that it couldn't possibly be true, and since you said you met him in a game, we figured he joined some human competition. They do that sometimes, they love games. Now, we know this might be hard to believe but—”

“It isn't,” Sarah said, interrupting him. “Because you guys were wrong.” She met each of their gazes. “I did wish Toby away.”

And so the gang sat silent and amazed through Sarah’s story. Sarah was an expert storyteller, her stories at open mic nights were a very anticipated event. She used all the tricks she knew to tell this story. It fell familiarly from the tongue as she had told it so many times to Toby. The start with the storm, (even though ’It was a dark and stormy night’ was such a cliche), her meeting with Hoggle, the hours spent in that first damn trick corridor, the riddles she'd had to overcome, the overly friendly helping hands and so on. She took them into the oubliette with Hoggle, the hallway with Jareth and the cleaners, the forest with the dancing dismembering Fireys and on and on through her ten hours there. The only part of the story that changed with each retelling was what the Goblin King
had said during their final confrontation. At the time Sarah hadn't been paying the slightest bit of attention, she'd been trying so hard to remember the lines that would get her Toby back and so in each telling she came up with something appropriately intimidating and Goblin King-y and said he'd said it.

“And that was the last I heard of him,” Sarah said, concluding the first part of her story. “Until the anniversary of my father's death.”

And so she started weaving for the first time the completish tale of their latest encounters. This one was far more heavily edited. She was close with all of her friends, even if they hadn't told her their knowledge of the Underground, but there were some parts, like the bits where they ended up in bed together, not the way it sounded she knew better than to tell her friends if she didn't want to hear endless teasing and FAR too many of Sokka's lame puns. What he would come up with, she didn't know, but it was Sokka. He'd find something to make a pun about. When she talked about how he was with Toby her voice softened. Toby had been so happy with Jareth around and Jareth... well, he seemed to really look out for her kid brother. The story came to a close with him disappearing from her kitchen, although Sarah neglected to mention the bit where she cried, and there was a stunned silence.

“So,” Katara asked, trying to clarify the situation. “You're seeing the Goblin King?”

Sarah spat out the tea she'd been sipping on and choked while Zuko patted her worriedly on the back. “As in with my eyes—sorry Toph—yes.”

“But are you together?”

“No,” Sarah said assertively. Then she remembered what nobody knew and corrected herself, “I don't think so.”

“But he's into you?”

“Sweetness,” Toph interrupted, “I could smell the testosterone off him. He's into her.”

Sarah remained silent on the subject.

“We should meet him,” Aang chimed in. Everyone turned to look at him. “I mean,” he said, scratching the back of his neck. “He's made it pretty clear that's he's reentering Sarah's life. She's our friend. We should get to know him. No pretenses this time. Gang meets Goblin King and all. I'm sure it will go great!” He smiled.

“He said something about being free Friday night. I'll try to get him to come meet you all,” Sarah said, unsure of the whole situation.

“Right,” Sokka said, nodding. He pointed at Zuko. “You're in charge of food and drinks. We meet here on Friday at 8 without fail!”

“What?!” Zuko cried. “Why am I in charge of that?”

“You're the best cook and mixer of drinks we've got, Sparky! If someone here can make food fit for a King, it's you,” Toph told him. “Suck it up.”

“I thought we agreed never again with Zuko's drinks after last time...” Aang said slowly, looking a little uncertain.

“Look Twinkle Toes,” Toph said. “We're going to be dealing with an all powerful Fae who
probably wants to whisk Queeny here away to his Underground castle forever. I don't know about the rest of you, but before doing that, I want a drink.” The gang nodded variously in understanding, sympathy, and agreement.

“And besides,” said Katara placatingly, placing her hand over his, “you don't have to drink if you don't want to.”

“Okay...” said Aang, still sounding a little unsure.

“It's decided then,” Sokka said with far too much finality for Sarah's taste. “On Friday night we meet here to have drinks with and interrogate the Goblin King.”

“Don't you mean meet?” Aang corrected.

“Right...” Sokka said, looking a little sheepish. “Meet.”

Sarah shook her head. Now all she had to do was get him to agree to show up to this. Somehow, she knew it would be anything but a piece of cake.

* * *

It was mid Thursday afternoon by the time Sarah had enough time and privacy to call on Jareth. She stood in front of her little mirror as she always did when calling on the Underground, fingered the pendant she now always wore and murmured,

“Jareth, I need you,” which always seemed to work when she called on her friends. She looked in the mirror but there was no change in it. Damn him, he'd said he'd come if she ca—

“You called, precious,” a voice purred from behind her. Sarah whipped around to see Jareth lounging on her bed. Seriously, what was it with him and beds? At some point soon they were going to have a talk about that. “Oh, yes please,” Sarah's back brain said, with just the tiniest hint of drooling.

“Yeah,” Sarah said, ignoring her back brain. “There's something that I wanted to ask you.”

He raised an eyebrow at her, inviting her to continue.

“First,” Sarah started, “you should know that all my friends know who you are.”

“Of course,” Jareth nodded. That brought Sarah up short.

“Of course?” she asked. “What do you mean, 'of course'?”

“Sarah,” he said, slightly condescendingly. “They all in one way or another have ties to the Underworld. I am an important figure there. They all probably grew up hearing stories about me. 'Be in before dark or the Goblin King will come get you', that sort of thing. Once Toph had identified me to them, it was obvious they'd recognize me.”

Sarah glared at the Goblin King who shouldn't have had anything to do with her life at all any more and yet somehow still managed to. She shook her head at his confidence that simply everyone would know him.

“Well, they want to meet you for drinks. Tomorrow. Eight o'clock at the Jasmine Dragon.”

This time both of Jareth's eyebrows went up in surprise.
“They want to meet me?” he asked, just to be sure. He would have thought they'd have been scared of their childhood boogie man—with the possible exception of Toph, whom he didn't think was afraid of anything—not inviting him out to drinks.

“Yep,” Sarah replied. “Apparently, as you are part of my life, they want to get to know you better.” Jareth preened internally slightly at being called ‘part of her life’. Admittedly it was some distance from 'part of my life' to 'my husband' but it was certainly a start.

“And I assume you want me on my best behavior?” Jareth asked, far too mildly.

“That would be nice,” Sarah said, surprised at him offering without her having to ask. Really, she should have known better.

“What do I get in return for such a promise?” Jareth asked.

“What do you mean?” Sarah asked warily.

“Well, precious,” Jareth said, “You are asking for my time and good behaviour so that I can impress your friends and make your life easier. What do I get in return for promising to make this as easy as possibly for you? What would you do to make it worth my while.”

Sarah looked at him uncertainly. She didn't really like where this was headed.

“What do you want?” she asked, almost certain she wouldn't like the answer. Jareth looked her up and down with lidded eyes, and then let his eyes drift down to the bed beside him. Sarah swallowed nervously. He smirked at her, before getting up and stalking over to her, like a large cat stalking something small and furry. He paused inches away from her and moved so his breath was tickling her ear as he spoke.

“Dinner,” he said simply.

“What?” Sarah said, jerking back. That was not what she had been expecting. While Jareth had entertained the idea of trading this for a kiss or five he would rather Sarah kiss him because she wanted to, not because she had to. Besides, he felt that he could get her to want to fairly soon and it was so much fun to watch her blush and her eyes turn dark at the hinted possibilities.

“Dinner,” he repeated, smiling, sharp canines showing. “Next Thursday is my birthday and I was hoping you'd attend a dinner with myself and Klio in celebration of the event next Friday.” Sarah blinked for a moment trying to figure out what days he was talking about exactly.

“Wait a sec,” she said, laughing a little. “You're born on April first?”

“Yes,” he replied. Sarah started laughing louder. “Is there a reason that date is so funny, Sarah?” he asked indignantly as she continued to laugh.

“Not really,” she choked. “It just seems appropriate. That's all.” Jareth wondered what she could mean as Sarah decided to wait until AFTER the event to inform the King of the Goblins of April Fools'.

“Alright,” Sarah said, thinking over his offer. “A dinner with your fiancé in return for good behaviour during drinks with my friends?” she asked, making sure she had it straight. While Jareth had flinched internally at her choice of title for Klio, he simply nodded.

“Deal,” she said, reaching out her hand. Jareth took it and pressed his lips against the inside of her wrist and murmured, “Deal.” Sarah shivered a little at the sensation. “Until tomorrow at eight then,”
Jareth said, before vanishing, leaving Sarah annoyingly hormonal and wondering how to deal with the glitter he'd left on her bed. Most importantly, though, filled with curiosity about how tomorrow night would go.

Chapter End Notes

Something that I've always found when watching the Movie is that, at the end, she really isn't focused on what Jareth's saying. In a lot of fics she didn't realize what was being offered, or knew but wasn't willing to give up Toby for him (which seems pretty reasonable, given their relationship, even if he DOES have REALLY tight pants :P). I always wondered what would Sarah's reaction be if she found out he'd offered that to a 15 year old her years later.... ^_^
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

What's this? An actual post on time? Could it POSSIBLY Be?

Yes, my dear readers, it is. I realize this is getting to be kinda OOC of me, BUT HOPEFULLY NOT FOR MUCH LONGER!

Also, lots of love and thanks to my beta for staying up after a long day so I could get this to you on time. Isn't she LOVELY.

On a side note, she would like to inform you that she is not a cat.

I would like to inform you that she is. Virtual cookies to anyone who ways in on my side (Beta: meows in annoyance) or comments. Come on. You know you want that cookie....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sarah walked into the back room of the Jasmine Dragon at eight o'clock with Katara. Zuko was already there, pouring various substances into drink mixers. Sokka was leaning on a wall, talking to Aang, who was right in front of him, gesticulating wildly and talking at a thousand miles a minute. The only member missing was Toph. Sarah and Katara moved to stand near the table, if not to sit down yet.

“Are you sure about this?” Katara asked, reaching out to her friend. “I mean, if you really don't want to I can call this off and talk down anyone who argues.”

“You guys will meet him eventually, I'm sure,” Sarah said, shrugging slightly uncomfortably. She hadn't quite made peace with this yet. “And I'd rather this be on our terms than on his.”

The door slammed open behind them, announcing Toph and Badger's arrival.

“So,” she asked, leaning against the door frame, “Mr. Tightpants here yet?” Sarah winced at the nickname, however appropriate it might be.

“Not yet,” Sarah said, fingering her necklace through her blouse. It had become a comfortable, familiar weight on her breast bone in the last week.

“Well, what's he waiting for?” Toph asked, pushing away from the door and walking into the room. “Sparky, how are those drinks coming?” she called out.

“They'll be done soon,” he called back, shaking the mixer.

“Well then Queeny, isn't it time to get this party started?”

Sarah took a deep breath and said quietly, if clearly, “Jareth, I need you.”

“You called,” a voice came from the corner where Jareth was now leaning. He wore the same ensemble he had worn in the tunnels, minus the high-collared studded leather jacket.
“Goblin King,” Sarah addressed him formally. “I believe it is time you were formally introduced to all of my friends. Please meet Miss Toph Bei Fong, Heiress of the Bei Fongs. Aang Yangchen, fae changeling, Katara and Sokka Arnook, part of the Southern Selkie clan,” Jareth nodded at each of them in turn as Sarah introduced them. “And finally, Zuko Sozin.” This time rather than nodding, Jareth smiled, though it seemed to be more a baring of teeth than anything amicable.

“Sozin,” he said. Zuko paused where he was pouring drinks, his shoulders tensing.

“I am more of a Roku than I will ever be a Sozin,” he said with a controlled anger. ’Wasn't Roku been his mother's maiden name?'

“I'm pleased to hear it,” Jareth said, actually smiling this time. “Your mother would be too,” Zuko’s head snapped up, but before he could ask, Sarah, desperate to finish the introductions, continued.

“Gang, meet Jareth, King of the Goblins and Lord of the Labyrinth.” Jareth bowed a very shallow bow to her friends. The rest of the gang bowed back in various degrees of deepness and grace. Toph's was surprisingly correct for someone whose attitude to good manners was essentially, “When I feel like it.”

“Your majestiness,” Sokka said, bowing a very flourishy and silly-looking bow.

“What should we call you?” asked Aang, as he straightened from his bow.

“The correct address would be 'Majesty','” Jareth said, looking them over. “But as you are friends of the Champion, Jareth will suffice.” Zuko started carrying the drinks to the table.

“Let's sit down,” Katara said, moving towards the table. Aang helped Zuko carry the glasses to the table where the food was already set out, some dishes vegetarian for Aang's sake. Jareth moved up to a chair and pulled it out for Sarah to sit before sitting in the one next to her. Toph sat on his other side followed by Zuko, Katara, Aang and Sokka, who completed the circle sitting next to Sarah. Zuko handed out the drinks, each person getting their favourite before stopping before Jareth.

“Uncle thought you'd like this,” he said, holding out a glass. Jareth took the glass and sniffed it before nodding, and leaning back in his chair.

“Your uncle has always had good taste.”

“You know Iroh?” Sarah asked. She was really starting to wonder if there was a single person in her life that he didn't know.

“Ah,” Jareth said, swirling the drink around in this glass, “That is a story for another time. I believe the reason I am here tonight is to be interrogated by your friends.” Sokka looked a little sheepish at Jareth's choice of words. “So,” he asked as Zuko took his seat. “What do you wish to know?”

“What are your intentions towards Sarah?” Aang asked, his face going serious.

“Guys!” Sarah objected. She had hoped this wasn't about to turn into an interrogation. Apparently, she had been the only person in the room who hoped that.

“You have to be careful with Fae, Sarah,” Aang said. “You've read the stories. They are master manipulators. We don't want you to get hurt.”

Sarah thought about defending Jareth. Then she thought about the cleaners and wisely remained silent.
“An understandable question.” Jareth said calmly. “My intentions towards Sarah are rather... complicated. Has she explained to you the situation we find ourselves in?” The gang shook there heads and Jareth continued.

“I am engaged—” Sokka jumped up as Zuko choked on the spicy chips he'd just been eating.

“Sarah, you're already engaged to this guy!? You've known him for, what? A week? Don't you think you're taking things a little too fast?” Katara reached up over and pulled her brother back into his seat as Jareth raised an eyebrow at him before continuing.

“To someone else.”

“And you're still courting Sarah?” Katara asked, eyes fierce.

“The marriage was arranged, and neither of us is interested in marrying the other. She is aware of and is actively encouraging my relationship with Sarah, just as I am aware of and actively encouraging her ongoing relationship with Camille.” He paused, brows pulled down in thought. “Or was it Catherine? Something beginning with a “Ca” in any case.” Sarah sighed. Apparently his thing about forgetting names wasn't solely targeted at Hoggle as she'd long suspected. “I intend to make Sarah my Lady and the Queen of the Labyrinth, if she will permit me. I simply have not figured out how to make that possible yet. Also, I believe this is a question that Sarah and I should discuss alone at some other point. What is your next question?”

“How are things in the Goblin Kingdom?” asked Katara, going for a more diplomatic line of questioning.

“Very well,” said Jareth, the habit of centuries making him reply so. “Of course, the winter storms this winter were particularly severe and all Kingdoms are presently striving do undo the damage but the Goblin Kingdom weathered it fairly well.”

“Are the seasons in the Underground different?” Sokka asked. He'd had a brief meteorology phase a few years back.

“That depends entirely on which part of this world you are using as a base for your comparison,” Jareth said, taking a sip. He noticed Sarah beside him, watching him closely. She was obviously curious to find out more about the Underground. Good. This was all information a future queen should know. He kept his answers plainer than usual for that reason.

“If you are referring to this part of the world, then the seasons are similar. We have four of them and celebrate the eight turning points of the year. Our spring is very nice this year, even with the unusual amounts of rainfall and snow melt.”

“I see,” Sokka said, nodding. “Do you have canals with a system of locks to deal with the overflow or are you experiencing flooding?” Jareth's eyebrows went up. The 'majestiness’ had caused him to underestimate the boy. It seemed Sarah was right in considering him a worthy friend.

“Our canals are handling the problem very well,” Jareth said easily, again refusing to show any weakness. “As our great poet Argitlam writes, 'I really hope next Friday's dinner is worth it.'” Sarah blinked at him.

“That's a famous line from a Fae poem?” she asked skeptically.

“It sounded very beautiful,” Katara allowed. “What does it mean?” Sarah blinked at her friend. Jareth had said the words as clear as day. She’d hardly call them beautiful.
“It speaks of the snowmelt after spring bringing new life to the land,” Jareth lied smoothly. While it was true that there was a poem by Argitlam that spoke of that exact topic, he hadn’t been quoting it. It was occasionally useful to speak a language no one else at the table did, except possibly Miss Bei Fong, though he doubted it. Being fluent in many languages had come in very useful in negotiations across the Underground as well as meaning he could curse for half an hour straight, much to the despair of his etiquette tutors.

“This poem mentions dinner?” Sarah asked skeptically, still not sure why Katara was being so tactful and Toph seemed to be thinking furiously. Jareth glanced at her, surprised.

“It does not. The line I spoke translates directly to, 'Life, ever changing, wakes from her cold slumber to flow and grow once more.’” That was a translation of a line from the poem.

“Jareth,” Sarah said evenly. “You clearly said, 'I hope Friday's dinner is worth it'. That has nothing to do with Life, water or growth.” Everyone stared at her in surprise.

“You speak the language of the Fae?” Jareth asked her slowly, both eyebrows up in surprise. “Where in both worlds did you ever manage to learn?”

“Don’t be an idiot Jareth,” Sarah replied in kind “Of course I don’t speak the Fae Tongue. You were speaking in English clear as day. You’re just exceedingly lucky that my friends are diplomatic. And what do you mean ‘is worth it?’”

“Okay, he said something about learning and the Fae, and she said something about being worth it and politeness,” Toph said, pointing at Jareth and Sarah respectively. “Sarah, where the hell did you learn Fae? You sound like a native speaker. My family would kill to get their hands on a tutor that good.”

“Look, weren’t you listening,” Sarah said, starting to get annoyed. “I. Don't. Speak. Fae!” Everyone was blinking at her in surprise.

“Sorry to tell you, Sarah,” Aang said, speaking up, “but you do. You and Jareth just had a back and forth in a language that none of us really understand. Except him of course.” He gestured at Jareth.

“I speak Fae?” Sarah asked looking around. Everyone at the table nodded. Jareth seemed particularly pleased. She fell back into her chair. “I speak Fae…”

“I suspect the Labyrinth’s influence in this,” Jareth said smoothly, placing a reassuring hand on her arm. “She would not want you at any disadvantage in the Underground,” he explained while internally rejoicing. Having her speak the language was a wonderful skill for the future Queen. Besides, it would save mountains of time teaching her the language. Sarah eyed her now empty glass from where she slumped in her chair.

“I don't know about the rest of you,” she said. “But I need another drink. Zuko?” Zuko nodded and got up to mix some more. By now nearly everyone's glass was empty. As he was pouring them them he called out to Sarah.

“Help me carry these over.” She got up to help him. When she was close he leaned in, gripped her arm and whispered intently. “Sarah, did you trade him anything to get him to come here?” Sarah's eyes shifted away from him, a little guilty. “Damn it,” he swore quietly. “What did you trade?”

“I'm going to dinner with him next week to celebrate his birthday,” Sarah whispered just as quietly, picking up some glasses.

“Sarah,” he said, now putting his hand on her shoulder. She looked up at him. “You should be
Sarah. She didn't even think the rest of the gang knew. Zuko wasn't really the type to open up about, well, anything. Before she could say anything, he had grabbed the last few glasses and moved back towards the table.

Jareth had watched Sarah’s entire interaction with the Sozin boy. He didn't like the way that the boy was touching her, or the intensity in his eyes as he spoke to her, but Sarah had traded coming to dinner for his best behaviour and, despite his earlier comment, he thought it would be well worth it. Jareth squashed the impulse to grab the boy by the collar, shove him against the nearest wall and growl, “Mine,” no matter how tempting it was. Besides, if he did that he would no longer receive the marvellous drinks that the boy was making, and they were worth a little patience. After a moment of whispered conversation Sarah came back and handed him a drink. Jareth took the drink, then took her hand and kissed its back, assuaging his territorial tendencies slightly. Besides, it was delicious to watch Sarah's eyes darken at such a simple and light touch as the one he had just given her. It made him wonder what kind of reactions he might get out of her were they alone, she willing and he had much more time to go about it. He stopped that train of thought before it pulled into too many more inappropriate stations. This was hardly the time and place for such thoughts and besides, they were hardly likely to lead to his best behaviour. He focused his attention back on the conversation during which he was supposed to be impressing Sarah's friends.

“How do you fit in those pants?” Zuko muttered before looking horrified and turning bright red. Jareth didn't even have time to raise his eye brow before Toph slammed her hands on the table.

“That's it!” she said. She was slightly more tipsy than everyone else, having the lowest alcohol tolerance and she seemed very irked. “What is the deal with his pants? I've heard plenty about them from both Katara and Sarah. Hell, even Suki talks about them!” Jareth turned to Sarah eyebrows raised. Sokka looked surprised and vaguely worried. “But what's the deal? I mean, is it really THAT big?”

“My dear Miss Toph,” Jareth said, holding Sarah's gaze firmly. “Would you like to see?”

“I'm blind, you idiot majesty. Geez, you're as bad as Sokka.”

“I remember your blindness Miss Toph,” Jareth said, smirking. “However, there are more ways to see something than eyes. If you are truly curious as to the object of Sarah, Katara and Suki's attention, hold out your hand.” Toph realized what he was implying, thought it over for a moment, and held out her hand. Jareth took her by the wrist and guided her hand to his crotch. The entire time he never looked away from Sarah. He had no problems causing the slight jealousy he saw flickering behind her eyes, not when this could so easily be explained as being kind to a friend of hers, just as she asked.

Toph shifted her hand slightly and Jareth felt his eyes darken, and saw Sarah's darken in return. He pulled on Toph's wrist slightly, removing it from where it might cause him to behave inadvisedly if it stayed there much longer. Toph kept her hand in the cupped position it had formed and seemed to be considering it with sightless eyes wide. She swallowed.

“That,” she finally said in the stunned silence that filled the room, “is no sock.” She turned to Sarah. “You have to look at that every time you see him and you still haven't slept with him?"

“Precious,” Jareth purred, taking another sip of his drink. It really was quite good, though, it was
obviously effecting his judgement as this was not his best behaviour. “You haven't told them we've slept together? More than once? I hadn't realized you were so modest.”

“Sarah?” Aang asked, sounding concerned. Everyone else just looked at her with wide eyes.

“Jareth!” Sarah snapped, eyes bright. God and Goddess but he loved her fire. “That is not what it sounds like and you know it!”

“So you did sleep with him?” Zuko asked.

“With him? No!” Sarah snapped.

“That's not the truth, precious, and you know it,” Jareth smirked.

“I slept in the same bed as him. Big difference.”

“True,” Jareth sighed. “Though,” he looked at her with dark eyes over his drink. “If you want to investigate more thoroughly what Miss Toph has just explored, I would be more than happy to indulge you.”

Sarah swallowed and took a long sip of her drink.

Before anything else could happen a knock sounded at the door. Iroh opened it and looked in.

“Sarah,” he said, holding a cordless phone against his chest. “Toby is on the phone for you. He seems greatly distressed.” Sarah was next to him taking the phone before anyone had registered her moving. She stepped outside to talk to him.

“Hi Tobes. What's up?” she asked, pressing the phone to her ear.

“Sarah, mom's sick and I don't know what to do.”

“Can you put her on?”

“No, she's asleep and I can't wake her up.” Sarah started to really get worried at this point, but she stayed calm, knowing from experience that panicking wouldn't help anyone.

“Tobes, I'm going to get Katara, ok? You remember her right? She's a med student. I'm going to have you tell her what's wrong and she'll tell you what to do, okay?” Sarah just hoped the answer wasn't “Call an ambulance.” She didn't want to put Toby through that, even if Karen would be OK. She refused to consider that she wouldn't. She pushed open the door and called out to Katara.

“Can you come help please?” Katara was out of her seat in an instant, followed swiftly by Jareth.

“What is it?” Katara asked when they were in the hall.

“Karen's sick, she isn't waking up and Toby's really scared.”

“I'll go to her,” Jareth said, getting ready to transport himself. “I may not be a good enough healer to have healed her from the accident on my own, but I am capable of ridding her system of some small disease. If I'm not, I'll get my healer.” He reached out and took Sarah's arm. “She'll be fine, Sarah. I promise you that.”

“What will it cost me?” Sarah asked warily. Katara was looking back and forth between them. Sarah wanted to know if he wanted something large enough that she'd have Katara look into it first or if it would be small enough to just give him.
“Nothing,” he said, smiling at her caution. “I'm on my best behaviour tonight.” And with that he was gone. Sarah put the phone back up to her ear.

“Toby,” she said, “I've got someone coming. He'll be there soon and he'll be able to help Karen.”

* * *

Jareth appeared in the room he knew to belong to Karen and looked at the woman laying on the bed. She was sleeping fitfully, covered in a thin layer of sweat from her fever. He reached down and placed a hand on her forehead. He focused and let his magic flow into her, clearing her system of the disease that was attacking it. After a few moments of focus, she fell into a deeper, more rested sleep. Her fever had broken. Jareth sighed and looked down at the woman. He should have bargained for more from Sarah for this but he hadn't been able to stand the look of worry and fear on her face. He sighed and prepared to return to her, to tell her of her step-mother's returning health.

Before he could, he felt a thwack at his knees. He jumped and turned to face his assailant only to see Toby, eyes swollen, red and wet from crying and small wooden sword in hand. Before Jareth could do more than open his mouth Toby flung himself forward and wrapped his arms around Jareth's waist.

“You're not dead,” he said, face muffled by Jareth's shirt. “Sarah said you weren't but she said you weren't coming back either. Why weren't you going to come back?” Jareth looked down at the small blond head in surprise. He hadn't expected such a response from the boy. He had thought him dead?

“It's complicated, Toby,” Jareth said, reaching down and patting the blond hair as he had seen Sarah do. “But I won't be disappearing again. Not for a long time at least. You'll be able to see me whenever you visit your sister Sarah.” He reached down and picked up the boy as he had done to countless distressed wished-away children and held him close. He had had centuries of practice at calming an emotional child.

“Have you eaten dinner?” he asked, holding the boy so he could look at his face.

“Yeah, there were leftovers in the fridge.”

“Alright, then get changed and into bed and I'll tell you a story before going back to see your sister. Alright?” Toby nodded where his face was buried in the crook of Jareth's shoulder. Jareth put him down and Toby went to check on his mother for a second. Seeing that she already looked better, he went to do as Jareth had instructed. Jareth walked into the hall and waited outside Toby's door. After a moment or two Toby came out in his pajamas and handed Jareth a phone. Jareth eyed it quizzically before imitating how he had seen Sarah use it.

“Hello?” he said into the strange mortal devise.

“Jareth,” Sarah's voice came from it. “Is Karen ok?”

“She's fine,” Jareth reassured her. “Toby is alright too. I'm just going to put him to bed and I'll come back.”

“Thanks for this, Jareth. I really appreciate it. I'll see you soon. Can you give the phone back to Toby?” Jareth handed the phone back to the pyjama clad boy.

“Uh-uh,” he said. “Uh-uh. Yeah, sis. I will. Love you too. Good night. Bye.” He pressed a button on the phone and put it down on a table in the hall. He went into the bathroom and brushed his teeth before returning to his room and climbing into bed. He pulled up the covers and looked at Jareth expectantly. Jareth sat on the edge of the bed and looked at the boy with the bright blue eyes.
"This is a new story for you. One you will have never heard before. My father used to tell it to me when I was sick and now I will tell it to you. It begins:" And so Jareth told Toby the story of how his parents met, and, eventually, got married. It was a brilliant story and had been one of his favourites as a child. Toby seemed to be enjoying it, and trying very hard not to fall asleep but he started yawning part way through and drifted off to sleep just as the story came to its close. Jareth leaned over and spoke another blessing and spell of protection over the boy before disappearing to assure his sister that all was well. On the small table next to Toby's bed, he left a small white heather flower.

* * *

When he reappeared in the back room of the Jasmine Dragon it was obvious that some time had passed. Toph was asleep, with her head on the Table, Aang as well. Katara and Sarah were both more tipsy than they had been, but seemed to have the presence of mind not to lose their heads. Sokka and Zuko, on the other hand, were another matter entirely.

“She turned into the MOON,” Sokka slurred drunkenly.

“Don't you mean she went to Lunar University?” Katara asked.


Jareth came up to stand behind Sarah. Sarah sighed and leaned back into him, seeming to welcome his arms around her.

“I don't know what we're going to do with this lot,” Sarah said discontentedly. “Getting them back to dorms or up the stairs to the guest room here is going to be a pain either way. I knew getting Zuko to bartend was a bad idea.” She sighed and pushed some hair behind her ear. Jareth summoned a crystal and threw it at the drunken crew who suddenly disappeared. He felt Sarah tense slightly in his arms.

“They are all safely in their beds, Sarah.” She shivered when he said her name. “Not to worry.”

Sarah relaxed against him again. “Thanks, Mr. Goblin King.” She took a deep breath in through her nose. “Did I ever tell you that you smell really good? Like cinnamon and some other stuff. I like your smell a lot.”

At this point Jareth noticed Sarah's now empty glass and realized that she was considerably more drunk that she appeared. With a sigh, he had her vanish off to her bed too. He didn't want to give her the chance to do anything she'd regret. She'd thank him in the morning for this. Jareth gave the rest of the room one last look before making a crystal appear and turning it into a note explaining what had happened to the gang that had been there. He left it on the table for Iroh to find before returning to his castle to try to put the thought of the smell of Sarah's hair and the feel of her pressed against him out of his mind and sleep. 'Perhaps,' he thought, 'more drink will help. After all, it worked before.'

And with that the room at the back of the Jasmine Dragon was empty, the only sign that people had been there that night the abandoned food and drink, a note, and a liberal amount of glitter.

Chapter End Notes

Am I creating new ships? JarethxToph? SarahxZuko? Do you think those crazy kids would work together? Let me know in that little box. I mean, it looks so empty.... And think about that cookie!
Will I ever stop referencing glitter and Jareth.... pants? Probably not ^_^ 

Also, "that is no sock". Won't Sarah be pleased :) 

See you all next week with MORE CHAPTER!!!
Sarah sighed as she packed up her books from her poli-sci class on Friday. She had no other choice. She didn't want to do this, in fact, there were many ways she'd rather spend her night, rather than on the floor of her friend's room but Katara had always been good about clearing out when she'd brought Jake or one of her other boyfriends back for the night so she would do the same. She threw her bag onto her back and ran to the hall to go meet Zuko.

“Hi,” she said when she caught up with him. “I have a favour to ask.”

“What is it?” he asked, curious.

“Can I crash at your place tonight? Katara wants the room to herself...” she trailed off.

“Ah,” Zuko said, looking slightly annoyed. “Jet's going over.”

“Exactly. Aang's taking care of a giant rabbit for his friend Bumi, we don't go into Toph's room and I don't want to impose on Iroh,” she explained. She knew Iroh would take her in without complaint but she really wasn't up to dealing with that much mysticism and advice early in the morning after she came home late from a dinner with Jareth. “So, do you mind?”

He shook his head. “Nah,” he replied. “Besides, Sokka's spending tonight at Suki's. I'll ask if you can steal his bed.”

“Thanks Zuko,” Sarah said, smiling brightly. “You're a life-saver. I'm having dinner with Jareth tonight, so I don't know when I'll get back but I'll be quiet when I do.”

“That's tonight?” Zuko asked, looking concerned.

“Yeah, it was his birthday yesterday so I'm celebrating with him today. Quit worrying,” she added, when his expression didn't change. “I beat him once and I can do it again if I need to. Besides, he's been behaving thus far. Don't you have a class to get to?” Zuko looked at his watch, swore and ran off, calling a goodbye over his shoulder.

Sarah shook her head at her friend's worry, appreciating it, as unnecessary as she hoped it would be. She started to make her way to the library, taking a shortcut. She turned into an almost empty hallway and nearly ran into Jareth, wearing an Aboveground outfit, arms crossed and glaring at her.

“Jareth!” Sarah said, stumbling back. “What are you doing here?”

“I had come to ask you what time you would like me to pick you up for dinner. Imagine my surprise when I overheard you making plans with another man,” Jareth snapped, glowering at her ominously from where he was leaning over his shoulder.

“Jareth,” Sarah said impatiently, shaking her head. “Katara is having her boyfriend over tonight as she thought I'd be out all night. I really don't want to ruin her night so I had to make other arrangements. This won't be the first time I've crashed with the guys, besides, she did the same for me.”

Jareth's eyes hardened. He was aware that Sarah had had previous partners, though The Three had
always not spoken much of them. He still didn't like hearing about them. Or the idea of Sarah spending the night with two men.

“Sarah,” he said, pushing away from the wall. “If it's a place to sleep you desire, feel free to stay at my Castle all weekend.” Sarah gave him a wary look. “You'll have a quiet place to study, a chance to see your Underground friends, and your own set of rooms.” He looked at her, eyes smouldering. “Unless, of course, you desire otherwise...” he raised an eyebrow.

“An evening cost me dinner.” Sarah said suspiciously. “What's this going to cost me?”

“A flower, precious,” Jareth said, smiling. “Nothing more.” Having Sarah all to himself for an entire weekend seemed like a marvellous thing. He didn't want to add too high a price tag; that would scare her off. Still, she seemed undecided, so Jareth added one last detail.

“Time works slightly differently Above and Underground, as I think you'll recall,” Jareth said.

“So?” Sarah asked.

“Well, my dear,” he said. “That means that come Monday morning you'll be able to sleep as late as you like and still make it to an early morning class.”

For Sarah, a college student with two majors and an active social life, that sealed the deal. She could definitely use a quiet place to study. Even on Friday evenings, the library could be annoyingly crowded. And besides, she could move between realms whenever she wanted.

“Ok, when can I come over?” she asked.

“Whenever you want,” he replied, pleased.

“I've got no more classes today,” she said, “Mind if I pack my bag, tell my friends the change of plan and head on over?”

“No at all, precious,” he breathed. “Not at all. I'll meet you in your room in an hour. You can change for supper at the castle, if you like. Oh, that reminds me. Klio has an interest in human fashions, please wear something modern. That outfit you wore on your birthday was very,” his eyes darkened and he smirked, remembering the exposed shoulders, the low back, the hint of cleavage and the way the pants caressed her hips, “appropriate. Perhaps something similar?” Sarah blinked—she hadn't considered what to wear yet. “I'll see you in an hour,” he said, reaching up to stroke her cheek. Without another word, he was gone. Sarah blinked at where he had been standing, shook her head and hurried up to her room. She knew exactly what to wear. The Goblin King wanted to tease her with his looks? Well, two could play at that game. Besides, what she had in mind was definitely modern.

She burst into her room, pulled a small suitcase from under her bed and started packing. Katara sat up from where she had been lying on her bed, reading a book on human anatomy.

“What's going on?” she asked, watching her friend place a few changes of clothes in her bag.

“I'm spending the weekend Underground,” Sarah told her, grabbing her makeup and jewelry box from her dresser.

“The whole weekend?” Katara asked. “Aren't you moving just a little fast?”

“Say that to Sokka, why don't you? He's known Suki less long than I've known Jareth,” Sarah said, moving over to her closet, and started pushing clothes out of the way.
“Yeah, but Suki isn't Fae or the Goblin King,” Katara pointed out reasonably.

“Quit worrying, Katara. I'm getting my own rooms and it will be a nice, quiet place to study. You can spend as much time in here with Jet as you want.” Katara seemed cheered by the idea. “Ah-ha!” Sarah cried, pulling out the item of clothing she'd been looking for. Katara's eyebrows shot up.

“You're bringing that?” she asked, looking at her friend. “You sure you're getting your own room?”

“Yes,” said Sarah smugly, “I am. Besides, he asked me to wear something modern to dinner tonight. Apparently, his fiance has a thing for mortal fashion. Besides, this is my counter to his pants. See how he likes it when two play at his game.”

“Oh, I'm pretty sure he'll like it,” Katara said under her breath, turning back to her book. Sarah packed the dress carefully and threw in the shoes that went with it before heading into the bathroom to grab her toiletries. Katara sat up as something occurred to her. She got off her bed and moved over to her dresser. She opened the top drawer, fished something out and tucked them into the folds of Sarah's dress along with a quickly scribbled note, thinking, “Better safe than sorry.” Sarah came back into the room and put her toothbrush and such into her suitcase before closing the lid and zipping it up. She checked the time. There was still 10 minutes before Jareth was supposed to arrive. Not nearly enough time to argue Zuko and Sokka into not trying to talk her out of going. She turned to her roommate.

“Can you tell everyone where I've gone? I'll be back on Monday in time for class.”

“Of course,” Katara said, turning a page in her textbook. “Sarah,” she looked up. “Are you sure this is a good idea? I mean, he's a Fae who's kinda famous for kidnapping.”

“Katara,” Sarah said, sitting down next to her friend. “I appreciate that you guys are worried about me but he has no power over me. He couldn't keep me there against my will, even if he wanted to. I'll be fine and I'll be back on Monday. Besides, Professor Tania will kill me if I don't have my corrected proposals in by five on Monday. And with everything she knows I'm positive she could find a way to the Underground to find me and give my the lecture of my life.” Katara smiled and stood up.

“That reminds me,” she said, moving over to her desk and grabbing a sheaf of papers. “These are proposals from me, Jet, Zuko and Sokka.”

“Perfect,” Sarah said. “These are the last ones I was missing.” She put them in her bag and shoved in a few books she would need for the weekend. She was happy she didn't have any papers due next week that she hadn't already written as she didn't think that getting her hands on a computer in the Underground was going to be easy. She checked the time again. Jareth should be arriving any minute.

“I'll see you on Monday, okay?” Sarah asked.

Katara got up and hugged her friend.

“Be careful and be safe, all right?”

“Yes mom,” Sarah joked back smiling. Katara's maternal tendencies could sometimes be annoying, but most of the time, it was nice to have someone who cared.

“Miss Katara, you are having a pleasant week, I trust?” Jareth asked from where he was suddenly leaning against the door. Katara jumped but Sarah was quickly getting used to his sudden appearances.
“Er, yes, thank you,” Katara said, eyes still wide with surprise. Manners dealt with, Jareth turned to Sarah.

“Ready to leave?”

“Ready when you are.” she said, throwing her bag onto her back and grabbing her suitcase and the oddly shaped gift-wrapped thing from where it stood on her dresser. He held out his hand towards her.

“See you Monday. And don't forget to tell the guys. Make sure you tell Zuko tonight, I was supposed to crash with him.” Jareth's fingers twitched with the reminder.

“Will do,” Katara said, sitting down on her bed again and picking up her textbook. She figured dealing with the boys was a fair trade considering Sarah was leaving her with the room to herself for the weekend. Without another word, Sarah took Jareth's hand and they poofed out of that world. Katara glared at the glitter that now covered the floor.

* * *

Sarah and Jareth reappeared in front of a wooden door in a long stone hallway, lit by flickering torches. There were two guards standing outside it. Jareth leaned over and opened the door. Inside, the room was done up in shades of green, with dark wood furnishings. It was centred around a queen sized, four-poster bed, with its head against the wall. There was a closet, a dresser, a vanity and a full length mirror in the end of the room with the bed. On the other side of the room was a fireplace with a few comfortable chairs near it. In the corner under one of the windows there sat a large desk. The room was lit by large windows, all with cushioned sills, perfect for curling up in with a book. There was also a set of glass doors that led out onto a small balcony. Sarah stepped into the room to get a better look out of the windows. The view looked out over a garden and then the Labyrinth which, from this angle, did not look bare and intimidating, but absolutely beautiful and full of life. Sarah wondered how she ever could have been afraid of it. She turned back to Jareth who was standing in the doorway.

“This is absolutely beautiful,” she said. “Thank you.”

Jareth nodded accepting the thanks. He was glad she'd liked it. He'd returned to the underground and ordered a room made up to suit her tastes and a maid assigned to her. He noticed the maid coming down the hall now.

“And here is your maid. I'll come collect you in two hours for dinner.” And with that he left to go finish the paperwork and prepare for dinner himself. He knew that he would need time to prepare himself, mentally if nothing else. After all, the first meeting of Sarah and Klio was not something to be approached lightly.

A young woman with light blond curls and deep blue eyes came into the room and curtsied.

“My name is Kelsa, my lady Champion, and I'll be your maid while you stay at the castle.” Sarah blinked at the young woman before her in surprise. She hadn't expected a maid when she had agreed to this.

“I don't need a maid,” she said. After years of getting dressed and ready on her own she was pretty sure she could manage.

“Have I already displeased you?” Kelsa asked, voice full of concern and disappointment.

“Um, no.” Sarah said, wondering what the woman thought she could have done to displease Sarah.
in their less-than-a-minute conversation. “I just don't need a maid at all. I can get ready by myself. I'm fine on my own.”

Kelsa looked affronted by this.

“It would hardly be right for the Champion of the Labyrinth to have no servants. His Majesty would be very angry if you were shown such disrespect. I understand if I've displeased you but please, allow one of us the honour of serving the Victor.”

“I wouldn't call serving me an honour,” Sarah said, a little self-deprecatingly.

“Of course it is!” Kelsa said, conviction in her voice. “Serving you is serving the Royal Household. To serve someone as high ranking as the Champion of the Labyrinth, the Victor, is a great honour for any of the servants.”

Sarah’s head jerked around from where she'd been looking around to look at the girl before her.

“I am not part of the Royal Household.” ’No matter what Jareth seems to hope for,’ she added privately to herself.

“Of course you are,” Kelsa said, looking slightly confused. Sarah interrupted before she could continue.

“Look, I don't know what Jareth told you, but we haven't done anything that would count me as part of the Royal household,” she said firmly. Kelsa’s eyebrows drew down and she spoke her next words slowly and clearly, as if she wasn’t sure of Sarah's wits.

“You are the Champion of the Labyrinth, correct?”

“If you mean I beat Jareth at his own game and got Toby back, then yeah. That's right.”

“That rank makes you part of the Royal Household no matter your relation to His Majesty. In fact, normally it is part of the engagement process—”

“What?!” Sarah squeaked.

“Normally it's part of the engagement process...” Kelsa repeated, a little unsure.

“That's what I thought you said...” Sarah trailed off, face pale.

“But since his Majesty is engaged to the Lady Klíora, you simply have a place in the household as Champion. Unless you will be taking the position of Royal Courtesan...” She trailed off, waiting for Sarah’s answer.

“No,” Sarah spluttered. “Really really no. That is, not a position I will be taking,” she finished firmly. “Look—What was your name again?”

“Kelsa, my lady Champion.”

“Kelsa. I really don't need a maid, but you say you'll get status by serving me?”

“Yes, my lady Champion.”

“Right. Then I guess you can be my maid. And stop calling me that.”
“Calling you what, my lady Champion?”

“‘My lady Champion.’ My name is Sarah. Use that.”

“But, my lady Champion, that would hardly be proper.”

“Tell me Kelsa,” Sarah said, searching for arguments that would stop the woman from addressing her with such formality. “Would you argue with the Goblin King? Even on a matter of propriety.”

Kelsa looked affronted. “Of course not! I would never presume to argue with his Majesty.”

“Then don’t argue with me either. Believe me when I say my will is as strong as his. Call me Sarah.”

“Alright, my lady Ch—Sarah,” Kelsa said slightly uncertainly. She shook her head at the Victor’s strange ways but determined to respect them. “Shall I draw you a bath as I unpack your bags?”

“Oh, that sounds great!” Sarah had meant to shower before coming that night but hadn't had time with the sudden change of plans. Kelsa disappeared into a room that led off the main one. Sarah grabbed her suitcase and heaved it onto the bed and opened it. Kelsa had reappeared at the sounds and put her hands on her hips.

“Lady Sarah,” she said, obviously irked. Sarah jumped back, like a child caught with her hand in the cookie jar. “I will unpack for you. Do you need help washing your hair or undressing? Although, I must admit that I am unfamiliar with these clothes…” Sarah shook her head and Kelsa stepped out of the doorway to the bathroom. “Everything you may need has been provided. Not to worry.” Sarah stepped uncertainly towards the door and Kelsa bustled over to her suitcase and pulled out the dress.

“I've never seen an undergarment such as this,” she said to herself.

“That's actually the dress I plan on wearing tonight. It's all the rage in the Aboveground,” Sarah said, smiling to herself. She couldn't wait to see Jareth's reaction to it. She disappeared into the bathroom. She stuck her head out after a second and pointed to the wrapped package. “Oh, and can you get that to the Kitchens? It should be kept cold if at all possible.” She disappeared back into the bathroom.

Kelsa made a mental note of the Aboveground fashion. She gave the dress a slight shake to smooth out any folds left in it. Something fell from the dress to the floor as she did so. Kelsa reached down and picked it up. It was a couple of small square packages in a material she wasn't familiar with and a note that said, “Just in case, -K”. She looked at them critically and considered the dress she had laid out on the bed. She couldn't quite figure out how they went together, but newly arrived wished away often wore strange clothes. She herself had arrived in the Underground in clothes that no one would have worn there. Since the Lady had come some of the fashion had been explained but they still mostly wore Underground styles. She laid the packets next to the dress and placed the shoes that seemed to go with the dress on the floor near the bed. She would take a closer look at the ensemble when she had finished unpacking the Victor's clothes. She made a note to pass on the details of Lady Sarah's wardrobe to Lady Kliora's servants. All the staff knew of Lady Kliora's fascination with the styles of the Aboveground. Kelsa took the parcel to the two runner/guards stationed outside the Champion's room, told one of them to take it to the kitchen to be placed in the cold room and then bustled about quietly, finishing her work.

Sarah luxuriated in the warm bath. It had been a very long time since she had had a chance to take one. Normally, she took advantage of the bathtub at home, but she hadn't had the chance to take long relaxing baths with Jareth in the house. This felt like pure heaven. She could feel the warm water dissolving the tension in her body. She sat up to consider the bottles that lay on the side of the bathtub that was sunk into the bathroom floor. There was one marked “Hair,” and another “Body.”
Sarah opened the “Body” bottle and sniffed. It smelled like some fruit, but she couldn't recognize which. 'At least it isn't peaches,' she thought to herself. She washed her body and hair, before rinsing and laying back in the tub again, closing her eyes. After a little while she realized that she had no idea how long she'd been in there and she still had to get ready. Not wanting to be late for dinner, she got out, got dry, wrapped a towel around herself and stepped out into her room. Kelsa was just finishing arranging her makeup on the vanity. She turned around and curtsied to Sarah.

“How long until Jareth comes and escorts me to dinner?” Sarah asked, a little worried.

“About three-quarters of an hour,” Kelsa replied. “Don’t worry, your dress seems fairly simple to get into.” She moved over to dresser and asked. “Which undergarments do you plan to wear with that dress? I would have lain them out, but I am unfamiliar with these kinds of garments…” she trailed off as she opened one of the drawers. Sarah flushed as the woman lifted out a pair of underwear and a bra looking at them rather helplessly. Sarah hurried over and grabbed the underwear she had packed to wear with the dress. Seeing a screen in the corner, Sarah hurried behind it to change. She slipped on the underwear and heard Kelsa call out, “Won't you be needing one of these?” Sarah stuck her head out to see what Kelsa was talking about.

“Normally, I'd wear one, yeah,” she said, looking at the woman holding the bra uncertainly. “But not for this dress. Can you bring it over please?” Kelsa put the bra back in the drawer, closed it and brought the dress over to Sarah. She undid the fastening in the back that she had figured out how to use while the Victor was bathing and held it around the screen, not looking. It seemed the Victor was very modest. There was the sound of ruffling clothes and then Sarah said,

“Can you zip me up?”

“Pardon?” asked Kelsa confused. Sarah came out, back facing Kelsa and gestured to the fastening. “The zipper, can you do it up.” Understanding, and making a mental note of the name, Kelsa did up the zipper. Sarah turned around and Kelsa held out the shoes. Sarah slipped on the four inch strappy heels she had brought with her. She moved back behind the screen and came out with a towel. "What should I do with this and the clothes I left in the bathroom?” she asked, looking around uncertainly.

“Just give them to me. I'll deal with these while you go finish getting ready.” Sarah handed over the towel with an 'if you're sure' look and Kelsa came up behind her and offered her the things that had fallen out of the dress.

“What should I do with these, Lady Sarah?” Sarah groaned mentally, but that seemed to be the compromise Kelsa was willing to work with. Sarah glanced at what Kelsa was holding out before doing a double take. “Where did you find those?” she asked incredulously. If the Goblin King had sent them— did they even have condoms in the Underground.

“They were in your dress with a note saying 'Just in case' signed 'K'.”

“Ah,” Sarah said, understanding what must have happened. She and Katara were going to have words when Sarah got back on Monday. She snatched the foil packages out of Kelsa's hand and tucked them into a drawer in the vanity. “It was just a joke played on me by an Aboveground friend, Kelsa, nothing to worry about.” Kelsa watched as Sarah painted her face with the kind of ease that came with long practice. When she was finished she had darkened her eyelids and under-eyes in a way that made the green colour of her eyes stand out. She had painted her lips a deep, sensual red and used the rest of the things on the table to hide the slight imperfections on her face. She grabbed a
gold necklace and bracelet and put them on before standing and turning to Kelsa.

“How do I look?” she asked. Kelsa looked her over and wondered how serious she had been about rejecting the position of Royal Courtesan. However, she had to admit that the Victor looked striking in the ensemble. She looked very good and very powerful.

“You look very nice.”

“Think it’s modern enough for Klio?”

“Oh yes,” Kelsa said, thinking of Lady Kliora's tastes. “I think Lady Kliora will like this outfit very much.” She frowned. “Will you be doing something with you hair?” she asked as she considered how it fell down the Victor's back.

“If Katara was around, I would.” Sarah said, tugging on a lock. “But I’ve always been useless with hair. I just wish it had had time to dry,” she moaned.

“I'll have you know, Lady Sarah,” Kelsa said, proudly, “that hair is one of my specialities. Sit down and describe the look you want and I'll see to it you get it.” Surprised, Sarah sat down and faced the mirror in the vanity and described the updo she wanted. Kelsa opened one of the drawers in the vanity and pulled out a brush, a few clips, a few gold hair ornaments, and a stick Sarah didn't recognize. Kelsa spoke a word and ran the stick along Sarah's hair, drying it instantly. Sarah made a note to learn that trick. When the hair was dry Kelsa set to work.

As she worked, she considered the Victor. She was not quite as she had imagined her. She was fierce and strong, yes. But she was also gentle and a little unsure. She cared for others. Of course, stories The Three told did trickle back to the human community but one was never sure what was true and what was not. For example, the Lady Sarah was not 10 feet tall and she did not, so far at least, breath fire. Ha, wouldn't it be nice to prove John wrong on that one. She couldn't wait to tell everyone she'd met her. They'd all be so jealous. She wondered if the Victor would come and meet her village if asked. On the whole she thought probably, but it would hardly be proper to ask her Lady that. Then again, the Victor didn't seem to care much about much about propriety, so perhaps she wouldn't mind. Kelsa decided to see how things progressed before asking her but all in all, so far she liked the Victor. She was very happy to have been assigned to her, although she did wish that she would be a little more cooperative when it came to propriety.

“There,” Kelsa said, putting in the final ornament. Sarah considered herself in the mirror. Her hair had gone from simply falling down her back to an elegant knot on the back of her head in a matter of minutes.

“Thanks for all the help, Kelsa,” Sarah said, turning to the woman and smiling.

“Lady Sarah, there is no need to thank me for doing my job.”

“Yeah,” she said, smiling to show she meant no offence. “There is. You really don't need to call me Lady, you know,” she tried one last time.

“It is how I show respect for the Victor,” Kelsa said. Sarah wondered why Kelsa called her that. It was the second time she had used that title.

Before she could ask, a knock sounded at the door.
Serious Author's note: I'm writing Jareth as jealous because that is his characterization and, in all honesty, it can be fun to read and write. However, I do not condone real life jealousy. If I met Jareth in real life (and he wasn't an all powerful Fae who could bog me with a thought, (come on, I've got some sense of self preservation) I would want to tell him (in the words of my sister) to get over himself. Sarah isn't really giving him reasons to think she's cheating on him. Even if she was, they haven't discussed exclusivity, or really, where their relationship is going at all, aside from Jareth's statement that he want's her as his Queen. And one person making a statement does NOT count as a discussion. This is a discussion that they need to have. And they will.... Eventually. Keep in mind, this is Jareth and Sarah we are talking about. Can you really see either of them sitting down of their own free will to talk about their feeling in a constructive and open manner? Hehe, that's going to be fun to write. But to some up, were this not fiction, (hell, if this weren't fan fiction where a character has jealousy as a VERY obvious part of his characterization and has scary amounts of power) I, or one of my characters, would tell him to get a little less possessive. Our culture really marks jealousy as a sign of love and it isn't. It's a sign of mistrust. Then again, we are talking about Sarah and Jareth here.....

Silly Author's note: Wow. Serious Author is serious huh? Fortunately, Silly author is often the one who gets to do the writing. And Silly Author has a thing for Jareth's pants. (Admittedly, so does Serious Author, she's just quieter about her obsession) What's coming up next? What is going to happen with those Condoms? How will the meeting of Klio and Sarah go? Will Nifflers storm the castle and demand cookies in place of surrender? (Ok, probably not. Then again, this is the Underground, so you never know....). READ ON AND FIND OUT. And if you have thoughts, you could totally leave them in the little box.
HIHI! I'm BACK! And only a few days late this week.... And now, for the chapter you've all been waiting for, Sarah Meets Klio! Feel free to leave your impressions of those two, and head cannons of what they'd get up to. Man, Jareth really didn't think this one through, did he?

When Kelsa opened the doors to Sarah's room, Jareth asked,

“Is Lady Sarah ready?”

“I don't know, Jareth. What do you think?” Sarah's voice drifted out from behind the maid. Kelsa smiled softly, curtsied and stepped out of the way. Jareth's forebrain was immediately tasked with wrestling his hindbrain into submission and not pushing Sarah up against the nearest object and kissing her senseless before moving on to other interesting activities. This meant that Jareth's impression of Sarah's outfit only came in impressions of single words. The first was “Skin”. Followed by, “black” followed by, “more Skin” followed by “gorgeous” followed by “even more Skin”. Both parts of Jareth's brain wanted to have the chance to properly appreciate the sight before them. Coming to the agreement that they would stand still for at least the time being, they stopped wrestling and gave Sarah a once over.

Her feet were clad in—what had Klio called them?—“strappy black heels.” Apparently they had not been invented as a form of torture. (Though his hindbrain begged to differ.) Her legs were bare and exposed from her shoes to her mid thighs. Her legs looked gloriously soft and creamy and he longed to run his hand along them. He wondered what kind of reactions he could elicit by doing that... The skin of her legs was cut off by the start of her dress at mid thigh. The dress was only slightly shorter than the shorts of her pajamas but was much more flattering. It was short, low cut and black with a sweet-heart neckline and thick black straps that left her shoulders and arms bare. The dress was low enough cut, Jareth couldn't help but notice, that it more than hinted at cleavage. Her lips were painted a colour that practically screamed “KISS ME” and Jareth would have been very happy to indulge them had it not been for her eyes. Her eyes were done in a dark colour that made their green flash brightly, and were clearly challenging him. “So, Goblin King,” they asked, “just what are you going to do?”


Sarah smiled. “Think this is modern enough for Klio?”

“Oh,” Jareth said, smiling slightly mischievously, “I think Klio will like your choice of clothing very much.” He offered his arm and Sarah moved forward to take it. As she approached her smell intoxicated him. She had her usual scent but overlaying it was a perfume with a hint of pomegranate. Jareth adored pomegranates. The scent made him want not to go down to the dining hall, but scoop Sarah into his arms, walk into her room and kick the door closed behind him. Jareth couldn't decide if it was fortunate or unfortunate that Kelsa's presence prevented him from taking such a course of action. Thinking of the ribbing he'd get from Klio if he did such a thing he decided against it. He moved into the hallway with Sarah on his arm, directing them to the dining hall where they would
meet Klio.

Sarah walked with Jareth through the labyrinthine—of course they were labyrinthine—corridors and staircases that led from her room to wherever they were going. It wasn't a very long walk, but it was plenty of time for her to worry. Would Klio like her? Would dinner be an awkward affair full of in jokes and stories of mutual friends that left her stuck on the sidelines of the conversation? What if Klio didn't like her? What if she messed up completely and horribly and Jareth wouldn't even look at her again out of embarrassment?

“You know,” Sarah's back-brain said, “if you pull him into a closet and just start making out with him, making you both miss dinner, you wouldn't have to worry about what Klio would think of you. And I'm sure he would enjoy it...”

Sarah forcefully ignored the thoughts, though they did make a good backup plan. She pulled herself up straighter and walked on tall. She was the Champion of the Labyrinth and she had nothing to fear from this woman.

Jareth walked with her on his arm, luxuriating in her proximity. It was intoxicating. Unfortunately, intoxicated was not something Jareth could afford to be right now. He was, no matter how much he hated to admit it, even to himself, worried about the meeting to come. Klio was the most important person Sarah would meet in his life, aside from his family. He trusted his family to care for her for his sake if nothing else, and while he knew that Klio would be happy for him no matter what, he wanted her to like Sarah. Besides, if this all worked out in the end it would be good for Sarah to have some female friends in the Underground. After all, he didn't want her spending all her time with The Three. He did not like the idea of Sarah spending her days frolicking with the damn dwarf. Although he would let her have the friends she wanted, he didn't like the way the dwarf had looked at her while she was here time before last. He supposed he should inform The Three that she was here. It could wait until tomorrow. He looked down at the woman whom he adored and saw her confident smile and stance. Suddenly, he wasn't worried about what Klio would think of her. He knew these two would get along just fine.

When they arrived at the dining hall the doors swung open before them and Sarah got her first view of Klio. She stood tall and thin in a green dress with gold embroidery that brought out the warm undertones of her hair. Her hair fell in copper waves to her waist, but was pulled away from her face with a few ornate combs. Her hair and dress showed off her beautiful pale skin and the slight rosiness of her cheeks.

She smiled, showing off perfect white teeth and her bright blue eyes sparkled when she saw Jareth. She was beautiful, Sarah couldn't help but think. Then her eyes fell on Sarah and they widened. She walked up to her and looked her over before turning to Jareth.

“You were right,” she said firmly. “She is gorgeous.” Jareth smiled in agreement before turning to make the introductions.

“Sarah, Champion of the Labyrinth, may I introduce the Lady Kliora of Perraen. Klio, may I introduce the Lady Champion, Sarah.” Sarah held out her hand to shake as this dress was far too tight and short to pull off a curtsy in. Klio dipped into a modified curtsy, taking Sarah's hand and pressing the back of it softly to her lips before murmuring, “My Lady.”

Jareth raised an eyebrow and said, “Klio,” with just a hint of an edge in his voice. Klio came out of the curtsy and laughed.

“Don't worry Jareth. You know my taste runs more to blonds than brunettes, no matter how fetchingly attired. Besides, I don't think my lady would appreciate such an indiscretion.”

“Probably not,” Jareth said firmly before adding, “shall we eat?” and gesturing to the table. Sarah
blinked for a moment, processing what had just happened. It was the first time a woman had shown interest in her as far as she knew and it was a little disconcerting. “Did you see how Jareth reacted?” her back-brain asked “This could have its uses...” Sarah continued to ignore it and went to sit where Jareth had pulled out a chair to the right of the head of the table. A servant had pulled one out for Klio already and she was seated to Jareth's left. Sarah calmly made her way over to where Jareth was standing and took her seat. Jareth took his seat and the servants started to bring in the food.

“Sarah—May I call you Sarah? Jareth calls you nothing else and I've gotten used to it, though I could call you Lady Champion if you prefer...?”

“No,” Sarah said smiling, “Sarah is fine.”

“Then you must call me Klio,” Klio said, smiling brightly. “I wouldn't be surprised if these introductions were the first time you heard my full name. Jareth has very little time for formalities when he can get away without them. So, Sarah, you must tell me, where did you get that dress?”

Jareth leaned back and enjoyed his salad while Klio quizzed Sarah about Aboveground fashion. He should have known he had nothing to worry about. Klio soon had Sarah relaxed and talking easily. Partway through the conversation Sarah speared something with her fork and held it up for inspection.

“What's this?” she asked, showing it to Jareth. Jareth looked at it and replied.

“Cinderberry. They are a delicacy Underground and one of my personal favourites.”

“That reminds me. Happy Birthday, Jareth,” Klio said, turning to the Birthday Boy. “I know I’ve already said it, but it's not every day you enter your 25th century!” Sarah dropped her fork and stared at Jareth.

“You're 2400 years old?” she asked, stunned. She knew he was old but... Jareth winced internally and sighed. He knew humans could be strange about ages, particularly age differences. They also viewed age differently. Mental age did not always match with them physically. It could be strange and confusing, when dealing with them. He'd decided to not mention his age for a while longer but the chicken was out of the coop now.

“Yes,” he said. “Yesterday I turned 2400.”

Sarah blinked at him before muttering, “I should have gotten him something better.” Jareth perked up at this. She had gotten him a gift? He looked forward to finding out what it was.

“So, Sarah,” Klio said, sensing something was wrong but not sure what. “I hear you have a younger brother? What's he like?” Sarah blushed a little, remembering why the Underground would know about Toby. She smiled though, talking about Toby always made her happy.

“His name is Toby. He's a sweet kid. He's in grade 1 now, and I swear he's one of the brightest kids in his class. He has an insane vocabulary for a kid his age. He can be a bit of a brat sometimes but he cares about his family and friends and he's fiercely loyal. He likes stories a lot and plays a lot of make believe.”

“And,” Jareth adds dryly, “Sarah is very careful about educating him on the proper way to deal with the Fae.”

“Really?” Klio asked confused.

“Oh, yes.” Sarah said firmly. “Toby is never going to end up accidentally stuck with some Fae for
reasons like eating something or taking something. I've made damn sure he knows better.”

Klio laughed, light and sparkling. “I'm glad you've made sure to educate him. Boys will often do silly things if not told better. Did Jareth ever tell you about the time he managed to break both his legs?” Klio gave Sarah a wicked grin.

“No,” Sarah said, replying in kind. “Do tell.”

“Well, this story begins when Jareth's Father was telling Jareth about all the powers he would one day have as an adult Fae and a King. Now, one of the things he told him was that one day, he would be able to fly.”

“Oh dear,” said Sarah.

“Yes. Now Jareth decided if one day he was going to be able to fly then he should be able to fly right now and decided to test this out.”

“I see,” said Sarah, glancing at Jareth's horrified face.

“He decided the best way to test this was by jumping off the roof and figuring it out on the way down. Now, he wasn't a complete and total idiot when it came to deciding which roof. He knew he would need time to figure out which part of his magic would do the trick so he picked the highest roof he could find.”

“Oh,” said Sarah, eyes wide with horror as she imagined a young Jareth, who probably looked something like Toby did, jumping off of the tallest tower of the Goblin Castle.

“Naturally, he didn't work it out and managed to break both of his legs. You should have heard the lecture he received from his parents after that stunt.”

“Klio,” Jareth practically whined. “I was barely 140 years old when that happened. Must you really bring that up now?”

“I admit your age was a factor for that incident,” Klio conceded. “But that hardly explained what happened the winter you were 416, does it?” she added with a malicious glee before launching into that story. Jareth sat back speechless and watched in horror as Sarah lapped up many embarrassing tales from his childhood. The disadvantage, he thought to himself, of the long lives of the Fae was that they had FAR more opportunities to collect embarrassing stories.

“Which is when he said,” Klio continued her latest story, “you're the Ambassador?” Sarah collapsed a fit of giggles. “Which reminds me of the hedgehog incident. That all started when—”

“Klio,” Jareth interjected for the first time. He really and truly did not want Sarah to hear the Hedgehog story. “Tell Sarah that story, so help me, I just might track down Chamomile and tell her about the éclair incident.”

“First, Chamomile? Really? Normally you manage better than that. Secondly, I don't believe you for a second. Not even you can be that cruel and third, she already knows.” That brought Jareth up short.

“You are really serious about this woman, aren't you?” He asked her.

“Believe me when I say I am deathly serious about her. I've never loved anyone as much as I love her and I don't think I could ever forgive you if you ruined my relationship with her.”
"As you've been poisoning Sarah's ear?"

"I wouldn't call that ruining a relationship. I'd call it giving her a more complete view. In any case, I could appreciate if you'd at least try to remember her name."

Jareth smiled ruefully. He was normally pretty good with names but for some reason this woman's kept escaping him.

"Klio," Sarah said, changing the topic again. "In one of those delightful stories, thanks again for telling me them, you mentioned a little brother. What's he like?"

"Klibdus is an idiot," Jareth said firmly. He had never had much patience for the lad.

"But he loves his family and wants what's best for us," Klio said, giving Jareth a sharp look, more out of habit than anything else. She knew very well her friend's opinion on her younger brother. "He..." she searched for a diplomatic way of putting it, "just isn't always very good at going about getting that. Rather like my parents in that regard." She sighed. It was her parents who were forcing her to go through with this marriage. They really couldn't understand why she was so unhappy with it. She was partially to blame for that but she didn't want to deal with the fall out of them finding out that not only did she not want to marry a noblewomen, she didn't want to marry a Fae at all. She knew she'd have to deal with it some day, but wanted out of this marriage first. If they found out while she was still engaged they'd just push her harder toward the marriage to Jareth than ever before.

"Your parents?" Sarah asked.

"Lord Klipanos and Lady Klimona," Jareth supplied. "They think they have their daughter's interests at heart." His tone was dismissive. Klio sighed. He never could understand why she put up with them, but his parents had always been different.

"They do their best," Klio returned. Sarah blinked.

"That's a lot of names beginning with Kli," she said. "Is that important to your family?"

"Oh," Klio said dismissively, "It used to stand for something but everyone's forgotten what by now. It's just tradition that it be the first three letters of everyone in the family's name. Although, you can tell when someone outside the family is planning a future marriage alliance as they will name their kid some name beginning with KLI, like my father."

"Interesting," Sarah said, filing that bit of trivia away.

"Speaking of," Jareth said, smirking, "Just how is Klinola doing?"

"Jareth, please don't remind me of him. But, since you asked, I hear he has finally gotten engaged to a Lady from Guilder and they seem very happy together, now that I am engaged and therefore, not available."

Jareth took a swig of his wine. "Please don't remind me."

"And I think now is time for dessert." he made a gesture and the servants out dished of pomegranate cinderberry crumble with whipped cream. It was Jareth's absolute favourite dessert and his cook had the recipe down to perfection. He smiled gleefully as the servant placed the dish in front of him. He took a bite and savoured the taste before watching Sarah take a tentative bite. She raised an eyebrow at the taste. She enjoyed the taste of the cinderberries, she could see why they were a favourite of Jareth's, but—

"Really, Jareth?" she asked. "Pomegranates? Isn't that a little Roman for someone out of Celtic
mythology?”

“Pomegranates are another favourite fruit of mine. And I must say, Precious,” he purred, “The scent of them in your perfume is intoxicating.” Sarah blushed and mentally cursed. Had she really scented herself with pomegranates? That was practically asking to be locked away in his underground kingdom for as long as he could get away with. And she didn't think Linda or Karen could hold humanity hostage to get her free.

“That scent does suit her quite well,” Klio agreed. “Especially in this season. Tell me, Sarah. Has Jareth told you anything about Underground fashions or has he just left you to flounder like the clod he can be?”

“Oi!” Jareth snapped.

“No,” Sarah admitted. “He hasn't really.”

“Well, I haven't the time to get into them now,” Klio said, checking the clock. It was getting rather late and she wanted to return home. “But I believe you're here all weekend. If my schedule permits, would you like me to stop by and tell you about them?”

“That would be great, thanks,” Sarah said smiling. She'd had a great time getting to know Klio and she was looking forward to spending more time with her. Klio rose and the rest of the table rose with her.

“Then I think I'll be off. I'll see you both later. Happy birthday again, Jareth.” She moved over to where Jareth stood and gave him a hug. Jareth hugged her back.

“Thanks, old friend. Come we'll see you to the door.” The three walked the short distance from the dinning hall to the entrance hall and a servant brought Klio her cloak while another opened the door. As soon as the door opened, Sarah felt a strange compulsion. “Come,” she heard a woman's voice echo through her mind. She unthinkingly started to follow it. Jareth cut off what he had been saying to Klio to turn to watch Sarah walk, expression vacant, out of the door towards the city gates and the Labyrinth.

“Sarah,” he called after her, reaching out. Klio placed an arm on his.

“Let her go. The Labyrinth is calling her and those two have a lot to talk about and not even one of the goblins would dare touch the Champion when the Labyrinth's power is all over her,” she reassured him. When he still looked worried, she added, “Watch her from one of your crystals if you must, but let those two talk.” Jareth nodded, not looking nearly as happy with the situation as she'd hoped he'd be but with one last goodbye she left him to his worrying. Jareth moved to the throne room where he could watch from the window her progress through the Goblin City, ready to summon a crystal as soon as she went out of sight.

* * *

Sarah followed the voice, taking the turns she heard it advise before stopping in a clearing she didn't recognize.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“The Labyrinth,” came a multifaceted voice in reply.

“What do you want?”

“You,” the Labyrinth said. With the words came such a sense of longing, of need, of loneliness that
soon Sarah started to cry. Still the emotions came. She felt like a piece of sand being picked up and thrown about by the waves in the face of such raw emotions. Her vision started to tunnel as she was completely overwhelmed.

“Jareth,” she choked out. “Help.” The last thing she felt before she passed out was strong arms catching her as she fell.

Chapter End Notes

Hi All! In case you were wondering KLI actually DOES stand for something. Virtual cake to anyone who gets it. And THIS cake IS NOT a lie. In other news, I'm fast running out of prewritten chapters. Soon updates might be coming slower as RL is INCREDIBLY hectic right now and even writing every chance I get isn't getting me far. I should have a little more time soon though, so hopefully, I'll have that ready for you when I run out of these ones! Mean while, Enjoy! And please leave a contribution in the little box!
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Hi guys....

Sorry it's so late. Mid terms are EVIL! EVIL I SAY! But this week I edited two chapters with my Wonderful Awesome Beta of Everything Incredible, so chapter 16 WILL be up on Tuesday..... Assuming RL doesn't kill me between now and then. But hey! Chapter 16 is edited, so my sister could post it anyway :P.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next morning, as the sun rose, Jareth stormed out of the healing wing through the nearest window and headed towards the Labyrinth's centre. It was time that they had words. Sarah had lain unconscious in the healer's wing the entire night. At first he had tried to wake her but the healer had... recommended letting her rest. She still hadn't shifted into normal sleep before he left and if he had to wait another second to find out what had happened he feared he'd lose control of his magic.

He landed in the clearing and called out loudly, “LABYRINTH!” This time, he didn't care if he offended her. He was royally angry about what She had done to Sarah and wanted Her to answer for it.

“Goblin King,” the Labyrinth's voice said, polite, if slightly defensive.

“Labyrinth,” Jareth said, barely keeping control of his anger. “Would you care to explain to me why the Champion is now unconscious in the Healer's Wing after you summoned her to speak to you? Just what happened while she was out here?”

“We spoke,” the Labyrinth said simply, seeming to be avoiding the question.

“And?” Jareth asked impatiently. “I remember you speaking with my mother many times. Not once ended with her unconscious for hours at a time. What changed?”

“We spoke,” the Labyrinth said simply, seeming to be avoiding the question.

“And?” Jareth asked impatiently. “I remember you speaking with my mother many times. Not once ended with her unconscious for hours at a time. What changed?”

“My mother was the last Champion of the Labyrinth. Everyone knows that,” Jareth said impatiently.

“Wrong,” the Labyrinth said severely. “Your mother completed the Labyrinth that had been made easy for her by your father and Ourselves. Her run was simply a formality as it has been for all Fae Queens of the Labyrinth. We have not had a Champion who proved herself by fire in a very very long time. She solved problems in minutes it took others hours to solve, if they ever managed it at all. Not even you taking hours away from her managed to stop her from regaining her brother. She understands Us in a way no other has done in such a long time even We had begun to forget. This means We have a stronger, more instinctual connection than We have had with any other creature in time beyond remembering.”

Jareth frowned. “What does your stronger connection have to do with the Champion being in the Healer's Wing?”

“We need a certain intensity of feeling to communicate with those less connected. We communicated
with Sarah with the same intensity, not taking into account the difference in our connections.”

“Well, why not?”

“We... forgot.” If an extremely powerful wish-granting magical sentient entity could sound sheepish, the Labyrinth did. “It had been such a long time. We did not intend the Champion any harm. She should have woken by now. A goblin messenger approaches as we speak. We swear, Goblin King, We will be more considerate in dealing with she who should be Queen in the future.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Jareth said rather testily.

“The messenger waits around the corner to the entrance of this clearing. Go to him, Goblin King, and then go to our Champion. We will not lose her again. Go.” With one last look at the now somehow empty air around him Jareth turned on his heel and went to see the messenger.

He turned the corner to see the messenger impatiently shifting his weight back and forth. No goblin wanted to be Bogged for interrupting a conference between His Majesty and the Labyrinth.

“Your Majesty,” he said, falling into one of the awkward bows all goblins did.


“The Lady Champion has awoken Sire. The healer says she—” but he didn't bother finishing the sentence. His Sire had already vanished in a cloud of glitter. He stuck out his hands and let the glitter collect on them. He knew that Fae powder brought luck just as well as all the other Goblins did. Maybe with this, he would actually get to meet the Champion. She was said to be fearsome, but he trusted he would survive the experience. With that happy thought, he turned and started his trudge back toward the Goblin City, and his post as a messenger at the Castle.

* * *

Sarah blearily opened her eyes.

'That's weird,' she thought. 'I don't remember my room having a ceiling made of stone. And why didn't Katara's alarm wake me up? And why is the mattress so comfortable?' She shifted to see what should have been her clock but instead was a goblin woman, dressed in yellow and sitting in a chair.

Sarah jerked back at the unfamiliar bumpy face.

The face broke into a smile as the goblin rose and said, “Lady Champion, I'm glad to see you awake. I'll send word to the King of your condition immediately,” in a voice that was much deeper than Sarah expected, but still feminine. She spoke with a soft lilt that was incongruous with her short and bumpy features.

“Please sit up my Lady, so that I may examine you.” Sarah rolled her eyes at the “my Lady” but did as she was asked. Sitting up, she saw that she was no longer in the black dress she had been wearing the night before, but lay in a loose white gown. Sarah was absolutely certain she hadn't been wearing that when she had passed out.

“I and my apprentices changed you, if that was what you were wondering,” The matronly Goblin said, bustling about grabbing bottles and mixing their contents in a cup. “That strange gown you arrived in was hardly meant for sleeping in. Drink this.” She handed over the cup and Sarah downed the content, winced, and handed it back. It had tasted vaguely of spoiled chicken.

“You were found by the King unconscious in the centre of the Labyrinth.” She poured a glass of water and handed it to Sarah. Sarah downed it, grateful for something to wash away the fowl taste of
the other potion. “Do you remember what happened?”

Sarah cast her mind back and the fog of memory lifted. “I was talking to the Labyrinth, and She needed me. She needed me so much it hurt. Why was that?” she wondered, not really expecting an answer. To her surprise, the Goblin nodded.

“Empathy backlash. That can happen to all telepaths.” She sighed. “My Lady Labyrinth should have known better. But She is old, and set in Her ways.”

“What happened after I passed out?” Sarah asked. She remembered falling into strong arms, but nothing else.

“The King found you unconscious, as I said, and brought you straight here. He stayed by you most of the night, pacing and sitting by turns, trying to wake you, until I threatened to evict him if he didn’t calm down. Then he went through the window, gods know where.” She shook her head at her King's behaviour.

“You can evict the Goblin King?” Sarah asked, incredulous. She’d never met someone who had that kind of authority. She couldn’t imagine Jareth putting up with it.

“One of the advantages of being his healer his whole life and setting more broken bones than you can count. He listens to old Ner’da when I tell him what needs doing. Ner’da would be me, by the way. Healer Ner’da is my full title. Please to meet you, my Lady Champion.” She fell into a curtsy, her short stature sinking even lower. Sarah waved and she stood again.

“Tell me, my Lady,” Ner’da asked her, giving her a once over, poking her here and there to see her reactions. “Do you have any questions?”

“Actually,” a voice said, “I was wondering if the Fae had any sexually transmitted diseases.” Sarah looked around, wondering who could have asked the question. When she saw the incredulous look Ner’da was giving her—Sarah's eyes widened in shock. Had that been her?

“And just what might one of those be?” Ner’da asked, carefully.

“Oh,” Sarah’s mouth continued, entirely without the permission of her brain, “it's a disease that’s passed through blood or sex from one partner to another. Humans sometimes carry them, I was wondering if the Fae did.”

“The Fae have no such disease as the one you just described, Lady Champion. Does one afflict you?” Ner’da cast her eyes around the room, taking stock of what she had and wondering how to treat the Champion. She hadn't noticed any such disease during her inspection of the Champion, physical or magical. Then again, she hadn't been looking. Perhaps—

“Oh no,” Sarah’s mouth cut her off before she could continue that line of thought, “I'm clean. I was just wondering about the Fae. Well, really Jareth, but since the Fae have no such diseases, he can’t carry one either. My other question is how do the Fae prevent pregnancies? They are always depicted as a hedonistic lot and I can imagine bastard children being a problem for this kind of society, so how do they stop that from happening?”

'Ok,' Sarah addressed herself. 'What the hell is going on here?'

'Sarah,' a voice that Sarah associated with her back-brain said, 'these are your loins talking. Remember us? Cause it seems like you don't. You wanna know why we think you don't remember? Your break up from Jake who'd you’d barely been seeing a semester was months ago and since then we've been feeling pretty neglected. You promised you'd be nice to us over March break, but were
you? No. No you weren't. And not only were you not nice to us, you taunted us with an attractive
male who spent time in your bed with you and you did NOTHING with him. NOTHING.'

'Look, can you calm down about this and STOP taking over my mouth?' Sarah beseeched.

'Oh, we are perfectly calm. Do you want to know why? You are spending the weekend in his castle
and so help us, if you do not get AT LEAST one make out session with him before you leave, we
will spend your entire test on Tuesday plaguing you with images of the Goblin King and what you
could have been doing with him. If you want a demonstration of how serious we are, we have started
gathering images of what he'd look like oiled and trust me, they are very distracting.'

'If I promise to try to kiss the Goblin King if he's interested,' Sarah asked, 'do you promise to not take
over my mouth anymore?'

'Honey,' Sarah's loins said, 'after last night, you'd better believe he's interested. So, not try. Will. And
not one kiss. A full make out session. I want moaning. Do we have a deal?'

Sarah groaned at the hard negotiator her loins seemed to be. 'Deal.'

'Good,' her loins said, 'now pay attention. This might be important later this weekend. If not, we
always have those condoms....' Sarah went back to her usual habit of ignoring the voice and focused
on what the Goblin Healer was saying.

"The Fae have spells they can cast to temporarily induce sterility in either males or females. There are
also plants that can be eaten that have the same effect. Should I have a potion made of them brought
to your rooms?" she asked, curious. She hadn't really believed that her King would have taken the
Champion as a Royal Courtesan, but maybe the rumours were true. If he didn't treat her well, she
and he would be having words. She rather liked the way the Champion hadn't complained about the
tastes of her medicines, unlike other persons of royal status she knew.

"Oh no," Sarah said quickly. "That won't be necessary." Ner'da made a mental note to stock up on
the plants she needed to make the brew just in case. Suddenly the Champion looked nervous and
worried. "You're probably going to make a report to Jareth about my check up aren't you?"

"But of course," Ner'da said. "The King will want to know of your good health!"

"Um," the Champion asked hesitantly. "Is it possible to not tell him about what I just asked? It's just,
I don't want him getting the wrong idea and..." she trailed off and looked at the Healer cautiously.
Ner'da couldn't help but take pity on the young woman. She'd had plenty of women of all kinds in
her healer's rooms asking her these kinds of questions and many of them had not wanted their young
man to know. She wasn't about to betray the Champion when she had kept the confidences of all the
others.

"Now dear," Ner'da said, taking the Champion's hand and patting it reassuringly, "I don't know why
I'd need to mention something like that. People say all sorts of strange things when dealing with
Empathy backlash. I'm sure he doesn't need to know all of your ramblings. But my Lady," the
Champion looked up when Ner'da squeezed her hand. "Promise me you'll send word if you need
that brew. I can whip it up in two flaps of a chicken's wings, no problem." She smiled as the
Champion blushed and said, "Thank you," quietly. A knock at the door interrupted the secret
conclave of the women.

Ner'da moved to the door to see who was there. Sarah glanced at the door but her view of the person
was obscured.
“Ah, Gardener Hoggle,” Ner’da said. Sarah perked up at the sound of her friend's name. “I’m afraid Apprentice Am’ya is in the city doing rounds. She’ll be back soon, but she only finishes work at the eighteenth bell. You can have her then. Until then, I don’t want you around here distracting her, so off with you.”

“Actually, Healer Ner’da,” Hoggle’s voice drifted around the door. “I was hoping to see Sarah.” Ner’da glanced over her shoulder to see her patient’s eyes imploring her.

“Alright,” she sighed, stepping out of the way, “But I want you gone before Am’ya gets back!” And she bustled off into a side room to write up her report.

“Apprentice Am’ya, huh?” Sarah asked, raising her eyebrows at Hoggle.

“I don’t think the woman staying in the Goblin King’s Castle has much room to talk,” Hoggle said huffily. Sarah raised her hands in surrender.

“I’m here for the weekend though. I’d love to meet her at some point.”

“And just what are you doing here this weekend?” Hoggle asked. “And what happened last night? The entire Kingdom felt the Labyrinth’s cry, but no one was sure what caused it. Then rumors started spreading from the Castle that the Champion had been there and was now in the healer’s wing…” He trailed off, wringing his hands. He took her hands and looked at her worriedly and asked, “Are you all right Sarah?”

“I’m fine, Hoggle,” Sarah said, smiling reassuringly. “Don’t worry. I was just suffering from something called—what was it? Oh yeah,—‘empathy backlash,’” Hoggle, if anything looked, even more worried than he had before so she hurried on, “but Ner’da says I’ll be fine. Nothing to worry about at all.” She glanced hopefully at the door. “Are the others coming?”

“No,” Hoggle said. “Sir Didymus refuses to leave his post without a direct summons from either you or Jareth and Ludo isn’t allowed near the Goblin City without warning after what happened last time you were here.”

“Well,” Sarah said. “Since I’m here for the whole weekend, I really want to see you all. So you tell Sir Didymus from me that I want to see him with the rest of you. Leave the Ludo problem to me.” Suddenly, she leaned forward and pulled Hoggle into a hug, “Thanks for coming to check on me, Hoggle. You’re a good friend.”

When, before Sarah had let him go, but after he had hugged her back, a voice Hoggle had learned to dread above all others (aside from Am’ya’s when she was really, really angry) said, “Higgins, would you care to tell me what is going on here,” all he could think was ‘Oh no, not again.’

“Nothing!” said Hoggle jumping back, “nothing at all!”

“No?” Jareth said from where he was leaning against the door frame, eyes hard, “Nothing? Tra—”

“Oh stop that!” Sarah said, cutting him off. “I was happy to see him and I hugged him and that’s all.” Ner’da, hearing the commotion, waddled back into the main room. She quickly took in the situation with a practiced eye, (the hostile King, the defensive dwarf, the exasperated Champion), and set about getting her wing back into her preferred state, empty.

“Your Majesty,” she said, falling into a curtsy and taking his attention away from the dwarf. “The Champion suffered from empathy backlash but is fine now. I recommend a day of rest but then she should be as good as new. She is free to leave at any time and you,” she said, turning and pointing to
Hoggle, “are welcome back at the 18th bell and not a moment sooner. Now shoo.” She turned to her King, curtsied again, and waddled back into her office. Hoggle looked between Sarah and Jareth, not yet moving towards the door.

“If I need you,” Sarah reassured him, “I'll call. Now, go tell the others I want to see them.”

“Well, alright,” he said, moving towards the door. “If you say so Sarah. I'll see you soon.” And without another word he was gone.

Jareth considered the patient's gown Sarah sat in and summoned her a robe to wear over it and a pair of slippers.

“Come,” he said, handing them to her, “I'll walk you to your room.” Sarah slipped on the slippers and pulled the robe around herself, smelling his scent on it. It must be one of his. She got up and took his arm and together they left the Healing Wing.

“Tell me, Sarah,” Jareth said, leading the way. “What had you wanted to get done this weekend?” He hoped to find something quiet and relaxing that they could do together. He didn't want to tax her today and have her too tired for his plans for tomorrow.

“Well,” Sarah said, considering, “I needed to go over the last of the proposals for Celtic Studies and get some reading done, and I'd like to see my friends while I'm here.”

Jareth matched her work against his own. “Might I suggest that, after you change, you come to my study and go over your proposals while I do administration for the kingdom? It's one of the few places that you are guaranteed not to be bothered by goblins.” That and her room, though many goblins had tried to get past the protective barriers he had set up to ensure she had the peace and quiet she wanted.

“Are goblins really that bad? I mean, Ner'da seemed perfectly fine,” Sarah said.

“Yes,” Jareth admitted, “But while on duty, Ner'da does not drink. The sober ones are not a problem for the most part but Goblin Ale can do... strange things to a person.” He shook his head, as if to dislodge some particularly disturbing memory. “And I'll send messengers to your friends and make the necessary arrangements so that you can see them in the afternoon.”

They were approaching her door, and Sarah turned to him and said, “That sounds nice.”

“Excellent,” the Goblin King said, grinning. He doubted he'd get much paperwork done, not with Sarah right there, but it was worth it.

“Tell Kelsa to bring you to my study when you're ready. I'll meet you there.” He took her hand, brought it to his lips and kissed it. Sarah's breath caught at the sensation. Jareth smirked, and vanished.

'You know,' Sarah thought, 'he and I are going to have to have a talk about some of his annoying habits.' She pushed open the door and saw Kelsa standing, waiting for her.


“Lady Sarah,” Kelsa said. “What would you like?” Sarah thought about it and her gaze shifted to the window and the view outside. She felt pulled to it.

“I'm going to get some fresh air. Just for a minute or two...” Kelsa watched as the dazed woman
walked past her.

“I'll collect your dress from the laundry. I'll be back soon.” Sarah waved vaguely and, taking that for a dismissal, Kelsa went to do as she'd said. The laundress's look of confusion when she'd handed over the garment had been one worth savouring. She'd marched off muttering about Royalty and their Strange Taste in Clothes. There were legends about what some of King Jareth's clothes were made of. No one was quite sure about some of them, all they knew was that the laundry staff hated dealing with them. His Majesty was very particular about his laundry.

Sarah didn't notice the door close behind her maid as she stepped onto the balcony.

“We must speak,” the Labyrinth's voice called out to her, faint with the distance.

“Soon,” Sarah replied.

“Now,” the Labyrinth demanded.

“No.” Sarah was firm. Somehow, she knew that was the right tone to take with the Labyrinth. She might have been old beyond remembering and powerful beyond reason but She needed Sarah and Sarah was not about to let anyone, or anything, walk all over her. “Soon. I will not speak with you now.”

“Come to me when you are ready then,” the Labyrinth snapped, but there was a smile in the voice. It had been such a long time since She had met Her equal. She was truly looking forward to the conversation. Her presence retreated from Sarah's mind.

While Sarah no longer felt compelled to stay outside, she did enjoy the fresh air and the feel of the sunlight on her face. She put her elbow on the stone railing and put her chin on her arms. The warmth of the sunlight was so nice. She luxuriated in the feel of it for a while.

After several minutes had passed, Sarah took a deep breath through her nose and smelled something heavenly. She opened her eyes to try to find the source. There, within easy reach of her hand, was the top of a tree that was covered in black leaves. Nestled among those strangely coloured leaves were bright red berries that looked exactly like the cinderberries from the night before. Sarah had adored their taste and longed to try another one. Hadn't Jareth said something about their being grown in the garden? She reached down and picked a cluster, pulling a few of the leaves with it. She heard the door to her room open behind her and guiltily remembered she was supposed to be meeting Jareth. She hurried back into her room to see Kelsa hanging up her black dress in the closet.

“Thanks, Kelsa,” she said, gesturing with the hand that held the berries. Kelsa's eyes zeroed in on them and they widened in shock. Sarah suddenly felt guilty for not sharing her treat and held them out to her. “Do you want some? They're really tasty…” She trailed off as Kelsa started to back away, shaking her head in horror. “Kelsa?” Sarah asked, stepping forward. Hearing her name seemed to break through her shock and Kelsa turned and ran for the door. She threw it open and yelled at the messengers who had taken up station outside it.

“Get the King! Get the Healer!” They looked at her wild state in shock, not moving. “The Champion has eaten Banshee's Call.” That broke through their spell. They took off running. “Run!” Kelsa called desperately after them, “RUN!” and run they did.

But word spreads quickly, no matter how few people know the story. Sometimes, the stories could
get horribly twisted in the retellings, but this one was too horrifying, too shocking to change on its own. The Champion was dying.

* * *

Jareth sat in his study going over a report from one of the towns near the border of his lands. It seemed their bridge had been damaged in one of the winter storms. He signed away the necessary gold to have it fixed. The labour would be more of a problem. He sighed and looked up at the door. Sarah should be arriving any second.

There was a furious pounding on the door.

“Come in,” he called. He wondered what could be wrong. The castle couldn't be on fire again, he would have smelled the smoke. A messenger tumbled into the room.

“Sire,” he gasped, preforming the fastest bow Jareth had ever seen.

“What is it?” Jareth sighed as the messenger stood up.

“Sire, it's the Champion,” he got out between breaths. Jareth's entire body tensed. What could have happened to Sarah to cause the state of alarm his messenger was in? “She ate Banshee's Call!” The blood drained from Jareth's face. No. He had to be wrong. Some miscommunication. Sarah couldn't be dying.

“Return to your post,” Jareth snapped, and disappeared.

He reappeared in Sarah's bedroom, not particularly caring at that moment how inappropriate it was. Sarah was curled up in one of the armchairs. Kelsa was putting a basin on the chest of drawers. Jareth could smell the sick from it. It seems she had already made Sarah empty her stomach. Perhaps that would help. Jareth crossed the room to kneel in front of her.

“Jareth,” Sarah asked, voice wavering and unsure. “What's going on?”

“You're going to be fine, Sarah,” he assured her before turning and bellowing at the door. “WHERE IS NER'DA?”

“Jareth,” Sarah said more firmly. “Why are you afraid?”

“I'm not afraid, Precious,” he said calmly, pushing some hair out of her face. It was true. He wasn't afraid. He was terrified. He couldn't lose her again. It would destroy him if she died. He would not lose her. So Banshee's Call had an extremely low survival rate. So Sarah's system was probably weak from the events of the night before, so WHAT. He would not lose her. He pulled her out of the chair and into his arms.

“I'm not about to lose you, Sarah,” he said firmly, cradling her close. “I am not about to let you go without doing everything possible. God and Goddess I will do the impossible if that is what it takes to keep you alive.” Sarah stiffened in his arms.

“Jareth,” she asked, her voice surprisingly level and authoritative, “am I dying?”

“No,” he said, looking her in the eye. “I will not let you die.”

“That isn't what I asked.” She pulled herself from his grip and turned to Kelsa.

“Kelsa, tell me. Why is everyone panicking?” Kelsa looked at Jareth but he was too distressed to be
“My Lady,” Kelsa said hesitantly. “The berries you ate were poisonous.”

“Right,” Sarah said, forcing herself to stay calm. Her father’s death and Karen’s subsequent injuries had given her long practice in keeping a level head in emergencies. “How poisonous exactly?”

Kelsa looked away, unable to look the dying woman in the eyes. Any minute now the signs would start setting in. All that having her be sick had done was buy them a little time. “Deadly,” she whispered. Sarah took a deep breath and turned to Jareth.

“Jareth,” she said calmly. She didn’t have the time or the luxury of panic. If she was about to die there was something she had to do. “I want you to take me to Toby.”

“What?” Jareth hissed, standing suddenly up.

“I want you to take me to Toby,” Sarah said clearly. “If I’m about to die, I want to say goodbye. I want you to take me to him so I can tell him I love him and he’s to live a long and happy life without me.”

“I will do no such thing,” Jareth hissed fiercely. He walked up and grabbed her by the shoulders. He was not taking her away from the only chance she had at survival.

“Jareth.” Sarah was almost screaming. “Take. Me. To. My. Brother!”

“You’ll be going nowhere,” said a voice from the doorway, “until I’ve had a look at you.” The pair turned to see Ner’da standing in the doorway, apprentices behind her carrying bags. “Sire, please put her on the bed. I need to examine her to see if the damage can be slowed or stopped.” Jareth scooped Sarah into his arms, despite her indignant squawk that she could still walk, and laid her on the bed. One of the apprentices hurried forward and placed a footstool by the bed which Ner’da clambered up on. She placed both knobbly hands on Sarah’s abdomen. She closed her eyes and concentrated as her hands began to glow softly yellow.

“You had her throw up the berries,” she said, eyes still closed. “Very good.” She frowned, and the light glowed more fiercely. She shook her head and stepped back.

“You,” she snapped, pointing at Kelsa, “bring me the berries she ate.”

Kelsa hurriedly scooped them off the shelf where she had put them and brought them over to the healer. Ner’da picked them up and poked at them. “No,” she muttered to herself. “These are definitely they...” She held out the bunch in front of Sarah.

“Are these the berries you ate?” she asked. Sarah nodded. “Are you sure?” Ner’da repeated, looking slightly perplexed. Sarah looked a little more closely before nodding again. They were definitely the berries she had eaten. Ner’da stepped of the footstool shaking her head. Sarah sat up the look at her while Jareth stared intently from where he had started to lean against the wall.

Ner’da curtsied to Jareth. “Sire, I don’t understand it. She’s as healthy as she was this morning. The worst I can find is her throat being a little raw from being sick. All of her organs are working, her blood is clean. I don’t understand what happened.” Jareth pushed away from the wall.

“Are you sure?” he asked, slightly incredulous. He’d used Banshee’s Cry as a means of execution before.

“Sire, I’ve been healing from before you were born. I know the signs of that poison and she had none
of them.”

“So,” Sarah said, feeling a little unsure. A lot had changed in the past half hour that she was still processing. “I'm not dying?”

“No,” Ner'da said definitively. “You're not.”

“Why?” Jareth and Sarah asked simultaneously. Ner'da shrugged but Sarah's entire body suddenly tensed.

“Did you really think,” Sarah said with a voice that was not quite her own, “Goblin King, that Our own life force could hurt Our Champion? Do not be so foolish.” There was slight scorn in her voice. “We will not lose her to something so trivial either. And, this time, she will be fine when I leave.” Sarah's body slumped and she fell back on the bed. Jareth started forward but before he could reach the bed Sarah was sitting up again. She brought her head to her temple and frowned. “That,” she said, “was weird.”

“Ah,” Ner'da said, understanding before either of the other two. “Sire, I believe you'll find that no Underground poison can touch the Champion. Her Lady protects her.”

“So,” Jareth said, one last time, just to be sure. “Sarah is in no danger?”

“None,” Ner'da said firmly.

Jareth moved forward so fast that Sarah didn't see him move. All of a sudden she was in his arms again. She could feel him shaking slightly with giddy relief. “Sarah,” he breathed into her hair. “Could you please go the rest of the weekend without terrifying me like that again? At this rate you'll be the death of me.”

“I thought you were immortal,” Sarah said, leaning into him, reassuring him she was still there and still fine.

“You always did like a challenge.” She could hear his smile.

Ner'da looked at the pair on the bed and shook her head. She mentally highlighted the note about getting the ingredients for the sterility potions as she waved all her apprentices out of the room in front of her.

This time the rumour that spread through the Castle was a much happier one. Cries of lamentation turned to cries of joy, mourning to celebration. The Champion would live.

(This incident was also the start of the rumour that the Champion was immune to all poisons, which in turn led to the Great Eggplant Incident, but that is another story.)

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer:

Author has never read The Prince. Also, Author is not Celtic and the idea for the Marriage of the King and Queen of Spring comes from other Labyrinth fics I've read, not studies of ancient celtic rituals. Please be understanding and I'm sorry if I offend anyone.
Kodos and cookies to anyone who catches the Vorkosigan reference as well as the Moist Von Lipvig one.

Please keep feeding my fuel as an author by leaving donations in the "Thoughts on the fic" box located just below! See you all (not literally, wouldn't that be weird) on Tuesday!
I think this is the fastest update I think I've ever posted. And I don't even have any new Bowie music.... Though I do have his music stuck in my head. You know, this REALLY isn't a problem. What is a problem is this is the last prewritten chapter I have. Hopefully, chapter 17 will be done by next week. However, please be patient. Or review a lot telling me what you like about the story, what you hope to see more of, etc. Not just telling me to write more though, please. There is nothing that is a bigger writing turn off then getting a review which is pure order and no appreciation... Encouragement welcome. Enjoy the chapter!

Jareth looked up from yet another book of Fae law telling him that he had to marry Klio when he heard Sarah swear gently under her breath. He had waited outside her door, allowing her to get changed before escorting him to his study personally. It had taken much gentle and not so gentle prodding from Sarah and a whispered instruction to Kelsa not to let her eat anything without him there before he was willing to leave Sarah even for the few minutes it would have taken her to change. After all, based on the last 26 hours leaving her side had a 50% chance of ending with Ner'da involved. He could hardly be blamed for his caution. Or, he admitted, if only in the privacy of his own mind, for wanting to see Sarah change. They had moved to his study and he had continued his search for a loophole and dealing with ruling as Sarah had started to read her proposals, pen in hand, making notes on the papers and a notepad separately. They had continued, each quietly going about their own work until he heard the curse.

“What is it, precious?” he asked, slipping the useless book back onto the shelf by his desk.

“Oh, nothing,” Sarah dismissed, pushing some hair behind one ear. “It’s just there’s one guy in my class who can rival even my knowledge of obscure ancient Celtic rituals and his activity sounds right, but I’d need to check some of the reference books at the library to be sure it’s historically accurate. Well,” she sighed, “there goes my break on Monday.”

“Sarah,” Jareth drawled, moving to sit next to her on the couch. “You’re speaking to one of the Fae. I lived through those times. I promise you I am much more accurate that any textbook you might find in your university library. Let me have a look at it?” He held out his hand and Sarah handed the papers over.

“What is this for?” he asked, skimming through the pages.

“Oh,” Sarah said, “My class is throwing a Beltane festival. These are ideas for various activities for the guests. You should come if you can. You can laugh at all the inaccuracies.”

“I would love to, Pet,” Jareth said, flipping a page. “But Beltane is a very busy time in the Underground. I don't think I'll be able to make it.”

“Oh,” Sarah said.

“What activity do you have planned? Storytelling of the old tales perhaps?” he asked, trying to
distract her.

“Me? I'm not planning anything. It's my job to make sure this all runs smoothly.”

Jareth smiled at the idea of Sarah in a position of power. It suited her well. He frowned, focusing more intensely on the paper he was reading.

“Incredible,” he muttered. “I’ve seen this done exactly as described at several Beltane celebrations in Albion nearly a millennium and a half ago before they fell out of fashion. It wasn't large enough for your historians to discover I had thought.” He turned to Sarah, bemused by the paper. “Just who wrote this?”

“Oh,” Sarah said, smiling, “That would be Merlin Hunithson all over. His parents are both historians with specializations in the history of England and huge fans of the old Arthurian legends, so he has all this random knowledge about this stuff that comes up in class. We occasionally have these competition to see who can come up with the most obscure bit of lore. They're great fun,” Jareth bristled slightly internally, even if, if his suspicions proved true, being jealous of this man would be not only dangerous, but unnecessary. Sarah frowned. “Even if he does almost always win.” She sighed before smiling brightly again. “But the best part is that he's rooming and best friends with this guy from my politics class named Arthur. You should hear the jokes people will say about that friendship.” Sarah stopped at the surprised expression on Jareth's face.

“The Once-and-Future King has returned? It's about damn time. I thought he'd be back sometime in the Hundred Years’ war, but no. Apparently the Fates had other plans for him. He's studying politics, you say?”

“Wait,” Sarah said, incredulous. “You mean to tell me that the Arthurian legends are real?”

Jareth merely raised an eyebrow, his expression clearly saying 'You are in the Underground castle of the Fae Goblin King, are later meeting your friends a dwarf, a rock-caller, and a fox-knight, Aboveground you are friends with part-selkies, a changeling and two people whose families have long histories of dealing with the Fae. Is there any reason that you'd find this hard to believe?'

Sarah sank back in the sofa. “Of course they're real,” she muttered. She turned to face Jareth, “So you're telling me that my close friend Merlin is—”

“The Emrys of old? The most powerful sorcerer to ever grace Albion? Over a thousand years old? Yes, Precious, he is.” He smiled. “To be honest Sarah, can you really be that surprised? Look at your other friends, surely Emrys can't be that much of a surprise after that.”

“Yeah,” she sighed, “I really should have seen this one coming. At this point I should stop assuming my friends are normal human beings and start thinking that they are all mythical somehow.”

“Sarah,” Jareth purred, “I thought you'd learned the dangers of taking things for granted. I'm almost entirely certain that the girl Sokka is dating has no connection the Underground, aside from courting a part-selkie. Now tell me,” he said, moving closer to Sarah to look at the other papers in her lap. “What else is planned for this Beltane fair?” And so the two sat, reading over the various proposals and discussing the best ways to organize the fair. As the morning progressed, Jareth's arms went along the back of the couch and slipped around her shoulders as they discussed how to lay out the fairground. Sarah leaned against him as they argued over the pros and cons of various traditions of the Maypole and the marriage of the King and Queen of Spring, the exact wording of the handfasting. He rested his cheek against her hair as they discussed what kind of food should be made available. Jareth smiled as he inhaled her scent and watched her hands dance in front of her as she described which music she was hoping to have played. She leaned, comfortable against him, and he
held her close, as he had longed to for years. It was a timeless moment, beautiful for its simplicity—and it was totally ruined when there was a knock at the door. Sarah jerked upright and Jareth just managed to not clutch her close before calling, “Come in,” a definite sharpness in his tone.

A servant Sarah didn't recognize entered. “Lunch is ready, Sire,” He said, bowing. Sarah's stomach made itself known, loudly, having not had anything to eat since dinner the night before. Sarah blushed a little, before remembering something.

“Can you have my package brought up from the kitchens to lunch?” she asked.

“Of course, my Lady Sarah,” the servant said, bowing again. Jareth, curiosity piqued at the mention of the package she had brought, stood, preparing to go to lunch. He offered his hand to Sarah and she took it, standing before turning to stack up her proposals. She figured she'd do the last few that night. Arm in arm, they walked down to the dining hall.

Once again Jareth pulled out a chair for Sarah to sit. He sat, and the servants began to bring in the food. Today's appetizer was soup. Sarah set to it with gusto. She'd been through a lot that morning on no fuel and was desperate to reverse the situation: more food, less danger. The soup was delicious, creamy and spicy, and it made her entire mouth just feel happy.

“So,” Sarah asked, halfway through her bowl. “What were you reading earlier?”

“Yet more law and lore on marriages,” he said, looking annoyed.

“Find anything useful?” she asked, sounding vaguely hopeful.

“No unless I plan to murder Klio, no. That, or committing suicide in a noble and useless way, seem to be the only historic options for dealing with unwanted marriages, and neither of them really suits my purpose.” He ran a hand through his wild hair.

“What about those papers you were going through? More law?”

“No,” Jareth sighed, “those were written statement from last week's court. Not all the cases are simple or easily solvable. For example, one city needs funds to pay workers to restore a bridge and get the materials needed. The storms I mentioned caused quite a lot of damage and there's only so much magic I can use.” Sarah's eyebrows went up. “Oh, yes,” Jareth assured her, “there is a limited amount of magic I can use. Admittedly, those limits are very large, but the sheer size of the areas affected would be problematic.” He sighed as Sarah settled back in her seat. “Fortunately none of the areas are in bad enough shape that they will starve, if I can get some of the excess of other areas to help them stock up for winter. At least,” he growled, looking angry as Sarah frowned, “I wouldn't have to worry if it weren't for that thrice cursed Gel'tiec.” Jareth continued muttering under his breath in another language. Sarah wasn't sure what the words actually meant but, judging from the very controlled looks on the servants face's and the vehemence behind them, she was pretty sure it was swearing. She was annoyed that her translation didn't seem to work.

“Gel'tiec?” Sarah asked, cutting Jareth off mid-word, “Who's that?

“Ah,” Jareth said, getting a hold of himself again. “Of course, you wouldn't know. Gel'tiec is a bandit who operates in the East of the Kingdom. Well, operated. My guards captured him during his last raid. He will be killed, no question in that. He's caused far too much damage for any other sentence to be considered.” He paused as Sarah frowned. “He's stolen food that people will desperately need come winter as well as attacking and weakening bridges and attacking and killing many of the Hill Goblins who have been bringing relief supplies for some slight or other one Hill Goblin apparently did him years ago.” He snorted, and, noticing Sarah's mildly confused expression,
explained, “Gel'tiec is part of the Plain Goblins. You can tell them apart by their tusks. In any case, he's done far too much damage and death is the only possible choice.”

“I'm not disagreeing,” Sarah said, raising a hand placatingly. “If anything, I'm wondering how one man managed to do so much damage.”

“That,” Jareth snarled, “is part of the problem. Gel'tiec is nothing if not charismatic and he had a fairly large following of young Goblins. Them,” he sounded a little more uncertain, “I am a little less sure of what to do with. They aren't old enough to be recognized by law as adults, and thus held accountable for their crimes but I can't afford to let these actions go unpunished. It sends the wrong message as well as leaving the families that lost people completely unavenged.” He ran his hand through his hair again, thinking again over possible solutions.

“I've heard it said,” said Sarah slowly, “that when you have one problem, it is often impossible to fix. However, when you have more that one problem, they tend to solve each other.” Jareth cocked his head at her, inquiringly. “Well,” Sarah continued, “It seems to me that that's what you have here. You need cheap labour and have a bunch of people that you don't know what to do with. Split them into smaller groups so they don't band together and set them, mixed with a bunch of non criminals to show them the craft, to work on fixing the damage they caused. Maybe take special precautions for the more violent ones but you get cheap labour, they get rehabilitated and marketable skills that they can sell after their term is up, which should help stop them returning to a life of crime. Your problems solve each other and after it might even help your economy.” Sarah smiled brightly as she popped the last bit of rabbit into her mouth as Jareth stared at her in shock.

“That,” he murmured quietly, “is not in The Prince.”

“Nope,” Sarah said smugly. “A university education has to be good for something, huh?”

Jareth threw back his head and laughed.

When the laughter had died down, a servant stepped away from the wall.

“My Lady Champion,” he asked, “would now be an appropriate time for us to bring your package?” Sarah started, then turned to face him and nodded. He stepped out through a small door Sarah hadn't noticed before before stepping back in with her gift.

Jareth eyed the strangely shaped object with curiosity and excitement. He wondered what Sarah could have possibly gotten him. From its shape it wasn't a book or piece of clothing. Sarah took the gift, nodded her thanks to the servant and turned to Jareth.

“Happy 2400th birthday Jareth! Sorry the gift is late. And I won't sing the song since I know it's illegal, but.” Sarah started humming the forbidden song as she handed over the gift. Jareth smiled like a child at Christmas before tearing at the paper without any of the dignity or circumstance it seemed a King should have. When he'd finally rid the package of its concealing paper he stared at the gift in confusion. He couldn't quite believe what was sitting in front of him.

By all appearances, it was a fruit basket.

She had gotten him a fruit basket.

A fruit basket, by the God and Goddess. It was perfect. Jareth smirked, knowing exactly what do to do with it. He waved his hand and the servants trickled out of the room. He didn't want any collateral damage if things went wrong. He picked up a pineapple that sat at the top of the basket and revealed, safely nestled in a space made by a couple of apples, a perfect, plump peach. His smirk widened. It
seemed the fates were smiling upon him. He plucked it from its perch and carefully cut out a piece of it. He ate it, savouring its particularly sweet juices before proffering another slice to Sarah.

“Oh no,” Sarah leaning as far away from the from the proffered peach slice as possible. “I am violently allergic to peaches.”

“Hm?” Jareth asked, not withdrawing his hand in the slightest.

“Yep,” Sarah said, glaring at him and ignoring the offering. “When I eat peaches, I break out in violence. This is such a lovely dining room, I'd so hate for it to become collateral damage.” Jareth breathed a laugh and popped the peach into his own mouth. It was far too good to waste. However, he couldn't simply let Sarah be. That defiant spark in her eye was far too delicious to waste. He placed the peach to one side and picked up an apple instead. He carefully cut a slice and offered it to her.

“But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it. For the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,” she quoted with a raised eyebrow.

“Wrong lore, Precious,” Jareth said, amused at her caution. “Although, that is the reason apples stopped being good distractions. Around the turn of the millennium people stopped taking apples offered by mythical creatures. It took me a while to figure out why. After I did though, it was a simple matter to switch from apples to peaches. Besides, I think one death scare is enough for the day.”

“You mean you give out peaches often?” When Jareth refused to answer and looked meaningfully at the apple slice, Sarah sighed, took it and popped it into her mouth. Jareth sat back and started cutting more fruit.

“But these days,” he said, taking some more of the peach. “But in the old days, when people actually knew the lore, grew up with it and had some idea of how to deal with magic, I had to hand them out much more often.

“You must have gotten really good at dancing,” Sarah supposed, before looking indignant. “Did you really expose people even younger than me to that kind of dream? I was barely old enough to understand what was going on in there. There are some things that young people should just not be exposed to!”

'Like Goblin Market,' Jareth couldn't help but thinking, hoping that Toby hadn't suffered irreparable damage from the repeated telling of the story. He feared, however, that it was too late. “Sarah,” he said. “Must you continue to take things for granted?” Her eyebrows went up as she looked a little sheepish. “Most runners didn’t even get dreams. They just had their memories taken so that they wandered around uselessly until their thirteen hours were up.” Sarah really wanted to say that that wasn’t fair, but she just knew that he’d ask her if she’d found a basis for comparison, so she kept her mouth shut. “And the ones that did get dreams I mostly didn't even bother with. They were too boring to be a useful expenditure of my time. But you,” he said, leaning forward, eyes intense. “You made it to the Oubliette, far further that most runners did, in record time. You stole Hoblins’—”

“Hoggle,” Sarah interrupted, not even sure why she bothered anymore.

“Yes, him—jewels to get him to work for you. You'd befriended the Rock-Caller and even as I gave Hoggle the peach you were beating the Fireys at their own game. You stood up to me when others would have cowered in fear. Your only reaction to me taking time away from you was to try harder, after a bit of complaining. You even called the Labyrinth a piece of cake.” Sarah got ready to duck.

It was a habit she hadn't quite managed to kick even years later. Her friends had given her weird
looks at first, but eventually they had just learned to cut the expression out of their speech whenever she was around.

“You, Miss Sarah Williams,” Jareth continued, eyes bright. “You intrigued me. I wanted to watch you, see what made you tick, as well ensuring my victory.” Sarah scoffed at that. “It almost came to nothing though. You probably won't be surprised to hear how much work it took to get the damn dwarf to give you the peach. I had to threaten him multiple times.”

“And even then, he only gave it to me when I was hungry,” Sarah said, thinking back. Jareth nodded. Honestly, Sarah was no longer angry at her friend for giving her that peach. She had forgiven him, back in the Labyrinth, before the Goblin City, but some part of her had still hurt from that betrayal. Time, though, as it was wont to do, had smoothed over the hurt and allowed her to heal.

“I honestly think it would have worked though,” Jareth said, eyes going distant as he imagined dancing with her for much, much longer. “If it hadn't been for that thrice-damned—”

A distant bell in the city sounded the hour and a servant ducked into the room, bowing.

“Sire,” he said, keeping his head down, knowing the Goblin King probably didn't want to be disturbed when he was alone with the Champion, especially if the rumours he had heard flying about from both his people and the human servants, that she was to become the Royal Courtesan, were true. He glanced at her from the corner of his eye. He supposed she was alright, for a human. “The Royal Seamstress is ready to take the measurements of the Champion.”

Jareth sighed and waved and said, “Thank you Al'fiec. Would you please show the Champion to her rooms?” Sarah stood slowly, giving Jareth a curious look. “If you are to stay in the Underground for any amount of time,” Jareth explained, “you will need clothes for important gatherings with officials from other lands as they they will want to meet you. The first true Champion in time past remembering? You'll be a sensation.” She opened her mouth to protest. “And it would reflect badly on me if you weren't dressed to the height of fashion, so go.” He waved his hand at her in a shooing motion. Sarah smiled at the silly gesture on the body of a King but got up to follow Al'fiec to the seamstress.

Jareth leaned back in his chair and popped another slice of scrumptious peach into his mouth. He was glad he had managed to keep the real reason she had needed to see the Seamstress today a secret. After all, he wanted her to be completely surprised.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, please leave a contribution in the little box. Every comment is one step closer to a new chapter. And remember Sarah's deal with her back brain....

Also, Pendi. Seriously, why tunics?
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

HI GUYS! I'M BACK! And with this chapter not too late too. I'm finally finding the time to write again! YAY! Nothing like your OTP hounding you to keep you up writing till two in the morning..... YAWN.

Anyway, many thanks to my beta for finding time to fix all my grammar errors. Which there were quite a few of. Anyway I hope you enjoy this weeks chapter! Please leave your thoughts in the little box.

Sarah followed the goblin—Al'fiec was it—as he led her through the castle, chatting all the way. “My mother, may she rest in peace, worked in the kitchens and she once served the last Queen and King dinner personally when they were short on serving staff. She'd never let anyone forget it either, not that you can really blame her. It would do her good to see me not just serving but actually speaking the Champion of the Labyrinth herself, even if you won't be queen, if you'll excuse me saying so. Rumour says the King wants you as a courtesan.”

Sarah was really wanting to slap whoever had started that rumour. Or kick in him the fork, if it was Jareth himself. It wasn't like it would be a hard target.

“Of course, I don't really see what he sees in you, but I suppose you being human I wouldn't. I mean, I'm sure for a human you look quite nice but you're far too tall and pink for a goblin, if you don't mind me saying, lady.”

“Mh-mh,” Sarah muttered. It hadn't taken her long to realize she wouldn't get any more in.

“Lady,” the goblin said, sounding almost shy. That more than anything made Sarah pay attention.

“Would you mind breathing some fire? I mean, if people know I've seen the Champion, they'll ask me right away if I've seen her breathe fire.”

“You think I can breath fire?” Sarah asked, blinking.

“Of course!” Al'fiec said, smiling brightly. “Everyone knows the Champion can breathe fire! It's how you defeated the mighty Galsnic in the forest of Argh as you ventured to save your brother! Ask anyone!” Sarah was really wondering where these rumours came from. At least this one she was pretty sure Jareth didn't start. “But why am I telling you that? You were there!”

“Right,” Sarah said, thinking fast. “The thing is, breathing fire is dangerous, and if I did it in here, you would get hurt. I need an open space if I'm going to breath fire,” What was the harm, she thought, in getting herself a reputation? And the little guy looked so hopeful, she couldn't quite bring herself to disappoint him. Al’fiec nodded furiously.

“Of course! And His Majesty would be furious if we broke all the furniture in this hallway... again...” Sarah couldn't quite keep back a laugh at the sheepish expression on his fearsome face. “Anyway!” he said brightly, and quickly changed the subject. “Here we are! Seamstress Her’ta's workroom. I'll see you back to your rooms when you're done here. Afternoon Her’ta!” he called as
he pushed open the door. A relatively tall, dark green goblin wearing a light blue dress turned around. The cut of the dress flattered her tall figure; that as well as the colour softened the masculine features of her face, and suggested curves that, upon a closer examination, were not quite there. 'She's like Miles,' Sarah realized. Miles, her mother’s friend, had had to argue with stage managers many times to be allowed into the correct changing room, all because they found it ridiculously hard to understand that he’d been born in the wrong type of body.

“Oh Al'fic,” she called in a low rumble. “Get out of here, I've got work to do. Shoo. Go on, shoo!” Al'fic hurriedly ducked out the door, closing it behind him. Her'ta looked Sarah up and down. “You'll be the Champion then. Come in, come in, I've got to get your measurements and there's a dress I want to see if I can take in to fit you.” She waved Sarah forward and Sarah stepped obediently into the indicated place and lifted her arms.

Her'ta muttered to herself as she took the measurements of Sarah's waist, hips and inseam before going and getting a small step ladder to measure her bust, back length, neck, arms and so on. Eventually she walked over to her work desk and started marking down all the numbers she'd got. She peered at Sarah before marking some other things down and muttering, “No appreciation for the time art takes”. Sarah wondered what she could be talking about, but before she could ask, Her'ta was off again, this time to a part of the room hidden by a screen. She bustled out a few seconds later with a bundle of red and orange cloth in her hands. “Take off the Aboveground clothes, will ya? I need to see how this’ll fit on you.” Sarah glanced around. She still wasn't comfortable changing in front of people. The locker room was one thing, you were supposed to change there and everyone else was changing too. This was different.

Sensing her discomfort, Her'ta nodded to the screen. “Change behind there if you must,” she said, handing Sarah the bundle of cloth. “But be quick about it.” Sarah hurried to do as she was told. She slipped into the dress without even really looking at it. She stepped back out and hurried over to the stool.

“Hm,” Her'ta said, talking to herself more than Sarah. “Not bad for working from only pictures...” When had Jareth gotten picture of her? “But 'bout an inch too long and needs about half an inch in at the waist. Well,” she said to Sarah. “Take it off so I can make the adjustments. And the cobbler should be here any minute and I'll have this finished in time for dinner.” She shooed Sarah back behind the screen.

“Cobbler?” Sarah asked pulling on the jeans she'd chosen that morning.

“Yes, he's my grandson,” Her'ta said proudly. “And it's not really like you can wear your new wardrobe with... those...” she made a disapproving face and gestured at the beat up runners Sarah hadn't bothered to slip on again. Sarah blushed slightly. She'd brought nice shoes for the formal dinner. “Then again,” part of her wondered, “doesn't dining with a king make all meals formal? Maybe I shouldn't have brought the jeans.” Luckily, before she could spend more time worrying about possible poor fashion choices there was a knock at the door. A human boy probably the age Sarah had been when she'd run the Labyrinth stuck his head in.

“Hi Gran-Gran, I'm here for the Champion's measurements!” he said brightly.

“Stephen!” Her'ta cried, shocked. “Where is your father?”

“He's finishing up the last touches on a set of boots needed for tomorrow so he sent me.”

“Are you sure you're up to this?” Her'ta asked, worried. Serving the Royal household was important work.
“I'm sure he'll do just fine,” Sarah said definitely. This sounded like an old argument and the kid could use a chance. Hopefully the taste of responsibility wouldn't go as disastrously wrong as hers nearly had. Then again, if it did, at least she really did like her runners.

“See,” Stephen said, grinning at his great-grandmother. “She thinks I'll do just fine!”

“Stephen,” scolded Her'.ta in the tone of adults everywhere, “Manners!” she gestured at Sarah. Stephen's eyes went wide and he fell into a deep bow.

“MyLadyChampionitissogoodtofinallymeetyou!” he said, almost too quickly to understand. Sarah looked down at the kid fondly. He, she thought, she could probably get to drop the 'My Lady Champion”. He knelt before her and pulled some strings similar to the ones Her'ta had used from one of his pockets along with a pencil and paper.

“May I have your foot, My Lady Champion?” he asked, looking up at her. Sarah raised her foot and he took off her sock and brought it to rest on a board he'd placed on his lap. As he started measuring her foot, the obvious question finally occurred to her. Really, you could hardly blame her for taking so long to realize it. After all, she'd had a very full past 24-er, 26 hours. She looked between the Goblin great-grandmother, working on the dress and the human great-grandson, measuring her feet. Eventually, she gave up trying to figure it out and decided on the straightforward approach.

“So,” she asked, “how did you two become related? If you don’t mind my asking?”

“I took in his grandfather when he didn't fit in well with the human families. Sometimes, a child just has more goblin in them than human, or the human community just has too many children for the adults to properly take care of. When that happens, a human child is given to a goblin family who wants to take one in. My son Rupert came to me and my Her'feic like that. Then he married a nice Human girl and moved back to the Human Village. It's quite nice there. You should visit it some time. You'd fit right in.”

“Other foot please, My Lady Champion.”

“Please call me Sarah,” Sarah said, giving him her other foot. She didn't have to turn about to feel the glare Her'ta sent Stephen's way. Stephen looked rather desperately between Sarah and his great-grandmother, looking the definition of “stuck between a rock and a hard place.” He took a deep breath and said, rather uncertainly, “Of course, my lady Sarah.”

It seemed that was the compromise that she would have to live with. Her'ta settled back into her chair with her sewing. It was then that Al'fic stuck his head in the door.

“Is the Champion finished yet? The rock-caller is here looking for her and none of us want to keep him long.”

Sarah started bouncing in place, impatient to see all her friends again. It had only been a few weeks, but it was such a rare treat. Besides, if she was late, Ludo might start crying. Yes, Sarah did know he only wanted friends to keep him company as he cried, but it had been really hard to convince Karen that yes, she really did want to start an indoor rock garden, that summer he had fallen down the stairs. Stephen held her foot firmly still as he quickly took the last few measurements.

“Done,” Stephen said, letting go of her foot. Sarah shoved her feet into her shoes and was out the door, throwing a hurried but heartfelt, “Thank you!” over her shoulder. Stephen considered the disappearing back of the Savior, and the squat goblin, hurrying to keep up.

“She's a strange one,” he said, smiling. “But I like her.” Her'ta reached up and smacked her great-
grandson on the small of the back.

“Ow!” he cried, rubbing the sore spot.

“Don't be looking at her like that. I saw the look in your eye young man. His Majesty won't be having with any of that. Now hurry back to your father. We both have a lot to do before tomorrow morning.” Thinking about all the work left back at the shop, Stephen sighed. Why was it Gran-Gran was always right?

* * *

When Al'fiec stopped to announce her at the entrance to the garden where her friends were waiting, Sarah didn't bother stopping with him. She just burst past him and into the waiting arms of Ludo. Affiec threw his arms into the air and left her to it. After all, if the Champion could breathe fire, she had nothing to fear. That reminded him. Petitions were this afternoon, perhaps he should go talk to His Majesty about getting that open space for the demonstration.

“Sawah!”

“My Lady!”

“Hello, Sarah.”

Her friends said as they gathered around her to hug her, bow to her and pat her shoulder, respectively.

“My Lady, what brings you to the Underground? Is there some mischief afoot? Do you need our help, my Lady?” Sir Didymus asked, drawing his sword and starting to wave it around. “I will fight any creature, go to any land, be it through the desert or over the ocean! I will brave—”

“Sir Didymus! Sir Didymus!”

“My Lady?” he asked, his name finally breaking through his furious bravado.

“Sir Didymus, I'm celebrating Jareth's birthday with him and staying for the weekend. Didn't Hoggle tell you?”

“I did.” Hoggle grumbled. “But, you know him, never listens when he thinks there is an adventure to be had.”

“Why Hoggle!” Sir Didymus cried indignantly as Ambrosius stuck his head out from behind the bush he was using for cover to nod, and Sarah giggled uncontrollably. When she regained her composure, she turned to Sir Didymus and spoke with mock severity.

“I must say though, Sir Didymus, I find that you have seriously neglected your duties to me.” Sarah struggled to remain serious as Sir Didymus looked horrorly stricken. “Imagine my shock,” she continued, “when I arrived in the Underground only to hear of Am'ya not from one of my friends, but from Healer Ner'da.” Sir Didymus turned to Hoggle, wide eyes incredulous.

“You mean to tell me you have not told the Lady Sarah about Apprentice Am'ya?”

Hoggle looked at the floor, wringing his hands. “Well, I don't think it ever came up really.”

“In over a year?” Sir Didymus said.

“It's been over a year?” Sarah asked, looking at Hoggle, who suddenly seemed to find the stonework
on the bench he was sitting on the most interesting thing in the world.

“Er... yeah,” he finally got out, after an expectant silence.

“Well?” Sarah asked. Hoggle looked up and sighed in defeat. He never could refuse Sarah.

“Am'ya's father owns the jeweller’s in the Goblin City. I met her one day while looking at a new selection. She was beautiful,” he sighed, his bulging eyes gone dreamy. “She was an apprentice healer at the Castle but she knew her gems down pat. She was impressed that I had real, genuine plastic. From the Aboveground, I told her. After that, I'd see her around the shop and we'd chat, and, well, one thing led to another...” He trailed off smiling.

“And, Friend Hoggle...” Sir Didymus said, encouraging him to keep going. Hoggle shot him a dirty look.

“And,” he said gruffly. “I'm saving up to have a jewel imported to make into a necklace to propose with. She don't know yet. But I can't just get her something from her father's shop, now can I? It would hardly be a surprise. Her father is terrible at keeping secrets,” he explained at Sarah's confused look. Sarah looked at the other two.

“What do you guys think of her?” she asked.

“Apprentice Am'ya is a fair and beautiful lady whose compassion is only matched by her intelligence,” Sir Didymus began.

“Am'ya fwiend,” Ludo nodded.

“And she loves our dear friend Hoggle from the bottom of her heart.”

“Am'ya loves Hoggle,” Ludo continued to nod.

“And you want to marry her?” Sarah asked Hoggle, just making sure she had all the facts straight.

“With all my heart,” he said, conviction in his voice.

“Right,” she said, a plan forming in her mind. “Don't order any jewels from far off kingdoms yet. I've got something I'll need to give you.”

“You're planning on returning to the Underground soon, My Lady?”

Sarah pulled her necklace out from under her shirt.

“Jareth gave me this, allowing me to travel between the Under and Above whenever I want.” The three stared at the symbol of leadership in the Goblin Kingdom that hung around their friend's neck. “I'll come down and give it to you once it's ready. Now is there anything else I should know about that you three haven’t told me?” The Three shared a glance. Surely Jareth/His Majesty/King-y would have told her what it implied before asking her to wear it. Surely....

They all shook their heads, answering no.

“Right,” Sarah said, settling down comfortably on the bench. “So tell me more about Am'ya.”

* * *

Kelsa arrived in the garden two hours later to find all four laughing uproariously, as Sir Didymus mimed out his great battle with the fearsome Doormouse of Ack!
“My Lady Sarah,” she said, coming forward. “It's time to get ready for dinner.”

“What?” Sarah said, turning to her and checking her watch. “It’s only barely past noon. Wait... that can't be right,”

“Time moves differently in the Above and Underground.” Hoggle reminded her.

“Dinner will be in a little over an hour and a half and Seamstress Her'ta has sent your dress for the evening,” Kelsa said, obviously feeling that was not nearly enough time. Sarah sighed and got up. She turned to her friends. “I'll visit you guys again soon. And don't order that jewel.” She gave them all one more hug before following Kelsa into the Castle to her rooms to change.

Getting into the dress, Sarah now understood why Kelsa had thought the other dress simple. The lacing had had to be redone three times before she and Kelsa could come to an compromise between being able to breathe and having the dress look as it should. Sarah was just glad there was no corset. She'd heard horror stories about that and swooning into the Goblin King's arms once a weekend was quite enough, thank you very much, despite what her back-brain might think. Eventually, the dress was actually laced up, all the cloth free of wrinkles and falling nicely. Sarah sat down at the vanity to allow Kelsa to do her hair, then was made to resit down, making sure the dress wasn't folded up under her. At this point she was seriously considering going back to the jeans and t-shirt she'd been wearing earlier. But Kelsa had already put in so much work, as had Her'ta so she sat still and let Kelsa weave what she thought were topazes (Hoggle would know, perhaps she'd ask him later) of various warm colours set in gold through her hair.

There was a knock at the door and Kelsa added the last few touches to Sarah's hair, leaving it looking just this side of wild before answering. At the door was a rather haggard-looking Stephen.

“I've brought your slippers for tonight, Lady Sarah,” he said, holding out a wrapped parcel. Sarah started to get up, but sat down after getting a look from Kelsa. Stephen came over to her and knelt before unwrapping the parcel. A pair of soft, doeskin slippers in a warm brown colour lay inside and he gently slid them onto her feet. They fit better than any shoes Sarah had ever worn, seeming to caress her feet as she wore them.

“Thank you, Stephen,” she said, wiggling her toes in her comfortable shoes.

“All in a day’s work, My Lady Sarah,” he said with a satisfied smile. “Which reminds me.” He stood, and looked from Sarah to the door. Sarah looked at him blankly, then to Kelsa for a cue on what she was supposed to do.

“He needs to be dismissed, Lady,” she explained.

“Right,” Sarah said, slightly uncertainly, “you can go now.”

“Thank you, My Lady,” he said, bowing before withdrawing.

“Right,” Kelsa said, coming forward, “Let me paint your face and you'll be ready in time for dinner.” ‘If only just,’ she added to herself. Getting the dress laced up had taken longer than it should have. But the undergarments the Saviour wore seemed like they would be much more comfortable than a corset. Easier to move in. She’d bring the concept to the attention of Lady Kliora. She had experimented with the Savior’s paints earlier in the day, and could now use them fairly well. After a few more minutes, she was done.

“Come and see yourself,” she said, leading Sarah over to the mirror. Sarah looked and was surprised by what she saw. “Wait till Jareth sees this,” she thought, before starting to follow Kelsa to the
Jareth sat at the dinner table, holding his most perplexing petition of the day in his hands. He was still trying to figure out why the goblins would specify that the open space they wanted needed to have “nothing that could catch on fire, your Majesty. She didn't want to do no damage.” He suspected Sarah had something to do with it.

As if summoned by his thoughts, the doors opened and Sarah swept into the room. She looked like fire. Her dress was red bleeding into oranges and yellows. Her hair was stylized in a kind of wild order on her head, in a style he recognized as similar to his own. Perched in her hair were topazes, also in fire’s tones. He smiled to himself. She looked like the fire he had so often thought of her as. Perhaps having servants overhear conversations was not as bad as all that. Especially since they seemed to have the sense not to speak to her about the royal courtesan rumour. He got up and pulled out the chair for her. She settled down in her seat and Jareth reclaimed his before handing her the piece of paper he had been examining earlier.

“Sarah,” he asked as she took it from his hands, “would you care to explain why I received this petition today?” Sarah read it over and blushed slightly.

“Um, right,” she said, putting the paper on the table as the servants began bringing forth the food. “That reminds me. Do you know of any spells that would let me breathe fire?”

“Sarah,” he asked, an edge creeping into his voice, “Why do you want to breathe fire?”

“Well, you see,” Sarah started, taking great interest in the soup that was now in front of her. “One of the goblins asked if I could breathe fire, and he just looked so hopeful, so I told him that it was too dangerous to breathe fire indoors and...”

“Sarah....” Jareth groaned, leaning back in his chair and wondering what insane thing his subjects would decide she could do next. That she would agree to demonstrate. He sighed and sat upright again. “I believe I do know a spell. I'll arrange for a date and time for the demonstration. I rather think I'd have a revolt on my hand if I refused.” He pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Surely it wouldn't be that bad...” Sarah trailed off, blowing on her soup. Jareth just gave her a look.

“So,” she asked brightly, “what were you up all day?”

“Hearing petitions,” he said giving her a dry look. He didn't bring up the message he'd received from the high council, once again telling him that his petition wouldn’t be heard. You’d think the damn council would want the Labyrinth’s Champion to be queen but they kept refusing to give him audience.

“What happened?” Sarah asked cautiously, taking in his murderous frown. Jareth looked at her, an expression she couldn't quite read in his eyes before he masked it over.

“Nothing, Precious. Just wondering what preposterous thing the goblins will bring me next. Why just today they---”

“Chicken Droppings,” Sarah said firmly. Jareth was brought up short wondering where she had managed to pick up that expression. “Your goblins annoy you. They aggrivate you. They have at least once driven you to drink.” He and the damn dwarf were going to have words if Sarah knew the entirety of that story. Well, one word. Or at least the definition thereof. Or rather, a demonstration of it. It was a wondrous thing that the English language had such a word as defenestration. “They even
make you angry, but that level of frustration and helplessness? No goblin could cause that level of emotion. You'd have Bogged them by now. That or thrown them out of the window.” Jareth smiled at the image of his problems being so easily disposed of. Sarah looked at him, eyes fierce and face concerned.

“Oh, Sarah,” he sighed. Her breath caught. “As I have said, I am bound to the Council's will in this matter. I have been trying to request an audience to inform them of your return and at least request a delay if not a total breaking off of my engagement to Klio. But they refuse to hear my petition. It's ridiculous! As a King they owe me audience and yet they have repeatedly refused even to read my missives.”

“Storm the castle?” Sarah suggested. When he looked at her incredulously, she shrugged. “It worked for me.”

“While that is a charming idea I have been entertaining for a while, it wouldn't work. Such actions would make the Council, never mind the King, extremely unsympathetic to my cause. Not only that but it would have my case dismissed for a month. Once I have my petition heard I will probably have to do campaigning to bring the anti-mortal faction of the council into line. They will simply dismiss you because of your birth. Never mind that you overcame the hardest trial the Underground could have given you.”

Sarah bristled angrily, “Let me at them. I'll teach them to dismiss me.”

Jareth considered her thoughtfully. “Actually,” he said. “That's not a half bad idea. Let them see what it is like for you to turn their worlds upside down.”

“The Escher room was your thing, not mine, Goblin King.”

“Oh, Sarah,” he purred, “there's more than one way to turn someone's world upside down. For example,” he reached forward and stroked the inside of her wrist with a gloved hand. He started tracing the veins visible against her pale skin up towards her elbow. Sarah knocked her fork to the floor and quickly ducked under the table to pick it up and get away from his hand which was already taking far too many—few, her back-brain corrected—liberties. Although, her back-brain thought, this position does give us quite a nice view of some other bits of anatomy. Looks like we weren't the only ones excited by the prospect of touching, huh Goblin King? While Sarah's back-brain was focused on that sight, Sarah's fore-brain realized that this brought her near other parts of him that made certain things possible. Sarah acted quickly, before she could talk herself out of it, then grabbed her fork and came back to the top side of the table where Jareth was looking at her with a raised eyebrow. While she had been under the table, her mostly finished bowl of soup had been exchanged for a plate of what might have been venison. Whatever it was, it certainly tasted good.

Sarah looked over at Jareth who was obviously enjoying it. “Have you ever read Pride and Prejudice?” she asked curiously. It would be interesting to get such a different perspective before her test. Her teacher, John Smith—she took a moment to be jealous about his hair—always threw out the weirdest essay questions.

“Wonderful social commentary, terrible romance. Darcy's character was so weak,” he replied flippantly before spearing something that looked like a lime green potato with his fork.

“I'd hardly call him a weak character,” Sarah protested. “And what do you mean, terrible romance. So they don't like each other at first, so what? They grow to respect each other and care for each other and that is what's important.”

Jareth simply scoffed. “He is totally weak. He could have used his position of power over her to
claim her after he helped her sister. But does he? No. He lets her go on her merry way, never even wanting her to know what he did for her. It was a wonderful opportunity wasted. If he were a member of my court, I'd have him dismissed for such stupidity. Bargain from a position of power,” he sneered at her, “begging never works.”

“He wanted a lover, not a debtor. And in that case, how do you justify your actions last year when —” her eyes turned sad and she looked at her plate. “When you saved Karen’s life. That was you, wasn’t it?”

He sighed and gazed at the ceiling. “Technically, that was Klio. She is a far more skilled healer than I. But yes, I did take her there.”

“You did that, and yet you extracted no payment from me. I expected you to, the first few weeks, but you never came....” she trailed off.

“There are two reasons I did not come to you. First, I am bound to the power of your wishes. What's said is said. Even after you had made that wish, I still had no power over you. I still could neither see nor speak to you, never mind appear before you to extract payment. If you hadn't been at home taking care of Toby when I came, I might not have been able to save her at all.” He looked at her then, eyes considering. “If I had been able to, who knows what payment I would have demanded for services rendered.” Sarah shuddered at the suddenly alien look in his eye. She suddenly wasn't that hungry, but still needing something else to look at, started pushing her food around her plate.

“I see, Goblin King,” she said quietly. They both knew that to keep Karen alive there was nothing she would not have done. She couldn't let Toby lose both his parents at once.

“Why do you ask?” He wanted to lighten the mood. Besides, he neither wanted nor needed to extract that debt now.

“Post-Renaissance literature test on Tuesday. I have to write an essay on the book as well as answer some questions and compare it to texts we studied earlier in the semester.”

“Such as?”

“Oh, Evelina, Wuthering Heights, a few others.”

“It sounds like it would be an interesting comparison. I'd enjoy hearing your thoughts on it after the exam finished. Are any of your friends taking this course?”

“None of my close ones,” Sarah replied, “Of course, I'm friendly with plenty of the people in the class and there is a study group I sometimes go to, but mostly we don't hang out outside class settings.”

“I see. Any other exams coming up?”

“Midterms are mostly over, though finals have yet to really start, so not too much. But what with the double major and teachers liking to think that theirs is the only class I'm taking, I've still got plenty of work to do.”

“Ah yes, why the double major?”

“Well,” Sarah began and went on to explain her two passions and how they worked surprisingly well together. A good leader should be well-read. She wanted to make a difference, make the world a better place, work to get children better education and care and politics seemed like the best way to do that. However, she still couldn't give up her love of fantasy, of history, of stories and imaginings.
Therefore, Liberal Arts. She figured that a training in classical thinking probably wouldn't hurt. She kept talking until she interrupted herself with a jaw-cracking yawn. She pushed back from the table.

“You know, Jareth, I think I’m going to go pass out. I’m exhausted. I'll see you in the morning.” She turned and headed towards the door a servant was moving to open. Jareth stood and stepped to escort her to her room. He promptly tripped but managed to catch himself on the table before he hit the floor. Sarah shrieked happily and fled the room. He glanced at his boots, one of the only laced pairs he owned that looked very good with his outfit, to see the laces on both boots tied together. He suddenly remembered Sarah taking longer under the table than strictly necessary, though he had remembered her blush. He tried to be angry, he truly did, but it was so very goblin of her. He threw back his head and laughed. The Labyrinth had made a good choice.

Chapter End Notes

Hello. Just letting you know that Her'ta is my first ever rans character. I'm sorry if I offended anyone, it was completely unintentional. Unless you are transphobic, in which case PFO. But yeah, any thoughts on either her or other parts of the chapter would be very welcome. Reviews A) make me a better writer and B) make me less likely to be mean in the next chapter. And I can be as cruel as Jareth in a really fowl mood if I want to be. Seriously. He does NOT like chickens :P

I'll see you all next week in another installation of "To Serve Her Purpose"  *cues theme music*
Klio was sitting in the garden, reading, when Klibdus stormed up to her.

“Someone's in a foul mood,” she said, marking her place with a finger before looking up. “What's wrong?”

“I just heard from our parents. When were you going to tell me that the Champion had returned to the Goblin Kingdom?” Klio sighed and put down her book entirely.

“I was going to tell you tonight after dinner. I wanted to avoid this kind of attitude. Sarah really is a lovely woman, you know. If you get to know her I'm sure you two would get along.”

“Me?” snorted Klibdus. “Get along along with her? Impossible. Anyone whom the Goblin King admires is bound to be exceedingly overrated. Besides, she's a mortal.”

“I wouldn't under estimate her if I were you, little brother.” Klio placed a hand on her brother's arm. “She's more powerful than you might think. The Goblin King would never admire a weakling.”

“That's the problem!” Klibdus cried, breaking away from his sister's touch. “He shouldn't be admiring other women at all. He should be attending on you. You are to be married in a few months and he isn't even giving you a chance. You two are so close! Who knows, it might grow into love one day. But only if he gives you a chance!” Klio longed to tell her brother about her Lady, but knew that that would be a terrible idea. He would react badly to her seeing someone when she should be courting Jareth, at least in his and their parents' eyes. If he knew the woman she was seeing was mortal... Well, it didn't really bear thinking about. “It's wrong of him to be carrying on like this. If news of her arrival, of how he's treating her, gets out, you'd be the laughingstock of the whole court!” Oh little brother mine, do you really think I care so long as my best friend is happy and I can see my Lady? “I won't have him making a fool of you like this!”

“Brother,” Klio said, a little more firmly. “Little Klibby.” Her voice softened and he rolled his eyes at the old, old nickname. “Do you really think you are one to tell the Goblin King how to behave? We may nobility, yes, and yes, he was a childhood friend, but please remember not to speak to him like that. I'd hate to have to fish you out of the bog...” A playful sparkle lit her eye. “Again.”

“Klio,” Klibdus complained in the voice of oppressed younger siblings everywhere. Some things didn't change no matter where, when or what you were. “That was only once, and it didn't happen like that, and you know it. I landed in a tree.”
Klio smiled to see him forget his anger. “I know, brother mine, but it is so much fun to tease you like that.” She picked up her book, tucked it under her arm and grabbed his hand with hers. “Come walk with me? We still have some time before we have to go in for supper and it's surprisingly nice out today.”

Klibdus sighed and followed his sister out of the garden. Yet he hadn't truly forgotten his anger at the Goblin King who would disrespect her so. Surely there was something he could do to stop her from being hurt.

* * *

It was way too early the next morning when Kelsa woke Sarah up. Sarah sat up blearily. It was the weekend. The day wasn't supposed to start for another few hours. She groaned, and reluctantly stumbled out of bed to let Kelsa help her into her clothes and sit her down at her vanity to start brushing her hair. Before Sarah sat a tray with some delicious-smelling, spiced sweet rolls. They were still warm, and covered with a liberal amount of butter. They were also accompanied by fresh fruit sliced on the side of the plate. The best part of the breakfast though, Sarah had to conclude, was the coffee. She sipped on it contentedly as Kelsa began to braid her hair. It was the most delicious coffee she'd ever tasted. She wondered muggily if she could trick Jareth into revealing where he kept his stores of it so she could raid them and whether or not she could lay her hands on a cat suit for such an operation.

Slowly, the coffee started kicking in and kicking out all the cotton that seemed to have taken up residence in Sarah's brain as she slept. This left room for the questions that had been fighting to get her attention through the cotton, questions that could be summed up as: “What the hell am I wearing?”, “Where the hell did it come from?” and “Why the hell am I wearing it?” When put in leather, Sarah's body was known to react vehemently.

The first question was simple enough to answer. Sarah was wearing a cream peasant shirt and a lot of brown leather. She was wearing a brown leather vest with lacing in the front and brown leather pants that, while comfortable, were much more form fitting than she was used to. It was very soft against her skin. She was also wearing knee high leather boots which were darker than the leggings. She looked good in the ensemble but was absolutely positive she hadn't owned any of it when she had arrived. She turned to face Kelsa just as the maid finished tying her braid.

“Kelsa,” she asked. “What am I wearing?”

“His majesty had it delivered to your rooms early this morning and asked that you wear it for when you meet him this morning.”

“Meet him for what?” Sarah asked, starting to feel concerned. She didn't necessarily trust that whatever Jareth wanted from her in tight leather pants was totally innocent. Then again, maybe whatever he had planned would manage to fulfill the terms of her deal with her loins. She was starting to run out of time for that and really needed to be able to focus during her essay. She really doubted her teacher wanted an essay on how Darcy's character could have been improved by more descriptions of him lightly oiled and in tight pants. By the end of the day, one way or another, she was going to have kissed—made out with, corrected her back-brain—the Goblin King. Sarah shuddered in something not entirely unrelated to anticipation.

“Where am I supposed to meet him?” she asked, standing up. The boots were incredibly comfortable. They felt like the were made for her, as did all of the clothing. Remembering all the measurements that were taken of her yesterday, Sarah realized they probably were. Jareth was being very generous, Sarah had to admit, even if only to herself. Some part of her wondered what they were playing at, he was engaged for God's sake. Even after meeting Klio, and realizing that Jareth
wasn't just saying things when he said Klio wouldn't mind or be possessive, she still knew that she
and Jareth could go nowhere. She didn't want to be his mistress and wasn't really comfortable
making herself less than his equal. It would be hard to claim that her kingdom was as great and he
had no power over her if she was living under his rule in his kingdom. Perhaps she could live in the
Aboveground and he could visit her? Or she could make a place to live in the Labyrinth. She was
Champion there... Sarah caught herself thinking these thoughts and quickly shook herself out of it.
Wasn't it still a little early to be thinking about spending the rest of her life with the Goblin King?
Though, if she was going to be building castles in the air, she was in the right place for it, she
couldn't help but think. She shook her head at Kelsa's concerned look and the maid turned and
started to lead Sarah to who knew where, where Jareth was waiting for her.

Kelsa lead Sarah into the entrance to the stable, where Jareth was talking to a man who seemed to be
about Kelsa's age.

“Sire,” Kelsa said, curtsying. “My Lady Sarah, Champion of the Labyrinth.” Jareth gave the man
one last instruction before turning to Sarah. Kelsa moved to follow the man into the stables.

“Good morning, Precious.”

“Good morning. Care to tell me why I'm here?” She gestured at her new outfit. “In this?” Jareth
smiled a smile that had just a hint of leer in it. The outfit hugged her figure in all the right—or was
that wrong—places. “In case you didn't know, I don't ride horses.”

“Oh, I know. John!” he called out over his shoulder. The man he had been talking to earlier,
apparently named John, came out leading a chestnut horse on a lead line. The horse already had its
tack on and had dark, intelligent eyes. Sarah stepped forward in wonder.

“Her name is Yareya.” Jareth told her as Sarah stepped forward and let the horse sniff her hand.
What Jareth knew, though Sarah didn't, was that Yareya was the female form of his Kumbutchan
name.

“She's beautiful.” Sarah whispered softly, her hand gently stroking Yareya's soft nose.

“She could be yours,” he said, drinking in the look on her face. Sarah's hand fell to her side.

“What will she cost me?” Sarah asked, looking at him with suspicious eyes.

“Enough visits that you learn to ride her properly. Such a fine horse needs a fine rider to suit her.”
Sarah thought about it for a moment. Even if he did end up marrying Klio, Sarah would probably
have to return semi-regularly to deal with the Labyrinth if nothing else. She felt that to start with, her
relationship with the Labyrinth might be a high maintenance one. If she stayed in the Labyrinth or
the stables, she not have to see Jareth, she could keep moving forward in her life. She looked at
Yareya's warm face and childhood dreams of hours spent riding in the woods, away from all her
troubles, made the decision for her.

“Agreed,” she said. “So, will John be the one teaching me?”

Jareth smiled wickedly. “Oh no, Precious. That would be me. Now, come to the field.” And before
Sarah could protest, he was leading Yareya off to a nearby enclosure. Sarah followed, mentally
cursing herself for forgetting that one should never make deals with the Fae without covering all the
angles.

“Doesn't a King have better things to do with his royal time than teach me how to ride a horse?” she
asked, catching up.
“Making sure the Champion of the Labyrinth does not make a fool of herself if ever she is in a company that rides is not a waste of my time.” Besides, he added to himself, there was no harm in getting in Sarah's good graces. He remembered all those afternoons he'd watched her in the park, describing long rides through the forest. If he was going to woo her, this would be a good place to start. After all, he doubted a ball, crystal or otherwise, would go well at this point, given their history, even if she had eaten the peach the day before. He opened the gate to the enclosure and lead the horse inside. Sarah followed. He stopped and placed his hand on Yareya's neck.

Sarah considered the horse before her. “How do I get on her?” Jareth had figured they would have to start with the basics. He laced his hands together and held it out to her as a form of step.

“Place your foot in my hands. I'll give you a leg up.” Sarah gave him a suspicious look. “I promise I mean you no harm in this,” he reassured her. Sarah still looked at him suspiciously.

“No dropping me?” she double checked.

“No dropping you,” he reassured her.

“No feeling me up?” she asked skeptically.

He grinned. “No promises.”

She thought it over, and let him help her anyway. He walked her through the steps of mounting a horse and within a few minutes she was up on Yareya. He adjusted her stirrups and showed her how to start Yareya walking. She walked her horse around the enclosure in a circle as Jareth held the lead line and called out pointers to her. Yareya walked calmly, though Sarah could feel the horse's desire to run. This is probably part of what lead to things going wrong when Jareth decided to let her try trotting.

Sarah had become very comfortable atop Yareya, she looked rather like she was born to ride a horse. Besides, Jareth was excited to share the feeling of freedom that flight could bring. True, riding wasn't quite as good as flight, but it was quite some time before Sarah would be able to fly. He didn't want to start her on magic lessons until she was staying in the Underground for more than a weekend. He didn't want to have to handle clean up in the Aboveground. Knowing Sarah, it was bound to be rather spectacular. He did look forward to going flying with her, though. If the council would hear him. If she would have him... He pushed those thoughts away and decided to see if she could handle a trot. After demonstrating proper form, and taking Yareya off the lead line, Sarah guided her into a gentle trot. However, unfortunately for Sarah, the cue to get a horse to switch from a trot into a canter was a very small, very easy one to make and not one that Jareth had told her not to do.

And so, without really noticing it, Sarah lifted her feet along the horse rather than leaving them down by her sides. Yareya had been itching to canter and gleefully followed the instructions her rider had given her. The problem was, Sarah had no idea how to canter, or, more importantly, how to stop a cantering horse. She did her best to remain calm and figure out what the hell she was supposed to do as the scenery started going around much faster than it should have been. She was trying to remember how to stop Yareya when all of a sudden Jareth was standing in the path of her charging horse, holding his arms out and stance firm. He was still a ways away but Yareya showed no signs of stopping. Sarah pulled the reins to one side and sat back in her seat. She didn't want to hurt her horse, but she rather suspected committing regicide was the greater of two evils. Yareya came to a sudden halt before Sarah could kill the Goblin King and possibly start a few wars.

“Jareth!” Sarah cried, from atop her horse. “What the hell were you thinking!? As much as I'm still annoyed about the damn Cleaners and the drugged fruit, I don't actually want to kill you.” She thought for a second. “Most of the time,” she added for honesty's sake. Jareth raised an eyebrow at
“Yareya would have stopped before running into me,” he explained. “She isn't trained to trample people. If you ever need a war horse, I'll make sure that he's a fine trampler.” He paused, before adding dryly, “And be sure to never stand in front of you.”

Sarah smiled at the possible prospect of one day being able to trample Jareth. Though she didn't really want to kill him. Perhaps only a small amount of trampling. Just enough to leave a mark. And possibly make him fear for his life. After all, turnabout was fair play, right?

Jareth considered the dreamy look on Sarah's face with just a tiny bit of apprehension. What could she be thinking about?

“Care to try a simple walk again?” he asked her, patting the neck of the horse. Yareya snorted her displeasure at the way she had been treated. She'd rather enjoyed the canter, even if it was not the gallop she longed for. Perhaps the dark haired human who fed her would take her out for a gallop later. While she liked the smell of the human who now rode her, the abrupt halt had not been pleasant. The human who now rode her murmured softly and started patting her neck. Yareya let herself be comforted, though she would be even more so if the human had a nice apple to give her after the day's exercise was done. Training humans was such boring work, though at least this one looked promising.

Sarah patted Yareya's neck and thought about taking another walk. “Before I do anything else, mind telling me what I did to send Yareya into a canter like that?”

“Your heel went up,” Jareth explained.

“Right, and how do I stop her if she goes into a canter again?”

“Sit back in your saddle and pull lightly on the reins. She should drop into a trot then a walk before stopping completely.” Jareth said, starting to feel trepidatious at the look in Sarah's eyes. “Sarah...”

“Right,” Sarah said, turning back to Yareya and gently squeezing the horse into a walk.

“Just what are you planning...”

Sarah and Yareya shifted from a walk to a trot.

“...to do?”

Jareth's question was answered as Sarah and Yareya shifted from a trot to a canter and the two made their way around the enclosure three times. It wasn't as fast or as free and exhilarating as a gallop but Sarah looked ecstatic as she rode Yareya. After three runs around the circle Sarah and Yareya slowed into a trot and then a walk. She turned to Jareth with a huge smile. Jareth smiled right back. It would have been hard not to be infected with her happiness.

She swung her leg over to dismount. Jareth caught her waist as she started to slide off Yareya's back and guided her more softly to the ground. Sarah supported herself with her hands on his chest. Sarah's face was flushed with success, her eyes bright, her hair starting to escape from its braid and fall into her eyes. Jareth removed one hand from her waist to brush her hair back out of her face. They looked into each other's eyes and suddenly realized the other's. Sarah felt his heart beat faster under her fingers. Jareth felt Sarah's breath become shallow under his hand. Sarah looked into mismatched blue eyes gone dark and Jareth into pools of emerald fire.

Neither of them was really certain, afterwards, who moved first. That didn't really matter though.
What mattered was that they finally knew what the other's lips felt like. Jareth pulled Sarah closer to him and she gasped at the hunger in his touch. Before anything else could happen, Jareth transported them away from the field, the horse and the possibility of prying eyes.

* * *

John looked at the space where the Champion and the King had been locked in a passionate embrace and went out to bring Yareya back to the stable. He pulled an apple out of his pocket and Yareya ate it with a happy snort. John couldn't wait till he finished his work at the stable and could tell Kelsa that she'd been wrong about the Champion not becoming the Royal Courtesan after all.

Chapter End Notes

Whooee.

65,000 words and FINALLY they kiss. See what I meant by Jareth wanting her in his bed sooner than what really happened?

In other new, Klibdus. He's new. And what could he be planning? WHO KNOWS?!?!!

Fortunately, me! And, as soon as I actually write it and have my wonderful, lovely, awesome beta read it, YOU TOO!

Did you know that when I'm happy, I write more? It's true! Do you know what makes me happy?

Please read and review!

(Hurray for accidental poetry!)
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

I'M BACK!!!!!

I'm so incredibly sorry that this is ridiculously late. Finding time to edit was ridiculously hard due to ridiculous business. I swear, it's like teachers don't care about the importance of fandom to their students... :P

Anyway, I suppose I've kept you waiting long enough. I should really stop blathering, you know, going on and on and on and just stop with all this ridiculous talking and let you get to this next dramarific chapter!

I hope the content was worth the wait! After all, it is about time I start earning my rating... Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

One of Jareth's hands was on her waist, pulling her closer, while the other was in her hair, tilting her head back giving him better access to her mouth. He teased her with his tongue, lightly touching her lips before pulling back. The smug bastard was toying with her! Sarah wasn't about to let him have his own way entirely. She slid her hands up to his shoulders and pulled him down to deepen the kiss. Her tongue snaked past his lips to start exploring his mouth.

He growled and broke away from the kiss and started trailing kisses along her jaw and down her neck. Her back arched instinctively, pushing herself against him and exposing her neck, urging him onward... and downward. He smirked, moving to her collarbone where he started nipping at her sensitive skin as his hands roamed over her body in electrifying caresses. Sarah gasped at the sharp sensation of his teeth, before it was quickly soothed by his tongue. Heat shot from where he touched her and started to pool deep in her core. Sarah's hands fell from his shoulders to his hips as she rubbed herself against him. She let out her breath shakily, trailing off in the faintest moan.

Encouraged, his teeth became more insistent as he made his way back up the length of her neck to her ear.

"Sarah," he murmured darkly, placing a possessive hand on the small of her back. "Don't start anything you don't intend to finish."

Sarah pulled back a little to look him in the eye, even as her hands started to explore the feel of his taut stomach under his shirt. His eyes were soft and hungry and seemed to drink every inch of her in. 'His pupils are the same size,' some far-off part of her noticed.

"Turn back before it's too late?" she asked a little mischievously. Jareth took in the glint in her dark eyes, her hair as it started to come out of her braid, her lips swollen with kisses and the feel of her hands roaming over his body and threw caution to the wind. The tie that held her hair up was coming loose and he pulled it out completely. He ran his hands through her hair, then brought them forward, framing her face and pulling her towards him.

"Don't you dare," he growled, reclaiming her lips with his own. Sarah's body was aflame with the desire for more. She wanted to touch him, not his clothes, no matter how soft they were. He was
even wearing the damn gloves. She started pulling at his shirt where it tucked into his pants. Jareth broke away from the kiss and pulled off his shirt entirely. Sarah only had a moment to admire the creamy expanse of skin, the angles formed by his collarbones, his strong, lean frame as he stood before her in all his half-naked glory before he pulled her against his newly-revealed skin.

“Be careful what you wish for, Precious,” he said as he renewed his assault on her neck. His hands traced the line of her neck before plunging down to undo the buttons of her vest. He lapped at the hollow at the base of her throat as she trembled in his arms. He started kissing his way down her chest and mentally cursed that he hadn’t ordered the shirt be lower cut as he explored her neckline.

Sarah, however, was determined to match Jareth, no matter how much better at this he seemed to be. Her body was hot with a need Jareth had awoken within her. She longed to return the favour. Her hands moved in slow circles, working further and further down his chest and stomach towards the parts of him still covered by cloth. She wanted him to burn as she did. One hand retraced its path, working its way up to tangle in his hair. She turned his head, pulling it away from her chest so that she could have access to his neck. She made her way down it and onto his chest, which was easier to reach in any case. She explored his chest with lips and teeth and tongue. He moaned low in his throat as she teased him, keeping a hand in his hair as the other explored his waistband. She slowly made her way back up to his jaw and kissed him lightly, chastely, even, before leaning up to whisper in his ear.

“You were saying, Jareth?” Her voice was maddening and breathless, as she slowly, purposefully shifted her hips against him.

Jareth exploded into movement. Before she had even realized he had moved she felt the cool stone of a wall press against her back. Jareth had had enough teasing. He grabbed her chin, tilted her head up and kissed her as she had never been kissed before. Sarah kissed back just as passionately. Their kiss was fire and storm and pent-up longing. Years of anger and regret and a promise for the future was all contained in that kiss when all of a sudden... it stopped.

Jareth pulled away from her, body tense, head lowered, arms on either side of her, and growled, “Not now, damn it.” He looked up at Sarah, skin flushed, lips swollen and slightly parted sand eyes still dark with lust, for all of their concern. The tug at his magic became stronger and he knew he could not ignore it, nor would he if he could, no matter how much he might wish to.

Sarah looked with concern at the obviously aggravated Goblin King as he swore long and hard in a language she didn't understand. He looked at her, his eyes seeming to capture her every detail, before saying roughly, “Don't move. I'll be back as soon as I can,” and disappearing in a cloud of glitter.

Sarah sagged back against the wall and stared at the slowly descending glitter that stood where Jareth had been moments before. After a few moments of stunned silence her back-brain spoke up. “Wow. Can we do that again?”

Sarah's forebrain, however, ignored it. If Jareth were to run off from that it was obviously something important. She felt a tug, deep in her gut. She had thought it was a reaction to the kiss, but now she wasn't so sure. It was becoming stronger and more painful with each passing second. ‘What in the world?’ Sarah thought to herself, and suddenly she wasn’t looking at the stone floor of Jareth’s study anymore. She looked up and found herself in the clearing she had walked to in her trancelike state two nights before.

“Alright, Labyrinth,” Sarah called out. “What the hell is going on here?”

“We have a runner, Lady Champion.” The Labyrinth's voice filled the clearing. “Will you help Us test him?”
“What?”

“The runner must be tested. Will you help Us?”

“How?”

Suddenly, Sarah felt the entire Labyrinth as an extension of her body. She felt the walls as they moved. She felt the lives of the creatures living in the Labyrinth as though they crawled across her skin. With a bit of focus she could see Ludo, trudging down the long corridors of the Labyrinth, speaking softly to the rocks that made the walls. For the first time in her life she understood what he said as murmured to her, and understood her reply. Or, was it their reply. She was all of them and they were all her, though all different. She flexed her mind and walls began to move.

She wasn't the only force inhabiting the Labyrinth though. There was another force, moving her body. It was changing the path between the entrance and the city, making it harder to navigate. No, Sarah thought, and pushed back against that force. The Labyrinth wouldn't make truly straight corridors, for that was the nature of the Labyrinth, but Sarah's will to let this boy child reclaim his Wished-Away sister burned through the Labyrinth and its path simplified. The trail would be long, but safe and straightforward.

A blinding rage swept back along that path from the other entity. It burned along her well-marked trail, twisting it out of all recognition. She raged back against it. It had more power than her, but she was more patient. Slowly, wall by wall, she pushed the walls back into the positions she wanted them in. Angrily, the force pushed it back.

It was with the same sense of anger that someone grabbed her shoulders and started to shake her. She opened her eyes and Jareth stood before her in full Goblin King regalia, eyes harsh with anger.

“Just what do you think you are doing?” he snapped, barely restraining himself.

“I'd think it was obvious,” she said, still feeling the battle for control of the path going on in the back of her mind. However, without being able to put her complete focus on it, she couldn't dream of winning against him. She might have as much power at him, but she sure as hell didn't have as much practice. His assault hadn't slowed down in the slightest as he spoke to her while she could barely keep her defences up. Not that any of their battle mattered yet. The Runner was still at the gate.

“You make the challenge too easy. His success would prove nothing and he would not regain the child even if he did win,” Jareth accused her. Not letting go of her arms. To think that just minutes earlier, him holding her had been a good thing.

“What the hell are you talking about, Jareth?” She ripped herself from his arms and put a little more focus into their battle for control. Jareth stepped back and looked at her incredulously.  

“You truly don't understand what it means to run the Labyrinth?”

“It's a test. I solve the puzzle, I get the Wished-Away. It's that simple.”

“A test, yes,” he said in something halfway between a snap and a disbelieving murmur, “But a test of what?”

That gave Sarah pause. She knew that when heroes had to overcome challenges in stories, they were almost always a test of something, a way to prove the hero worthy. However, she wasn't quite sure what the Labyrinth tested. She'd needed dedication, intelligence, courage and perseverance to get through the challenges the Labyrinth presented her. Well, those and a chair. But none of those seemed quite right for what the Labyrinth actually tested...
"Love," said Jareth flatly. "We test your love for the child."

"Love?" Sarah repeated.

"Love," confirmed Jareth. "Only someone who truly loves the Wished-Away will be able to regain the child, as you truly love Toby. If you make the path too easy for the Runner, it proves nothing. Besides, it’s almost certain that he doesn’t love the child."

"What do you mean?"

"No one completes the Labyrinth."

"I did." Sarah pointed out, eyes fierce. Jareth eyed her, his eyes intense with a disturbing hunger.

"Yes, you did," he said, his head tilting as he considered her. "You, Sarah Williams, who loves Toby more strongly than anything else. Who loved him enough to complete the Labyrinth. Whose love was strong enough to make the words unsaid." He was moving towards her and she was backing away, slightly horrified. "You, alone in this world, have the power to unsay what has been said. Do you have any idea how powerful you are?"

"Jareth," Sarah stopped retreating as a thought hit her. He stopped too as she stood her ground. "Do you truly believe that all those who wish away someone away don't love them?"

"Of course," he dismissed. "Everyone knows that what is said is said. You don't wish someone away unless you truly do not want them. Any regret that might cause them to run the Labyrinth is a facade to cover up the lack of feelings they know they are supposed to have for the Wished-Away."

"Everyone? Even the Wished-Away are told that... that they weren't loved?"

"They are told the truth, Sarah," he said harshly.

"Would Toby think I didn't love him if it had taken me a few more seconds to remember the line?"

"That's ridiculous. Such an outcome was impossible. Your love for him was strong enough to overcome the Labyrinth. To think otherwise is a waste of time and energy."

"You can rearrange time if you want to and we both know it. Answer the damn question."

Jareth considered the woman before him, seeing a mix of fear and anger in her eyes. "Had it been true, yes, we would have told him that."

Sarah shook her head in horrified disbelief.

"Leave," she whispered.

"Sarah—"

"LEAVE." This time, it wasn't just Sarah's voice that spoke. For a moment, the Goblin King looked scared, his the regular mask slipped quickly into place. He bowed politely.

"I will check on the Runner. Let me know when you wish me to return."

Sarah sunk to the floor, shuddering. One missed step, she couldn't help but think, if her god damn shoe had slipped off and she'd stop to fix it, Toby would have thought she'd never loved him. That bright little boy she'd risk life and limb to protect again without a second thought. He might have thought she'd never loved him. She thought of all the Runners who had been like her, who'd made a stupid, not-thought-out, not-knowing-it-would-come-true wish. Of all the Wished-Away who
believed that they had never been loved in the Aboveground, that they had just been cast away like so much garbage.

What was worse was she wondered if Jareth was right. After all, in the stories, the worthy always completed the challenges successfully, and those that didn't, failed. Was it possible that Jareth was right? Could it be that Sarah was truly that unusual? She tore the thoughts from her mind. It was ridiculous. There was no way she was the only person in over a millennium to actually love the person she'd wished away. She didn't care how much the child in her who'd wanted desperately to be special wanted this to be true. It wasn't. She had proven herself special in many ways since then. She didn't need to be the only person to love strongly enough to pass the Labyrinth. She was the Champion of the Labyrinth, that was enough.

She wondered how the Labyrinth could let Jareth go on believing that. Why would she?

“Labyrinth?” she called out to the empty air.

“Yes, Lady?”

“Why do you let him think that?”

There was the sense of a sigh. “Lady, you have but twenty-three years and the experience of an immediately regretted wish. You, Lady, loved your Wished-Away. He has millennia, as have the Fae who ruled before him. He has seen hundreds of thousands of Wished-Away, and not all of them were loved. Many were not welcomed where they were before. Many Wishers would have left the child even without the promise of their dreams. Some were never even offered—they showed no interest in regaining the child. Countless times, children have arrived broken, of mind or of spirit. It can take them a very long time to heal. Some never get the chance to heal; they die before my Lord can get them to a healer. I do not care why the Wished-Away come to me. I do not like it when they are damaged. In those cases the Runner will truly encounter dangers unnumbered. However, their motivations do not matter to me. Even of those that were loved by their Wishers, for that is what both parties often claim at first. How many times do you think you can hold a child, screaming for a loved one they can never see again? How many times do you think you could see a child caused that much pain before deciding that it is all because the Wisher did not love them? I do not care why. You mortals must protect yourself from that pain.”

Sarah knew exactly how much it hurt to watch a child scream for a loved one gone. She alone had been the one to hold Toby while Karen was in the hospital, still too hurt see her son. She'd been the one to explain that her little brother that their father would never, ever, be coming back to them. She'd held him as he wailed, stopped him from hurting himself or something else, held him tight as he'd screamed it wasn't fair. She'd thought, but not said, not then, 'No it's not, but that's the way it is.’ Her heart had gone out to the broken brother she held, even as she mourned the loss herself. She imagined what it might be like to have to do that again and again and again. She shied away from the thought. Yes, it would be awful, but the idea that none of the runners loved their Wished-Away... She couldn't accept that. Jareth barely gave them a chance. She'd only succeeded because she knew how stories worked. It... It wasn't fair that Jareth was making it even harder for them than the Labyrinth on its own.

And though she understood the pain of a child’s weeping, she had taken no part in their separation. She fell back into the skin of the Labyrinth. The other was still there, and it was very angry. Its presence burned against her mind. She started to put the Labyrinth into the order that it had been before either of them had started to tamper. It cooled when it saw what she was doing. Much faster than she could, it put it back into its original form, even wresting the bits she was manipulating from her control. It burned through her, over her, around her, so quickly and fiercely that Sarah pulled her
consciousness out without even noticing having made a decision to do so. She found herself lying on the floor of the clearing, looking up at a grey sky.

“Damn him, why is he so much more powerful than me here? Isn't this supposed to be my damn demesne?”

“Because,” the Labyrinth said, making Sarah jump. She had to remember that talking to empty air here wasn’t actually talking to empty air. “You are not yet Queen. You are still only She-Who-Should-Be-Queen. When you are ready to be Queen, no one will truly be able to contest your powers here. My Lord may be able to put up something of a fight, for he has ruled here for a thousand years without a queen. He knows Our ways, but even he will not be able to stand up to the full force of your will.”

That intrigued Sarah; she'd always loved beating Jareth at his own game. But being Queen... Once more, she shied away from the thought. She had other things to think about. Like how on earth—or under it—she was supposed to get back to the castle. Come to think of it, how had she gotten here?

“Labyrinth?” she asked, “how do I get back to the castle?”

“You wish.”

“I what?” Sarah squeaked. She didn't make wishes anymore. Not without great need. She'd hardly call this great need. “I don't want to owe the Goblin King any more favours, thank you.”

“It is your magic that enacts your wishes, Lady. Even when you wished the Link away—” the link? “—it was your power that called out to the Goblin King. There is power in words, and what is said is said. To go back to the castle, simply wish you were there.”

Sarah paused. “They’re wrong, you know. The Runners do love your children, some of them at least. And for the Fae to tell the children that the Runners don’t love them, when they’re the ones keeping the Wished-Away from seeing the Runners again—it’s all just wrong. It’s like stabbing someone and blaming them when you’re unhappy that they died.”

Somehow, she couldn’t quite tell how, Sarah got the impression of a shrug. “The Fae have always been good at self-serving logic.”

“Well, that was certainly true,” Sarah thought, and looked around her. Jareth wasn't anywhere nearby, besides, it wasn’t like she would be wishing to him. She took a deep breath.

“I wish,” she whispered, “that I were back in my rooms at the castle.” There was a light tug in her gut again, but this time it didn't hurt, because, she guessed, she wasn’t resisting. Colour and sound swirled around her for a moment before the mess solidified into her rooms in the Goblin Castle. She stumbled for a moment before catching herself on her dresser.

Kelsa turned around at the smell of magic, wondering what her King could want. She stood still, momentarily shocked, when she saw it was the Saviour, not the King, who stood before her. The Saviour blinked for a moment then stumbled forward. Kelsa hurried forward to support her.

“My Lady Sarah, are you alright?”

Sarah pushed the hair that not even Kelsa's best efforts could keep in a braid, not with the combined effects of a horse ride, a passionate goblin King, two magical transportations and the floor of the Labyrinth, out of her eyes.

“I'll be fine, Kelsa, but I think I'll head home early. Do you mind helping me pack?” Kelsa guided
Sarah to one of the couches by the fireplace. She lit the fire and turned back to a protesting Sarah.

“My Lady, you look exhausted. Rest, I'll pack for you.” Sarah started to rise. Kelsa put her hands on her hips and used her best 'John you're being an idiot, stop before I have to hurt you' look. Sarah wisely sank back onto the couch without further protest. Besides, it was warm and comfortable there. Kelsa bustled quietly around the room as the Saviour started to doze off. She knew from the younger goblins that using magic for the first time could be exhausting. She sent one of the messengers at the door to go fetch some hot chocolate for the girl. The Lady would make it when someone came to her in great distress. She rather thought it would be exactly what the Saviour would need. She pulled out the bag the Saviour had brought her things in and started to fold them up and put them in. As she finished packing the underclothing and started in on the strange blue trousers the Saviour wore, there was a soft knock at the door. She opened it and took the tray with the mug of Hot Chocolate from the goblin who’d been carrying it.

“Allow me,” the King's voice said behind her. Kelsa turned around and his Majesty took the tray from her and took it over to where the Saviour was sleeping. Kelsa returned to begin packing the Saviour's paints as the King bent before the Saviour and started muttering too softly to be heard. Sarah slowly started to drift back to consciousness as she heard someone calling her name.

“Sarah, Precious, wake up.” Sarah's nose started to identify the smell of chocolate. Her eyes flew open. Before her was a pair of mismatched blue eyes, but in front of them was a mug of what had to be hot chocolate. Sarah's hand reached for the mug before the rest of her was even fully awake. She sat up and tasted it. It was warm and creamy and chocolatey and wonderful. It helped bring her more awake as well. She took another sip, sighed and leaned back. "I'm leaving once Kelsa's finished with packing, Jareth.” Jareth's eyes flashed with anger and denial before he managed to hide how he was feeling. “Look, Goblin King—”

“Jareth,” he said firmly.

“No. That's the point. Right now, you are the King of the Goblins. Taker of the Wished-Away. And I—I refuse to be a part of this.” Jareth's eyes went fierce as he opened his mouth to protest. Sarah lay a finger over his mouth before he could start and they'd start arguing again. It had hurt to fight him, inside the body of the Labyrinth. She didn't want to start again. “I talked to the Labyrinth about this. I can see why you think—I think you're wrong—It's just—” she sighed and started again. “I need some time to think this over, ok, Jareth? I need to go back now.” She put the half-finished mug of hot chocolate on the table by the edge of the couch and got up.

“Let me take you,” he half asked, half ordered, standing with her. “You've only just started using transportation spells and they take time to get used to. If you do a third one today, you'll be unable to do anything else all day. Let me.”

Sarah really didn't have the energy to fight him. She just nodded her assent and they both turned to Kelsa who was just finishing packing. In fact, the last thing she packed was the square packet the Saviour had brought and shoved so hastily in a drawer.

Jareth blinked when he saw the foil package his servant was holding. Why had Sarah brought one? Or rather, since he knew that if Sarah had one, she probably knew what they were used for, why had she brought only one? He knew he could use his magic to prevent pregnancies but obviously she didn't. He'd have to explain, when the time came. He looked down at the tired, hurt, strong, beautiful woman beside him and knew that now wasn't it. He longed to hold her as he had before the day had gone so spectacularly wrong, but she needed to leave, and the Runner needed his attention. He could see her to the Aboveground, but not much more. Kelsa zipped up the bag and handed it to Sarah.
“Ready, Precious?” he asked extending a hand.

She met his eyes. “I wish I were back in the quad of my university.”

Jareth swore, causing Kelsa to squeak, and followed her. At the very least, he thought grimly, he could catch her if she fell.

* * *

“So it would really be a smart choice—” Arthur was cut off in mid-sentence by the look on Merlin’s face. He’d seen many expressions on his friend’s face over the years—anger, joy, plenty of ridiculousness—but this was an expression he hoped he’d never see again. It was a combination of rage and fear and, for one brief moment, helplessness. Arthur had never seen anyone’s eyes turn gold with emotion before. He turned to see where Merlin was looking. Across the courtyard, Sarah Williams stood in the arms of an older man with wild blond hair and ridiculously tight pants.

There was only one thing that could cause his friend this much anguish. He’d realized early on his friend was gay, even if he’d never talked to Merlin about it, and he’d gotten used to it fairly quickly. For the first time, he thought, he was seeing one of Merlin’s lovers.

The man across the courtyard had to be Merlin’s boyfriend. And he was cheating on Merlin with Sarah Williams.

Chapter End Notes

WHOOEEE!

This chapter was hard to get down. I'd like to give a million thanks to my best friend for sitting with me and turning the lemon part of this into the smexy thing it is today. Also, for supporting me as I stumbled my way through my first draft. Also, you have her to thank for Shirtless!Jareth, as she was having a bad week, and what week isn't made better by Jareth with no clothes?

Also, a bajillion (yes sis, that it TOTALLY a number) thanks to my Beta!Sister for staying up ridiculously late to get this finally edited and sense making. Also, for pointing out problems with physics and morality, you are the best and I love you. Even if you are a cat. (B/N: I'M NOT A CAT!) Alright. Fine. She isn't. But keep it between us, ok readers, I'm trusting you here.

And in other news, this fic has become my NaNoWriMo project, so I am going to be ahead in terms of numbers of chapters written. Hopefully, this means it will be easier to find time to edit. Then again, considering I'm working on 21 now and we only just managed to edit 19.... maybe not. HOPEFULLY I'll be able to post another chapter next weekend. All I need is to make all the OTHER people understand how important Serving Her Purpose is....

Anyway, I really hope you enjoyed the chapter! More to come, I can promise you that! 50,000 words is a huge goal though, so please leave your encouragement in the little box!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

And in my time of darkness
My fanfiction comes to me,
Speaking words of wisdom,
Have some squee!

Hi guys. Sorry for not managing to post last week. School is evil. Evil, evil school. Updates will be very irregular until Christmas break as my wonderful Beta!Sister needs to survive before she can edit. I will update as quickly as is possible/healthy for both of us.

But in the mean time, I think that with the days getting long and dark and snow starting to cover EVERYTHING (If I have readers who don't have to deal with snow, rejoice. Rejoice oh ye of warmer climate) I figured we could all use a little silliness this week. So, with that in mind, enjoy this week's chapter of To Serve Her Purpose *Cues Theme song*

Arthur sat in the library, at a desk by the window, looking out over the grounds of the campus and not really thinking about the paper on the worth of a benevolent, competent monarch he was supposed to be working on. His thoughts were, instead, on Merlin, Sarah, and the mysterious tight-panted man. He'd been thinking of little else for the past couple of days. He'd be working on a paper, or talking to Gwen or Morgana or Gwaine, or sitting in class, and all of a sudden Merlin's expression would flash across his mind's eye, just as shocking as the first time he saw it. He's stop, sometimes mid-sentence, and just stand there with his mouth open like some overgrown fish. As was happening now.

He shook himself, and started scouring Hobbes for quotes. After about ten minutes of productivity, thoughts of who The Man could be started to drift though his mind. Arthur had never seen him on campus before, and only ever seen him once at the bar when he was looking for Merlin. At least, he thought it was the same man, he hadn't really been paying attention. The Man was obviously very confident, Arthur could just see that plain as day in his pants—uh, stance. Just as it was plain as day that Merlin knew him and the two had an emotional connection. He had tried to ask Merlin a few times, in a sideways kind of way, who The Man was. Merlin, however, had always changed the topic. He wasn't really sure what else he could do to get the recalcitrant idiot to open up.

He felt a hand rest on his shoulder lightly. “Arthur, what's wrong? You've been sitting here doing nothing for about 15 minutes.” Arthur turned to look at one of his closest friends, Gwen. She was looking at him with her kind, knowing eyes that had once set his heart running. That was quite some time ago though. She had fallen for his cousin, Morgana, instead and he had moved on. There was no point dwelling in the past. Besides, they were both quite happy. Arthur looked over his notes and back to Gwen and realized that, though he might not be sure how to get Merlin to open up, Gwen might. She often had good ideas.

“It's Merlin,” he said, turning his chair out to face her. She frowned and pulled up a chair to sit next
to him. “I think he's keeping secrets from me.” Gwen's eyes darted aside and back. She knew Merlin had magic. One didn't spend as much time with Morgana as she did and not recognize the signs, even though Merlin seemed to have much better control than her girlfriend did. While it was true Morgana hadn't told her that she had magic, she'd managed to figure it out. Normal people didn't cause light bulbs to explode or candles to light just by waking up from a nightmare. Gwen, however, was patient enough to wait for Morgana to come to her with her secrets. She was also pretty sure that Merlin had been teaching Morgana magic, as Morgana often spent time with him and came back much calmer and more centred. That she was less sure of as Morgana would be very vague about what they did there. It seemed that Merlin wanted his secrets kept, and so Gwen respected his wishes, even if she'd figured it out on her own.

“Why would you think that?” she asked, keeping her voice honest and open. Arthur seemed too distracted to notice that she was hiding things from him as well. He slumped back in his seat.

“It all started on Sunday,” he explained. “Merlin and I were walking back to our dorms from the library when I saw Merlin see something and get very upset—did you know that his eyes turn gold when he's really, really upset?” Well that proved it, she'd seen Morgana's eyes turn gold right before strange things started to happen. “Well, I turned around and I saw what he was looking at. Sarah Williams—you know her, don't you? That woman from Merlin's Celtic Studies class, she's in some of my courses too—well, she was in the arms of this older gentleman who was holding her almost... tenderly. The only reason I can think of that Merlin would be so upset was that he had been betrayed. I know it isn't Sarah, as we both know Merlin's gay.”

“Bi,” Gwen pointed out. “He flirts with women as well.”

That gave Arthur a moment's pause. “I really don't think think he's attracted to Sarah, though,” he said finally.

“That's certainly true,” Gwen agreed. She often wondered how Arthur could be smart enough to notice that Merlin was attracted to men, but completely fail to notice which man Merlin was attracted to. You'd practically have to be blind not to see it. Merlin looked like he had been waiting his whole life for something and that something was Arthur.

“So it had to be The Man,” Arthur continued. “Merlin isn't really the jealous type.” That was true. He'd always been kind to her even when Arthur had had that embarrassing crush on her. She was glad they'd managed to move past that and remain friends. “So, for him to be that upset, I figure Merlin must be going out with The Man who was holding Sarah and now it seems that That Man was cheating on him with her.”

Gwen blinked. There was absolutely no way that Merlin was seeing someone. Sure, he occasionally flirted with members of both sexes, but it was never with any kind of intent. Besides, Merlin really just wasn't that good at keeping secrets. If he were, she never would have figured out that he had magic. There was simply no way he would have managed to hide a partner from all four of them, and she knew that, even if Morgana wouldn't tell her about the magic, she would share the gossip of Merlin seeing someone, especially someone who wasn't Arthur.

“I beg your pardon?” she asked, not really sure that she had understood correctly.

“Merlin is being cheated on by this Man,” he spat out the word with derision and a hint of, was that jealousy? Was it possible that those two would finally get their heads out of various bits of anatomy and do something about the feelings they so obviously had for each other? “Who is seeing Sarah Williams.”

Arthur sat up and leaned towards Gwen, who was biting her lip, looking pensive and thoughtful. “That's the bit I don't get though. Sarah seems like such a nice woman. I mean, it's true I don't know
“I don't know,” Gwen said. “I think he'd have told us if it was a girlfriend.”

“Right,” Arthur sighed. “Because he still doesn't know I know he's gay—bi—whatever.”

“So it's the man, then,” Gwen offered doubtfully.

“Yeah. And I didn't think Sarah'd be the kind of person who would break up a relationship like this...” He trailed off, looking out the window.

“Is it possible she doesn't know?” Gwen suggested. Her mind was still on how to get Merlin and Arthur to actually talk about their feelings for each other.

“It's true I'm not that close to her, but I could speak to her, I guess...”

“That might be a good idea—What does Merlin say about all this?” she asked.

“He doesn't!” Arthur exclaimed, before remembering to keep his voice down in the library. “I've tried to get him to talk to me about this but he just isn't getting my hints—What's that look for?” Gwen shook her head. Some men needed to be hit over the head with a brick before they got a clue. Some men... needed a bigger brick.

“Have you tried asking him what's wrong directly? Telling him what you know and seeing what he says when confronted with this head on?” Arthur looked at her askance, clearly doubting the usefulness of her advice. She rested her hand on his knee. “Honest communication has seen Morgana and me through many problems together.”

“Merlin and I aren't dating,” he pointed out defensively. Gwen raised her hands placatingly, thinking 'If only. Then so many problems would be solved.'

“Nonetheless,” she continued, “it is the best way to solve problems like this. Go talk to him, Arthur. Ask him to tell you what's really wrong.” Arthur looked at the desk which had papers strewn all over it an very little work actually done. He sighed, then packed up all his papers to leave.

“Thanks, Gwen.” he said, throwing his bag over his shoulder. “I think I'll try that.”

Gwen smiled happily as she watched her friend make his way through the bookshelves towards the door.

“Was that Arthur I just saw you talking to?” Morgana said as she came up behind Gwen and leaned down for a kiss on the cheek. Gwen reached up and grabbed her lover's hand, gripping it tightly before gesturing to the chair in front of her. Perhaps Arthur's wasn't the only relationship that could benefit from some honest communication.

“Morgana, love, I've got something to tell you.”

It was time to tell the wonderful woman sitting across from her that Gwen loved her. Magic and all.

* * *

Arthur stopped outside his room, hearing the raised voices. He heard Merlin's upset voice, but something stopped him with his hand on the door and he waited and listened.

“—away from her!” Merlin finished.
“You do not have to power to stop me from this, Emrys.”

Emrys?

“You will stay away from Sarah Williams. She is not of our kind!”

Our kind? Gay? Of course she bloody well wasn't. Wasn't her being straight what was causing the problem?

No, wait, bi. Damnit. Perhaps Sarah was bi; he'd always thought she was awfully close with her friend Katara.

“No!” the man cried, before saying again, more softly, but no less powerfully, “No, Emrys, I will not. She is mine. You can not stop me from seeing her. Not even you can get in the way of the Labyrinth's will.”

The Labyrinth?

“She has spoken?” Merlin said, sounding full of awe and terror. Arthur twisted the handle and pushed at the tone in his friend's voice, still listening to the continuing conversation.

“She has. It is now up to Sarah.” He was barely aware he had moved until both men froze in the candlelit—candlelit!—room. Suddenly, Arthur felt very odd and embarrassed about intruding. He had obviously interrupted Merlin's plans for the afternoon.

“Merlin,” he said, trying to bluster through the awkward tension, “I forgot my copy of Vita Caroli...”

Merlin's cheating boyfriend looked at Arthur, snorted and turned back to Merlin. “What goes on between myself and Sarah Williams is none of your concern, Emrys. You will stay out of it,” he said before storming out, past Arthur, to whom he nodded in frigid politeness. Merlin sank back onto his bed and put his head in his hands. Arthur looked at his friend, not really sure what to do.

“Have you seen it?” he said in an attempt to distract. Merlin looked up at him.

“Seen what?”

“My copy of Vita Caroli, dollop-head,”

“I'm not a dollop-head, Arthur, you are,” Merlin replied, more out of habit than any real feeling, and fell back on the bed.

“No, I most certainly am not. Well? Have you seen it?”

“It's under the loose leg of the bedside table.”

“What on earth is it doing there?”

Merlin shrugged and Arthur stooped down to pull it out, bringing some of the candles to his eye level. He turned to face his friend.

“Emrys?” de asked.

“Just what he calls me.” Arthur wondered what kind of pet name Emrys was. It did sound familiar though. He wondered where he'd heard it before.

“What's his name?”
“Don't you have a paper to finish?” Merlin picked up a book and lay back in his bed, starting to flip through it.

“Merlin.” Arthur tried again to get his friend to speak.

“Don't you have a paper to finish, dollop-head?” Arthur looked at the book in his hand, at the bag he'd thrown on his bed, which contained this very important paper, at the door which would lead to the library and back at his friend who lay on his bed, pretending to read a book. It was upside down. He sighed, remembering what Gwen had advised he do, and sat down next to his bag. His friend needed to hear this, and his paper could wait.

“I know about you and him, Merlin.” Merlin froze. Arthur took a deep breath and plunged on. “Honestly, I've known about you since very early on in our friendship.”

“You've known all this time?” Merlin breathed. He sat up and faced his friend. “Why didn't you say something?”

“I was waiting for you to come to me about it. If you wanted to keep it quiet, I felt it wasn't my place to pry.” Arthur defended himself. Merlin did look a little guilty when Arthur said he'd been waiting for him to come forward.

“And you didn't have questions? I mean, surely it was a little hard to believe.”

“Some people are just born like this. It doesn't stop them from being people.”

“Wait.” Merlin sat up to face his roommate. “Some people are just born...You know more people like me?”

Arthur blinked for a moment. Maybe Merlin really was slow. Morgana and Gwen had been together for nearly a year. Maybe he meant more bi men?

“Of course. I mean, Morgana and—”

“You really know...” Merlin interrupted. “And you're ok with this? You don't think I should be locked up and studied because of it?”

Arthur stood in anger that his friend would insult him so. “Really Merlin!” He snapped. “I hardly think anyone being bi is a reason to—”

“What!” Merlin cried, shrinking back.

“I know you're bi, Merlin. And that's ok.” Merlin blinked for a second, mouth opening and closing, before bursting into what sounded a lot like Gaelic. At least, Arthur thought it sounded like Gaelic. He couldn't understand a word of what was being said though he could tell it was angry, frustrated and exasperated. And he was pretty sure he now knew the Gaelic for dollop-head, idiot, and a few other insults. He hadn't even known Merlin could speak Gaelic, though it made sense, as he was pretty sure Merlin was Irish.

Merlin grabbed his bag and headed for the door. “I'll be back in a few hours,” he said, and pulled the door firmly shut behind him. Arthur looked at the door in bafflement. Of all the things he'd expected when he'd finally talked to Merlin about his sexual orientation, this had not been it. He sank down and tried to figure out what had just happened.

Merlin had probably been upset because of the disastrous end to his candlelit plans. Arthur couldn't help but notice that the candlelight had looked... good playing across the sharp, pale features of his
roommate. He slowly started moving around the room to extinguish them.

As he did, he found himself getting more and more annoyed. What had Merlin been thinking planning something romantic with This Man who had just been making eyes at—even holding—someone else. He hoped Merlin would have more self respect than that. He certainly hoped he'd stand up for himself more if his boyfriend—er, girlfriend, yes, not boyfriend, wrong term—ever cheated on him. What could Merlin be thinking not stopping this liaison between the man he lo—cared for and Sarah Williams.

Honestly, Arthur could barely believe Sarah would do this. It's true, he barely knew her, but she and Merlin were good friends. Suddenly, something hit him. Merlin was in the closet. It was possible The Man In Ridiculously Tight Pants hadn't told her he was spoken for. Arthur felt himself getting even more irked. Merlin shouldn't be with someone who'd manipulate others so. Still, even if Merlin decided to respect the bastard's wishes and not tell Sarah, she deserved to know the reality of her situation. True, Gwen had told him to try talking to Merlin first, but he'd done that and it had gone nowhere. If Merlin and that bastard wouldn't do the right thing then by God it fell to him to do it. He had a class with her tomorrow morning. He decided it was time she knew the truth.

* * *

“Sarah! Wait up!” Arthur called as he finished throwing his books in his bag. The brunette stopped and turned to wait for him. He ran down to meet her. “Can I talk with you for a minute?” She frowned at his expression.

“What's up?” He looked around at the students who were still milling around, talking to friends or waiting to ask the teacher a question. He shook his head. Sarah probably didn't know about the harm she was causing Merlin and didn't deserve to be embarrassed publicly.

“Not here. Walk with me?” She nodded slowly and turned to follow. Arthur took them into the hall, around a few corners and then stopped by a window at the end of a deserted corridor. This would be a better place for this conversation. He took a deep breath.

“Sarah, you know that man you are seeing?” he asked her.

“I'm not sure if I'd call Jareth and me a package.” Arthur sighed in relief, but nonetheless, their embrace had seemed more than just friendly.

“Good.”

“Good?” Sarah looked taken aback at his qualification.

“Yes. You see, I'm not sure if you know this, but he's spoken for.” Sarah looked at him incredulously before shaking her head and sighing.

“Look, I know he's engaged, but—”

Merlin was engaged? Arthur felt overcome with emotions. To think that the man that Merlin wanted to marry would be such a complete and utter bastard to cheat on his fiancé! And that Sarah would be heartless enough to hurt him like that. He grabbed Sarah by the shoulders and shook her a little.

“I thought Merlin was your friend, Sarah, how could you do this to him?”

“Merlin?!? Arthur, what are you—” Sarah managed to get out before another voice entered the corridor behind them. Was it possible she didn't know about Merlin? Was The Man three-timing them?
“You will unhand her, Arthur Pendragon.”

Arthur let go of Sarah and turned to face The Man—hadn't Sarah called him Jareth?—who seemed to have appeared from thin air further down the hall. He was dressed entirely in black, and seemed to suck the nearby light into a void. For the first time, Arthur really got a good look at him. He took in the mismatched blue eyes, the high cheek bones, the eyebrows that seemed to sweep up and the stance that was somehow very very threatening. The look in the man's eyes was cold as ice. A thought crossed Arthur's mind unbidden: 'He isn't human.'

Arthur, however, didn't care. His friend had been hurt by this man and to protect the people he cared about, he'd stand up to dragons. 'Where had that thought come from?'

“You!” he accused, stepping forward. “How can you treat someone you love like this?”

“My private affairs are none of your business, Arthur Pendragon. Stay away from her.” His eyes flicked to Sarah and back. “I will not tolerate your or Emrys' interference.”

Which was when Merlin, as if summoned by his pet name, came around the corner.

“You will not hurt him,” he yelled, extending a hand. Arthur had never seen this look of pure confidence and power on his friend's face. Jareth turned to glance over his shoulder. Did his inhuman confidence flicker...?

“I will deal accordingly with whoever messes in my affairs, Emrys.”

“Affairs,” Arthur scoffed. “She has a right to know that you are engaged to Merlin!”

“Wait, what?” Sarah said, turning to Jareth, who suddenly looked significantly more human and confused.

“Wait,” he in turn turned to Arthur, “you think what?”

“What?!” Merlin said incredulously, looking at Arthur in horror. He suddenly looked much more the college student than the powerful man he'd seen earlier. “You think— I mean— Him?!” He pointed at the man in black with wild blond hair, as if to be sure they were talking about the same person. “Him?!”

Arthur blinked at the three nearly identical incredulous expressions.

“You mean,” he finally said to his roommate, sounding rather weak after his righteous indignation before. “You aren't?”

“No!” the two other men said in unison, looking at each other with undisguised aversion. “Why on earth would you think that?”

“Well,” Arthur began to stammer, “I mean, your look when you saw them, his hair, the candlelight encounter, his pants.” At this point, Sarah doubled over in helpless giggles.

“What,” Jareth asked, seeming to try to pull the dregs of his dignity around him, “might I ask is so funny?”

“Well, you have to admit,” she managed to choke out, “he does have a point! After all, you are a fairy!” before collapsing into giggles again. Jareth bristled and turned back to Merlin.

“Emrys, I believe you are best suited to explaining this situation to him. At least, your part of it. You
must speak to Sarah, if you want to know hers.”

Sarah straightened up, having recovered from the giggles, and turned to Jareth. “Speaking of explaining, Goblin King,” Goblin King? “what the hell were you thinking threatening my friends?”

Arthur turned helplessly to his friend who looked at the other two, sighed as they started to argue, and gestured Arthur to walk with him. After they turned the corner and the pair were out of earshot, Arthur turned to Merlin, and asked, “Merlin, what in the name of God's green earth is going on here.”

Merlin sighed, looked his friend up and down and said, “I'll tell you when we get back to our dorm, it's a very long story, and it'll take some time to tell, whether or not you believe me.” Arthur gestured impatiently and the pair made their way back to their rooms. Arthur sat on his bed, facing Merlin, who sat, rubbing his hands together.

“Well?” Arthur asked impatiently. Merlin stopped rubbing his hands as if he had come to a decision and looked up at the oldest friend he had.

“The first thing you need to know,” he began, “is that Magic is real and there's a reason my name is Merlin.”

Chapter End Notes

Ok, just so as you know, the candles were so Merlin could summon Jareth. Also, Arthur might not be that far off the mark. I can neither confirm nor deny that Jareth and Merlin may or may not have had a one night stand around the turn of the last millennia... (Tries to look innocent while the Goblin King glares at me). Anyway, next chapter brings us back to our usual cast of characters with a few more additions.... Stay tuned! Also, the views expressed by the characters are not necessarily those of the authors. Except for Sarah's back-brain. Most of the time, she and I agree.
And please leave me your thoughts. I love them and they make me happy on the inside. And the outside. And all other relevant or irrelevant sides. So please review! Thanks!
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

And in my time of Finals
David Bowie comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom
BANANANA GET ME OUT OF HERE!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The door to his study swung open and four of the people Jareth least wanted to see entered the room. He took a split second to consider his options. It was too late to run, they'd already seen him, same problem with an invisibility spell. He was trapped. He sighed in defeat and stood up.

“Mother, Father, Uncle Fezzik, Uncle Inigo, what an...unexpected...surprise.”

“Jareth, my boy!” his father said, stepping forward. “What's been going on here? The Labyrinth surged with power a few days ago. Your mother felt it, even in retirement.”

“Nothing in particular, Father.” Jareth said, picking up one of the pieces of paper and considering it, “we had a Runner in the last few days, perhaps that was it.”

“Jareth,” his mother said, walking over and taking the paper from his hand. “I was the Queen of the Labyrinth for centuries, I know what a Runner feels like. Besides, why would I feel this Runner when I haven't felt any other the others since we abdicated?”

“Perhaps this Runner won,” suggested Inigo. Jareth raised his eyebrow at his uncle, who shrugged unabashedly. “It was only a suggestion.”

“Or perhaps the Champion had returned!” Fezzik added. Jareth froze, only for a moment, but long enough for his parents to notice. His father leaned over the desk.

“How? When?” asked his mother. Jareth looked at the firm, curious gazes of the people surrounding his desk, and sighed. There was no hiding it now. He knew he'd have to tell his family what happened eventually, but he had hoped he would have more time, be more sure of his relationship with Sarah. True, she had accepted the horse and would be returning to learn to ride, but she said she needed more space to think after the Runner and had gotten very mad at him after the whole Emrys debacle, though she had gotten even more mad when she had learned that Emrys had been trying to protect her from him. She understood his interference a little more once she knew what had motivated it. Still, he would have to be careful of his protective tendencies around her. Not that he really thought she needed it, not the Champion of the Labyrinth.

That thought brought him back to the here and now where his parents and uncles were looking at him. He stood.

“This is a rather long story, perhaps we should find somewhere more comfortable to sit.”

“The yellow parlour?” suggested Inigo, and as one, they all transported themselves there.
In this room there were several comfortable couches and armchairs. It was a fairly comfortable place and Jareth would often retire here with his guests after a dinner party. Jareth sprawled on his usual armchair as his parents took one couch, Uncle Fezzik another and Uncle Inigo stood behind it. Jareth looked about, took in a deep breath and began.

“It all started when a wish was made about the Champion of the Labyrinth, Sarah Williams, about a month ago,” he said, and proceeded to tell his family what had happened in the last month, leaving out Klio’s threats and what had caused them. He eventually came to the present moment, talking about their most recent fight and his frustration with her denial of the ways of the Trial of the Labyrinth.

“But,” Uncle Inigo said, looking confused, “what's said is said.”

“But, Inigo,” pointed out Fezzik, “she is She-Who-Can-Make-The-Words-Unsaid, so it is not true for her.”

Inigo nodded. “I see what you mean.”

“Have you tried granting her wishes?” suggested his mother. “It worked for your father.”

“She doesn't make wishes anymore. Not since the death of her father. I can hardly grant wishes she refuses to make.” Jareth groaned, burying his head in his hands. “Nor can I trap her here through spell or enticements or even agreements as I have no power over her.”

His parents exchanged a look, remembering the man who had tried to keep his mother captive, and the lengths she had been willing to go to escape him. His father spoke. “Would you trap her here if you could?”

Jareth's anger seemed to collapse in, leaving him feeling a little hollow. “No,” he said, quietly but firmly, “I wouldn't. Even if I could, I wouldn't.”

His mother smiled, proud of her boy. His father, however, took the opportunity to make things that much worse for his son.

“So!” he asked. “When do we get to meet this young woman?”

“It would be interesting to see what about her fascinates you,” Inigo added, remembering a young Fae who, while he had had many relationships over the years, hadn't seemed to find the love his parents had or that depth of feeling—until now, until this mysterious Champion of the Labyrinth.

All of a sudden, Jareth sat very upright, feet firmly planted on the floor. “Not yet, I don't think. She's met Klio, but I think introducing her to—” He froze as he felt the magic in the air shift around him. Damn it, not now!

* * *

Sarah walked down the halls of her university lost in thought, heading slowly but surely towards the cafeteria. She'd waved her friends on after Celtic Studies so she could talk to Merlin. That had gone well enough. He'd promised to not try to interfere with her affairs if she promised to come to him for help if she needed it. They'd also made a date for coffee over Easter. Sarah was very excited to hear some of the stories of what he'd experienced in the past millennium and a half. He'd seemed a little relieved to actually be able to talk to someone about it. It seemed that while Arthur did believe him in the end, he was taking a while to process it all, and Merlin didn't want to overload him with too much too soon. Sarah was seriously starting to question whether or not anyone she knew didn't have a connection the the Underground somehow. She was starting to think the answer was no. Well at
least her friend's significant others were normal. Or at least, as far as she knew Jet and Suki had no connection.

Speaking of Jet, Sarah rounded the corner and saw Jet and Katara pretty much making out in the hall. Did they really have to do that in public?

'Ugh,' Sarah thought to herself. 'I really wish I didn't have to see this.'

Sarah felt a tug in her gut and had just enough time to think “Oh sh—” before the magic transported her. When the colours and sound settled, Sarah found herself in the Underground, specifically, in the Castle Beyond the Goblin City. That was rather where she’d suspected she’d be, what with the Labyrinth's interference. She knew it was the Labyrinth's work, because while she hadn't wanted to see that, the Labyrinth would not have been her first choice of other places to go. Not with the smell of food wafting up the corridor from the caf. 'Damn it Labyrinth,' Sarah thought viciously, hoping that the Labyrinth would pick up on these thoughts as well. 'Those were so not the right words!'

Sarah turned around and took in the sight before her. There was a man, with black, wavy, shoulder length hair, with twin scars on his cheek who was looking at her suspiciously, his sword drawn and pointed at her. Behind him was—Was that a Giant? Well, he was huge, even if he was purely Fae. Then on another couch there was a beautiful woman and man who bore something of a resemblance to Jareth. The woman was dressed in a perfect pale blue dress, her wavy golden hair falling down her back. The man was dressed entirely in black, a looser shirt accompanied by— damn it, what was it with men in the Underground and tight pants? Finally, she looked at Jareth, who was dead white, staring at her with wide eyes and shaking his head, slowly, in horrified disbelief.

"Jareth," she said, taking a step forward. The Man with the Sword moved between them.

"Do you have six fingers on your right hand?" he asked. Everyone in the room blinked and gave the man a strange look.

"Uncle," Jareth said, giving the man—his uncle?—a look. "You killed Count Rugen before I was even born." The Man with the Sword looked a little sheepish, sheathed his sword and bowed with his arms a little out from his body.

"I apologize. Old habits die hard."

"Who are you?" the woman said, standing up and giving Sarah the once over.

"Jareth...?" Sarah said to the only person in the room she recognized. He looked around the room, took a deep breath, suppressing the panic in his eyes, and stood.

"Sarah, allow me to introduce my Uncle: Lord Inigo Montoya, my Uncle: Lord Fezzik, my mother: Her Royal Highness Buttercup, former Queen of the Labyrinth and former Lady of the Goblins and my Father: His Royal Highness Wesley, former King of the Goblins and former Lord of the Labyrinth, as well as former Dread Pirate Roberts." The man—Jareth's father?—gave him a look. "Mother, Father, Uncle Fezzik, Uncle Inigo, I'd like you to meet the Champion of the Labyrinth, She-Who-Should-Be-Queen, Sarah Williams."

Sarah blinked and looked more carefully. She could see echoes of his features in his parents' faces, and he had their hair, and a possible similarity to Inigo in the hollow cheeks, but nothing in Fezzik's face was present in Jareth's. For that matter, neither Fezzik nor Inigo looked anything like Buttercup or Wesley.

Buttercup came forward and took Sarah's hands.
“It's very nice to finally meet you, Sarah,” she said, smiling at her and giving her hands a squeeze. “Jareth was just telling us about you.” Sarah shot Jareth a look. He refused to make eye contact. “Come, sit with us.”

“Yes, we want to hear more about the lady who could beat our Jareth,” said Lord Fezzik, patting the couch beside him. Sarah glanced at the couch, at Jareth, at the giant and his other relatives, trying to make up her mind. Unfortunately, her stomach chose that moment to growl very loudly, making it very clear that it was not pleased that she'd skipped breakfast to go over the layout of the fair with Professor Tania and desperately wanted to be fed now. Her back-brain pointed out that there was a very attractive goblin king present, and she really wouldn't mind getting a taste of him again, even if that didn't count as real nourishment...except possibly for her hormones. The only trouble would be getting the relatives out of the way. She didn't think she was up to transporting multiple people yet and besides, pouncing took energy. Jareth stood and walked over to her.

“Perhaps we can discuss this over lunch?” he suggested, offering her his arm. “I'll escort Sarah to the dining room, shall I meet all of you there?” He kept his voice bland and polite and his family nodded and disappeared. He whirled to face Sarah, mask gone and face slightly panicky.

“What are you doing here?” he hissed.

“It seems the Labyrinth wants me here,” she defended herself, taking a measured step away. “I saw Katara and Jet kissing and thought that I wi— that I really didn't want to see it and the next thing I knew I was here.” Sarah was starting to use magic? Unintentionally? How? Jareth started swearing low and vehemently, calling the Labyrinth all the names he could think of and then some. Sarah was untrained, she shouldn't be using magic without supervision in the Aboveground where anything could go wrong or she could be noticed.

“What language is that?” she asked, her brows pulling down in a frown. “I don't understand it.”

“Elvish,” he said, realizing a little late that swearing in another language wouldn't necessarily be more decent if the person he was swearing in front of had the gift of tongues. His back-brain pointed out that that wasn't the only gift of tongues Sarah had. He smirked to himself.

“I understand Fae well enough, why wouldn't I understand this...” she trailed off. Jareth offered her his arm and she took it as he started to walk her towards the dining hall.

“Perhaps you've lost your ability to speak in tongues?” he offered as they strolled.

“Nope,” Sarah replied, her casual syntax sounding odd in the Fae tongue. “I can still understand you clear as day.”

“What about Goblin, understand that?”

“Yes, that too.”

Jareth threw another string of syllables at her that went in one ear and continued to make no sense. She shook her head. He tried another language, this one sounding rather like gargling pebbles. Again, Sarah shook her head, starting to get impatient with the testing of her magical ear when they had more important things to worry about. For example: Jareth's family waiting to meet her properly just a few hallways away. “You know,” her back-brain pointed out, “we still have the closet plan from that dinner with Klio. Maybe now's the time to pull it out.” Sarah dismissed the thought, despite her body's protestation. She had survived, even enjoyed, the dinner then, she could make it through this lunch. ...Probably.
'At least now I know how to get out of there with magic if things manage to go spectacularly wrong.' She tried to think of the positive side of things.

“So,” Sarah said, as she started to recognize parts of the of the decor and realized they were coming to the end of the relative-less reprieve. “Anything I should know about your family before I head in there?” Jareth thought for a moment.

“Don't mention ROUSes, Prince Humperdinck or Count Rugen,” he said finally, as they approached, “And you should be fine.”

“What the hell is an ROUS?” Sarah asked as Jareth pushed open the door.

“Telling her about the Rodents of Unusual Size?” Former King Wesley asked his son as they came into the room. The four of them had already found their seats, leaving the spot at the head of the table and the seat to the honoured right free. “You'll want to be wary of those, they’ve moved out of the swamp and into the Labyrinth proper since Jareth made the bog less dangerous and more... smelly.” Sarah shuddered at the memory of the sheer horrifying nature of that smell.

“The Bog wasn't always smelly?” Sarah said taking her seat.

“No,” Jareth's father continued. “Not always, back in my time it was the Fire Swamp. Filled with ROUSes, flame spurts and quicksand. Not too dangerous if you knew how to get around.” He reached over and gripped Former Queen Buttercup's hand. They shared a smile.

“As we found out as we fled Prince Humperdinck and Count Rugen,” the Former Queen finished off. Sarah glanced at Jareth, at the look the two were sharing, and decided that this was too good a story to pass up, despite Jareth's warnings.

“Prince Humperdinck and Count Rugen?” she asked, keeping her tone polite and innocent. Jareth shot her a look and Sarah felt a small kick on her ankle.

“What,” Former King Westly cried amiably, “Has Jareth never told you this story?”

“It's not the sort of thing that has come up,” Jareth ground out through a large smile. While he did love the story, he really didn't think Sarah needed an example of how true love was supposed to work, as their story bore very little resemblance. He didn't want to draw her attention to this fact, and certainly didn't need his parents to do so.

“What story?” Sarah latched on quickly. She was already a good chunk of the way through the book of stories Sir Didymus had made for her, and was always eager to add to her collection.

“It's the story of how Wesley and I fell in love,” Former Queen Buttercup said, smiling nostalgically. Sarah almost winced. The last thing she needed right now was a love story. She'd been skipping over some of those in the Book of Tales. Her own love life right now was a little too.... her eyes darted to Jareth and away...complicated, to deal with love stories right now. However, she had asked, and it would let her eat as they talked. The servants had just finished setting all the places and were going to start bringing in food any moment now. “You see,” Jareth's mother continued as her son settled comfortably in his chair, as a man who knew there was a long story coming, and started to sip his wine. “I was raised on a farmstead, in the country of Florin.”

Sarah had planned to not pay that close attention throughout, mostly act attentive and nod and make the right noises when called on. However, she found herself quickly drawn in. It was a story of fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, True Love, miracles... It was no wonder the people who had this kind of story had raised Jareth. It also explained why Jareth's uncles
did not look like anyone else in the family. It was a beautiful story and Sarah couldn't help but notice the contented look on Jareth's face as he listened. A small, soft smile played around his lips and eyes. The story traded around, different parts being told by different members: Former Queen Buttercup describing her time in the Castle with the Git Prince Humperdinck, Former King Wesley describing his being called back to the Goblin Kingdom to deal with an emergency and then hearing of the engagement, Lord Inigo finally getting revenge on his father's murderer and Lord Fezzik... well, he helped out a lot. It seemed he was a very loyal friend.

“And then we all lived happily ever after,” Former Queen Buttercup said, giving her husband such an intense look of love that Sarah looked away, feeling she was intruding on their privacy.

“At least, until little Jareth was born,” Lord Inigo pointed out noticing Sarah's discomfort at his old friends' extremely close relationship. Sarah couldn't quite stifle the giggle at the Goblin King being referred to as 'Little Jareth'. Jareth managed to glare at her and his uncle simultaneously, despite them being on opposite sides of the table.

“True enough,” Wesley said with a laugh, turning away from his True Love. “Speaking of Jareth,” Jareth sat up, wondering where his father could be going with this. “Why have you rejected him? He's an intelligent, cunning, attractive young Fae.” Sarah wondered how old most Fae were to consider over 2 millenia young.

“He has a wonderful sense of humour,” added Lord Fezzik. Jareth was managing to both preen and look rather embarrassed.

“He is a wonderful musician and singer, not to mention a great swordsman,” was Lord Inigo's contribution. Sarah smirked very slightly as her back-brain came up with another meaning for 'great swordsman', if one was thinking symbolically. After Sunday, she really wouldn't be surprised if it turned out he were one.

“And I've never heard any of the ladies of the court complain about him as a lover,” Jareth's mother added.

Sarah choked on the water she'd been sipping and Jareth shot upright in worry, as did everyone else at the table, as Sarah tried to rid her lungs of liquid.

“I'm sorry,” Buttercup said, leaning forward in concern and glancing at her son. “Did I say something wrong?”

Sarah shook her head as her coughing jag died down. “No,” she said very croakily, “No, nothing wrong, it's just... Well, it's not exactly normal for a man's family, or well, at least the older generation, to either know or say that kind of thing. At least, it's not where I come from!” she managed. The Fae in the room considered this statement quizzically.

Former King Wesley waved at her. “Fezzik, if you would.” The giant who sat next to her turned in her direction.

“If you give me your hand, Lady Sarah,” Sarah glanced at him, and at Jareth, who had buried his head in his hands.

“Fezzik was trained by Ner'da herself,” Former King Wesley explained. Trusting in Ner'da's teachings, Sarah reached out and placed her hand in his. She felt his magic poking at her insides, seeing if this or that was still in place. She then felt it withdraw. It was a little more invasive than when Ner'da had been checking her for poisoning. She wondered if that was because he was Fae or simply a worse healer. He patted her hand with his massive one.
“You should be fine,” he said, sitting back in his chair. Inigo leaned forward in his.

“What is it, though,” he said, brows drawing down, “that makes you refuse him?”

‘Well,’ Sarah thought. Really, it was a matter of where to start. She considered Jareth and he looked at her in the eye, curious about what her reply would be. “There was the whole taking my baby brother away, taking other well-loved children from their homes,” his eyes hardened. Sarah blazed on, regardless. “Setting the cleaners on me, the whole Bog of Eternal Stench thing, the giant robot he tried to kill me with, setting the whole goblin army on me and not to mention the the mind-altering peach!” Her voice had been rising and getting more and more accusatory with each one.

“That's hardly very sportsman like,” interjected Fezzik. Jareth raised his eyebrow at his uncle's interjection, not breaking eye contact with Sarah. Sarah made an effort to mitigate her anger in front of his parents, remembering all the kindnesses he'd done her more recently. Reading to Toby to put him to sleep. Healing Karen when she was sick, saving Karen's life, helping her with her Celtic studies, even holding her as she cried...

“Then he disappeared on me...” Her voice trailed off and she looked away from eyes that were suddenly veiled. “Besides,” she said, picking up her glass to take a drink. “He's never really asked me.”

“What?” he hissed and Sarah's eyes were drawn back to him. She hadn't seen him this angry since she'd called the Labyrinth a piece of cake. “I asked you and you turned me down with your pretty little speech.” His eyes blazed as he spat the words. “'You have no power over me' and never calling me back into your life again unless you truly needed something was a very clear rejection to what I was offering.”

“What the hell are you talking about!?” Sarah cried back, a little defensive, but just as passionate.

“I offered you everything!” they both seemed to have forgotten their attentive audience. Something in him seemed to break and Sarah's breath caught in her throat to see it. “Fear me, love me, do as I say, and I will be your slave...”’ His eyes held such pain that Sarah could barely breathe.

She had never remembered what Jareth had told her at the end of her Run. “Is that what you said to me?” she whispered, eyes searching. He paused, all anger falling away at the sincere curiosity of her tone. He blinked at her, owlishly.

“You don't remember?”

“Jareth,” Sarah said, fondly exasperated. “I wasn't listening to a word you said, I was trying to remember the line that would get me Toby back.” Then the implications started kicking in. “Wait a minute,” Sarah said, drawing back. “Were you trying to trap me down here even then?”

“Even then? I was not trying to trap you. I wanted to be with you, Sarah. I was offering you everything!”

“Everything? What you were offering was a freaking abusive, paedophilic relationship! Damn it, Jareth! I was fifteen. Do you normally try to keep children so old? And what the hell kind of deal is fear you, love you and do as you say?” Sarah was shaking her head in disbelief, but her eyes stayed fixed on him, fierce through the tears that were starting to well there.

For months after she'd defeated the Labyrinth, she'd been terrified that Jareth would come back into her life and make her pay for defying him and getting Toby back. Nothing her friends could say or knowledge that that wasn't the way stories worked could stop her fear. When her first boyfriend had
made her feel even a little trapped she'd left the relationship as quickly as she could, barely stopping to say bye on the way out. That underlying terror of being trapped had faded over time, but never completely left.

It had come back full force last year after she wished someone would save her step-mother. She knew she would be placing herself in possible danger, that he might finally come and collect, but she couldn't leave Toby without a mother to care for him, no matter what the cost. That night, she had hugged Toby tightly and told him she loved him more than anything, put on comfortable clothing, packed a bag of essentials, grabbed the cast iron frying-pan Karen had since thrown out, and sat up, waiting for him to arrive. She suspected if he came, she wouldn't be able to over-power him, but she was damn sure she was going to try. At some point in the night, she'd drifted off to sleep, dreaming fitful nightmares in which he used his position of power over her to do terrible things to her and make her do... Then morning had come and she'd been woken by Toby asking her why she was sleeping in a chair and why did she have the frying pan and could they go see Mommy today. She'd held him close, glad to have escaped another time, or so she thought.

And then this year, when she'd woken up in his goddamn bed and he'd done what he could and had sent her back. Then done nothing to gain power over her in any of the time they'd been together. He'd made her believe that it was her he wanted. Not some point in their struggle for power. Now, to know her nightmares were true—"You didn't want me for a partner. You wanted me for a conquest. A subservient. A fucking submissive whore—"

"Sarah!" he snapped, trying to break into her flow, but she wasn't about to stop. The horrible implications just kept hitting her.

"—who you could just throw away when you had used, and keep around through threats in case you 'needed' her later. Just another servant. You never wanted me. You proved that well enough in the damn peach dream. You just wanted to toy with me. Humiliate me publicly. Use me! Prove that you won some damn contest and that no one could really beat you. You wanted to tear me down. Destroy me!" She whipped the tears angrily away.

"Sarah," Jareth got out, reaching toward Sarah. She jerked away from him and he pulled his arm back to his side. "I never—"

"Enough!" Former King Wesley's sharp voice cut through the tension that had been building. "Enough," he said more quietly as neither of the would be them first to break eye contact. "Jareth, perhaps we should talk. Buttercup?"

"Sarah, perhaps you'd like to take a walk in the gardens? I think there are some things we should talk about." Sarah looked at the woman and nodded.

"I wish I was in the Gardens of the Castle beyond the Goblin City." And Sarah disappeared. Buttercup sighed, gave her son a look, and disappeared as well.

Jareth looked at his male relatives and straightened his posture, shuttering away all his emotions. "I had not meant to trap her here," he said looking them each in eye in turn. "Not then and not now." His father sighed and leaned back in his seat.

"I know, Jareth, and so do you, but obviously she doesn't. Why?"

Jareth looked at his father through the curtain of his hair and sighed. "I'm really not sure." He straightened. "But there is someone who I think might be able to help me understand. I'll return when I can. Call me back before Sarah leaves."
The three men who had been through hell and high water together looked at each other.

“Maybe he won't mess up too badly,” Inigo offered.

“That's not a very nice thing to say,” complained Fezzik.

“You always were the optimist,” Wesley replied, shaking his head. He wondered if it was fated for the love-lives of all of the men in his family to be so interesting. He rather hoped that wouldn't be the case.

Chapter End Notes

Man, I really DO enjoy adding verses to this fic. And this should answer any question about what "the pain" Jareth threatened his Goblins with if they sang Happy Birthday. If there is anyone who isn't familiar with this verse, GO RECTIFY THIS SITUATION NOW! FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THINGS NERDY!

Also, I think there is nothing wrong with being a prostitute or other form of sex worker. I used whore because it's very strong language and Sarah is feeling VERY strongly right now.

Ah, I've left our two love birds (are there any really crotchety, stubborn birds that would describe these two? Love Chickens? ACK! I'M SORRY GOBLIN KING, I'M SORRY GOBLIN KING! PLEASE DON'T BOG ME! SARAH HELP!!!!!!) *Hits the play theme song button and goes and hides in an oubliette till Jareth forgets he's mad at me*

*Sticks head out cautiously and whispers*

Please leave me your thoughts and tune in (hopefully) next week! And if the Goblin King asks YOU HAVEN'T SEEN ME! *Ducks for cover*
Sarah walked for quite some time through the corridors of the Labyrinth. She was left completely alone, even the eyes of the vines staying shut as she passed. Not a single creature would dare crossing the path of She-Who-Should-Be-Queen when she was in this kind of mood. Besides, the Labyrinth had made it very clear that her Champion was not to be disturbed.

Eventually, she came back to a familiar garden and sat on the bench where she had sat with her friends just last weekend. She wanted them to be here. She could really use one of Ludo's hugs right now, though one of Sir Didymus' speeches on the excellence of his majesty would be less appreciated. She could also really use her Aboveground friends now. She just imagined it: Katara's comforting arm wrapped around her shoulders as she promised that she'd be safe; Sokka saying he'd like to see the Goblin King try to take her if she didn't want it and Zuko nodding along, getting that scary focus combined with explosive energy he gets when someone's really really going to regret messing with one of his friends; Aang would probably be playing peacemaker, helping her remember that Jareth wasn't totally evil, but he would still be totally on her side if it came down to a real struggle; Toph would just stand there, confident as always and say something like “What are we waiting for? Let's kick some Goblin King ass!” They'd all want the whole story, of course, but she couldn't imagine much stopping them from coming to her aid if something really did go wrong. Sokka could get... inventive when it came to finding solutions. She smiled, thinking of them.

The pale blue hem of Former Queen Buttercup’s dress came into her view. Her smile faded, coming back to the here and now and the problems she would face.

“May I sit with you?” Her melodious voice asked.

“I won't let Jareth trap me here,” she said, looking up with fierce eyes. “If you're coming to plead his case, don't waste your breath.” Buttercup's eyebrows went up. Jareth was right. Sarah was an extremely strong-willed, powerful woman. She could see why her son had fallen for her.

“While your troubles with my son do concern me, that is not my principle reason for wanting to speak with you.”

“Really?” Sarah was a little skeptical.

“Yes, really.”

“Then why do you want to speak with me?”

“Because of the Labyrinth’s interest in you.”

“Oh.” Sarah scooted sideways on her bench, making room for the Former Queen. The Fae sat beside
“From what I’ve managed to gather, you do not want to be the Queen of the Labyrinth,” the Former Queen began, watching the woman who should succeed her closely. “Why is that?”

“Why is that?” Sarah cried, turning to face Former Queen Buttercup. “I don’t know, maybe it’s because I don’t want to be in charge of tearing children away from the people who love them! I don’t care what you Fae think, even if I hadn’t “loved” Toby, it would have kill—devastated my parents to lose him like that. And then to have their daughter “go insane from guilt,” because what human is really going to believe the Goblin King stole my baby brother? I don’t want anything to do with that. I mean,” she added, remembering the feeling of being one with the Labyrinth. “I don’t mind being the Queen of the Labyrinth in general, but I do if that means I have to be a part of… that.”

Buttercup considered carefully what to say next. “Should you become the Queen of the Labyrinth, you will get a say in how the Runners are dealt with.” She saw the light of hope in Sarah’s eyes and continued quickly before the girl could start believing in the impossible. “However, the Labyrinth will never stop taking the Wished-Away, Sarah. It is in Her nature. Trying to stop Her from taking them would be like trying to stop one of us from breathing. And I don’t just mean she’d die. You might be able to stop it for a while, but as Her magic faded, so would yours, and eventually, your ability to stop her would fail and she would begin to take them again. We cannot strangle ourselves. Besides, the Trial of the Run serves more purposes than you might think. You cannot stop the Labyrinth from taking the Wished-Away. Even trying would be pointless.”

“So that’s it?” Sarah asked, starting to feel hopeless. She knew that as things stood, she could never really be with Jareth, not and have him disappear irregularly to destroy families, but some part of her hadn’t been able to help but hope that a solution to all this really was possible. That they could find a way to be together that didn’t rob her of her soul. But it seemed that was not to be. She absolutely refused to be a part of this. “I should just go on my way and try to forget the Labyrinth ever happened?”

“No,” the Former Queen said firmly. “That would be unwise. Even if we ignored everything else that attaches you to the Underground, your friends, for example, you have magic. You need training in it if you are to avoid disaster.” Seeing Sarah open her mouth to protest, Buttercup pushed forward. “But your future with the Labyrinth isn’t quite as bleak as you seem to think it. There is information you should have, before any more happens. That is why I wanted to talk to you, Sarah, She-Who-Should-Be-Queen. There are things you need to know.” She took a deep breath and continued.

“The title of Goblin King is a hereditary one, Sarah, passed from father to son for as long as there have been Goblin Kings. The title of the Queen of Labyrinth is not. The Trial of the Run is in part how the Labyrinth finds her queens. All Queens have had to run the Labyrinth, but not always with a child at stake and not always with it being a true trial, for the Former Queen will help us, if she deems us worthy, as will the Labyrinth. The King of the Goblins and the Queen of the Labyrinth must also be willing to marry one another, for, while it is the Queen’s duty to test the Runner, it is the King’s to take care of the Wished-Away.” Sarah nodded, following along.

“Also, the Queen of the Labyrinth is not tied to the King of the Goblins, he is tied to her. A Goblin King's reign ends when his son finds a queen.” Well, that was new.

“Then why—?”

“Is Jareth ruling without a Queen? The Labyrinth knew it was time for change. The time for my leadership, though it was good while it lasted, had come to an end. You say you cannot be a part of this? Good. Maybe that’s what is needed now. The Labyrinth will never stop taking away the Wished-Away, but perhaps,” the Former Queen smiled, taking in the expression on the Champion’s
face, “perhaps something can be done.” Sarah blinked at the woman with the deep, wise old eyes.

“Do you really think so?” she asked. “You think I can change this?” The Former Queen smiled, seeming amused.

“Sarah. You beat the Labyrinth, held your own against my son when he was doing his best to stop you, you even beat him at his own game. From what Jareth has told me, you are skilfully balancing your life in the Above and Underground, despite the extra work you have taken on Above. You are immune to all the poisons that the Underground can offer and have already united with our Labyrinth once. I could feel it. Sarah Williams, there is very little I think you could not do if you set your mind to it.” Sarah smiled as her mind raced. Maybe she could change this. Make a difference. Prove to Jareth that humans weren’t as vile as he seemed to think. She wondered how much she could change, and how she would change things if she had the power.

“I do have one request for you though, Sarah Williams.”

“Yes?” Sarah responded distractedly, her mind still whirring.

“Don’t agree to marry Jareth unless you love him,” Jareth’s mother said. “He loves you, more than anything I’ve ever seen. He loves you almost as much as I love Wesley, I think, perhaps more. I’d rather see his heart broken once, a quick clean break that he might have a chance to heal from, than watch it shrivel and die day by day for a thousand years, desperate for a love you don’t return. Please don’t do that to my son.”

That brought Sarah up short as she realized the other part of what becoming the Queen of the Labyrinth meant: marrying Jareth. Her feelings about Jareth were confused to say the least. He could be charming, frustrating, engaging, devilishly attractive, attentive, aggravating, caring and at times truly terrifying and she still wasn’t sure she could trust him. She really wasn’t sure what word to use to describe that, but love didn’t seem quite right.

“I wouldn’t do that to him,” she promised with conviction, looking the mother of the man she…felt for in the eye.

Buttercup smiled softly. “Thank you. Before I leave you, I believe there are some things you should know about Jareth.” Sarah cocked her head, listening. Everything that she’d heard so far had been thought provoking. “First, and this is the more trivial of the two I believe, but I think you should know humans and Fae develop differently. A Fae who looked 15 human years old would be much more emotionally and mentally mature than a human 15 year old.” Sarah nodded. “While Jareth should have known better, being the Goblin King and dealing regularly with humans, I do believe you stunned him into not thinking things through properly your first time in the Labyrinth. It was a bad choice, but not a paedophilic one.” Okay, Sarah thought nodding. That was good to know. It did bring Jareth several points down on the creepy scale, but there was still the matter of his wanting to trap her. “And secondly, and I think you found this the worse crime, Jareth would not trap you.”

“How can you know that?” Sarah said, drawing back and looking aside.

“First, because he is my son. I know him well enough to know he would never do that. Second, because he has said so and is bound to his word. However, I understand that this isn’t the case for humans and so you might not believe him and so third, and most importantly, because he loves you. He would never hurt someone he loves so much so badly, no matter how much he might wish they’d stay by his side. He would not trap you, not now, not ever, even if he did have the power to. He would not make you stay if you wanted to leave.”

“I’ve had experience with Goblin Fruit. I know he could make me want to stay with that.”
“He never would. But if he did—you beat it once. Do you really think you could not do it again?” The Former Queen knelt before the future one. “Sarah, think. Has Jareth done anything recently to upset you so? Has he betrayed your trust? Do you have any reason to doubt his intentions now?”

Sarah thought over her life since Jareth had reappeared in it. Not once had he really tried to trap her down here, though the horse lessons were a little iffy. Nonetheless, he had shown up, acted a little possessive, talked to her on many different subjects, been polite to her friends, even if that had cost her dinner. Even that exchange hadn't felt like a trap though. Not really. It felt like Jareth being the insufferable prig he could so often be, or the Fae who was too proud to ask for much, but not like a trap. Sarah sighed and shook her head.

“I realize that you and my son have had a lot of problems, but I've found over my many years—” Sarah snorted softly at the understatement “—of marriage that it is important to remember all of the history that Wesley and I share, the good as well as the bad.”

“Thank you, Your Royal Highness,” Sarah said, coming to her feet. While Jareth had requested she call him by name, his family certainly hadn't. “I think I should talk to Jareth now.”

“I think there are some things that my son needs to hear first. I’ll send him to you in a little while?” Sarah nodded. It would give her time to compose her thoughts. “Oh, and Sarah?”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness?” Sarah said, staying polite.

“Call us by our first names, Sarah. As She-Who-Should-Be-Queen you are part of this rather... eccentric family, no matter what your relation to Jareth. At least in my eyes.”

“Alright. Well then, thank you, Buttercup. You’ve given me a lot to think about.” Buttercup smiled, frowned and opened her mouth to speak.

“If I can offer one more thing for you to consider?”

“Yes, of course. Go ahead.”

“My son will not trap you here. The Labyrinth however.... The Labyrinth is a creature old beyond Time’s remembering. Even we Queens don't truly understand her. What I do know, however, is that you are the one she wants. If I had to wonder about the actions of one or the other, I would worry about her.”

Both woman felt the rumble of annoyance in the parts of their mind where the Labyrinth spoke, though Sarah felt it more strongly. Buttercup smiled in fond exasperation at her old, old friend and mentor. “I speak the truth, and she deserves to know,” she said aloud, so that Sarah would be able to hear as well. She shook her head as the Labyrinth continued to grumble about suspicious Former Queens and the best laid plans. Sarah looked slightly disturbed at that last bit.

“I think you and She should speak. I’ll send Jareth when we have finished talking.” And with that, Buttercup disappeared.

“Labyrinth?” Sarah called out.

“Yes, my Lady?”

“Is what she said true?”

“It is true a time for change has come and that you cannot stop the taking of the Wished-Away.”

“Alright. Good to know. Not really what I was talking about though, and you know it.”
“You are Sarah Williams, Champion of the Labyrinth, She-Who-Should-Be-Queen, She of Fire and Storm and Magic. It is you that both the King and I want for a Queen, not a broken shell of her.”

“So...?” Sarah asked, needing a slightly clearer answer than that.

“No. Neither the King nor I would trap you here, Lady Champion. Your strength comes in part from your freedom, your will to fight.” The Labyrinth's tone was very put upon. It changed now, to one more speculative. “A hawk is not truly a hawk when caged. It must fly free. I suspect that if one of us tried to keep you here, the other would do everything in their considerable power to free you.”

“Oh,” Sarah said, feeling the truth of the words down to her bone. If people who knew Jareth as well as these people did claimed that he wouldn’t trap her, could they be right? She pulled her knees up to her chest and rested her cheek on them, mulling over everything she’d learned and everything she had already known. Time passed as she thought the problems over and over.

“Compose yourself, Lady Champion. My lord comes,” the Labyrinth interrupted. Sarah rubbed her face, ran a hand through her hair and sat up straight, as ready to face Jareth as she’d ever be.

* * *

Buttercup appeared in the little hut that housed the Lady that Jareth had brought back to help take care of the Wished-Away a decade or so ago. He sat at the humble but wellsmade kitchen table one of the carpenters had made and was listening to the dark-haired, amber-eyed woman speak.

“I know what it’s like to feel trapped by someone, your Majesty. You know what my husband was like. You know how he treated me, holding my children hostage to my good behaviour. That is what the Lady Sarah fears.”

“It’s true,” Buttercup said, stepping close and laying a hand on her son’s shoulder. The lady rose to her feet and curtsied. “Would you leave us for a time? There are some things I want to discuss with my son.”

“No,” she said, understanding the dismissal, and made her way towards the door of her little house. With her hand on the handle, she stopped and turned back. “If I may offer one more word of advice and ask a question before I go?” Buttercup nodded. The lady turned to Jareth. “She will ask you if you intend to trap her. She’ll need to hear your answer from your lips. You should think carefully about how you plan to answer. And, Your Majesty... I hope your answer is no.”

Jareth frowned, but nodded. “And the question?” She hesitated before speaking.

“My son? Do you have any news of my son?” Jareth smiled.

“He was doing very well last I saw him. He has an excellent taste in friends.” The lady smiled, reassured. There was a much longer hesitation this time.

“And my daughter?”

This time Jareth’s look turned hard.

“She is ever her father’s child. You bargained for only her brother. I have done all I could.” The lady looked sad at the news but forced a smile.

“Of course, Your Majesty. Thank you for all you have done for him.” And with that, she was gone.

“Her son?” Buttercup asked, sliding into the lady’s abandoned seat.

“She bargained with me before she came here,” he explained. “She spends the rest of her life serving
the Goblin Kingdom and helping take care of the Wished-Away in return for me protecting her son to the best of my abilities.” Buttercup nodded. It was not the only time Jareth had been known to make deals that would benefit him, his kingdom, and the people he was dealing with.

“Her husband…?” She trailed off.

“On of the worst mortals I have ever had the misfortune to encounter,” he said with a tone of finality, clearly wanting this to be the end of this topic. “You spoke with Sarah?”

“Yes,” Buttercup acknowledged. “I can see what you see in her.”

“What did you talk about?” His eyes searched her face. She raised her eyebrows.

“That conversation is between Sarah and me,” she said firmly. “It was spoken in confidence and will remain so. Now, I want to speak with you.”

Jareth leaned back in his seat and made a ‘do go on’ gesture.

“What do you know about the time I spent in Prince Humperdinck’s castle?” She asked. Jareth’s eyebrows went up. He had not expected this turn in the conversation.

“You were engaged to him against your will, he tried to force you into marrying him and getting a marriage you had not consented to to stand legally, Father and Uncle Inigo and Uncle Fezzik showed up at just in time and the four of you escaped to the Goblin Kingdom.”

“Has anyone, your uncles or your father, told you what I was going to do to escape captivity?”

“No,” Jareth said, leaning forward, obviously intrigued. “I’ll admit, I always thought it odd that you hadn’t. I mean, it’s true you gave your word that you would go with him if he didn’t hurt Father, but he did and so you were free of that constraint. What did you do?” Buttercup took a deep breath and looked her son in the eye.

“I got my hands on an iron dagger on the day of the wedding. Your father stopped me moments before I used to,” she said, watching her son draw back in shock. “I would have used it, had your father not arrived, rather than allow myself to be bound to a man who would trap me like that. Sarah is no less determined than I am. Perhaps she is even more.”

“You would have ended your life?” he asked, not quite able to believe what she was telling him.

“Yes. He took me away from everything I loved and wanted to keep me there, forever, whether I wanted it or not. He used the people I love to control me. If I was no longer there, he would not have any reason to hurt them. It was the one and only act of defiance left to me. That was the worst time in my life, the darkest. The scariest. There is little I would not give to avoid being trapped again.”

Jareth sat back in his chair, deep in thought. “This is what she fears?”

“You would have taken her brother and trapped him away from his family. Why is she to believe you wouldn’t do the the same to her?”

Jareth shot to his feet.

“I would never!”

“She cannot know that!” Buttercup’s voice sliced through his anger. “When you first met you tormented her, toyed with her, drugged her and put her life in danger several times, as far as she
knows, and she still beat you. You are a proud Fae, Jareth. Why should she believe you do not want revenge. What better revenge than to destroy her and leave her standing so that you can torment her again?” Buttercup’s voice was soft now, almost coaxing and she watched the anger drain out of her son’s frame to be replaced by horror as she spoke. He looked as though her words had cut him off at the knees.

“This is what she believes?” he asked in a hoarse whisper. “This is what she thinks I want with her?” Buttercup shook her head.

“This is what she fears, above all else.” She paused for a moment before adding, “Actually, what I believe she fears most is that you will use her to get to Toby, though one of the ways you might do that is taking away his sister from him forever. That boy has already lost much.”

Jareth nodded, eyes going soft and sad as he remembered the weight of the little human boy who snuggled close as Jareth recited poetry.

“Too much,” he agreed. “There was nothing I could do to save their father. By the time I knew what had happened, it was already too late.” His fist clenched. Buttercup reached out and held her son’s hand, gently uncurling it.

“I know,” she said softly. “I know. I think you and Sarah are ready to talk now. She’s waiting for you in the garden with the myrtle trees.” Jareth nodded, taking a minute to compose himself. He pulled his magic around him, preparing to transport himself. He paused, and looked at his mother.

“Mother?”

“Yes, Jareth?”

“Thank you.” And with that he was gone. Buttercup smiled, before returning to the castle herself. Perhaps there was a chance for her son and his lady after all.

* * *

Jareth appeared on the far side of the garden from where Sarah was sitting, eyeing her carefully, looking to see how she’d react. Sarah looked back just as intensely, took in his slightly guarded, wary form and his eyes, so very intent. She thought over everything that she had learned and decided she only really had one question to ask him.

“Jareth, would you trap me here?”

“No.” His eyes were fierce, his stance turned open and she could read many emotions in his face. Love was there, as well as determination and, though this was was hardest to read, a hint of vulnerability, fear she would reject him, no matter what he did. ‘What’s said is said,’ she thought to herself, and, seeing the soul of the Goblin King laid out so unguarded before her, she couldn’t help but believe it. She scooted over on the bench. Jareth’s expression became its more usual slightly guarded, calculating self as his eyes flicked from her to the space on the bench and back. He made no move towards her. Sarah rolled her eyes and patted the seat.

“Sit down, Jareth.” Jareth carefully made his way over to the bench and sat down, careful not to sit too close to her. Sarah appreciated that he was trying to give her space. It seemed he meant what he had said, down to the smallest actions. He was doing his best to respect her boundaries.

“Your mother is a wise woman,” Sarah said as he sat down.

“I’ve often found that to be the case,” he agreed, turning to look at her.
She gave me a lot to think about.

He turned to look at her. “Myself as well. What did you speak about?”

“Some things about the way the Labyrinth works, the position of the Kings of the Goblins vs. that of the Queens of the Labyrinth. And you?”

“What it is like to be trapped by someone. I had not known to what actions she was driven to under Humperdinck’s control.” His eyes went hard and angry as he spoke about it and Sarah wondered what Buttercup had been driven to do. Jareth seemed to come back to the here and now and he looked at her. “Sarah, I could never hurt you like that. I do not want, have not wanted, nor will I ever want to hurt you in such a way.” Sarah looked back at him with wide eyes. Seeing so much honesty from the Goblin King all at once was a little overwhelming. Jareth seemed to notice and retreated to what he thought to be more mundane topics. “What did my mother tell you about the role of the King of the Goblins compared to that of the Queen of the Labyrinth?”

“Well,” Sarah started, “She made the whole idea of being the Queen of the Labyrinth a little more bearable.” Some of the tension seemed to flow out of Jareth then and hope started to glint in his eyes. Sarah looked at him dead serious, but placed a hand on his knee. “I still won’t be Queen with how the system stands now. I refuse to be a part of this.” She felt him tense up again and the anger start to build inside him. “Jareth.” He froze at the sound of his name. “I’m not saying no forever. I’m saying this needs to change.” The anger abated, but the tension stayed.

“How can it?” He asked. “How can those who treat the ones they should love badly, or simply do not love them at all, be punished and yet have you be satisfied?”

“I don’t know,” Sarah sighed, shaking her head. “But I know there has to be something we can do, or I’m pretty sure the Labyrinth wouldn’t have picked me. Your mother said it was time for the Labyrinth to change, and that that is why she left early. If I’m the one who is supposed to make the change, then a compromise has to be possible. After all,” she laughed softly, and moved a little closer to him, squeezing his knee, “even in the stories, the impossible tasks set by the Father of the Princess were never truly impossible. They just seemed to be, until someone looked at the problem in the right way.”

“You understand that I can not leave those who do not love their charges unpunished?” he asked her, eyes dead serious.

“Yes.” She nodded. She understood. “You understand that not all those who wish away their charges don’t actually not love them?”

“I understand that that is what you believe,” he said, in typical Fae circuitousness.

“Dammit Jareth,” Sarah swore softly, pulling back. He grabbed her hand as she started to pull away and looked her in the eye.

“What I do understand, Precious, is that you and I must come to a compromise on this matter.” He smiled that strange half smile of his that never failed to set winged insects loose in Sarah's stomach. “I’ll admit, I’m the slightest bit excited about this. You sure you’re up to making deals with a Fae?” Sarah looked back at him with the passion he so adored in her eyes.

“You bet I am.”

“Now?” He asked her, a wicked gleam in his eye.

“Er... no,” Sarah said, thinking about her plans for the weekend. “I still have to tackle the mountains
of homework the teachers assigned over Easter weekend, as well as Toby and Karen coming to visit.”

“Toby and Karen will be visiting you this weekend?”

“Yep. My family has always come and visited for Easter. After... since my dad died Iroh’s been letting them stay at the Jasmine Dragon. It saves on money for the trip, and it’s still really nice to get to see them.”

“I see. I'm glad that you will get to see your family again.” His voice turned dry. “After all, I know how important they are to you.” Sarah shot him a glare and he smiled a smile as dry as his voice and just a little teasing. Sarah rolled her eyes at him and snorted.

“I should get going,” she said, standing up. “My friends will be probably be worrying about me.”

“And you do need time to get ready for your visiting family,” he added rising to his feet and gently pulling her up to stand with him.

“That too,” she sighed, and pushed some hair out of her face. “We do need to come to this compromise, but after exams. I still have a year of school left, no matter what else happens. We'll pick a time once my exam schedule comes out.”

He nodded once, allowing her point if not agreeing with it.

“You've already done one transportation spell today, no matter how accidental. Would you care for some help returning to the Above?” Sarah winced, remembering how she'd pretty much collapsed into Jareth after her third transportation spell last time. She didn't have the luxury of extra sleep now. Not after spending this long in the Underground. Then again, maybe it wasn't that much time. How much faster was time here, anyway? Semi-reluctantly, she nodded.

“I fear I cannot accompany you today as I must still speak to my parents, but I can offer you aid.” He flicked his wrist and a crystal sat in his hand. “But before I do, here.” He threw the crystal up into the air and caught it in his other hand. There appeared a bouquet, held together by magic for no ribbon held the stems together. It held pinks, gentian, daphne and a few larch blooms perched among the flowers. Jareth reached out and plucked some myrtle off a nearby tree and tucked it gently into the centre of the bouquet. It was gorgeous and he held it out to her. “For you, Precious.”

Sarah reached out and took the flowers which stayed in perfect formation, unbound though they were. Their scent tickled her nose. They smelled heavenly, and they lifted her heart. She smiled at Jareth over them.

“Thank you, Jareth, but I should really get going.” He smiled back with a mischievous grin that put Sarah on her guard.

“I look forward to seeing young Toby again and meeting your stepmother.”

“Wait wha—!” was all Sarah managed to get out before he flicked his wrist at her and she disappeared.

Jareth smiled wickedly at the indignant, incredulous expression that had been on her face. He was, after all, the King of the Goblins.

* * *

Jet sat on the sill of his window that night, looking out across the campus. Smeller-Bee had been by
earlier to check in on him, and Long-Shot had only fallen asleep an hour ago, but Jet couldn't sleep, not yet. He still had things to think about.

No matter how many times Kat told him otherwise, he knew what he'd seen. Sarah Williams had disappeared in the middle of a hallway. He had not “lost sight of her in the crowd” and she had not “probably remembered something and turned down some hallway.” She had disappeared into thin air with a slightly disgusted expression on her face. There was only one thing that could explain that: Magic. The same magic that had killed his parents.

So, it seemed that little bitch had magic. They rarely moved alone, people of real magic. He wondered who around her was magic as well. Jet looked out into the calm night, not really seeing it as he thought about what kind of message he could use Sarah Williams to send.

Chapter End Notes

Alrighty folks, I've got some good news and some bad news. The bad news is, To Serve Her Purpose may not be updating for a while. Sorry folks, but I promise I'll get back to it ASAP. The GOOD news is, is that the reason for the tiny Hiatus is I'm doing a Holiday themed Labyrinth short story of pure Sareth goodness. Fluff guaranteed. It'll be around three chapters and I'll be posting it around Solstice/Hanukkah/Christmas. Until it gets finished To Serve Her Purpose gets a back seat in writing and editing time, but I'll be posting again hopefully by the new year. I hope you enjoy both the Holiday Fic and To Serve Her Purpose and, as always, please leave a contribution in the little box! (Some things never change XD)
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

HI GUYS! I'M BACK

Sorry about that hiatus, but I hope those of you that read Solstice Dawning enjoyed it.

To those of you who didn't and missed my seasons wishes, I hope you had a wonderful holiday, whatever you do or don't celebrate!

And now, back to To Serve Her Purpose, where we are also in a holiday mood, though a very different one.

And now, Chapter 23

*Cues theme song*

Katara looked up from the virology book she hadn’t really been reading at knock at the door. She marked her place, got up and opened the door. Zuko stood there, face and stance worried.

“Zuko!” Hadn't he said he would be working in the library? “Come in. What's up?”

Zuko stepped in and looked around. “Is Sarah back yet?”

“No,” Katara sighed, sinking onto her bed. “I haven’t heard anything.”

“Damn!” he swore, looking like he wanted to punch something. “What the hell are we going to do if she doesn’t get back before Karen and Toby arrive? ‘Oh, I’m sorry. You’re stepdaughter’s been kidnapped, and we aren’t doing anything about it. Calling the police will be useless, because he’s a goddamn Fae!’?” They way he looked, Katara was starting to fear for the breakable objects in the room.

“Calm down Zuko!” Katara snapped, glaring up at him. She was worried about their friend too, damnit, but there wasn’t enough space in here for them to spar. Maybe later she’d suggest they go to the dojo so they could work out this tension, but that was later. Now she wanted to be in her room, easily findable when Sarah came back. Zuko glared right back at her, before forcing himself to take a deep breath and relax a little. As he looked like he was no longer about to explode and possibly ruin her stuff—again (though really, why Sokka had needed her make up before asking Suki out she really didn’t know)—she continued.

“We don’t even know if something’s wrong. I’m sure she’ll be back soon. She knows Karen and Toby are coming tonight and I doubt there’s anything in any world that could stop Sarah from seeing her younger brother when she wants to.” She smiled, remembering how much Sarah cared about that boy. Sarah'd beaten the Goblin King once, Katara couldn't believe she wouldn't be able to again.

“How could something not be wrong!” He shot back at her, tension flowing back into his muscles. “You said she disappeared from the middle of the hallway, looking surprised.” His eyes took on an almost fearful tinge, his left eye just as expressive to her practised gaze as his scarred right. “Damn it,
he’s taken her! And I don’t care if she says he has no power over her—so what if he can’t use magic on her—she’s no fighter. If he manages to overpower her some in some physical way she’s done for. If I had only been more careful! Made her wear iron or, or—Damn it, why is Uncle always right—I can never think these things through!” He spun so that his back was to her. His fists clenched and unclenched as he tried to regain his composure.

“Zuko,” Katara said, taking pity on her friend, getting up and placing a hand on his back. “We really don’t know what’s happened to Sarah. And if it is something bad, it is not your fault.” If anything, his muscles grew tenser under her hand at her words. “If it’s anyone’s fault it’s the Goblin King’s and there isn’t a single one of us that wouldn’t do everything they could to get Sarah back and make him pay.” There was ice in her words as she spoke the last few words and it seemed to calm him. Katara decided now was as good a time as any to ask something that had been bothering her for a while. Ever since they’d learned who Jareth was, Zuko had been extra attentive and extra aware of Sarah. When they had met Jareth for the first time, she’d noticed when Zuko took Sarah aside to talk to her. Later, he’d been furious when she’d decided to spend the weekend with Jareth and had been distracted the whole time she was gone. She’d manage to flip him twice during their weekly sparing match before he’d finally brought his head properly into the fight.

“Zuko.” She took a deep breath. “Do you love Sarah?”

“Yes,” he said, some of the tension leaving his body. “I suppose I do love her. And I’m worried she’s going to do something stupid and I won’t be able to help her, either.”

“Either?” Katara asked, wondering who he could be talking about. As far as she knew, his ex, Mai, didn’t need any kind of protection.

“I couldn’t save Azula, either.” Katara jerked back.

“What’s Azula got to do with any of this?” she cried at this unexpected turn in the conversation.

“Well, if Sarah wasn’t like Azula, she probably wouldn’t make me think 'younger sister' so much.” Zuko turned to look at her, his one good eyebrow drawn down in confusion.

“Wait, you love Azula?”

“Damn it Katara, you know I do,” Zuko snarled, looking defensive. “I know the rest of you—aside from Aang—don’t see her as redeemable but she’s my little sister and I can’t just turn that off, OK!” Katara was so beyond confused at this point, she decided to go back to the original question, ask it a little differently, and see if the world decided it wanted to go back to making at least a little sense any time soon.

“Zuko,” she said slowly, making sure to enunciate each word. “Do you want to go out with Sarah.”

“What?” he yelped. “Sarah? Ew! No! Wait, you thought I wanted to ask Sarah out?”

“Well, yes,” Katara defended herself. “I mean, you’re over protective of her, constantly keeping an eye on her, you became upset when she got a new boyfriend and glower every time she talks about him. What was I supposed to think?” She sat down, crossing her arms and glaring at him.

“Trust me Katara, Sarah is the last person I’d have those kind of feelings for.” He still looked slightly green.

“Then why are you acting like this?”

Zuko’s expression turned sad. He sank down onto the bed next to her.
“She really does remind me of my little sister.”

Katara recoiled. “Sarah reminds you of Azula?!”

“Well.” Zuko eyes were far in the past. “More of who she could have been. If Mom had been there, if my fa—if Ozai hadn’t gotten such a firm hold on her mind. If I had been a better older brother…”

Katara reached out and put a comforting hand on his shoulder. “What happened to Azula was not your fault.” He still wouldn’t look at her. “After what your father did to you and your Uncle got you out of there, there was nothing you could have done. What she is now is not your fault. Your bastard of a father is responsible for all that, not you.” Pale gold eyes looked out from a mop of dark hair and into fierce, bright blue ones.

“Thank you, Katara,” he breathed, muscles slowly uncoiling. Katara smiled and squeezed his shoulder reassuringly, before getting back to the matter at hand.

“Sarah really reminds you of Azula?” she asked, eyebrows up and voice incredulous. It was true that she’d only met his little sister a few times during their road trip that summer, but it was more than enough to gain a very strong impression of her.

“Well, think about it,” Zuko said, finally turning his whole body to face hers. “Sarah is driven, powerful, proud and intelligent. She surrounds herself with people and friends who will have a variety of skills who will be useful to her. Think about the friends she ended up making in the Labyrinth. Or about us. Or Merlin.”

“You really think she’s using us?” Katara asked, glancing over at her roommate's side of the room.

“No. Sarah isn’t Azula,” he said firmly. “But… Well, I still can’t help but see the similarities and want to look out for her.”

“I see,” Katara said, processing this new information. “But that still doesn’t explain why you didn’t act like this at all when she was seeing Jake, or Tim.” Zuko just glared at her, not even bothering to point out what was so obviously wrong with this point. “Who I will admit weren’t Fae.” Katara conceded. His expression didn’t waver. “Or the Goblin King,” she allowed, before continuing “But you’re a Sozin.” He flinched as she said his name and she put her hand on his knee this time, showing she meant no harm. “You of all people know how to deal with the Fae, especially with your uncle’s help.”

“Uncle couldn’t do much when the Fae killed his son.” Katara’s eyes widened as Zuko stared fixedly at the opposite wall, his voice shaking slightly. “I was 12 when it happened,” he began, sounding as though the words were being drawn from him against his will. “There was this Fae family who were dealing for a child. Not a Wished-Away, but as a punishment to the parents. I heard my father talking about it and went to Lu Ten about it. We saved the kid—Lee, maybe 8 years old? —some iron amulets, a few diagrams taken from Uncle’s books, getting the parents to move—Well, Lu Ten did most of the work, but I helped. I did what I could. I was the one who told Lu Ten about it.” He paused, then forged on. “And Ozai found out. So did the Fae who wanted revenge. I think mom covered for me. Azula said she saw our parents arguing. That night mom came into my room, woke me up and told me ‘Everything I’ve done, I’ve done to protect you. Remember this, Zuko. No matter how things may seem to change, never forget who you are.’ And then she was gone. All I can remember is a man with blond hair standing in the hall, and then she disappeared. I’ve never seen her again. The next morning, Lu Ten was gone as well. Uncle doesn’t talk about him any more, but he always lights a candle on the anniversary.” He paused before finishing. “You don’t light a candle for the living, Katara.” His voice cracked and Katara drew him into a hug. He stiffened for a moment and then wrapped his arms around her in turn.
“Was that when Ozai scarred you?” she asked softly. She knew Ozai had scarred him. He didn’t talk about Ozai often, but if he did, his hand would sometimes wander up to touch his scar, before he pulled it quickly away. None of the gang called Ozai Zuko’s father. Again Zuko tensed. He didn’t talk much about how he got his scars.

“That was later,” he said haltingly. “That time, I didn’t ask for help.”

“Oh, Zuko,” Katara cried, burring her face in the crook of his neck, her hands rubbing circles into his back. She held him close, letting him know that here and now he was wanted and there were those he could reach out to for help.

“We’re here, if you need us,” she whispered fiercely, her eyes itching. “You aren’t alone. Not anymore.”

Slowly, carefully, as though he feared she might pull away, he laid his scarred cheek on her hair. They sat there for a while, comfortable in each other’s arms. Zuko’s smell filled Katara’s nose. He smelled warm and spicy and like the wind in the summer. His arms too were warm, and strong around her, and it felt so right to be sitting like this at this moment.

“Katara?” Zuko murmured, his breath tickling her scalp.

“Yes?” Katara said, pulling back a little so she could see his face. She froze, her face inches away from his. She saw his golden eyes gone dark and something lurched low in her stomach. She couldn’t look away. Her heart started beating faster and her breath became a little more uneven. She had no idea eyes could have this great an effect on her. She waited for him to speak, but he seemed to have gone speechless. Her mouth was dry. She couldn’t pull away. She couldn’t move forward without—

“—AT!” interrupted a new voice. Katara and Zuko jerked apart. “Oh damn,” the voice continued. Sarah stood in the middle of her room, looking at them. “Timing! Okay, uh. You two go back to doing whatever you were doing.” She smiled knowingly. “I’ll go to the…library! Yeah, the library! And I’ll be there until I go pick up Karen and Toby and we’ll be eating dinner at the Jasmine Dragon so I won’t be home until late. Or actually, you know what? I’ll ask Sokka if I can crash in his room and oh! Right! Katara, I still have that little gift you left me in my bag under my bed in case you’re out.” Katara sputtered, remembering exactly what she had given Sarah, and Zuko shot a confused look between them. “Right I’ll just grab my books and—”

“Oh no you don’t!” Katara muttered as Sarah hurried towards her desk to grab some books. “Sit. Down,” she ordered, pointing at Sarah’s bed and using her best ‘mom’ voice. Sarah turned back to face them and took in their expressions. She was pretty sure that was exactly how she’d looked the one time Toby had wondered off and been missing for a few hours when he was four. Relieved she was okay, but also really, really, angry that she had just gone missing in the first place. Angry because angry was easier to deal with than scared and helpless. She sat down and got ready to face the music. ‘Really,’ she reminded herself, ‘this wasn’t at all my fault and I have no reason at all to feel guilty. None.’

“Where have you been?” Zuko started, giving her a visual once over. “Katara said she saw you disappear in the hall and we’ve heard nothing else for the past three hours.” Had it really been three hours? Sarah glanced at the clock. Apparently.

“What happened?” Katara asked sounding calmer. Sarah sighed and got into storytelling mode. “I just want to say,” she started, giving Katara a look, “that none of this would have happened if it weren’t for you making out with your ex-boyfriend outside the caf after Celtic studies.”
“Ex-boyfriend?” Katara asked.

“Well, I kinda assumed you and Zuko wouldn’t…” Sarah trailed off, her eyes going wide as she took in their mild blushes. “Never mind! NONE of my business. Really. Um anyway! I was—”

“It’s not what it looked like!” Zuko defended himself before wincing when he realized how that sounded.

“Zuko was really worried about you and so I was giving him a hug to reassure him,” Katara explained. Sarah raised an eyebrow at her roommate, saying she didn’t quite buy it. Katara replied with a look that clearly said that they would be talking about this later and Sarah was to stop thinking along those lines right now! Zuko watched the entire exchange, clueless to its meaning.

“So,” Zuko said, returning to the subject at hand and away, far away, from earlier, more dangerous topics. “What happened?”

“When I turned the corner and saw those two going at it, I, um, thought a word I probably should not have while really not wanting to see that so—”

“You made a wish?!” Zuko asked, eyes wide.

“Hey!” Sarah defended herself, “It's supposed to be what's said is said, not what's thought is thought!”

“The Goblin King can read your thoughts now? That's not good.”

“Would you two please shut up? Or do you not actually care about what happened?” They shut up and let her continue.

“It was the Labyrinth which heard my thoughts, and apparently she wanted me to meet Jareth's parents,” Katara opened her mouth. Sarah glared at her. Katara closed it again. “Because I ended up right in the middle of a family reunion. His Uncle threatened me with a sword... Anyway, I met his family, heard about how his parents met. You know, I think I might use that as my story for the next open mic...” Zuko and Katara were glaring at her. She decided it was time to speed up with the story. They could obviously tell there was something she wasn't saying. Sarah, however, didn't really feel ready to tell her friends about what had happened. She sighed. Karen and Toby would be here soon and she should really be getting ready to go meet them. She would be very late if she were to tell them the whole story and then talk them out of locking her in an iron room for the rest of her natural life, which was really not on the list of ways Sarah had planned to spend it. Then again, until a few weeks ago, “Goblin Queen” hadn't been on that list either. Anyway, now was not the time to deal with this.

“Look, a lot happened and I want to go over it with everyone at the same time, okay? And right now, I have less than half an hour to get to the train station. Your Uncle is still meeting us there, right?” Zuko nodded. “Good. Tomorrow night, let's see if we can get everyone together and I'll explain everything, alright? But in the meantime, not a word of this in front of Karen!”

* * *

As it happened, Sarah managed to get to the station with enough time to catch her breath before the train pulled in. Toby was the first person off the train and plastered himself to her legs, hugging her around the waist.

“Sarah!” he squealed into her stomach.
“Hi there, Tobes,” she said, holding him close for a second, glad to see him safe again. She reached down and lifted him up. “Oof, you are getting huge. C'mon, let's go help Karen with your bags, ok? Iroh's waiting with the car outside.”

Karen made it off the train next, juggling a suitcase and a few extra bags.

“Toby, you left this in your seat.” Karen was holding out the wooden sword that Jareth had given Toby. Toby's eyes went wide and he scrambled out of Sarah’s arms to go grab the sword. He gave it a careful once over before sliding it into his belt. Sarah's eyebrows went up at the way he treated it. She hadn't seen him show that much reverence for anything that wasn't a book, ever.

She moved over to Karen to take the large suitcase. Her dad had always joked that he'd had kids so that he'd stop having to carry everything. Karen handed it off gratefully.

“Thank you, Sarah,” Karen said, adjusting the other bags for easier carrying. “By the way, where did you find that toy sword? I've never seen him treat anything so carefully, and when I asked to see it, he gave me a lecture on safety.”

“Um.” Sarah blinked as she tried to come up with a non-crazy-sounding explanation. “A friend of mine gave it to me to give to him over the break. I'm glad Toby likes it so much.”


“No, you haven't met him...” Sarah said as they started trooping off towards the van.

“Him?” Sarah groaned internally. She knew that tone of voice. Karen had used it every time she had gotten her hopes up that Sarah would have someone to date. Never mind that Sarah had had many boyfriends, by now Karen always seemed slightly surprised and hopeful when she met a boy. It was nice that Karen cared, but it could get on her nerves.

“Yes, him,” Sarah said.

“I'd love to hear about him later,” Karen offered, hearing the slight exasperation in her stepdaughter’s voice. “But for now let's get settled. I swear that trip feels longer every year. Ah, Mr. Sozin, thank you again for letting us stay with you.”

“Mrs. Williams, I must insist you call me Iroh. Mr. Sozin is my father,” Iroh said, smiling and shaking her offered hand. Sarah winced a little, realizing the implications of that old line.

“In that case, please call me Karen,” Karen said smiling. Once he had released her hand, he bent over to talk to Toby.

“My my, young Toby, look at how big you've grown. And you've gotten yourself a sword. Do you know to be careful with it?”

“Uh-huh,” Toby said, nodding very seriously. “You should always show a weapon your respect.” Iroh smiled hugely and reached down to ruffle Toby's hair.

“Very good!” he said. “My Nephew should have supper waiting for you when we get back to the Jasmine Dragon. If you'll just put your bags in the back, we can be off.”

“Already done.” Sarah said, as she closed the trunk.

“Then let us go and find dinner,” he said, his eyes twinkling, and they got in the car.
When they arrived at the Jasmine Dragon, Sarah asked Toby if he wanted to help her bring the bags upstairs. Karen smiled that maternal smile she always did when Sarah and Toby were getting along. Iroh winked at her. How that old man seemed to know what everyone was thinking and planning all the damned time, Sarah couldn't guess, but in this case she was glad of it. She could be sure he'd keep Karen distracted as she talked to Toby.

“Here you go,” she said as she handed Toby two of the lighter bags before heaving the suitcase out of the car. What had Karen packed, bricks? They were only going to be there for three nights. She managed to get it all the way up the stairs and into the guest room. Toby stood there waiting for her, his bags already left on the bed.

“Toby, can I talk to you before we head downstairs?”

He nodded and jumped up on the bed. “No shoes on the bed,” Sarah reminded him. Toby gave her a look and Sarah realized what she had just said. Gods, she was turning into Karen in her old age. Still, it wouldn't hurt Toby to be nice to Iroh's linens. Sarah sat down next to him.

“You haven't told Karen about the Goblin King, right?” she asked.

“Of course not!” He sounded indignant, but his hand drifted back to his sword.

“Good. See, the thing is, Toby, Jareth said he might come visit to see you and meet Karen while you two are here, but Karen can't know who he is, okay?”

“Ok, Sar,” he said looking serious.

“We won't even call him Jareth, 'cause that's a really weird name. What name do you want to use for him, Tobes?”

Toby thought for a second. “Jerry?” he offered.

“Perfect. If he shows up this weekend we call him Jerry. Then you can talk to Karen about my... friend, alright?”

“Isn't he your boyfriend?” Toby asked, with far too much innocence to be believable.

“That isn't something Karen needs to know about. You know how she gets when she thinks I'm seeing someone.” Toby continued to look innocent. “If you tell Karen about March Break I'm telling her about what really happened that time that all the fine china went missing for a week.” Toby went pale. “Deal?” He nodded furiously and fled. Twenty-three years old Sarah might be, but she wasn't above a little blackmail here and there. It was practically her duty as an older sibling. She made her more stately way down the stairs and towards the back room, from which delicious smells were emanating.

It was just the three of them at the table, Zuko and Iroh having brought in the food and left.

“How was the trip?” Sarah asked as she dug into her mashed potatoes, a favourite of Toby's.

“Long, but worth it,” Karen said, smiling at her stepdaughter. “I'm very happy to be able to get up here. Work's been ridiculously busy recently. How's school going?”

“Pretty well,” Sarah said. She thought for a moment, then decided to risk it. “I'm getting top grades in my Celtic Studies class.” If Karen changed the topic, she'd know not to bring it up again.

“Well, that's hardly surprising. You are incredibly bright and it's one of your favourite subjects. You
could talk about it for hours before you took this class. It would be far more shocking if you were to
do badly.” Sarah blushed a little at her stepmother's glowing praise. “So, tell me, what's interesting in
that class? Anything particularly new and exciting?”

“Well,” Sarah said, deciding to go for it. “I got elected by my class to be the head of the Beltane
Fair.”

“Congratulations. Beltane Fair? And just how do you plan to celebrate May Day?”

Sarah was impressed. It seemed Karen really did want to rebuild these bridges, out of solid stone this
time, possibly with a permanence spell.

“Well, we're having a celebration with a kind of Medieval fair/events that would be normally held on
Beltane, followed by a celebration with the marriage of the King and Queen of Spring.”

“That sounds lovely. Is it actually on Beltane?”

“Yes, actually, it's a Sunday this year.” Sarah could barely believe this conversation was actually
happening.

“And as head of the fair you...?”

“Have to organize the entire thing, and make sure it's all historically accurate,” Sarah said.

“That should be fairly easy for you,” Karen replied, eyes gleaming. “I think you had every book on
Celtic mythology and culture from our library at home memorized by the time you left for
university.” Sarah blushed a little at the gentle ribbing. It was true, although not necessarily for the
reasons Karen thought. After Sarah's encounter with the Goblin King she had become determined to
know every single possible defence against the Fae that she could find out about. She knew them
backwards and forwards, and had carried a bottle of beads with her for a year or so until Hoggle told
her that trick didn't work. “Well, I'm glad you are getting a chance to put that knowledge of yours to
good use. Actually, a friend of mine came across a problem in Celtic mythology that I said I'd ask
you about. The Fae are bound by their word, correct?”

“Yes.” She blew softly on her stew, and said more softly, “What's said is said.”

“Well, is there any way for a Fae to get out of an agreement they made? Agreeing to marry someone
for example—Are you alright?”

When Sarah had stopped choking, she looking at Karen with watering eyes. “Um... Yeah. Fine.
What was the question again?” She couldn't believe she'd heard right. The level of coincidence was
ridiculous. Was it possible that Karen knew about Jareth?

“My... friend was telling me about how the Fae were bound by their word, how they had to stick
with any arrangement they made, no matter what. I was left wondering if there was any way for a
Fae to break their word. For example, if a Fae promised to be faithful, would they have to be? Or if
they promised to protect someone?”

“Well, yes,” Sarah said, not entirely sure where Karen's sudden interest was coming from.
“According to the stories and what I’ve heard, the Fae have to keep their word no matter what. They
can't not.”

“Hm,” Karen had that faint furrow between her eyebrows she got when she was thinking furiously.
“Thank you, Sarah.”
“No problem,” Sarah said, feeling very nonplussed. She decided to turn to a more steady topic of conversation. “So, kiddo, how's school going?” The mystery of Karen's new interest was pushed to the back of her mind as Toby regaled her with tales of his life at school. She heard about spelling tests that were “way too easy” and complaints about how the teacher could “never tell a story as good as you do, Sar!” Sarah was pleased to hear her little brother brag, proud to be the older sister of such a bright kid.

“There's been talk of having him skip a grade,” Karen told her as Toby broke into a jaw splitting yawn. “And I think it's time for bed, young man. In fact,” she added, “I think it's time for both of us to get to bed. Travelling can be surprisingly tiring considering you're sitting down all day.”

“Can Sarah tell me one story? Please mom?” Karen looked at her son's pleading expression and her stepdaughter's excited one.

“Oh, very well,” she sighed. “But just one. Sarah, can you go with him? I've some things I need to talk to Iroh about.”

“Come on. I've got a great story for you tonight!” Sarah said, ushering her brother ahead of her. She'd come downstairs to clear away dishes after, if there were still any left out. She waited patiently while Toby changed and brushed his teeth before curling up on one of the two beds in the room. Sarah sank down beside him.

“I've got a new one for you tonight. I only just heard it today.” Toby looked at her eagerly. A brand new story that Sarah hadn't made up was a rare treat. “It begins a long time ago on a farmstead in a country called Gloster. There lived Buttercup with her farmhand, a boy named Wesley.”

“Sar-aaah,” Toby pouted. “I know that one already.”

“Where did you hear this story? Are you sure it doesn't just start the same?

“Uh-huh.” Toby nodded. “Ja—erry told it to me when mom got really sick. Don't you have another one? Please Sarah? Tell me one about the Trolls?”

Sarah sighed. She'd been so looking forward to telling him a new story. Trust Jareth to have gotten to him first. However, she couldn't bring herself to deny Toby a story, so she got the threads of one together, and began to spin a new tale for him.

“Once upon a time, in the Land of the Trolls, there lived a clever little troll,” she began.

It was some time later that she slipped out of the room and started making her quiet way down the stairs. She met Karen on the way up, who paused for a moment, then slowly opened her arms. Sarah smiled and stepped in for a hug.

“I'm really glad you could make it.” she said, squeezing the woman who had helped raise her.

“It's very good to see you,” Karen replied, giving her a gentle squeeze in return before stepping back. “I have some gifts for you for your birthday, but they're upstairs and Toby is asleep...”

“It's fine, Karen. Tomorrow will do just as well. Want to go on a walk tomorrow afternoon? The park is really nice right now.”

“That sounds wonderful. After a day of sitting all day it will be lovely to stretch my legs, and I'm sure Toby would like to be able to run around for a bit. On the other hand, it will be nice to get some rest...”
“Tell you what. I'll stop by at around one and we'll walk over. Sound like a plan?”

“Wonderful.” Karen smiled softly before yawning. “Oh, I'm sorry. I—”

“Don't worry about it, Karen,” Sarah said, waving the woman up to her room and to sleep. “I'll see you tomorrow. Good night!”

“Good night, Sarah,” Karen replied, making her way up the stairs. Sarah grabbed her coat, said goodbye to Iroh and Zuko, and made her way back to her dorm to sleep. She'd had a long day and still had to worry about when the Goblin King might show up. All in all, it was looking to be an interesting weekend.

Chapter End Notes

And I have started on 24, so hopefully you won't have to wait TOO long.

Also, I'd like to thank Mrs. Pepperpot for her contribution to my knowledge of anti-Fae lore.

Stay tuned for Next chapter with more Toby! Karen! Possibly some Jareth! Probably the Gaang and an appearance from a long absent Character.

See you all in hopefully about a week!

*Screen fades to black as the theme song plays and the fading voice of the author begs for reviews before the time runs out and an add for breakfast cereal takes it's place*
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

IT'S ALIVE!!!!

Dear readers, I am SO sorry this chapter has taken so long. Real life is really really hectic right now and I barely have time to write. Once my semester is over though, I should be posting WAY more regularly. In the mean time, I hope you have a very pleasant Pass over/Easter/Long weekend/weekend/spring!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sarah returned from breakfast the next morning to find Klio sitting on her bed. Sarah was actually surprised t this interruption in her life. She might have expected one of her friends, or Jareth, (more probably Jareth, especially as Klio was on her bed. Maybe it was something with the Fae and beds?), but Klio?

“Klio?” Sarah asked, pushing her door shut. Klio hurriedly put Sir Didymus' book of tales back on Sarah's bedside table and stood up.

“Sarah, it's wonderful to see you,” she said stepping forward and taking Sarah's hands in hers and squeezing them.

“Yeah, you too,” Sarah said, squeezing back before reclaiming her hands. “Um, Klio. Not that it isn't nice to see you, but....what are you doing here?”

“Oh, right. May I?” She gestured at the bed.

“Our course.” They sat. Klio fidgeted, rubbing her hands together and not looking at Sarah.

“So...” Sarah said as Klio continued to say nothing. At this prompt, Klio shook her head and started talking.

“I hear you and Jareth had a fight, and it seemed to me that you should have someone to talk to. I know that Her Highness spoke with you, but she's his mother. It's true I'm his friend, but.. Well, I know he can be a complete idiot sometimes.” Sarah couldn't suppress a smile at Klio's exasperated tone. “And, well, I'm more outside the situation than anyone else. I thought maybe you'd want someone to talk to?” she finished, halfway between a statement and a question. Sarah smiled at the kind, uncertain offer. It was very thoughtful of Klio to come talk to her like this.

“Thanks Klio,” she said, “I appreciate the offer, but right now... I'm still processing everything I learned yesterday. If I have questions in the meantime..?”

“Feel free to call on me. Tell the Labyrinth you wish to speak with me. She knows how to get into contact with me and can transport me to wherever you are.”

“You can't transport yourself?” Sarah asked. She knew it took a lot of energy at first, but Jareth had implied it got easier with time. It certainly seemed easier for him.

“Inside a world? Of course. It's travelling to a different world that is beyond my powers. Only a
monarch or something as powerful as the Labyrinth can do that.”

“But I can do that and I'm not even Fae,” Sarah pointed out the obvious. Klio gave her a sharp look.

“Only a monarch or something as powerful as the Labyrinth can do that,” she repeated slowly.

“You're saying that the Labyrinth transports me?” Sarah checked, knowing from the inflection that that hadn't been what Klio had been trying to say, but still not wanting to face the truth.

“While it might be possible that the Labyrinth was transporting you, the fact that you are drained after a transportation suggests that that isn't the case.”

“How do you even know that?” Was Klio spying on her? What was it with the Fae and keeping tabs on her...

“I speak regularly with both Jareth and the Labyrinth. I end up knowing quite a bit.”

“You can speak with the Labyrinth too?” Alright, apparently Sarah did have a bunch of questions for Klio.

“I am technically engaged to Jareth, much to our mutual despair, and that makes me She-Who-Might-Be-Queen, letting me speak to Her. Personally I like to add 'Even-If-She'd-Really-Rather-Not-Be' to that title.” Klio smiled and Sarah grinned back. She rather liked Klio. After a moment, Klio's smile faded.

“I may be able to speak with Her, but I'm not nearly as close to Her as you are. And while you are very close to Her, She isn't the one who is transporting you.” She paused, her eyes examining Sarah's face. “Only a monarch can transport themselves between worlds, Sarah.”

“You know,” Sarah said, standing up and starting to pace. “I'm getting really tired of people telling me I have to marry Jareth and be a queen. Shouldn't I get a say in this? I mean, it's my damn life, my damn brain, my damn heart. I mean, my relationship with him is big and complicated, but everyone keeps telling me how good he is, how he wouldn't hurt me, how I have to take the position. What if I don't want to be a friggin' queen! What if I don't want to have to deal with this!”

“Sarah,” Klio stepped into the line of Sarah's pacing. She looked completely serious and almost afraid. “Do you really want magic to leave your life?”

That stopped Sarah cold. Give up magic? She fell back onto her bed.

“Is that the cost of not becoming Queen?” Her voice was very bleak. “I have to give up magic?”

“No,” Klio sounded so certain, Sarah felt she could build a house on the foundations of that belief. Sarah looked over at Klio who came to sit down beside her, hope stirring in her chest. “Sarah, magic will never leave you, no matter what you decide about Jareth. Unfortunately, your magic is tied to the Labyrinth and so to Jareth. The only way to cut him completely out of your life would be to completely remove magic from it. That doesn't mean you have to be his Queen, or love him, or be Queen of the Labyrinth but refuse to marry him. The Labyrinth might want you as Queen, She may have eyes for no one else, She may be more powerful than any of us can possibly imagine, but you, Sarah Williams, you are She-Who-Can-Make-The-Words-Unsaid. No one can trap you, and anyone who tried would be an idiot. The Labyrinth is many things, but an idiot isn't one of them.”

“And Jareth?” Sarah asked, curious. Much as she was annoyed that people kept pitching him to her, she rather thought that Klio would be more blunt in her opinion, and perhaps have eyes less clouded with maternal love.
“Well...” Klio thought for a minute. “Jareth can be a complete idiot sometimes, but not in stuff like this. Well, yes in stuff like this, but not in a 'let me trap you and keep you here forever' incompetent villain who never gets the girl kind of way.” Sarah snorted at Klio's description of him. “My Lady has very definite views on this kind of thing.”

“Does she?” Sarah felt a grin spreading across her face at the idea of Chamomile, Camille, whatever, and Klio bonding over the uselessness of incompetent villains. She made herself stay on topic though. “What do you mean about him being an idiot about things like this?”

“Well, he abandoned you,” she explained. “After his five days with you,” she added at Sarah's confused expression. “He let you go, turned away from all the possibilities without even consulting you because he was too cowardly to fight for what he wanted or even just talk to you about the situation honestly. Like I said, an idiot.” Sarah toyed with the pendant that hung close to her skin, concealed by her shirt. He'd said she would always be able to move between worlds with this, that she'd never be helplessly abandoned again. So, maybe he had been an idiot for not talking to her about this first, but he had ensured she'd always have a voice, so maybe he wasn't a complete idiot. He'd given her a way out of any trap.

“What's that?” Klio asked, seeing her fiddling.

“Oh.” Sarah blinked. She hadn't really been aware of what she was doing. She pulled the pendant free of her shirt and showed it to Klio.

“Jareth gave this to me so I could move through the worlds at will. He said that this way, I could always find him if he disappeared again, though I suppose it lets me leave the Underground whenever I want as well...” She trailed off, looking at the curving horns and embossed gold inset. Her thumb had memorized the pattern in the weeks since her birthday.

“May I?” Klio asked, reaching out towards pendant. Not taking it from around her neck, Sarah put the pendant in her hand.

“Did Jareth tell you anything else about this pendant when he gave it to you?” she asked, carefully looking at it. Surely Jareth wasn't that stupid, to give her something like this and not explain it...

“Nope,” answered Sarah. Oh, why was she trying to fool herself? Of course Jareth was that stupid. Sarah frowned, taking in Klio's seriously irked expression.

“Is there something he should have...?” She trailed off invitingly, almost afraid of the answer. Every time she felt she was starting to figure out her relationship with Jareth, someone threw in another curve ball that sent her flying into uncharted territory. While it was good to know the things she was learning, she was getting damn tired of being worried all the time.

Klio sighed. Jareth was her friend and she wanted to see him happy, but Sarah needed to know what she was wearing, and he needed to learn, as she had, that relationships with humans couldn't be built on deceit and words left unsaid. She'd almost lost her Lady like that and at least Jareth would have her to try to help a little with damage control, the lucky bastard.

“Sarah, there is something very important you should know about this. Please let me finish this explanation before you go and kill Jareth.”

“Will I want to?” Sarah asked, eyebrows going up at this request.

“Probably,” Klio admitted. There was no point in lying to the woman.
“Alright...” Sarah sighed. “I'll wait until you finish to attempt regicide.”

“Well,” Klio began, realizing this was probably the best she was going to get. Sarah was, after all, a woman Jareth wanted to court. Now, where to begin... “Have you ever noticed that Jareth never wears a crown?”

“Yes,” Sarah encouraged. She had always wondered about that.

“That is because different kingdoms use different symbols of rulership. The Kambutchans wear a kind of beaded choker, the dwarves a special bread—don't ask, the elves have rings. Only the High King and Queen wear actual crowns.” Klio took a deep breath and let the next sentence tumble out in a rush. “Jareth's badge of office is his pendant. The Queen of the Labyrinth's badge of office is very similar to your pendant.”

“Similar, but not the same?” Sarah asked as Klio let go of the pendant, letting it fall back again Sarah's breast bone.

“Very similar,” Klio specified. “So similar that it was only on close inspection that I realized he hadn't flat out given you the pendant to trapse off with. Not that I think you’d run off with it, but still. Something this close must have taken a lot of work...” She trailed off, considering the pendant, before shaking her head and continuing. “This is the badge of office of the Queen of the Labyrinth, or close enough that no one will be able to tell the difference. You said that Jareth gave you this so that you could travel between worlds. I was right when I said only monarchs can travel between the worlds, Sarah. You have the raw power to be a monarch, you have the approval, in this case, the rather insistent approval, of the land you rule—all lands get a say in their rulers, just few are as vocal as the Labyrinth and there are no stories of a Land being as insistent as the Labyrinth is about having you—and you also wear what might as well be the badge of office of the Queen. It's no wonder you can move between worlds. I wouldn't be surprised it you could bond with the the Labyrinth Herself, not just talk with Her.”

“Um, by bond you mean...?” Sarah asked, afraid she already knew the answer.

“Well, Former Queen Buttercup once described it as becoming one with the Labyrinth. Almost as if She were an extension of her body. I believe she used the phrase 'flexing my walls' to explain how it felt once. I'm sure you'll experience this eventually.”

“Um, yeah... About that....” Sarah sighed and decided to just explain. “That's already happened. Last weekend there was a runner and, well, I know exactly what it's like to be bound to the Labyrinth. You say that's something else only the Queen can do?”

“God and Goddess, he really is smitten.” Klio muttered just loudly enough for Sarah to hear. Her eyebrows went up. Klio considered the pendant for another moment before going looking back at Sarah.

“Sarah, you and Jareth need to have a serious talk about just what he meant by giving you that. I've known him for years and not even I can figure it out. If you need leverage, tell him I will tell you the hedgehog story if he doesn't. But, I think you and he should have a talk. Again.” Klio sighed and rolled her eyes are her oldest friend's antics. If only he'd actually applied what she told him about her relationship with her Lady... Well, some people just needed to learn the hard way. She just hoped this lesson wouldn't cost him his queen. She didn't want to see him hurt so much again, and this time it would be much, much worse. “In the meantime, is there anything else you wanted to know?”

“He gave me a dress and some riding leathers, as well as a horse, as long as I learn to ride it. Anything extra special there?”
“Well, Jareth has always said he enjoys a woman who knows how to ride,” Klio mused. Watching Sarah turn pink, she decided not to specify in either direction. It was more fun that way. “It is a generous gift to be sure, but not inappropriate to someone you are seriously courting. A set of riding clothes to go with it would make sense, though they aren't always made of leather,” 'Oh of course he had requested leather,' Sarah thought to herself. “As for the dress,” Klio continued, "can you describe it?"

"It's long, it has a fitted bodice, and it's in red and orange with accents of bright yellow,” Sarah said. Klio smiled.

“So, is there some special significance?” Sarah asked, confused by Klio's expression.

“Well, it's just that I've heard Jareth wax rhapsodic about what he calls your 'fire'. He admires the way you stand up to him and never seem to be afraid of him. It seems the servants heard, and Seamstress Her'ta decided to do something with that. Jareth's servants have always been very loyal, and he is a good king to them.”

“For example?” Sarah prodded. She'd yet to really see Jareth as the Goblin King aside from the whole child stealing/taking angle.

“I'll have to let his subject speak for themselves.” Klio smiled softly. “It's better if you experience it firsthand.”

“If you're sure...” Sarah said, not sounding it herself. Klio reached out and put her hand over Sarah's.

“I am. Talk to Kelsa, or Ner'da or Her'ta or Jim—he's a goblin, don't ask—or any of his servants. Servants gossip like no one's business and you can always tell when they're just being loyal or really sincere. And, well, I'm sure you'll see for yourself.”

Sarah smiled, wondering what they would say. Remembering Ner'da, she was pretty sure she'd get a truthful reaction from her at least. Whatever they said, it was sure to be interesting. She also wondered when she'd get to ask them. She wouldn't have time to go to the Underground this weekend, not with Karen and Toby—

Sarah looked at the clock and swore. She'd have barely enough time to eat and get to the park on time. These damn Fae were going to cost her her scholarship, she'd had no time to study this morning. Well, she was a college student. She knew how to make do with little sleep.

“Look, Klio, I really appreciate the talk, and maybe you can give me a real introduction to Underground fashions some other time, but my stepmother and brother are in town this weekend and I'm supposed to meet up with them and I need to get moving now if I'm not going to be late.” She started moving around her room getting together everything she'd need for this afternoon.

“Jareth mentioned you live away from your family?”

“Yeah, they're here for Easter,” she said, pulling on her coat.

“A common human Holiday?”

“Well, around here it's big enough for people to get time off school or work. So, yeah, I guess so.” She shoved her keys into her pocket. “Why do you ask?”

“Oh, no reason. My lady is also gathering her family around her at this time, which is why I am not whisking her off to the Underground.”
“Your lady is a mother?” Sarah asked. Somehow she'd imagined Klio's lady being more like her age, or even younger. Weren't the Fae supposed to be obsessed with young humans? Maybe she was a young mother.

“My lady is the head of her family, yes. Now isn't your own mother waiting for you?”

“Stepmother,” Sarah corrected before looking at the time and swearing again. Head of a family? Sarah was reminded of Katara and Sokka's Gran-Gran. How much older than Sarah was Klio's lady? Well, now was not the time to find out more, her little brother and stepmother were waiting.

“See you, Klio!” she yelled over her shoulder as she closed the door behind her, knowing the Fae could see herself out.

Klio smiled at the closed door, knowing how powerful the urge to do right by your family was.

“How did it go?” a voice spoke in her head.

“As well as could be expected, considering it's those two. Fear not, dear Labyrinth. Our plans will work. Especially with Jareth this motivated to get out of the marriage.”

“Good,” the Labyrinth said, sounding rather exasperated. “It is taking them rather longer than I'd like.”

“Patience, Labyrinth, Patience. Give them time. They'll learn.”

The Labyrinth sighed. “They'll have to. Are you ready to return?”

“Yes,” Klio said simply, and without a cloud of glitter, Sarah's room was empty once again.

* * *

Sarah arrived at the doors of the Jasmine Dragon out of breath, only to be taken aside by Zuko before she could spot Karen. “Tonight, we're all meeting up in my room to hear about what happened yesterday. I'll walk you over after you're done with your family.” Damn. Well, that ruined any chance for flight. Her friends knew her too damn well.

“Alright. But after I'm done with them and I'm not rushing the little family time I get for this,” she specified. Zuko nodded and opened his mouth to say something but was interrupted before he could.

“SARAH!” said Toby, crashing into her and flinging his arms around her waist.

“Hi Tobes,” Sarah said, bending down to hug him back before straightening to greet Karen.

“Really Toby, your hat,” Karen said, handing it off to him. He took the hat and pulled it on, rolling his eyes at Sarah when Karen was safely distracted. Sarah tried to give him a stern look, but she couldn't stop her eyes from laughing. She hoped he wouldn't turn out as rebellious and sulky as she'd been as a teenager. He didn't have a younger sibling to wish away to give him a wake-up call. Well, at least he'd have her to talk to. She hoped Toby wouldn't make as much of a fuss when Karen introduced him to her new... friend as Sarah had when her father had brought home Karen. Well, she'd help Toby deal if the time came and it wasn't be like Karen had no experience dealing with sulky children. Between the two of them, it should be fine.

“Hi Karen, ready to go?”

“Yes, it will be very nice to stretch my legs and possibly Toby can wear himself out a little.”
“Let’s get going then.” Sarah smiled and offered Toby her hand. He rolled his eyes but took it and the three made their way towards the park.

As soon as they stepped over the boundary of the park Toby started jittering.

“Oh alright, but stay where we can see you,” Karen said. Glint in his eye, Toby tore off, darting in and out of a bunch of nearby trees.

“So, how’s work going?” Sarah asked as the two women started strolling along the path.

“Oh, it's the usual. They want me to work more hours but I have to be able to be home to look after Toby.” Once again, Sarah was very glad she’d managed to land the scholarship she had. “Fortunately, next year Toby will be old enough for the after-school program and I'll be able to work a few extra hours a week.”

“Mr. Garak isn’t pressuring you for those extra hours, is he?” If he were, Toph might be able to get some dirt on him. Sarah wouldn't be surprised if she could. The way Toph managed to hear stuff was slightly scary.

“Oh no, Mr. Garak is very understanding. I think he just wants to know I can take the extra hours if I need them.” So maybe Toph wouldn't need to look into him. Still, maybe Sarah should ask. Mr. Garak had always given her a bit of a strange feeling. He seemed harmless enough, but there was something a little off about him. Still he’d always been kind to her stepmother, and seemed to be very protective of Toby. Apparently, he hadn't complained the few times Karen had brought him to the store when she couldn't find a sitter. Maybe prying wasn't the right choice... “Besides, he's been talking about possibly raising my pay, instituting a commission or something like that. He wants to make sure Toby is alright. I think that doctor he's seeing came up with the idea. Dr. Bashir is such a nice young man. He was so nice to Toby when giving him shots. I'm glad he decided to move from the big city to our smaller town.” Sarah smiled to hear her stepmother's support for Garak and Bashir's relationship. In many ways, Karen was a surprisingly modern thinker. Sarah was happy that no matter who Toby loved, he'd know his family would accept him. While Sarah knew that Karen would accept her if she came home with a girlfriend, she wasn't so sure how she'd react to a Goblin King.

“That reminds me, are you feeling better? Toby called when you were sick. I told him to go to sleep and call me in the morning if you weren't better, but I wasn't sure.”

“Oh, yes he did mention he called you. Yes, a good night's sleep can work wonders.” “That,’ Sarah thought to herself’ or the healing touch of a Fae.’ “Dr. Bashir commented it's the fastest recovery to this particular virus he's seen. I'm just glad Toby missed catching it.”

“Well, I'm glad you're alright. If Toby had called the next morning I probably would have called neighbours to make sure someone checked in on you.”

“Remind me, Sarah,” Karen said rather dryly. “Who is it who has the maternal role in this relationship? I can't quite seem to remember.”

Sarah blushed. “Yeah yeah,” she muttered under her breath, adjusting her jacket. Karen placed a placating hand on her shoulder. Her grip turned from comforting to hesitant.

“Actually, Sarah, there's something I wanted to talk to you about.”

“Yes?” Sarah said, forgetting her mild embarrassment at Karen's tone.

“I was wondering if there's any advice you could give me when it comes to introducing Toby to
my... friend? I hope that they get along...” She trailed off, not saying ‘unlike the horrifying relationship we had at first’. Although, Karen probably wouldn't put it like that, she was too tactful.

“Well, I'd give Toby a chance to meet and get to know this 'friend' before just suddenly making him part of the family. I remember it all being quite sudden and shocking. I think a gradual introduction would be better than sudden.” Sarah's brain caught up with the rest of the conversation. “Wait, how serious are you about this friend?” Sarah knew she should be supporting her stepmother and honestly wanted to, but the deeply repressed inner child wept, wondering if she was the only one to not forget her parents.

That was, of course, ridiculous. Karen still remembered her father, and the person wouldn't be a replacement for him. Sarah knew that Karen wouldn't do that. She'd never been upset that Sarah called her stepmother or Karen and had never asked Sarah to call her anything else. Karen wouldn't try to make this person a replacement for Robert to either her or Toby. Karen pulled her stepdaughter to a stop.

“Sarah, I can't replace Robert, and I will always treasure what he and I had. I'm not about to introduce my friend to you or Toby yet. I just wanted to talk to you about this in person. And it's not like I see marriage as something on the table right now, but I might very well want to introduce... my friend to at least Toby before you return this summer. You said the examination period would last until almost the end of May this year.” It was true. It would be close to two months before she was home again. After a moment's thought, Sarah was glad that Karen had decided to talk to her about this.

“Well, I think that the gradual introduction is a good choice. Give Toby a chance to get used to the idea. That and make sure I'm available for a phone call later that day. I'll be able to make talk to him about his concerns. After all,” she added teasingly, “I know the terrors of a strange adult coming into your life. And, I think it will help that Dad didn't... choose to leave.” There was a moment of silence after that, and Sarah looked around. If Toby had been close enough to overhear, they might have to have that talk sooner than Karen might like.

Toby wasn't close enough to hear. Actually, Toby wasn't anywhere to be seen. She looked around again, not wanting to frighten Karen if she didn't need to, but Toby had disappeared.

“Sarah!” A voice called out behind her, making her spin around. Even after all this time the sight of her brother with the Goblin King made her twitch. At least he was bringing Toby back, if he hadn't lured Toby away in the first place... And of course he'd decided to ambush her like this. It made sense. There was no stopping him from meeting Karen this way. Not even the broom cupboard plan could help her now.

“What with the lovely weather today I decided to go for a walk. Imagine my surprise when I came across your little brother.” He smiled a smile that seemed blissfully unaware of the murder she was planning. “And you must be Karen,” he said, turning to her stepmother. “Sarah has spoken highly of you. It is a pleasure to finally get to meet you.”

'Finally?' the quirk of Karen's eyebrows seemed to ask her stepdaughter before turning back to the strange man holding her son's hand.

“I'm terribly sorry, but you seem to have the advantage of me, Mr...?” Before either Sarah or Jareth had the chance to talk, Toby took over the conversation.

“Mom, this is Jerry. He gave me my sword!” His hand went to caress the hilt. Jareth shot her a look. 'Jerry? Really, Precious? Jerry?’ was what he was obviously thinking. Jareth, however, didn't let his new name affect him long.
“Allow me to introduce myself more formally. Jerry King,” Sarah could hear his distaste for his new name and took some satisfaction from it. After all, if he hadn't intruded, he wouldn't have to deal with the name change, so really, he was doing it to himself. “I'm a... friend of Sarah's.” This time it was Karen's turn to give her a look. 'Friend?' it clearly asked. Yep. Jareth was definitely dead for making her have this conversation with Karen. It was only a matter of how long she could draw it out.

“I see,” Karen said in a tone that made it very clear that she really did. “So, have you and Sarah been... friends long?” Sarah decided to take things over at this point before Jareth made it worse.

“We met years ago, but only really got to know each other over the March break when I ran into him.”

Seeing the adults falling into 'Big People Conversation Mode' Toby reached up and tugged on Jareth's sleeve. “Jerry, I've been practising like you told me. Can you show me some more moves?” Jareth looked up at Karen, checking if it would be alright. Karen, seeing the opportunity to debrief her stepdaughter on the strange... friend she had not seen fit to mention at all, despite the fact that he was important enough to Toby for Toby to treat his gift with such respect, nodded her acquiescence. Toby smiled hugely and dragged Jareth off the path and started going through one of the drills Sarah recognized from March break.

“So,” Karen asked as soon as the boys were out of earshot, “Would this Jerry be the reason for the morning disappearance your first morning of the break?” Karen's memory, Sarah decided, was far too good.

“Only sort of...?” Sarah tried before sighing and giving in and starting yet another edited version. “Look, Jerry and I met when I was 15 and essentially spent the entire time, well, fighting. That Monday, I couldn't sleep so I just went out, I wasn't really thinking straight that morning.” Karen's eyes softened in understanding. “I, ah, ran into him—literally. He was in town again, he doesn't live there. Anyway, he recognized me and started snapping at me at which point I, um, burst into tears. He had heard about Dad from a mutual acquaintance and, well, when he realized what was going on, he made sure that I got home okay. The next day he showed to see how I was doing and Toby kind of latched onto him. So he kept coming by when you were out and well, we got to know each other better than we did during our first meeting and then it turned out that he had business in town so we kept seeing each other and well, now you get to meet him.”

“Business? So he isn't a university student?” Karen asked.

“Nope.”

“What kind of business does he do?”

“Um...” “Think quickly girl!” “It's probably best he explain, it's kind of complicated. Every time I try to he corrects me. But I think it's something in acquisitions.”

“Hm,” Karen murmured, her brows furrowed in thought. When they relaxed, Sarah only had a moment to panic before Karen called out: “Jerry!” Jareth looked up from where he was correcting Toby's form.

“Would you care to join us for lunch tomorrow?” Jareth's smile was far too satisfied for Sarah's taste.

“Mrs. Williams, I'd love to,” he practically purred, the bastard. He finally seemed to take in Sarah's murderous expression. “I fear that I really do need to get back to work soon, but, might I have a
word with Sarah first?” Karen's eyebrows shot up when she took in Sarah's expression.  
"If it's all right with you, Sarah?"
Oh, she couldn't wait to yell at—er, speak with—Jareth. "It's fine," she said, smiling dangerously.  
“I think Toby and I will continue our walk through the park. Catch up with us when you two are done.” She took Toby's hand and they started making their way down the path, Toby throwing glances over his shoulder.

Sarah smiled and waved at her brother, reassuring him, before she turned to Jareth, eyes blazing.

“Jareth! What the hell were you thinking!”

“Well, Precious, it's not like you gave me much warning before showing up in front of my family.”

“I didn't get a say in that! It was the damn Labyrinth who read and misinterpreted my damn thoughts and decided that me meeting your family was a good idea and see how well that ended?”

“I told you I might be coming,” Jareth defended himself.

“Look, Jareth. I only get to see my family a few times a year and maybe if I was 2,500 years old, I might be more OK with people interrupting the little time I get with my little brother and Karen, but as it is, I am NOT. My friends already want to know what happened yesterday as Katara noticed my vanishing act and so tonight I have to explain about meeting your parents and everything to them and I need to find SOME time to study because I need to keep up my grades so I can keep my damn scholarship and the time I plan to study keeps getting taken up by you damn fae!”

She was panting and glaring when she finished her rant. Jareth looked genuinely taken aback.

“Sarah... I hadn't realized...”

“Of course you hadn't! You're a damn king! What are the concerns of us petty mortals to you your majesty?” Other people in the park were starting to give them looks, so Sarah lowered her voice.  
“Look, Jareth. I like you. God knows why, you make it hard enough, but I do. I just need you to remember that my life isn't you and I have other stuff to do. And Fae popping in and out of my life at random is not helpful.”

“Fae? Not just me?” Jareth paled, if possible, even further. “My parents have come to speak to you more, have they?”

“No, it was Klio. She wanted to go over the fashion stuff like she promised me. Which reminds me.” She fingered the leather thong the pendant hung on. “At some point we really need to discuss informed consent like the fact that, apparently, you've given me what is essentially the crown of the Queen of the Labyrinth, even if it is a necklace, not a crown, but not. This. Weekend. This weekend is about my family, not my relationship with you. So, come to lunch tomorrow, sure, meet my stepmother, spend some time with Toby, but the rest of this weekend, can you please just stay out? I need to breathe.”

Jareth's face had become shuttered as she spoke, though his eyes grew wide. He opened his mouth, closed it, scrutinized her face, swallowed and said, “Of course, Precious. I'll see you tomorrow at lunch then. And I'll speak to the Labyrinth. Inform Her of your wish not to be disturbed.” He had just enough time to smile her gratitude before he disappeared. Looking around, no one seemed to have noticed. She shook her head. Of course he could disappear without being noticed, even despite the cloud of glitter that was...getting on her clothes, aarg.

She did her best to dust off the glitter, then, putting her hands in her pocket, she turned to follow her
family down the path towards a dinner's worth of interrogation and the meeting with her friends. It was time to face the music.

Chapter End Notes

Wait, did Jareth just manage to actually UNDERSTAND some of Sarah's needs and concerns? O.o Maybe there's hope for these two crazy kids yet.

I hope to be posting again soon! Thanks for sticking with me through this ridiculously long wait and welcome all new readers!

And please leave a contribution in the little box!
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! I'm back! No, seriously this time. For realsies.

I'm really sorry that this update took SO LONG. RL came down hard and fast and I didn't really have time to do anything but try to keep my head above water. Fortunately, the currents have settled and I have WAY more time to write! This summer, I'm hoping to get back into posting weekly, although, chapters now are much longer than they were when last I did.

Either way, I really hope you enjoy!

And now, onto this week's chapter of To Serve Her Purpose!!

*Cues theme song*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time Sarah had finished dinner (which passed surprisingly unlike an interrogation. It seemed Karen was waiting till tomorrow's lunch for that) and had said good night to her family, Zuko already had his coat on and was waiting by the door. She wished Iroh had kept him busier longer, but no doubt Iroh also wanted a debrief on what had happened between her and Jareth. She'd heard how upset Zuko'd been the night before from Katara and there was no way that Iroh wouldn't have gotten what was wrong out of him. She'd seen the looks Iroh had been giving her. Come to think of it, maybe Zuko was hurrying so he could avoid listening to Iroh bombard her with sayings. Sarah wasn't really in the mood for Iroh's advice either. She wanted to make this decision herself and everyone else could stop weighing in, thank you very much.

“Ready?” Zuko asked as she shrugged on her coat.

“Will the answer to that question change anything?” she asked, raising her eyebrows. Zuko only shrugged and opened the door. Sarah sighed and, with Zuko, headed out into the night.

* * *

Walking up to Zuko and Sokka’s door she could hear the muffled voices of their friends. It seemed Karen was waiting till tomorrow’s lunch for that) and had said good night to her family, Zuko already had his coat on and was waiting by the door. She wished Iroh had kept him busier longer, but no doubt Iroh also wanted a debrief on what had happened between her and Jareth. She’d heard how upset Zuko’d been the night before from Katara and there was no way that Iroh wouldn't have gotten what was wrong out of him. She’d seen the looks Iroh had been giving her. Come to think of it, maybe Zuko was hurrying so he could avoid listening to Iroh bombard her with sayings. Sarah wasn't really in the mood for Iroh's advice either. She wanted to make this decision herself and everyone else could stop weighing in, thank you very much.

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* * *

Walking up to Zuko and Sokka’s door she could hear the muffled voices of their friends. It seemed that Katara was halfheartedly critiquing Toph, who was responding boisterously as Aang tried to keep the peace and Sokka made terrible jokes, egging both of them on. Opening the door, Sarah saw that that was exactly what was happening. Toph was sitting on Sokka's chair, picking her toes. Sokka sat on his bed, and Aang and Katara on Zuko's. When the door opened, everyone (except Toph, of course) turned to see the newcomers. With the gang in front of her and Zuko behind her she couldn't help but feel a little trapped. Especially when Zuko closed the door behind them. She refused to let them see her swallow.

“Hey guys, what's up?” Aang said, getting up so Zuko could sit on his own bed, though his eyes slid to Katara. Katara was not looking at Zuko, who was not looking at Katara, although Zuko seemed to be blushing. Sarah was starting to wonder if she really had walked—magicked? whatever— in on something earlier. That train of thought was thrown off the track when she noticed Aang’s bandaged
“Aang, what happened to your hand?” His eyes went wide and he slipped his hand behind his back, trying to pull a ‘Hand? What hand?’ expression and not succeeding in the slightest.

“Smellerbee tripped on the stairs and her bag opened and everything fell out,” Katara said, looking happy to have something other than Zuko sitting right next to her to focus on. “Aang and I helped her gather her stuff. She had something iron in there and when Aang tried to pick it up, he burned his hand pretty badly. She looked upset, but she hurried on before we could ask if anything was wrong. Maybe I’ll ask Jet if he knows what was wrong.” Katara frowning in worry. Aang and Zuko were also frowning, though Sarah suspected that had more to do with Katara mentioning Jet than any sense of concern for Smellerbee. Then again, with Aang it could easily be both.

“You alright?” Sarah asked, wondering why on earth Smellerbee would be carrying around iron at all. Wasn’t that against school rules? She looked over to Katara. “How long do you think it will take to heal?”

“Probably a week or so,” Katara responded, before shooting Aang a look and saying, “If you leave it to heal and don’t use it to go rescuing stray animals from trees with it, or cooking pies, or using pies to rescue stray animals from trees.” Aang tried looking innocent again. He had so much practice, Sarah reflected, you’d think he’d be better at it. Katara sighed. “At least it’s on your off hand.”

“Do you really think that an iron burn will heal like a normal one?” Depending on the myth, Sarah knew that that kind of burn could easily turn out to be fatal.

“I’ve had iron burns before.” Aang shrugged. “It sucks, but it’ll heal.”

“If you’re sure...” she trailed off, looking to Zuko. “You think your uncle would know something that might help him heal faster?”

“Maybe,” Zuko said, frowning in worry. “He knows this healer, Song. I think she has connections to the Underground. Maybe she’ll know something.”

“I’m not worried,” Aang put in. “It’ll heal.” Katara started to look worried as well.

“I don’t know, Aang. It’s a pretty bad burn. Maybe you should have it looked at by a magical healer. I can call Gran-Gran and see if she knows anything too.” She started to get up from the bed.

“HOLD IT!” Toph yelled, causing everyone in the room to freeze. “Sweetness, you sit back down, you can call Gran-Gran later if you want,” she said, pointing in Katara’s direction. “And you,” she said, turning her finger on Sarah. “Nice try, Queeney, but we’re gathered here to talk about you. Sweetness and Sparky can look into healers later. Sit.” She said, pointing (with a little correction from Sokka) to the one unoccupied chair left in the room. “And spill.” Sarah swore deeply, vilely, fervently and above all, mentally. While she had been partly hoping that this would distract them with Aang’s injury, that hadn’t been her sole purpose. She wondered how well iron would work on Jareth if she needed it, as a repellent, rather than a weapon. She didn’t want him dead. Where did one get cold iron anyway? She moved to the chair and sat, looking at them each in turn.

“Alright, on Thursday I was walking down the hall and came saw Katara and Jet kissing and thought-not said, thought- that it would be preferable that I wasn’t seeing this, but using a more powerful word.”

“So, you made a wish?” Aang clarified, looking confused.

“No,” Sarah said, very firmly. “I thought a wish. It’s supposed to be ‘what’s said is said’ not ‘what’s
thought is thought’. Once again, she hoped the Labyrinth was picking up on this. “However, the
Labyrinth seems to enjoy messing in my affairs, especially when they might be interpreted to involve
a certain Goblin King, and decided that a thought was good enough. I appeared in the
Underground,” she took a deep breath to fortify herself and let all of the rest of her sentence speed
out on the exhale. “Right in the middle of a family reunion. Jareth’s family reunion to be exact…”
Seeing the confused faces all around, she knew that she’d have to be even clearer. “I met Jareth’s
parents. Also, his uncles. One of them threatened me with a sword…” She paused, ready for a quip
from someone, probably Sokka or Toph. They stayed silent. Sarah was taken aback. ‘They must be
taking this seriously…’ “Well, they were really…nice?” She braved on in the face of the skeptical
expressions. “When I showed up, Jareth introduced us and they insisted I stayed for lunch. Jareth
seemed to think this was a terrible idea, so I went along with it.” She smirked. So, she was shading
the truth, it was her story and she’d tell the truth in the important parts. “I heard the story of how they
met, I’ll probably tell it next open mic, but I don’t think that’s what’s really important right now.

“I can remember almost all of my first trip through the Labyrinth very clearly,” she continued in the
face of all the of raised eyebrows at the sudden, seeming non sequitur. “But I could never remember
the last thing Jareth offered me during our last confrontation. Every time I told the story, I’d make
something up I figured was sufficiently scary and Jareth-y, but this time, I learned what he actually
said. It was a lot worse than I thought.

“During dinner, his parents tried to paint him in a flattering light and eventually asked me flat out
why I wouldn’t marry him. I gave my reasons and ended with pointing out he’d never asked. He got
mad and, er, well, it turned out he had.” Just thinking about it, she was getting mad again. “I was
fifteen years old for God’s sake and the final thing he offered me was ‘fear me, love me, do as I say,
and I will be your slave.’”

“What!?” said Sokka, Aang and Katara in unison. Zuko flinched, and Toph’s blind eyes were
wide.

“He must really love you,” Toph said quietly, too shocked to be snarky.

“I mean, that’s a lot to offer…” Katara said, looking off into space.

“A Fae—a Fae King—offering to be someone’s slave.” Aang said, starting to shake his head. “Are
you sure you heard right?”

“Well,” Sokka said, frowning in thought. “Is it really offering that much? It seems like the deal is
kind of mutual…”

“Yeah,” Toph said, toying with her favorite black bicep band. “He’d only be her slave if she feared
him, loved him, and did what he said. He would only have to do what she said. Maybe fear her…”

“What did you say?” asked Aang.

“Um…” said Sarah, blinking. THAT certainly hadn’t gone as she’d expected… “Well, I accused
him of being a pedophile and not wanting me so much a as to get one up on me, to prove he couldn’t
be beaten.” Everyone but Zuko seemed to pause and blink.

“That might have been best,” Zuko offered. “Any relationship where you fear someone, love them,
and do what they say without question is going to end badly.” He turned his face away from the
gang, trying to hide his scars. Sarah winced internally. Of course Zuko might have a different view
of a that kind of dynamic. After all, from what she’d gathered, that was exactly how he’d grown up,
until his uncle got him out of there. They all knew that he still loved his little sister, for all that anyone
who knew her feared her. Katara reached out and placed a hand on his shoulder. He tensed for a
moment, before relaxing a little and turning back to the group. Now that was odd. Zuko more often then not would shrug off that kind of comforting hand, even from Katara. Aang shot them both a suspicious look, but said nothing. Just what had Sarah transported in on a few days ago?

“Um…” said Sokka, blinking, “That certainly is another way of looking at it.”

“The Fae do like their games,” agreed Toph, looking thoughtful. “So, you leave him choking on your dust as you got your butt out of there?”

“Um…” said Sarah. “Not exactly. I did storm out, but I didn’t storm between the worlds—transportation takes a lot of energy. Anyway, Jareth’s mom came to talk to me. I thought she wanted to talk to me into marrying him, but she wanted to talk about what being Queen meant.” She quickly summarized what Buttercup had told her about the Goblin Queen being chosen. “One of the last things she said was that it’s the Queen that decides when the rulership changes. A King and Queen abdicate when their son finds a wife.”

“But Jareth isn’t married…” trailed off Katara.

“He could have been previously,” suggested Aang. Sarah froze. That was something she hadn’t considered. Had Jareth been married?

“Nope,” said Toph, cutting off that train of thought. “An event that big, my family would have been invited to or at least heard about. There’s nothing in the family histories of dealing with the Goblin Kingdom about this one getting married and we do have records of his coronation.” Well. That was a bit of a relief. Sarah was wondering if maybe she should be a little less paranoid. Then again, way it really paranoia if they really WERE all out to get her?”

“So,” Said Sokka, trying to get them all back on topic. “Why is Jareth ruling alone?”

“Apparently the Labyrinth decided it was time for a change and it seems like I’m it.” She gathered them each in by eye. “Jareth and I agreed to negotiate for a possible new way of dealing with the Wished-Away. He truly believes only those who don’t love the people they wished away would do such a thing. If they complete the Labyrinth, it is because they ‘truly loved’ the wished-away child. I know that isn’t true. I wouldn’t have been the only person to beat the Labyrinth in so long. More people have to have regretted their ill thought, didn’t–actually-think-magic-was-real and actually loved those they wished away. It just doesn’t make sense. I could save families that are being torn a part by stupidity or a lack of knowledge. And for those who truly didn’t love their Wished-Away…” Her voice and eyes went cold. “Well, there will be ways to deal with those.” She frowned a little. “One of the last things Buttercup asked me, before warning me the Labyrinth might try to trap me, even if Jareth didn’t, was to promise not to marry Jareth if I didn’t love him. She didn’t want to see that happen to her son.”

“Who would?” asked Katara, eternal mother of what ever group she was in.

“Wait,” said Zuko, looking concerned. “So now we have to worry about the Labyrinth trying to kidnap you, as well as King of Goblins?”

“Isn’t that what she JUST said happened?” snapped back Toph. “Queeney, I really think you should start wearing iron. It should help keep you in this world unless you want to go Underground.”

“Well, yes,” Sarah said, interrupting before they could continue on this vein. “But the Labyrinth only took me for a little while and most importantly, she let me come back. Before I left, she and I had a talk and she made it pretty clear that she didn’t think she or Jareth would keep me there. And she also told me that if either of them tried, the other would try to free me.”
“And you believed Her?” Toph said, her brows shooting up. Sarah shrugged defensively, even knowing Toph couldn’t see it.

“When the Labyrinth speaks to me… I can just tell, alright? It’s a magic thing. I just know she’s telling the truth.”

“Right…” said Toph, leaning back and looking nearly as skeptical as Zuko.

“So,” Sokka cut in, “Let me be sure I have this straight. The Labyrinth, Jareth, and just about everyone Underground we know about wants you to be Queen?”

“Yes. Well, maybe not Hoggle, I think that’s less, me as Queen and more lingering fears about me and Jareth…” Sokka waved the point away.

“And the main reason you have a problem with becoming Queen of the Labyrinth has just opened up for negotiations?”

“Yep, although, the negotiations do need to happen. I don’t know if we can’t find a compromise…”

“Right. But, no matter what the outcomes of the negotiations, you’ll only marry him if you love him?”

“Yeah, that about sums it up,” Sarah said, nodding.

“So,” said Toph, sitting up and paying attention. “I think the question that needs to be answered before anything else is, do you love him?”

“That’s just it, I don’t know. I mean… Well, it’s complicated…” she finished lamely.

“If you do decide you love him, I think you should marry him,” Aang offered, tentatively. “You never know when you’ll lose those you love. Losing someone you love forever because of an argument… isn’t good.” Sarah almost winced at that. She’d known for some time that Aang had grown up in a monastery and it had been all he’d known until he’d run away one night after an argument between the monk who’d taken him under his wing and the elders. When Aang had gotten back, the monastery had burned down, and no one had survived. He’d found people who loved him in Katara and Sokka and their family who’d taken him in, but he’d lost everyone he’d known and loved all at once. Katara looked like she was about to get up to hug him, but decided against it. She sent him a compassionate look instead. Maybe Aang’s experience was something to think about.

Sarah knew what it was like to lose one person she loved, but did she love Jareth? She shied away from the question once more, not ready for the answer, no matter what it might be. And, how would her relationship with her Underground friends be affected by her relationship with Jareth. For that matter, how would her Aboveground relationships be affected? Why did it all have to be so complicated?!

“Love isn’t always enough. There has to be more, like trust, to make a relationship work,” Zuko insisted, looking slightly guiltily at Aang. She’d found out in the last few weeks as she quizzed people about their connections to the Underground that it had been the Sozins who had burned down Aang’s monastery. He’d begged Aang’s forgiveness and naturally Aang had given it. For anyone else, that “Naturally” might not belong, but with Aang it did. Forgiving people, at least people who were truly repentant, was just what Aang did.

“Look, we agreed that the negotiations are going to take place after classes end, though we’ve yet to decide exactly when. When it happens, will you guys help me with the negotiations? I know a lot from the stories and my own experiences, but you guys grew up with this culture, and Toph, Zuko,
you guys are used to making deals with them, and Sokka can think in ways so twisty he’d make an overenthusiastic cork screw. I could really use you help with this one.” The rest of the gang turned to Toph. While they would of course help their friend, there was something they wanted from her too, and Toph was good at making deals.

“All right Queeney, but we need something from you, too.”

“What?” Said Sarah, looking slightly nervous. Deals with Toph could be dangerous things, you were never quite sure what she’d want, or why she needed two bags of fireworks and a frog to do it.

“We want you to start training in how to fight,” said Sokka, taking over the negotiations. “We were talking about this earlier and part of the reason we were all so freaked out when you disappeared on us is that we all know you don’t know how to defend yourself properly from an attack. When you’ve got your friends to help you, you’re good, but if Jareth—or some other Fae—got you alone, then you’d be screwed. Zuko and Katara are willing to teach you and we think it would be good if you learned…”

“Why Zuko and Katara?” asked Sarah, slightly confused.

“They train together, so they’re used to working with other styles and will be able to help you and teach you two styles. Aang’s way too busy with side projects to teach you seriously any time soon. I work with my sword and boomerang mostly, and who knows if you’ll be armed. We actually want you to like us, so not Toph (for some reason, Aang looked very nervous at this, and those two between the two of them know armed and unarmed combat. You’ll learn a lot quickly.”

Thinking about it, Sarah realized it probably actually was a good idea. Knowing how to fight would be useful, especially if no one Underground knew she was learning. “Alright. Deal. When do we start?”

“Tuesday night,” said Katara, smiling at her friend. “You and I’ll meet Zuko at the dojo after dinner.” Even knowing it was a good idea, Sarah sighed to herself. Another bit of time taken away from precious studying. She really did need to keep this scholarship for just one more year. Maybe she could talk to professors about some extensions? Complications arising unexpectedly from her father’s death? It was technically true…

“All right. Tuesday. Can I please have the rest of the weekend to spend with my family or is there anything else you guys wanna talk about?” The last word trailed off into a yawn.

“No,” said Katara, giving her a slightly concerned look. “You head back to our room. I’m going to stay and talk to Zuko about how best to start your training.”

“And get back to us with details on the negotiations,” said Sokka. Brow furrowed with thought about who knew what, he turned to Toph to hash out some detail of lore.

“All right. I’ll see you all—” there was another yawn—“tomorrow. Night.” And without another word she went off in search of a pillow.

When she got back to her room, however, there was something that caught her attention even more than her bed did. On her desk, next to the vase where she’d put the bouquet Jareth had given her, was a crystal, shining softly. Tucked into the flowers was a note, sealed with wax marked with the design of her pendant. Sarah popped the wax and read the note.

7 hours of spelled time to make up for that which you’ve lost. Break to use. -J

Nothing else. Sarah tucked the crystal ball into her desk drawer, waiting for when she’d need
it. When she finally got into bed, she felt asleep smiling. It seemed like Jareth had listened.

Chapter End Notes

CHAPTER 26 COMING SOON TO A SCREEN NEAR YOU!!

(No, seriously, I've started it already! Shouldn't take too long to get it ready. Of course... reviews do make me want to write more and faster... I'm just saying... XP)

Please leave a contribution in the little box and I hope to see you all next week!
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Sorry I'm late guys! I was traveling and my sister was busy and it took a while to edit! Chapter 27 is well on its way to being written, so hopefully next chapter comes sooner!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sarah finished her reading for her Celtic studies class, stretched and looked at the clock. Still another half hour before she needed to head over to the Jasmine Dragon, but enough time for what she really wished she didn’t have to do. Well, at least Katara was out working with Jet. Being glad that Katara was spending time with him was not something Sarah often felt, but now… She stood up and turned so she could see both of the beds.

“Jareth,” she said, hand going to her pendant. “I need you.”

“Precious,” Jareth said, sitting on her bed, glitter settling around him. (Sarah really was going to need to figure out a better way of dealing with that. Well, at least with Katara she never needed to explain all the glitter in the shower. It got everywhere.)

“We should be heading over to the Jasmine Dragon in about half an hour.” Jareth looked at her from behind shuttered eyes, curiosity faint in them. He sat straight, face closed, clothes unusually modest and tasteful for him. He didn’t lounge or smirk. He was, all in all, very contained and courteous. Sarah appreciated the respect he was showing her in this, and in his gift, but something wasn’t quite right.

Sarah walked over and flopped down next to him. It was her bed damn it.

“I figured we should get our stories lined up so that we don’t say anything that really contradicts each other.”

“Yes,” said Jareth, eyebrow raised as he looked down at her, tension easing slightly from his shoulders. “That does seem like a rather prudent idea. You know everything I told her. What did you say of our first meeting?”

“Just that we fought a bunch. Then I said I literally ran into you on that first Monday of March Break and you made sure I got home alright after you realized what was going on. Then Toby got attached, so you came back and we got to know each other better and it turned out that you had work in town here so we’ve kept in contact.”

“Work?” he asked, carefully reaching out, as a man would pet a cat whom he doesn’t know will claw or purr, and began stroking her hair. “And just what did you say my work was?” He rather suspected that she wouldn’t have said ‘King of the Goblins, Taker-of-the-Wished-Away,’ to her stepmother.

“Ha,” Sarah said, leaning into the stroking. The feel of the leather brushing lightly against her scalp was nice, his smell reassuring. “There even my imagination failed me. I said that it was complicated, that you’d have to explain it.” She smirked. “I said you worked in acquisitions.”
Jareth’s hand paused for a moment in his stroking of her hair. His eyes glittered. “Acquisitions? Yes. I do believe I can work with that.”

“Good,” said Sarah, shifting her head into his lap and looking up at him. “I rather thought you would be able to.”

Careful not to disturb his access to her hair, she reached up and tugged very lightly on one of the longer strands of his mane-like hair. “Although I don’t appreciate you popping in on my family time uninvited,” the hand in her hair paused. “I do appreciate your effort to manage to look more like someone from my world and less like a Fairy King.”

“Goblin King,” Jareth corrected mock-reproachfully, but his hand continued toying with her hair.

“Yeah yeah,” Sarah replied, letting go of the strand, trying not to smile. “Still, I’m not quite sure Karen’s ready to deal with the idea that all that fantasizing I did as a teenager was actually based on reality.”

“Fantasizing about me, were you?” Jareth gently teased.

“About magic,” Sarah correct in turn. “Though, yeah. Also about you. Even at age fifteen these pants made an impression.” She rocked her head back and forth against the smooth material. Jareth did his best not to swallow. “Though, I rather think that was the point of them. I might have even been distracted if I hadn’t been so fixated on finding Toby.”

“Perhaps it was for the best,” Jareth mused, eyes far away.

“That I won?” Sarah said, sitting up to look at him properly. This seemed too important to be distracted by marvelous head scratches.

“Yes,” said Jareth, looking at her properly. “I wanted you as my Queen, but without you being Champion of the Labyrinth, you never could be. We might have been able to make you run it again, but I’m not sure the Labyrinth would have accepted you if you’d truly failed Her test once. Mistress, perhaps, but never Queen.” His eyes turned fierce. “And I would have you no less that that.” He paused and looked her in the eye. “No less than my Queen. After all,” a strangely proud smirk, “your kingdom is as great.”

Sarah wasn’t sure if it was the smile, the fierce joy in her strength, his seemingly genuine desire for an equal, the pants or some odd mix of them all, but instead of replying, she leaned over and kissed him. It was a brief kiss. Just long enough for Jareth to realize that, yes, she was actually kissing him and start to hesitantly return it, before she pulled away.

He looked at her, eyes hungry and disbelieving and maybe just the slightest bit hopeful.

“Come on,” Sarah said, standing up and smoothing down a shirt that had already been free of wrinkles. “We’ll be late for lunch.”

* * *

Jareth held open the door to the restaurant where they were meeting Karen and Toby. The walk over had been a simple one. Jareth had magicked into modern clothes, though he’d kept his gloves. He’d offered her his arm as they started their walk, and they’d spent most of the time talking about her classes, though some anecdotes of ruling the Goblin Kingdom came up. Sarah could only raise her eyebrows and try not to giggle when he'd starting muttering about the historical inaccuracies of her textbook.
Toby and Karen were in a booth along one of the walls, sitting on one side of the table. This meant that Saran and Jareth would be sitting far too close to each other on a bench without the nice safe gap chairs would have left between them while they could still taste the other on their lips. This was going to be a long lunch.

“Mr. King—” Karen stared getting up from her seat and offering her hand.

“Jerry,” Jareth said with a forced smile, taking the proffered hand. “Please.”

“In that case, call me Karen.” Shaking hands, they sat down. Sarah ended up against the wall across from Toby who made his ‘this could be boring because big people or this could be really awesome cause Jareth and Sarah’ face, while Jareth sat across from Karen. “And thank you for joining us.”

“Really, it’s my pleasure,” said Jareth, picking up a menu and starting to glance at the options. “Sarah speaks often of her family and it was very nice to get to meet you as well as Toby. And,” he put down the menu and looked up, “my condolences on the loss of your husband.”

“Yes, well,” Karen said, opening her own menu. “Thank you.”

There was some small talk between Sarah and her family as they ordered, which Jareth listened to attentively. After the waiter left, Karen’s posture changed, just slightly. Just enough that years of being a bratty teenager caused Sarah to have to fight the impulse to go hide. Karen was now paying Attention.

“So, Jerry, just how did you and Sarah meet?”

“It was at a party held by a mutual friend,” Jareth started, keeping an eye on Sarah for cues. She nodded, going along with it. For once he found himself actually glad of Hoggle’s close friendship with Sarah. It meant he knew that Karen had managed to force her to go to a few of her peers’ parties. “We, ah, got off on the wrong foot, and well…” He trailed off, looking a little sheepish, as if he were embarrassed by his teenaged antics, rather than much less believable stuff. “Well, our mutual friend, Harry,—” he had to suppress a smile when both Toby and Sarah said “Hoggle” under their breaths. “— would occasionally mention Sarah in our conversation, and, I believe, he sometimes mentioned me to her. This is how I heard of the death of her father, your husband. When we ran into each other later, well, you know how it is when you see someone for the first time in years, you pick up where you left off. Sarah… became visibly upset and, realizing too late that it was the anniversary of her father’s death, escorted her home. I stopped by the next day to see how she was doing and met young Toby.” Who was smiling at him like he was the greatest thing since peanut butter. Over the course of his time in the Aboveground that week he found out exactly how much Toby liked the sweet nutty spread.

“Who seems to see you as the best thing since peanut butter,” Karen said, leaving Jareth with the rather startling impression that she could read minds. When he glanced over to Sarah, she just shrugged as if to say, ‘she’s a mother, what did you expect.’ Suddenly, Jareth realized that if his relationship with Sarah ended as he hoped (that is to say, it didn’t) then his mother and this woman would probably be in the same room at the same time. And Sarah’s mother as well. He reminded himself that running now would be nothing but cowardice, however prudent. “Especially the sword you gave him…” she trailed off. “Tell me, Jerry, did you learn to use a sword as a child? I saw you teaching Toby in the park yesterday.”

“Ah, yes. I come from a rather old English family.” Sarah was almost successful at suppressing a snort. “My father and Uncle are excellent fencers and began teaching me when I was young. When I met Toby, it seemed like a good way to keep him occupied while Sarah cooked or worked on homework.” Karen smiled at her daughter in a way that made Sarah wince. She knew a ‘we will talk
about this later but right now we are going to seem polite in front of the company’s smile when she saw it. She’d gotten it plenty when she’d been in her bratty phase. Did Jareth really have to admit that she’d pretty much left her kid brother alone with a relative stranger? Oh well, what was done was done. And, she snorted mentally, what was said was said. “It a good skill to learn,” Jareth continued, seeming to sense the faux pas. “Focuses the mind, good for the body, keeps you fit and with a respect for weapons and their dangers.”

“Yes,” said Karen, looking rather bemused. “The first time I asked Toby if I could see the sword he gave me a lecture on the dangers of swords, even if this one was a toy one.” Jareth smiled proudly at Toby, who smiled back, basking in the praise. Sarah tried to avoid burying her head in her hands. It wouldn’t do anyone any good anyway. Karen seemed to pause to think. “Toby,” she said turning to him. “Would you be interested in fencing lessons?”

“YES!” Toby said, his eyes wide as saucers. “Oh, please mom. Please! Pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease!”

“Alright,” Karen interrupted before he could add a cherry and whatever other fruits he was thinking of to his plea. “We’ll look into it when we get back.”

“Can Jerry come and teach me?” Toby asked, looking across to Jareth, knowing from experience how quickly he could teleport.

“Jerry has business here that, so I don’t think so. We’ll look into classes nearer to home.” The money would be tight, she knew, but with Sarah’s scholarships and her being able to work the extra hours next year, they should be able to manage it.

“If you find somewhere, let Sarah know. Some of my old gear, from when I was a child, might fit him.” Of course, it would all fit him perfectly. He wasn’t about to let Sarah’s brother work with anything but the best. It simply wouldn’t do. Besides, flaws in equipment could end badly. Perhaps he should put some protections spells on it, not enough to stop Toby from learning, but enough to ensure no serious accidents could occur while he couldn’t be watching. Yes, that was probably wise. There were few people foolish enough to mess with the Labyrinth, but if it became known that Toby was Sarah’s sibling… Well, he’d better start on those spells. “It’s still in very good shape, I assure you,” he said at Karen’s slightly skeptical look.

“Thank you,” said Karen, nodding graciously. “I’ll let Sarah know if we find a class. And how is your business going? Sarah mentioned you work in acquisitions?”

“Ah yes,” Jareth said, smiling. “That is both accurate and incomplete. I head a company—my father decided to retire early and left me in charge— in any case, my company works with acquiring resources from other companies that they no longer desire and finding uses for them. It can be challenging, but the work is very satisfying.” Sarah gave him a sideways glance. That had to be the strangest description of his job she’d ever heard.

“I see, you must work very hard,” Karen said diplomatically.

“Yes, and it requires I travel frequently. We have many different places from which we operate, but I find myself coming through here fairly often, and it is always very nice to be able to see Sarah,” he said, looking down at her and reaching over and gently squeezing her arm.

Karen settled down in her seat, gaining a mystified look from Sarah, even as her stepdaughter leaned into Jerry’s touch, apparently without noticing. It wasn’t what he’d said so much as how he’d said it, and how her stepdaughter had reacted to it, that had made her relax. Toby obviously thought he was amazing and her son was normally a fairly good judge of character; he’d even disliked Sarah’s first
boyfriend, before Sarah had realized the relationship wasn’t healthy and left. He’d liked Jake well enough, and he and Sarah and ended on good terms. Jerry though, Jerry he seemed to love, not merely like, and Karen could see why. It was hard to not like someone who so obviously cared for someone as deeply, if quite differently, as you did. He and Sarah were obviously quite close, and their connection ran quite deep, for all she knew they had fought yesterday. (She’d fought enough with Sarah in the first few years of their relationship to tell when she was about to blow.) She was just glad it wasn’t directed at her this time, though she was pretty sure that it hadn’t been unprovoked. The way he said her name, the gentleness in his touch, it was obvious he loved her. Karen couldn’t help but smile. She didn’t think that Jerry would be Sarah’s ‘Friend’ for much longer. She’d have to have him over for dinner over the summer, if he was ever in town. And if things did go badly… Well, Sarah was an extremely competent young woman and had a large and supportive group of friends at the college. She’d be fine. Though somehow, she doubted it would end like that.

“So,” said Karen, smiling softly at Sarah and the man who loved her stepdaughter and whom her stepdaughter loved. “Is anyone interested in dessert?”

Chapter End Notes

This and the next chapter are fairly short and sweet, but I've got plans and there are storm clouds on the horizons...

Read and review to get them quicker! Each review puts me in the mood to write! So, please, leave a contribution in the little box!
Hi Guys,

Sorry this was late, between job hunting, getting employed, starting my job, a few deadlines and solstice I've been VERY busy.

On that note, HAPPY SOLSTICE! Hope you had a great longest day of the year in the northern hemisphere, or Winter solstice down south or a very pleasant Sunday.

From here on I think updates will have to be every couple of weeks. Sorry, I'm doing my best! In the mean time, ENJOY!!!

Sarah sat in the cafeteria eating her food slowly and looking at the book Toby had made for her for her birthday while Zuko and Katara argued something about the way they should teach her. Aang and Toph were talking about the various uses of marbles, and Sokka wasn’t there—‘probably off chasing Suki,’ Sarah thought. Karen and Toby had given her her birthday gifts at breakfast the day before, Karen’s being a gorgeous blue peasant top and a necklace that went with it beautifully, and Toby’s, a book. So far the book seemed to be the story of a little boy with a sword who was going on an adventure to save his big sister from an evil witch so that his sister and the kind magician could live happily every after. Well, there was no doubting how he hoped her love story would turn out. His illustrations were pretty good for an eight-year-old. The kind magician had hair that looked almost recognizably like Jareth’s. She had just gotten to the part where the little boy with the sword was facing off with the mighty Galsnic in the forest of Argh—and really, how had Toby managed to hear about that anyway?— when one of the University’s secretaries (dressed all in black, as they all did for some reason) interrupted her.

“Ms. Williams?”

“Yes?” she said, looking up from her book and trying to stay calm. Her friends all stopped their conversation. Last year it had been a police officer, true, but they might send a college official instead. ‘Please let this not be happening again…’

“You have an appointment with the dean.”

Sarah blinked. Well, an appointment was probably not going to be announcing that her family had been in another car crash, but on the other hand…

“I’m sorry, but I’m pretty sure I don’t.” Sarah had never even met the dean of her faculty, never mind the dean of the entire college. What could he possibly want to speak to her about?

“You’d be amazed how many people think that they don’t have an appointment with the dean. Come along now.” Hesitantly, Sarah stood up. She’d almost finished dinner anyway…

“I’ll see you guys at the dojo later, I guess,” she said, looking at her friends (who nodded back worriedly, though Katara smiled a smile that was probably meant to be reassuring), before following
the secretary through the halls of the university.

When they got to the dean’s office, he had her sit in what seemed to be a waiting room that had a clock that had to be broken, even if it was telling the right time. She’d never heard of any other clock with that irregular tick-tock. Even the ones in the Underground were more reliable than that, even if around Jareth they were wont to lose several hours. At least, in her experience they did.

She sat there for a few minutes, listening to the surprisingly infuriating clock and trying to figure out what the Dean could possibly want to see her about. Had someone plagiarized her work? No, her teacher would have talked to her first… Her scholarship? Even if there was a problem with that, it wasn’t the Dean’s job to look after it at all… What on earth could he want her for?

The same secretary looked up from where he was working. “The Dean will see you now.” Weird, Sarah was pretty sure that he hadn’t received any signal. This was starting to seem as weird as her first trip to the Underground, but this time she didn’t know any of the rules. Well, no matter what, she was the Champion of the Labyrinth and a Straight A student to boot! It was time to play.

She opened the door to the Dean’s office.

“Ah, Ms. Williams, do take a seat,” said the Dean. He was a tall, thin man, with dark hair that was starting to go a little grey and a goatee that actually seemed slightly intimidating. Sarah wasn’t sure why. She took a seat. “Ms. Williams, as I’m sure many of your friends could inform you, the use of magic in any academic setting is strictly prohibited.” Sarah’s mouth fell open. “This includes the use of spelled time.” The Dean’s eyes were hard as he stared at her, his voice cutting. He held her gaze until she remembered how to work her jaw muscles and closed her mouth. “However,” he said, leaning back in his seat, his eyes looking less like they would bore holes through her skull. “I have been…informed that your duties as Champion of the Labyrinth and She-Who-Should-Be-Queen have been taking up sufficient amounts of time from your schoolwork to have a possibly deleterious effect. Also, that an ancient sentient creature has been regularly kidnapping you and keeping you from said schoolwork. This, with a decrease of Goblin antics by 50% until such a time as you graduate, has inclined me to direct you to the office of Inadvisedly Applied Magic, where Mr. Von Zinzer should be able to help you with the appropriate paperwork. I believe the offices should be open this late due to the frog incident. Drumknott will have the papers for you to bring down. Thank you, Ms. Williams, don’t let me detain you.” And with that he went back to working on what seemed to be a crossword puzzle on his desk. Sarah blinked, knowing the dismissal for what it was, but still not quite believing what had happened. Since when did the school have an ‘Office of Inadvisedly Applied Magic? Why hadn’t she heard of it before? And what did he mean her friends would be able to inform her?

“Um, thank you, Sir,” Sarah said, standing up slowly and heading off to go get the documents she apparently needed.

* * *

Sarah, paperwork in hand, arrived at a door marked “Moloch Von Zinzer: Head of IAM.” Underneath this, in larger letters, read “BEST MINION EVER!” This sign seemed to have many indications that someone had tried to take it down. Apparently, it hadn’t worked. Under this in larger letters than the first sign, but smaller than the second was written “Schmott Guy!” Well, if there ever was a door for a “Head of Inadvisedly Applied Magic” this would probably do. Carefully, she reached up and knocked.

“Do you have any spells, goblins, magical orbs, other magical paraphernalia, screwdrivers or cucumbers on you?” a muffled voice came from behind the door.
“Um… no?” Sarah responded. She wasn’t sure why some of those items were on the list, but at least she’d found the right place.

“Then come in.” Sarah eased the door open, wondering what would be on the other side. What was there was a kind of scruffy-looking man who had a surprising amount of grease on his clothes and messy black hair, sitting behind a desk and a LOT of filing cabinets and papers. They filled the room, some seeming to be stacked on top of each other in ways that couldn’t possibly be safe, or, for that matter, physically possible. ‘Yep,’ Sarah thought to herself as she walked to the desk, ‘Definitely the right place.’

“How can I help you?” the man who must have been Mr. Von Zinzer asked.

“Hello—the Dean said I should see you about the use of spelled time? He said to give you these.” She handed over all the papers and he started rifling through them. After looking through them, he pulled a pocket watch and placed it on the table and pushed a knob on the top. The pocket watch… stood up. And then blinked. Instead of a face, it seemed to have a single eye. Sarah really was going to have to ask Jareth about this. This wasn’t like any of the mythology she knew. “I need Sarah Williams’ file.” And off buzzed the little thing. Mr. Von Zinzer watched, apparently to make sure it went in the right direction, before turning back to Sarah.

“Right, Miss Williams. So, let me be sure I got this. You’re supposed to marry the Goblin King. He keeps showing up and messing with your schooling, so he gave you some spelled time to make up for it and made a deal with the Dean so you could use it?”

“Um… yes?” Sarah said. That was fairly accurate, though she really wasn’t too sure about the ‘supposed to marry the Goblin King’ bit.

“I’ll need a 2B form too.” He checked something in the papers she’d brought. “No, wait. Make that a 2C and a WWT, not a 2B,” he called up to the little bronze thing that seemed to be gathering files that looked way too big for it to carry. He turned back to Sarah. “Do you ever find yourself possessed by magical object?”

Did the Labyrinth count? “Probably,” she replied.

“Right, and WTFIGU.” He paused, glanced down at the papers again and looked back at Sarah suspiciously. “Is this magical object a building or other edifice that thinks it has a sense of humour and may or may not try to kill you?” Sarah thought about it for a second.

“Probably,” she repeated. It seemed to be a fairly accurate answer. Mr. Von Zinzer looked like he was trying to avoid swearing in front of a student.

“Right,” he said, through clenched teeth. “And finally a YCFMIQ.” The little bronze thing dropped onto the table with quite a few papers. It tried to hit Mr. Von Zinzer, who pulled his hand out of the way just in time in a strangely absentminded manner, before going back to looking like a fairly ordinary pocket watch.

“Right. Do you have your student ID card?” Sarah scrambled in her bag, got out her wallet and handed it over. He looked it over and started filling out the forms that the bronze thing had gotten for him. “You really should have registered with us your first term. Yeah, we know you’ve been good about not using magic, surprisingly good for a powerful user like yourself.” He gave her a suspicious look, seeming to wonder if she was just surprisingly good at getting away with it. “But the important thing is that you’ve come to us now to get the paperwork done so you won’t be cheating on finals. I’m sure you know that the Dean takes cheating very seriously.” He paused and frowned. “Cheating and mimes.” He shuddered. “Anyway, I’ll need you to sign these four forms before you can go. It
Sarah nodded, took the proffered pen and started reading over the forms. She knew better than to bind herself to any agreement without knowing exactly what she was getting into. Stories could get really scary on that point. Eventually she filled them all out (though now she knew why she’d needed to get the frog and fireworks instead of, say, Aang) and handed the last paper back to Mr. Von Zinzer, who looked it over and inserted it into her suddenly much thicker file.

“Thank you Ms. Williams, that should be all,” he said, reaching into his pocket. “If you have any questions, concerns or other magical academic aids, please stop by and have them registered.” His smile would have been much more convincing if he hadn’t continued under his breath, “so at least we have some warning before the school blows up.. again.” Sarah, deciding she really didn’t want to know, got up and started thinking about how she was supposed to meet Zuko and Katara instead. Would they still be waiting? It had taken a while…

She was already down the hall before she heard the door open and Mr. Von Zinzer stick his head out and call, “Ms. Williams?”

“Yes?” Sarah turned back, startled. Did she still have to fill out yet another form?

“Keep those damn Goblins and Trickster Labyrinths away from me!” And he slammed the door behind him.

* * *

Sarah arrived at the dojo slightly out of breath. She’d gone to dinner in clothes she could work out in, and probably would have been a little embarrassed to see the Dean in them if she hadn’t been so nervous and then flabbergasted. When she actually ducked into the room, Zuko and Katara were already sparring.

“I told you,” said Zuko, darting in to grab Katara’s arm and flip her. “I’ve got my shift on Friday, I can’t meet up then.” Katara’s whole body seemed to twist like a snake as she went through the air.

“And I told you,” she said, landing on her feet and using her momentum to pull Zuko into a flip of her own, “That I have a paper for Pakku due on Thursday, so Friday is the only time I can meet!” Zuko landed on his back, but with a twist of legs and a jump that Sarah was pretty sure would have left her sore for days, he was back on his feet. The two faced each other, guard up and ready. Sarah decided that then was as good a time as any to make her presence known.

“Hi guys, what’s up?” They put their hands down, and then, before turning to her, they made eye contact and bowed.

“Hi Sarah,” Zuko said, giving her a visual once over to make sure she was okay. “What took you so long?”

“We were worried,” Katara added, nudging him with her elbow.

“Sorry, guys. Somehow the Dean found out about Jareth’s spelled time—” Zuko scowled, still not sure if he approved of the gift—“and he said I needed to register at the office for Inadvisedly Applied Magic and I’d be able to use it for because of,” she hesitated, “diplomacy?”

“Wait, you weren’t registered there already?” Zuko asked, his unscarred eye wide.

“Why didn’t you register your first semester? Even if you don’t plan to use magic, they sure like their paperwork,” Katara said, rolling her eyes.
“I don’t know,” Sarah said, starting to get really annoyed. “Maybe because I didn’t know that our school was a magical hot spot!?!?” Her friends stared at her in disbelief, mouths in a similar state to the one hers had been in when she’d found out that her school had an office of Inadvisedly Applied Magic.

“You…” Katara started when she seemed to have relocated her larynx.

“…Didn’t?” Zuko finished for her. And they wondered why she kept thinking they’d end up together. Ugh. For two people who were mostly pretty smart they could really make you want to tie them together until they worked out their differences and started making out. Sarah might have considered teaming up with Toph to do this if they hadn’t both been so good at Martial arts… Ah well, for want of a nail and all that. And these two nails could be pretty scary, judging from what she’d seen.

“No!” Sarah said, wondering if it was really supposed to be THAT obvious. “How was I supposed to know?”

“Sarah…” Katara started, looking a little concerned. “This is the school of the Magical community. Everyone knows about it.”

“Did you really not suspect anything when all your closest friends had a connection to the Magical community?” Zuko asked, raising an eyebrow at her. Katara shot a look of reproach at him. He shot back a look clearly saying ‘What? It’s a valid point!’

“I just thought that magical people automatically gravitated together or something…” Sarah volunteered. “That or that the Fae were interfering in my life even more…” Which really, just was a fairly safe bet, considering a lot of her life thus far.

“Once we knew you were the Champion, we figured you came here on purpose.” Zuko shrugged.

“Yeah, I thought it was a good school and it had a bunch of interesting classes. Wait, so not everyone here is magic, right?” She couldn’t possibly have managed to miss that!

“Nope,” said Katara, reassuring Sarah of her powers of observation. “But a large proportion of us are.”

Sarah squinted at her friend. “But Jet and Suki are non-magical, right?”

“Suki doesn’t even go to this school!” Zuko pointed out.

“Still!” Sarah insisted. “Are they magical or not!”

“Look,” Katara said soothingly, “As far as we know, neither of them are magical, ok? Now, the dojo doesn’t stay open that late, we should get to work.”

When the warm up was over Sarah gratefully took the water bottle Katara offered and guzzled half of it. “I thought you said,” she started, trying to catch her breath, “that you wanted me to like you guys…”

“We do!” said Katara, stretching and barely breathing heavily.

“But we also want you to be safe,” continued Zuko, looking serious. “Come on, it’s time to get to work.” He walked to the side of the room to grab something he’d left there as Katara showed Sarah a few more stretches to ensure that their friend would actually be able to move the next day. When he came back, he held a knife in his hand. Sarah had seen it a few times over the years, but never
unsheathed. He handed it to her.

“Unsheathe it, read the inscription,” he instructed her. Carefully, she did. For all its seeming functionality, she could tell it was important to him. Reading it, she frowned.

“Made in the Dwarf Kingdom?” she asked, not sure about the point. Zuko flushed as Katara inexplicably started to cackle.

“The other side…” he said with a resigned sigh. Curious, Sarah flipped it over.

“Never give up without a fight,” read the engraving. She looked up into eyes gone serious.

“Remember that.”

“And now we’ll teach you how to fight—well, physically. We want to teach you how to do enough damage to get away,” started Katara.

“If you can get away, run, get somewhere public, make some noise, use magic, teleport, but do not stay and fight. Your best weapons are your elbows and knees. Use them and get out,” Zuko picked up. Sarah wondered if they’d practiced before she showed up. Probably not.

“Today we’re going to start with a weapon. A knife is the scariest thing you are likely to face. It’s up close, personal, you don’t have to be able to aim and it’s more likely to be used by magic users. The hardest part is staying calm enough to do what you’ve learned. That’s why you drill,” Katara continued with an encouraging smile.

“Drill and drill and drill.” Zuko had the evil smile of someone who’d endured something and was about to get the chance to inflict it on someone else, a strange cross between sympathy and wicked glee. Katara shot him another glare, but it was only half-hearted. She seemed to be having a similar mix of emotions. Sarah suppressed a wince. “This is what you’re learning.” He held out his hand for the knife which Sarah returned. Its comfortable weight in his hand, he turned to Katara. They bowed, and he tried to stab her. There was a blur of movement and Zuko was being pressed into the floor, the knife in Katara’s hand. He tapped twice and Katara immediately let go. She looked up at Sarah.

“Your partner in practice taps out, you let go right away. You can seriously mess someone up with this.”

“Which is why we’re teaching you it,” Zuko said, sitting up and rolling his shoulder. Katara reached down a hand to help him up.

“Again, slower?” Katara asked, sinking into a low stance. Zuko nodded, copying her. He thrust the knife forward slowly and Katara’s arms went down in a cross, circled and twisted Zuko’s arm in a way that probably would have broken it if she’d gone full force. Zuko bent with it as Katara gripped his hand and she kept his momentum moving and brought him to the floor, taking the knife from his grip. They demonstrated and then, using a dummy knife, had Sarah try. And then they corrected her and made her do it again. Aaand again. …and again. Sarah kept doing the same set of motions for over an hour, till her muscles ached and she just wanted sleep. She didn’t stop. Though she doubted that Jareth would attack her with a knife, he wasn’t the only danger. She needed to be able to stand on her own. Again Zuko tried to stab her and again she blocked him, Katara still making tiny adjustments to her form.

Finally they called it quits for the night, deciding that that was enough for today and they’d take turns training her as they had the time. She’d be meeting again with Zuko to learn some grappling on Wednesday night. As Zuko held the door for them to leave, Katara tapped Sarah on the shoulder.
“Yeah?” she said, wondering what her friend wanted, only to see Katara’s fist darting forward. Cross, grab, twist, pull, down, went her body before her brain registered what was going on. Katara tapped the floor and Sarah let go, frowning at the surprise attack. Zuko walked over to give Katara a hand up. Standing together, they smiled at her as Sarah realized what she had just done.

“Good.”

Chapter End Notes

Just to be clear, I am NOT a martial artist of any sort (though I did do Karate for a few years as a kid. As I quit when I was 12, I don't think that really counts) nor am I trained in self defense. The scene was written based on a video I found after about 5 minutes on the internet and bits I can remember from my "combative activities" class.

Also, feel free to guess at what the letters of those forms mean. I promise to tell you if you're right!

Finally 100,000 WORDS!!! YAY!!!

Thanks for reading and please leave a contribution in the little box!

See you in a few weeks!
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

I think this chapter could also be called "Spot the fandom". This started off as a Labyrinth only fic. I'm still not entirely sure what happened....

Sorry this one is really late, I was sick, my beta was sick and both of us are working full time, often at opposing hours. However, you'll be glad to hear that 29 has already been written and is just waiting for editing before coming to a screen near you. In the mean time, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sarah tied on Zuko’s apron and began her shift, taking orders, serving tea, clearing tables, the usual. There were the regulars who were there every Friday. There was the dark and light-haired boys, dark with his bare feet curled up on his chair, who stared across a chess board at each other, grinning. Each time only one would make a move then they’d grin at each other as they sipped their tea until one knocked over their king. Sarah’d never really understood why the two were handcuffed together. Well, to each their own. Then there was the series of older men who would come to have a cup of tea with Iroh; Morgana and Merlin tucked away in a corner; and the two who came in with the cat.

Sarah’s never really understood the cat. Both why it was in a teashop (and for that matter, why Iroh let it stay and gave it peppermint tea) and what it seemed to be saying. The two with the pretty brown tabby seemed to understand her every meow and seemed to value her opinion. Sarah enjoyed eavesdropping on the various customers and spinning stories about what their lives might be like. Most of the regulars she either knew or they didn’t really speak and just looked creepily at each other and grinned even more creepily. Them she had decided she really didn’t want to know the story. Those two, though, (Three? Two and a half? How did one count a cat?) had given her lots of stories to think of as she helped around the shop. They’d been coming in all year. Today’s topic seemed to be a third (fourth?) friend of theirs who was often discussed, but had never joined them. Sarah had gathered that that friend was writing a story the three were reading. Today they seemed to be discussing what she should write next.

“The Sleeping Beauty AU should be next. I think we could all use a break from this fandom,” the girl with the glasses and curly black hair said.

“Meow,” replied the tabby, licking her paw sagely. That cat was always very dignified, unless Iroh was nearby, in which case she looked rather flustered and would rub her head against him till he patted her and brought her more tea.

“Not my fandom,” replied the dark-haired, absurdly tall young man, taking a sip of his tea. “I just want her to get to the lemons in this one already. We’ve waited long enough.” Curly and Tabby snorted.

“You would say that,” said Curly. “But seriously, what do you hope she’d work on next?” Tall’s eyebrows drew together as he thought.

“Honestly,” he said, coming to a conclusion, “I think she should finish up one of her original stories
she sent me a while ago, it looked like it had promise.”

“Meow,” said the Tabby.

“Yeah yeah,” said Curly.

“We do know it’s her choice and she can write whatever she wants,” Tall reassured Tabby.

“Mrrr,” said the tabby, and went back to licking her paw. Sarah saw someone across the shop wave to her, interrupting her eavesdropping. She wondered if the writer girl would ever stop by.

Sarah went over to collect the order of a new customer, a dark skinned woman with her light-haired husband and child who were playing with toy dinosaurs.

“Curse your sudden, but inevitable betrayal,” said the blond man as his son laughed uproariously.

“I’ll take a cup of jasmine,” said the woman, looking at her husband with a fond eye. “Honey, make your order.”

“Order?” he said, looking up from their kid. “Oh, right! Beautiful young woman needs to take my order. Um, I’ll take something delicious please.” His wife raised her eyebrows at him. “Some delicious tea! I’m going to go back to playing with Junior before I make this worse…” She snorted as her husband picked up the dinosaur.

“That a good enough order for you?” she asked Sarah, who was feeling thoroughly amused.

“One cup of jasmine and one of delicious tea coming right up,” she said, smiling. She went back to tell Iroh the order, pointing out the man who’d made it. ‘Surprise me’ was an actual option on the menu, and Iroh always made exactly the right choice. She continued to make her rounds, refilling Merlin’s tea, getting an order from the short boy who’d come in with his brother dressed in a suit of armor, getting another cup of peppermint for the cat (sometimes, Sarah really wondered how she’d managed to miss the fact that she was in a magical town), delivering the tea and biscuits ordered by the blonde in pink with her scruffily-dressed probably-boyfriend as the two looked over a law book, and as she worked she thought and tried not to wince.

She’d been sore all week, what with training. Zuko was a real taskmaster and had made her train until she’d practically fallen over. Katara had been wonderful and had given her enough of a massage that she’d actually been able to get out of bed the next day but even so, she still hurt. The best thing about working here was that both Zuko and Katara were busy. Sarah was planning to spend her weekend finalizing the fairground plan and sorting out final details. The group in charge of music still hadn’t decided which of the 5 songs she’d approved they wanted to play when and Sarah wanted to know. And while she was sure Aang was on top of it, he still did need to run the types of dances he wanted to teach by her. This would not be a repeat of the swing dancing fiasco of their first term, not if she had anything to say about it.

Toby’d called earlier in the day to say he loved her and missed her and to say hi to Jareth for him. She missed her little brother too. It always hurt a little extra to be away from family after they came to visit, but at least summer would be here soon. Sarah knew it wasn’t quite normal to be this attached to your family, but after nearly losing her brother to her own stupidity and losing her father to someone else’s she couldn’t help it.

“Labyrinth,” she called out with her mind.

“Yes?” the Labyrinth replied. Sarah had taken to asking Her questions over the past week, not quite willing to call on Jareth yet, as she was enjoying the space he was giving her even after her family
had left. However, she still had questions and this seemed like as good a source as any to get answers from.

“If I become your Queen—”

“When you become Our Queen,” interrupted the Labyrinth.

“—Will I still be able to go visit my family?” Sarah continued, ignoring the interruption. She and the Labyrinth could argue this all day and not get anywhere and Sarah still wouldn’t learn what she wanted to know.

“You have the power of transportation, though you need to practice more. You should speak to Our Lord about training. He is quite skilled in Magic.”

“Yeah, I know, he’s had, what? Two millennia of practice?”

“More, actually;” the Labyrinth pointed out helpfully. Sarah groaned.

“I’m never going to be able to match him, will I?”

“You have an advantage he does not,” the Labyrinth pointed out.

“Yeah?” Sarah asked, wondering what this could be.

“Us,” the Labyrinth replied, sounding rather smug.

“Really?” Sarah blinked. She knew the Labyrinth was able to help her fight as she’d been helping her move more quickly and more gracefully during drills. This was after Sarah’d had to stop to explain that, no, Zuko wasn’t trying to kill her and the Labyrinth really shouldn’t be trying to get her to magic him into a wall head first. Apparently most of the Queens had come already trained in self defense. Lucky them. Unfortunately, when Zuko realized what was going on, he made Sarah stop using the added speed and agility that the Labyrinth allowed. Ow. However, even helping her with the self defense, the Labyrinth had never mentioned help with learning magic. “Why can’t you just teach me?” Not that Sarah really wanted that. If she was being honest with herself, she was starting to miss Jareth, his sharp wit, his playful nature, the way he looked at her, his pants. Her life just felt a less vibrant, a little less full without Jareth in it.

“I will teach you of my magic later. It is better you have a grasp of the basics first. And to do that, you must learn magic from one of your own kind.”

“So, should I be learning from Merlin? He’s human. At least, I think he’s human…” Sarah trailed off as she cleared tables. Was he Fae? He did seem to have that immortal, never aging, trickster thing going for him…

“No, you should learn from Our Lord,” the Labyrinth replied with emphasis.

“Why?” Sarah was starting to get a sense of when the Labyrinth wasn’t saying something.

“Because Emrys is not Ours,” the Labyrinth replied with finality.

Sarah raised her eyebrows in bemusement at the ridiculously powerful entity that had decided She wanted Sarah for a queen, but before she could continue the conversation, the phone rang.

Sarah looked over and saw Iroh pick up the phone, so she continued, taking orders from Professor Smith and his blonde companion. She stopped in her tracks, though, when Iroh came out from
behind the counter.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to announce that the Jasmine Dragon will be closing early today. Please accept these coupons for one cup of free tea as an apology for the inconvenience.” He waved Sarah over. “Sarah, would you please close up for me, here are the keys and coupons. There’s something I must attend to.”

“Sure,” Sarah said, frowning in worry. “Iroh, what’s wrong?”

Iroh no longer looked like the jovial, wise and knowing uncle that Sarah had grown to know over the years. He looked much harder, the steel that was normally only seen through a jovial fog now at the surface.

“I do not know entirely, Sarah. But I plan to find out.” And with that he was gone.

Sarah made sure everyone got a coupon as she ushered them out. Sarah had never heard of Iroh closing early. She didn’t want to think about what could draw the man away from his tea, and so, she didn’t. As she cleared away all the dishes and wiped down the tables, and did all the dishes she determinedly spun stories from the bits of conversation she’d overheard today. She imagined how blonde and Scruffy had met on the first day of Law school. They’d bumped into each other and both dropped all the books they’d been carrying, then they’d scrambled to pick them up and ended up sitting next to each other. As she did the dishes she thought about how the Tabby might be under a curse that had left her as a cat and her friends had just kinda rolled with it.

However, the worry was working its way into her thoughts, no matter what she did. As she finished up with the the last of closing up, she decided to head back to her room. Maybe Katara would be there. She’d been with Zuko all afternoon and if it was this big a deal to his uncle, surely Zuko would know about it, right? She’d get back to her room and everything would be fine.

‘Cause that always worked so well when you were younger,’ thought some viciously cruel part of her as she locked the door to the Jasmine Dragon. She started walking back to her dorm, stubbornly refusing to run.

“Sarah!”

Sarah spun around to see Sokka running towards her. He came to a stop, just before her, trying to catch his breath.

“Sokka, what is it?” Sarah asked, looking worriedly at his hard expression. What the hell was going on?

“Come on, we’re all at the hospital,” he said, his expression softening slightly at Sarah’s concern. Sarah felt all the blood drain from her face.

“What… What happened?” Not again, please, all the gods, please not again! Sokka’s face went hard again, but this time, Sarah could see the fear underneath.

“We should get to the hospital. Jet stabbed Zuko.”

Chapter End Notes

See, I told you all, my sister really IS a cat. Those with her are my friends who read my
work.

So... does this cliff hanger count as mean?

Please leave a contribution in the little... Oh, you guys know the drill :P
Sorry guys. Getting ready for con (Katara fire Nation this year! WOOHOO!!!) plus all the jobs has not made for easy availability for editing. Still, since we managed it, back to Zuko being stabbed.

Sarah and Sokka arrived in the waiting room, out of breath. The last time Sarah had run so long and hard she’d been in the first trickster corridor of the Labyrinth, with time fast running out. She prayed that that wasn’t the case here.

They stopped in the doorway, taking in the scene that lay before them. The whole gang and Iroh were there. Iroh and Toph sat looking grim, the perfect example of the calm before the storm. Aang was pacing, unable to keep still. Katara seemed to be somewhere between fury and worry, her eyes regularly flicking between each of her friends and a door marked ‘Authorized personnel only’. She looked up at their appearance.

“No new news,” Katara told them. “He’s still in surgery.”

“Surgery?” Sarah asked, her heart falling into her stomach. “What the hell happened?” They’d been too busy running, and she hadn’t managed to get an explanation from Sokka.

“I believe you should sit down, Sarah,” Iroh said, as kindly as he could. This was no fault of the girl’s, after all. Not when seen in a rational light. Sarah looked around at expressions all far too serious and gingerly took a seat. Surely the worst news had already come, hadn’t it? Katara took a deep breath and began. After all, she’d seen all of it.

“Zuko and I were supposed to meet Aang at the library to talk about a dance after the handfasting ceremony. He was running late and we were waiting outside, soaking up some sunlight and chatting.” Katara stopped. She didn’t seem to want to keep going, but after a glance at Iroh and another calming breath she forged on. “We saw Aang coming towards us. He waved, but then he seemed to be distracted by something. He gestured for us to wait and darted down an alley.” Sarah saw Aang flinch but he didn’t interrupt. “After waiting a few minutes we got worried. It could take a while if Aang had found another stray to adopt and we had a lot to cover in that meeting. So, we followed. We got to the alley and sure enough, there was an injured animal, something small and fluffy...”

“It was an injured bird,” offered Aang quietly. Katara gave him a blank look, then continued with the story.

“But there was also Jet. He was behind Aang, and he had a knife and it was already moving. We were too late. I called out to Aang, get him to move but Zuko... He just ran. He was barely fast enough. He managed to push Aang out of the way but... But...” her voice was waverling. Sokka went and sat next to her, wrapping an arm around his little sister. Katara leaned into the embrace and seemed to take comfort from it. Her voice steadied as she found the strength to keep talking.

“He didn’t have time to block. He took the knife in his lower abdomen.” Her voice went almost
clinical. “Judging from the amount of bleeding, Jet managed to miss the abdominal aorta. I ran to the edge of the alley, grabbed someone, told them to call 911 and ran for Zuko. Jet and Aang were fighting. Somehow, the knife was still in Zuko. I applied pressure to the wound and tried to keep Zuko talking but he passed out fairly quickly.” Katara glanced at Sarah, at Aang and away. “The ambulance got there soon enough. They took Zuko into surgery as soon as we got here. I called Iroh and, well, you know the rest.”

Sarah sat in shocked silence. Sure, they’d thought Katara could do better than Jet and hadn’t really liked him, but she didn’t think he was the type to go around randomly stabbing people. Actually, for that matter, she was pretty sure he wasn’t. Jet wasn’t the type to act randomly. He was almost freakishly goal-oriented and normally quite good with people. She might, might have been able to buy him stabbing Zuko in a fit of jealousy, but this? This didn’t make any sense.

“Why was Jet trying to stab Aang in the first place?”

“He said, while we were sparring and before he ran off—”

“Wait.” Sarah felt her heart race. “You’re telling me Jet’s still out there!” Sarah had been very, very wrong when she thought the situation couldn’t get any worse.

“Yes, and we think you need to be careful,” said Toph, voice hard as stone.

“Why?” Sarah asked, eyes wide. The rest of the gang traded looks and finally Aang spoke.

“Apparently Jet attacked me because he found out I was a changeling. Apparently his parents were killed by magic.” Aang looked sad.

“The iron that Smellerbee dropped?” Sarah asked, the strangeness of that incident finally sliding into place. Aang nodded, good hand going to his still-injured one. Sarah’s mind kept whirring, picking away at the story. “But wait, why now? I’ve been close friends with you guys, I know about all this stuff and even I didn’t figure it out until you guys told me! How did he even figure out to start to suspecting Aang was Fae?” This story still didn’t make sense.

Another set of looks passed around the gang, but this time, it seemed no one wanted to speak. Damn it, what were her friends keeping from her?

“Look, Queeney,” Toph started, sounding surprisingly gentle, “apparently he saw you disappear that day you went missing courtesy of the Labyrinth. He knew enough about magic to know it when he saw it. He started poking around and figured out about Aang.”

Sarah’s eyes went wide as the reality of what had happened settled in on her. Her careless actions had endangered those she cared about again. Hadn’t she learned her lesson when she was 15? Hadn’t she learned her lesson when she was 15? Hadn’t she learned her lesson when she was 15?

“This is not your fault,” Iroh cut through her panic. “You are not responsible for the actions of a madman. Jet alone is responsible for his actions and believe me when I say he shall pay for them.” His tone was very hard and it was then that Sarah truly understood why the Sozins were such a powerful name in the magical community. “How dearly he shall pay shall be decided by the outcome of my nephew’s surgery.”

Sarah remembered waiting for news about Karen’s surgery, before she’d been desperate enough to make her wish. Sarah’s eyes went wide and she shot to her feet.

“Sarah?” asked Sokka, looking up.
“I need to get someplace private.”

“With Jet after you, you shouldn’t be alone,” argued Toph, frowning at her friend.

“I won’t be. I need to have a conversation. And he’s way more protective than any of you.” Hope lit in Iroh’s eyes as understanding started to dawn on the rest of her friends’ faces. He’d been hoping she’d do just that, Sarah realized, but for some reason had been unwilling to ask. Weird. Whatever. She’d think more about that later. Right now, she had a friend to save.

* * *

Jareth was both surprised and annoyed to feel Sarah’s call. Of all the times she could have called him in the interminable last week he’d been giving her space (and he had been doing just that, after a conversation with Klio on the subject had left his ears ringing for a few hours) she had to choose when there was a Runner in the Labyrinth. He’d been able to bring her to the Aboveground last time as she’d just bonded with the Labyrinth. It had been teeming with enough Magic that the Labyrinth Herself could play a more direct role than she usually did. And so Sarah’s call to him was left unanswered and he was trapped here, watching the Runner as she made her dismal way through the Labyrinth. She’d been here for seven hours and was only just getting out of the first corridor. Idiot woman. Then again, he’d learned that when she wished away her son.

Jareth watched the woman throw yet another fit in her futile effort to win back her son and brooded. He hoped Sarah would understand why he hadn’t come, and wouldn’t be upset.

“Labyrinth,” Jareth called out, realizing a way of making that more likely.

“Yes, my Lord?” came the reply.

“Would you explain to Sarah why I cannot go to her, please.” It often paid to be polite when talking to ancient magical artifacts that he was only the Lord of. He still wanted the Labyrinth’s help in wooing her, after all.

“Yes, my lord,” the Labyrinth said, sounding slightly smug for some reason. Jareth didn’t bother thinking about it much. He’d given up trying to understand the Labyrinth centuries ago. That, after all, was to be Sarah’s job. If… Yes. Well. Jareth went back to gazing at the crystal. He wondered if there was a way to make the time pass more quickly. He could take time away from her, but really, he wasn’t supposed to on this pathetic a Runner.

His thoughts were interrupted when he felt the magic of the Labyrinth concentrate in a spot before pillow pit. What, by the God and Goddess—Sarah? He vanished the crystal and turned his attention to the source of the disturbance.

His eyes widened as, sure enough, Sarah appeared in the middle of his throne room. What in either world could have made her wi—want to speak to him enough that she’d come to his Kingdom when a Runner was here?

“Sarah?” he asked, then he took in her state, her wide eyes, scared face, her hands trembling by her side. He shot to his feet. “Precious, what’s wrong?” It took all his self-control not to wrap her up in his arms. She had asked for space and he was not going to risk messing up her first invitation back into her life by doing too much, too soon, no matter how he wished to.

“Jareth, I need Ner’da. Please, I don’t now how much time there is.” She looked a few moments away from a panic that she was desperately pressing away.

“Ner’da?” He gave her a quick visual check. Nothing seemed to be physically wrong with her. He
moved carefully toward her, and took her hands. “Precious, what happened?” Sarah gripped his hands and took a deep breath.

“It’s Zuko. Jet stabbed him. He’s in the hospital, in surgery and they don’t know… Jareth, I can’t let him die!” She took her hands from his and her voice firm ed. “I’ll do whatever I have to.”

Jareth’s eyes widened, realizing what she was really offering. Her life, her body, he could make her stay. All he had to do was say so and she would do it, willingly. On the other hand, he could not act and very possibly eliminate his greatest rival for Sarah’s affection. These thoughts passed quickly through his mind, equally quickly dismissed by the thought of what that would do to his relationship with Sarah. If he didn’t act, he would lose her forever; even if he woke up next to her every morning, even if she bore him children, she would never be his.

“I’ll send Klio,” he said, summoning a crystal and sending it to his oldest friend. “Ner’da can’t go. She’s too old, too attached to the Labyrinth. I cannot go, not with the Runner, but Klio is a very skilled healer in her own right. She is the one who healed your stepmother after I had ensured she would not die.” He saw a fraction of the tension drain from her body.

“But, Jareth, he’s in surgery. He might die before Klio can get to him. Is there anything—”

Before she’d finished her sentence, Jareth had conjured another crystal and launched it up into the air where it disappeared.

“That spell will ensure his state will get no worse until Klio can begin her work. Don’t worry, Sarah, your friend will survive,” he told her, knowing it to be true.

“And in return?” she asked, still wary.

‘Your trust, your love,’ he thought to himself, looking at the strong, wild woman in front of him.

“Nothing,” he said aloud. “It’s a gift, nothing more.”

The emotion that had been welling up within her finally spilled out into tears as she threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around him and holding tight. Surprised, he wrapped his arms around her in turn and started to rock her back and forth gently.

“Oh Jareth,” she murmured against his chest. “Thank you. Thank you.” He felt the wetness of her tears seep through his shirt. He held her, giving her what strength he could. His Sarah had already lost enough; he was glad he could spare her this. After far too short a time, he felt her pull back enough to look up at him. He let her, but kept his arms around her. He didn’t want to leave her alone, not when she was in this much pain.

“I should get going,” she said, wiping at her tear-stained face with one hand, the other resting on his chest.

“You’re welcome to stay.” He would be happy to hold her close, make her pain and panic less, while they waited for Klio’s return, leaving only as his duties to the Runner demanded.

“Thanks,” she said with a weak smile. “But I really should get back and tell them the good news.”

“You could send a note,” Jareth countered, not wanting to let her go so quickly after not seeing her for so long.

“Yeah, but I think my friends are worried you might have demanded my freedom in exchange for saving Zuko.” Jareth snorted, conveniently ignoring that that was something he’d considered. “And
“Very well,” Jareth allowed, pulling her close once more and kissing her lightly on the forehead. “I’ll come to you as soon as this Runner is finished.”

“How long?” asked Sarah, frowning.

“Only six hours, Precious.” Sarah smiled faintly.

“I’ll see you then.” She rose on her tip toes and kissed him lightly. “Thank you, Jareth.” He could still feel her breath against his lips as she disappeared. But he’d see her again soon. Six hours was not long. No, not long at all.

* * *

Klibdus put down his fork as Mother looked up from the note that a servant had just brought.

“It seems Kliora will not be joining us for dinner this evening,” she said, frowning slightly. “It seems that one of the Champion’s friends has been injured and Jareth has requested her help in the matter.” Klibdus couldn’t help but sigh at his sister’s antics, and he joined his parents in frowning.

“Perhaps simply having her killed would be more expedient, rather than this elaborate plot we have concocted to deal with the Champion,” said Father, looking thoughtful.

‘Oh dear.’ “I don’t think that would be wise,” Klibdus volunteered, earning his parents’ appraisal. “You see,” he continued, “Jareth seems rather irrationally fond of this mortal, from what Klio has told me. If she were to lose her life, I believe he would act unpredictably and he might very well lash out at those close to him. And if the engagement is carried through…”

“The person who is closest will be Kliora,” acknowledged Mother, nodding.

“And if he ever figured out who was behind the attack…” Father trailed off. “Yes, I believe that is not a situation we want our daughter to be in.”

‘Precisely.’ “And besides,” Klibdus offered, “if the first plan does not work out, we’ll have almost two months to come up with a new solution.”

“Very true. In the meantime, the preparations for Beltane are nearly finished.” Mother smiled, then turned to Father to talk about one of the incomplete details. Klibdus frowned as he half listened to them plot. While their plan would work, he still didn’t quite approve. If his oldest friend wanted the girl, he should just have her. True, that ‘no power over me’ thing was rather annoying, but he had finally found a way around it (he was fairly sure). It would be ready in enough time that his parents’ plan wouldn’t be needed and his friend’s strange sense of honour wouldn’t get in the way of his happiness. Nor would he have to deal with the angered Sozin family. Really, this was the best option. He’d visit the apothecary after dinner and begin. After all, there wasn’t that much time left.

* * *

Sarah stepped out of the room she’d ducked into. Her friends stood around looking even more worried than when she’d left. All eyes (but Toph’s) turned to her, expectant.

“Klio, a skilled healer, is coming as quickly as she can. Jareth cast a spell ensuring Zuko would survive. Klio is the one who healed Karen last year. Zuko’s going to be fine.” She smiled at them, wiping the last of her tears away. She could see the tension drain from the group, all but Toph.
“What did you have to trade for this?” she asked, prepared to fight tooth and nail for her friend’s freedom.

“Nothing.” Sarah smiled softly. “He said it was a gift.”

“Oh,” Toph said, relaxing. She could tell from Sarah’s voice what the Goblin King had gotten out of the deal. Iroh sighed in relief at this news. He wasn’t quite sure that his nephew would have forgiven him if he’d allowed Sarah to trade her freedom for his life. His nephew was very fond of the young woman and after what happened with his mother, well.

Sarah took a minute to remember Jareth holding her before pushing those thoughts away for later. She still had something to do.

“Aang, Katara?” They looked up at her, confused by the steel in her voice. “When Jet attacked, did he mention anything about knowing about the rest of your connections with the magical community?”

“No…” Aang trailed off, wondering where Sarah was headed with this. “He even said that he was sorry that Zuko had to die, him being an innocent, but that was the price for associating with magical people.” Katara’s eyes went stormy. For the first time, Sarah wondered how Katara felt about the fact that it was her boyfriend who was the one that was responsible for all of this.

“So, he’s just after me and Aang?”

“Yeah,” Aang confirmed. “I’m supposed to stick around here until the police can come and get a statement from me. When they know he’s after you too, they’ll probably want you to stick close as well.”

“But they haven’t been yet? So, I don’t have to stick around yet, right?” Aang nodded as he and Katara shared confused looks and Sokka, Toph and Iroh frowned, realizing where she was going with this line of questioning.

Toph shook her head. “Sarah, this is a bad idea.”

“I’m with Toph on this one,” Sokka said. For all that it would be effective, he wasn’t ready to risk this. Not this close to almost losing one of his best friends. Iroh held his peace.

“Well, if you have a better idea, feel free to speak up. I’m not going to spend the rest of my time walking around afraid and I want him behind bars before Jareth finishes with his Runner.” A chill ran down her spine at the thought of what Jareth might do so someone who actually intended to kill her. It had been bad enough when Arthur had grabbed her. She gave it a beat before continuing. “No? Then we’re doing this my way.”

Aang and Katara were starting to look concerned, figuring out what the rest of them were talking about.

“Sarah, just what are you planning?” asked her roommate, blue eyes wide. Sarah took a deep breath, refusing to let her fear rule her.

“Come on guys. We have less than six hours left to use me as bait for Jet.”

Chapter End Notes
Alright a couple of thing. First, Klibdus' s scene takes place from inside his head, as it were. Normally, I write from a more omniscient POV but not for Klibdus, for some reason. I'm really not sure why, but trying to write him any other way and still have him be the focal character of the scene just felt... icky. Not entirely sure why, but there you go. If you were confused, sorry, but that's the only way the scene was being written.

Second, my brain has reached critical mass of Plot Bunnies and they are exploding all over the place. I've got two multi chapter Zutara stories in the works, three connected Zutara one shots, various unconnected one shots, three connected Danny Phantom one shots and a probably multi chapter (Honestly, I'm really not sure here) story I'm calling "Fenton of the Opera". Any suggestions for which of these you'd like to see? Your input is valued! I swear, I will and want to finish this story, but it's nice to give other writing muscles a bit of a stretch.

Up after I survive/attend/enjoy con: What is Sarah's plan? How will Jareth react? Am I finally going to have some Zutara? What happens to Jet? All this, and more, next time I (and my beta) manage to have sufficient free time!
Chapter Notes

I'm really sorry this took so long! But my sister's job is finally finished, so editing should be happening more frequently! As a matter of fact, I have two Labyrinth one shots that I will be posting in the next week! I suggest checking them out, though they are very different from this fic. Also, if I have Zutarian's reading, I recently posted two sweet silly oneshots which I also recommend to your attention!

Anyway, I think I've kept you from this chapter long enough, and boy is it a doozy of one. TAGGING FOR STRONG LANGUAGE. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I still don’t like this plan,” Toph said, frowning, her sightless gaze somewhere between Sokka and Sarah.

“Me neither,” Sokka said, glaring rather hopelessly at Sarah. “But it should work.”

“It will,” Sarah said, sounding a lot more confident than she actually felt. On the other hand, Sokka and Iroh had been the ones who’d come up with this and that sounded like a pretty solid team. Maybe if she kept telling herself that, she’d actually believe it. Checking her watch, she firmed her resolve. “It’s time. Toph?”

It was only because she was really good friends with Toph that Sarah noticed her tighten her grip on Badger’s harness before letting go. Sarah wished they’d had enough time to think of something else, but this would work and they were time was something they were short.

“I’ll take good care of him,” Sokka reassured Toph as he took the harness. “We shouldn’t be long.”

“You better not be!” said Toph, punching Sokka in the arm. Sokka didn’t flinch away. “I can only stall for so long! Now get going!” She crossed her arms and glared at them. As they started walking away, Badger looked back at Toph and whimpered.

“Go on, boy,” she encouraged softly. She’d always shown more gentleness to Badger than anyone else they knew. “I’ll see you soon.”

Sokka and Sarah continued towards the sheltered spot in the park they’d told Smellerbee to tell Jet to meet them in—Sarah checked her watch—half an hour, in silence. Sokka had already said he didn’t like the plan, but he knew just was well as Sarah did that with Jet on the loose, everyone was in danger. He’d nearly lost one of his best friends; Sarah knew he wasn’t about to risk anything happening to his sister. He stopped when they reached the tree line, gripping Sarah’s shoulder and turning her to face him.

“I’ll be right there,” he assured her. “You say the word, you scream, I’m there. Don’t wait till too late, okay?” He searched her face. “Jareth would kill us,” he half-joked.

“Jareth wouldn’t hurt you guys ‘cause I was being an idiot,” she reassured him. With one final nod, Sokka disappeared into the foliage at the side of the path.
At least, she was pretty sure he wouldn’t. Sarah had no intentions of playing hero this time. This wasn’t a magical quest and this time there wasn’t a way things were done. Jet had nearly killed two of her friends. Any way to take him down was the right one.

‘Well, almost any way,’ she thought to herself as she stepped into the clearing. She was still very glad that Jareth was stuck in the Underground. She didn’t want to know what he’d do to someone who’d said he wanted to kill her.

He loved her, she was pretty sure. She fingered her amulet through her shirt. She’d been annoyed that he hadn’t come when she’d called him, but she understood what it meant to be bound to what one had to do. She was walking into a meeting with an attempted murderer after all. Still, she was glad he was, in a way, with her. After all, she was She-Who-Should-Be-Queen. If anything, Jet should be afraid of her. She would have preferred—

A rustling of a bush to her left caused her to turn, eyes wide, heart racing. The rustling got louder and turned into swearing.

“Run, Sarah!” Sokka shouted. Damn it, what had gone wrong? This wasn’t part of the plan… She took a stumbling step back before realizing there was something behind her. She felt a hand at her neck.

Without thinking, she threw herself forward. She felt her shirt tear and a line of fire appear across her neck as she fell away, managing to break her fall with her hands. She scrambled quickly to her feet and turned to face her attacker.

He stood there, eyes wild, knife in one hand, the other holding her amulet on the leather thong that had snapped when she’d thrown herself forward. Sarah took a deep breath and, without taking her eyes off him, brushed off her clothes. When she finished, she looked into the madness that hid behind his eyes—how had she ever failed to notice it before?—and said:

“Jet.”

* * *

“We’ve done all we can,” the doctor explained as she let Iroh and Katara into Zuko’s room. “He still might wake up, but the longer he remains unconscious…”

“I see.” Katara saw Iroh nod grimly from the corner of her eye as he spoke. Her gaze was fixed on Zuko’s too pale face, his scar stark contrast against it. “Thank you for all you’ve done.” The doctor’s pager beeped.

“I’m sorry, I have to go. There’s a call button if something happens.” She pointed and was gone.

Iroh put a hand on her shoulder. “You should sit,” he said, gesturing to a chair by Zuko’s bed.

“No,” she said, shaking her head. “Thank you though.”

“The Goblin King’s healer will be here soon,” he reassured her, taking her hand and giving it a gentle squeeze. “All we can do now is wait.” And with that he sat down in a chair by the bed.

No, Katara thought to herself as she looked at her closest friend as he lay helpless before her, that’s not all we can do. With a deep breath to calm herself she set about making sure everything was in order. She was sure that the doctors and nurses here were competent but they were stressed and sometimes stressed people could mess up. Zuko couldn’t afford that and he wouldn’t, not if she could help it. She hadn’t started studying medicine so that she could stand around helpless while her
friend lay hurt. She checked the blood feed, his IV, that his heart monitor was in good working order. He hadn’t been lying there long enough that bed sores would be a problem, but if—No. The healer was coming. Zuko wouldn’t be in this bed long enough for that to become an issue.

She gave him another critical look, trying to see if there was anything else she could do while she waited. His hair was wrong. It was far too flat. It was strange that that thing, above all others, should bother her so much, but maybe it was because she could fix this. With a glance at Iroh, who was staring intently out the window, Katara set to work fixing it. His hair was silky and it slid softly through her fingers as she ruffled it to give it its proper scruffy air. She’d seen him pull it up into a top knot a few times for presentations and the like, or when Iroh asked him to for some reason or another, but she liked it best when it was just let loose. It suited him best, she thought. She took a moment to consider her progress. Almost right.

She gently pushed some of the hair from where it had fallen in his eye. Her hand lingered on his scar, still bright red, even with the rest of him so pale.

She heard Iroh get to his feet and glanced at him.

“Lady Klio, I presume?” Katara spun around to face this new lady—how had she failed to notice her arrival? Lady Klio stood tall and graceful, intelligent blue eyes taking in the scene before her. After a moment she offered Iroh a small smile and nod.

“Yes. And you are Iroh Sozin?” Iroh nodded.

“And may I make known to you Katara Arnook, of the Southern Selkie clan?” Iroh continued, gesturing to where she stood by the bed, her hand still on Zuko’s hair. Klio offered her a larger, kinder smile.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Katara,” she said. “Sarah speaks highly of you.” Before Katara had time to say thank you or even blush Klio had moved around to the other side of Zuko’s bed. She lay one hand on his forehead and another rested lightly on his chest. Katara made herself be quiet. If the magic lady needed to know something she’d ask. The last thing Katara wanted to do was distract her.

“This wound…” Klio trailed off, frowning. “Was it inflicted by an iron knife?”

“The weapon was intended to kill a changeling, so I believe it was,” replied Iroh, voice far too calm. Katara’s stomach dropped like a stone. She knew as well as anyone the binding properties of iron on magic. If there were still traces of iron in the wound…

“Katara.” Katara’s eyes snapped up to meet the searching blue of the healer across from her. “Do you love this boy?”

Katara jerked away, her hand, which had found Zuko’s of its own accord, letting it go like it was burning hot.

“What? I—Why?”

“As he is now, I can ensure he doesn’t die. However, his recovery will be long and arduous, even if I can make journeys back to help him recover.” Klio’s eyes went distant for a moment. “However,” she continued, eyes latching on to Katara’s again, “Love is a powerful force. There is another spell I can use. It will require more power from both of us, but his healing will be far more complete. Either way, Jareth’s spell is fading and I need to begin quickly, so tell me, Katara Arnook, of the Southern Selkie Clan, do you love him?”
Katara’s eyes flicked to Iroh, who was giving her an unreadable look. “Speak truthfully,” he said, an edge in his voice she couldn’t identify. “For these types of spells, words alone will not suffice.”

Katara’s eyes flicked between them and settled on Zuko. She thought about their arguments. About their sparring that none of their friends wanted any part of, calling them insane. About study sessions lasting late into the night as they each strove for the best grades. About Zuko’s scowl and muttered curses when reading a book on medieval treaties. About his soft expression turned terrified when she’d woken up after practically falling asleep on him during one of those sessions. About the lame jokes he’d make to try to lighten the mood when she wanted to throw her textbooks against the wall. About how he was just as fiercely protective of their friends as she was. About the pain in his voice when he spoke of his mother that matched the pain she felt every time she spoke of hers. About how he’d asked if Aang was alright, even as he lay stabbed. How he had passed out saying her name, her tears staining his face. About his blood, far too much of it, running between her fingers no matter how she tried to stop it.

She looked up at Klio.

“What do you need me to do?”

Klio’s eyes lit up and a small smile played across her lips before she focused again.

“Place your hands over mine,” Klio said as she shifted hers down to the stab wound. “And dwell in your love for him. Love him as hard as you can, that will serve as power for the spell and I will work to direct it. I’ll need his name to be able to work this.”

“Zuko,” Katara breathed. “Zuko Sozin,” she said more strongly. She knew the importance of names.

“Very good. Mr. Sozin, will you act as our spotter?” Klio didn’t look away from Katara as she spoke.

“Of course,” Iroh said as he came to stand by the end of the bed.

“You will feel very drained after this,” Klio told Katara. “After a day of rest, you should be fine. If not, tell Sarah to talk to Ner’da. Are you ready?”

Katara simply nodded, placing her hands over Klio’s. Klio smiled one last time,

“Then let us begin.” She started speaking softly and quickly in a language Katara didn’t understand, though she thought Gran-gran might. Katara immediately felt her hands go so cold they started to shiver and the cold began creeping up her arms. For all that Katara was used to cold, having several school breaks visiting her mother’s relatives in Nunavut, she knew this wasn’t healthy. Pretty soon her fingernails would start turning blue and if this cold got all the way up to her core... she could feel the bone deep cold up to her elbows now. She could barely feel the warmth coming off of Zuko’s body.

At that thought, the cold halted in its tracts. What in the world? Why had it stopped? Had her elbows been far enough? The cold started creeping up her arms again.

‘Zuko,’ she thought firmly to herself and, once again, the cold stopped its climb. Realizing that she hadn’t been doing what she was supposed to, Katara threw herself into thoughts of him. Bright golden eyes. A scar that was his and his alone. The feel of his hair mere minutes ago. Slowly but surely the cold started to recede down her arms. Katara poured herself into these memories as the cold was slowly pushed out of her. With the memory of what had almost been a kiss the day Sarah had disappeared the cold was banished entirely. Normally Katara shied away from that memory,
embarrassed by what had almost happened while she’d been dating someone else, but right now she
didn’t care. She threw everything she had into that memory and others like it. She let herself love the
young man laying on the bed in front of her and, as she searched her memories to fuel the spell she
realized she why she did and wondered how long she had. She wondered how long it would have
taken her to realize if she hadn’t nearly lost him.

She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she didn’t notice when Klio finished the spell and Zuko’s
eyes blinked open. She didn’t feel Klio gently slide her hands from between Katara and Zuko. She
didn’t see Iroh smile in relief and hold a finger gently to his lips. She didn’t see Klio and Iroh step
gently from the room, so focused was she on her task.

“Katara?” Zuko said, breaking her from her reverie. He reached up to wipe a tear from her cheek—
when had she started crying? “Katara, are you okay?” He shot up in bed, eyes wild. “Aang? Oh god,
is Aang okay?”

“Aang’s fine,” Katara reassured him. “He’s in the waiting room talking to the police. Don’t worry
about—”

That was when her legs decided to give out on her.

“Katara?” Zuko practically shouted, eyes wide in worry as she managed to catch herself on the bed.
He reached out and grabbed her shoulders. “Katara, are you okay? Did Jet hurt you?”

“I’m fine,” she reassured him as she sat down next to him on his bed. She’d just sit there for a
minute. “Jet didn’t hurt me at all.” Katara’s head was starting to feel fuzzy. “Klio healed you.
Needed my help—” a yawn cut her off. Zuko was still holding her shoulders, looking concerned. He
was so warm and so close and still smelled like summer wind. “You’re alive,” she said, her hand
resting over the stab wound. She smiled giddily. “You’re alive!” And with that she leaned forward
and kissed him. He had just adjusted his arms so he was holding her more closely and had started to
kiss her back when she passed out.

* * *

Iroh gently shut the door on his nephew, who was wiping away Katara’s tears. He doubted she had
even known when she’d started to cry, she’d been so focused. He would get his turn with his
nephew in a moment, but after Katara’s revelation to herself, he thought they might need a moment
in private to collect themselves. Besides, he wanted to give the spell a moment to settle before
enveloping the boy in a rib crushing hug…and he had something he wanted to ask the healer.

“Lady Klio, if I might ask, how did you know?” she gave him a considering look.

“About Katara’s feeling for your nephew?” He nodded. He’d had years to watch them grow into
friends and then their feelings develop into something even stronger, even if neither would admit it.
She’d had barely minutes to figure it out. “When you get to be as old as I am, young one,” Klio told
him, giving him a lopsided smile, “People have a way of presenting themselves. Besides,” her smile
turned into a frown, her expression dark. “I find myself growing tired of thwarted love stories. There
are far too many of them of late.” She shook her head and gave him a considering look.

“Before I go… Though he can’t tell you himself, I think Jareth would want you to know. He is well.
China seems to suit him. He’s getting married next month. He wishes you could be there.” And
without another word, the hallway was empty. Iroh’s face was completely blank. He would not cry,
not here and now, but it seemed that this year he would be lighting the memorial candle early. He
wondered what her name was.
Before he could continue on this train of thought, the door to Zuko’s room was flung open. His nephew, who seemed to have detached himself from all the machines to reach the door (machines which were currently going haywire. No doubt the doctors would be here soon to investigate), stood there, expression wildly confused and worried.

“Uncle, what’s going on?!?”

It seemed the candle would have to wait. For now, Iroh had his second son to attend to.

* * *

Klio materialized in Jareth’s throne room, exhausted. Jareth would have to send her home himself, or let her rest here. Honestly that might be preferable, she felt like she was about to fall over. At her appearance, Jareth glanced up and frowned. With a flick of his wrist there was a comfortable chair behind her and a table with a glass of water next to it.

“What happened?” he asked, putting his crystal off to one side for the time being.

“I used a love-based healing spell. The young man is fine, but it took a lot out of me.” She waved his concern away and drank thirstily from the glass. If anything, Jareth’s frown deepened. Hadn’t he wanted her to heal the boy?

“And whose love did you use to fuel the spell?” There was an edge in his voice that she didn’t often hear.

“Katara’s.” Jareth seemed to relax slightly and his expression became more confused than anything else. “Wasn’t she dating the boy who stabbed Zuko?”

“How should I know?” Klio shrugged, sipping her water more daintily. “Whoever she was dating, it was Zuko that she loved. If she hadn’t, that spell wouldn’t have worked and he wouldn’t have been healed.” Again, Jareth’s expression darkened. “Which will make Sarah happy with you, won’t it?” she said, trying to lighten her oldest friend’s mood.

“Oh,” he said dismissively. “I have no doubt Sarah will be overjoyed with his recovery.” He picked up his crystal again and glared into it. Klio was just about fed up with his cryptic words.

“Jareth,” she said, forcing herself to her feet, despite her exhaustion. That won her a concerned look. Good. At least she had his attention. “What in the name of the God and Goddess is going on here? What do you have against this boy?”

“Nothing. He is Sarah’s good friend, after all.” The sneer in his voice was as clear as day, and despite that, she could hardly believe what she was hearing. There was no possible way that this could be what it seemed to be. Surely Jareth wasn’t that thick.

“Jareth…” She could barely make herself say the words. “Are you jealous of the boy?”

The crystal in his hand cracked and he went perfectly still. She was right. He was jealous of him.

“Jareth, that’s ridi—”

“Ridiculous?” He turned to face her and Klio was silenced by his expression. “Jealous of a boy? I, ruler of a Kingdom, commander of Magics few can comprehend, jealous of a mere boy? Of course, that would be ridiculous.” He threw back his head and laughed a laugh that shook Klio to her bones. “What can a mere boy have compared to me? What of her trust? Her love? Her presence every day in his life without her being wary of him. His ability to stand by and protect her without her getting
angry at him. His ability to not be banished from her side for a week. When she is in need it is him
she turns to. Not me. Not ever me if there were another choice.” Jareth got up and started stalking
towards Klio, who firmly stood her ground. “And when he lay dying and her hand was forced, why
she was willing to give up everything to save him. She loved him enough to give up her life, her
principles, her body, even if I took none of it. And what of me? The Goblin King, the Child-Stealer,
destroyer of Families and Happiness, her Childhood Villain, I, who wants her as a ‘fucking
submissive whore.’” He snarled the last words. “Have you heard her speak of me in my official
capacity? It’s enlightening, I assure you. To her, I am a monster from nightmares, not to be trusted
and he, he is her knight in shining armor. You’re right of course,” he gave her a horrifying,
heartbreaking smile. “It would be ridiculous to be jealous of him.”

Klio looked into her friend’s eyes for a long moment, before he looked away.

“You are no King Arthur,” she said, reaching out gently to touch his arm. “And Camelot was a long
time ago.” He flinched slightly at her words, his confessions having left him raw. “You know,” she
continued, drawing her arm back and looking away, giving him a moment to recover. “When I spoke
to Sarah about your relationship, it was never you she objected to. She worries about becoming
queen, and it is your official capacity, I think, that she is most concerned about. I believe you told me
of negotiations so that will no longer be a problem, to be arranged soon?” She glanced at him from
the corner of her eye. He seemed to be relaxing somewhat. Klio was glad she’d been here to hear
this. It had obviously been building for quite some time and if it had come out during an argument
with Sarah… Well. Best it was out now. “And even if it weren’t for the fact that the boy is in love
with the Selkie girl—” she really wondered how Jareth had managed to miss that. He was normally
much more observant. Well, love was known to make idiots of people “—you have something that
he never will.”

He turned to face her fully now, his expression much calmer. “And what might that be?” he asked,
eyebrow raised.

“Sarah’s half in love with you already and she wants to fall completely. Give her a little more time
for the fog to clear from her vision and let her see that you will be there waiting to catch her. Mortals
are careful with their hearts. You know how long it took me to win the heart of my lady and she and
I didn’t have anything close to your history with the Champion. Really,” she smiled, “I’m amazed
you two have come so far so quickly. Healing her friend without taking her in trade will have done
more to clear the fog she looks through that I think you can imagine. We still have over a month left
Jareth. You have time.” Again she reached out and gave her friend’s shoulder a squeeze.

“Thank you, Klio,” Jareth said softly, not quite meeting her eyes. “I should let you rest. Your regular
rooms are, of course, available to you. If you need any—”

A sharp, horrifying, enraged, helpless scream erupted in both of their skulls. Far away, the Former
Queen Buttercup clapped her hands over her ears as her eyes went wide with horror. The Labyrinth
was screaming. Jareth’s face drained of blood and his eyes went wide as he looked at Klio.

“Sarah.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was mostly written in one go and has a lot in it. First of all, Zuko with no
idea of what’s going on is the best thing ever! I love him in his obliviousness. Now that
Katara has worked out her feelings about Zuko, will he figure out his for hers? Will they end up together? WHO KNOWS? (As always, me, but you'll just have to wait for me to get there *cackles*)

On a more serious note, some thoughts on Jareth's monologue. From very early in this fic I knew that Sarah and Zuko were close, that Jareth was jealous of Zuko and that Sarah and Zuko had no romantic feelings for each other. I knew this, but it's only as I write that I'm actually realizing the reasons behind it. Jareth is so used to and afraid of being her villain, as soon as he sees someone who could be her hero, he starts worrying. After all, he better than anyone knows how Sarah loves stories. This completely ignores two facts. One, Sarah doesn't want or need a hero. What she wants is the Goblin Kings on terms she can accept. The second is Zuko is pretty much everyone knight in not so shining armor. I mean, seriously, that guy has redemption issues.

I spend a lot of time in this fic exploring Sarah's feels about what Jareth says and does, but not really Jareth's and while writing this scene it occurs to me that Sarah's said some really heavy stuff. It makes sense that Jareth is hurt and confused and *thank all the gods* Klio was there because can you imagine if all that emotion came out at Sarah? *Shudders* Cause what those two *really* need is more emotional baggage. However, I think that Jareth will have to talk to Sarah about some of this later. If they will, I don't know, but they should.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to say again that there is nothing wrong with being a prostitute or submissive, as long as everything is consensual.

Also, while I may not have a guide dog or any close friends with one, I'm pretty frigging sure "don't try this at home" applies here. ESPECIALLY the going to confront a dangerous stabby guy. Leave that to the professionals, kids!

Alright, I think that sums up my thoughts on this chapter. I'll write 31 as soon as I can, even if Jet is scary. Jareth is scarier, and Sarah, he, AND the Labyrinth all want this arc done already. Meep. If they ask, you haven't seen me *disappears in cloud of smoke*
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Work, health, work, school, work, school, work (And yes, each work listed IS a different job, though the two schools are the same), need I say more?

I am sorry I took over a month to update (though only just over!) especially after leaving you with that cliffhanger. It wasn't my intent, I swear. I really hope that the next one will be up before friggin halloween, but, given my life right now, I unfortunately can make no promises. I am writing more as it helps keep me sane and grounded in all this insanity, but it really is editing that's the problem, and you guys really don't want this unedited, trust me. In the mean time, I hope my one shots can keep you entertained.

Still, I'll stop blathering and let you get to the story! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What are you?” Jet asked, a look of pure hatred on his face.

“What?” Sarah blinked at him.

“Don’t play games with me!” His hand tightened on his knife. “I know you’re magic, I just don’t know what kind you are. Are there others like you?”

“I’m human,” Sarah said simply, trying to draw this out. Now it was just a waiting game. If she could make this last until Toph could do her part, they’d be fine. If not… Jet growled before taking a deep breath and smiling a horrible smile.

“Smellerbee! Longshot! Bring him out!”

Sarah watched in horror as Longshot and Smellerbee emerged from the trees, Smellerbee holding a knife to Sokka’s neck and Longshot with a gun—where had they gotten a gun?—trained on him. Sokka’s eye was already swelling shut, but he looked ready to spit nails.

Jet walked calmly over to Sokka.

“I’m sorry to have to do this, but there are consequences to hanging out with her sort.” He turned back to Sarah, and, looking her in the eye, cut Sokka’s arm in a long, shallow cut. Sarah felt like she’d been punched in the stomach as she watched Jet flick the blood from the blade and Sokka grit his teeth against the pain.

“Jet, it’s not his fault…” Smellerbee said, giving her friend a worried look, but not moving her knife from Sokka’s neck. There was blood there too, from where Sokka had flinched from Jet’s cut. Jet spun to face her, eyes wild.

“So? He associates with their kind! I’m not planning on killing him. You remember your brother, don’t you? You remember your parents forgetting? They took him away from you! How were you supposed to know he’d really come! And what about my parents? And after what they did to Longshot? They all deserve to pay.” Sarah looked at Smellerbee and once again had the wind knocked out of her as she recognized all too easily the guilt and the anger on Smellerbee’s face. She
knew it intimately. Jet shot a look at Longshot, seeing if he had anything to say. He simply nodded, his face impassive and his aim unwavering. Finally, Jet turned back to Sarah. “Let me explain how this will work. I will ask questions and you will answer them. If you don’t, I hurt him. Try to run and he dies.” Sarah could hear the utter sincerity in his voice and it was terrifying. But she’d kissed someone far more powerful and terrifying than he was, and she would not cower before him. After all, Jet could move no stars...he only held her friend’s life in his hands. She would show no fear. “Now,” his knife glinted in the moonlight, “Tell me. What are you?”

“Me?” Sarah looked at Jet, and in her heart apologized to Smellerbee for what she was about to do. “Once upon a time, there was a foolish girl who wished her little brother away. But what no one knew, is that the Goblin King had fallen in love with the girl and had given her certain powers. I am the beloved of the Goblin King, She-Who-Should-Be-Queen.” Sarah bowed and smirked, letting her inner Jareth to the surface. Make them mad. People made mistakes when they got mad, and this was all going so wrong, so fast, she needed them to make a mistake. Smellerbee was snarling, Longshot actually looked tense and Jet just looked disgusted.

“He took your brother away, destroyed your family! How could you love him!” Smellerbee shouted, the knife at Sokka’s throat trembling. Alright, maybe Sarah didn’t want them quite that angry.

“I won him back,” she said softly, looking at Smellerbee, who started shaking her head, eyes watering.

“No! That’s impossible! No one can get through that stupid maze in thirteen hours! IT CAN’T BE!”

“It is, Smellerbee. You’ve seen Toby when he visits me, heard Katara talking about him. I wished him away and I got him back.”

“YOU’RE LYING!” Smellerbee was crying now, though Sarah was fairly sure the young woman had no idea. “STOP LYING! IT CAN’T BE DONE! IT CAN’T!”

There was a noise in the trees and Sarah spoke up to cover it. Please, please let this go right.

“It CAN!” Sarah shouted back. ‘I’m sorry, Smellerbee. I’m so, so sorry.’ “You know what the Fae believe? They say that only someone who really loves the person they wished away can get through the Labyrinth. I guess you didn’t love your little brother like I loved mine. After all, you wished him away and left him down there.” And then, Smellerbee was pushing Sokka to the side, and running at her, and Longshot wasn’t aiming at Sokka anymore, but it was Jet who reached her first.

“You’re wrong!” he yelled, going to stab her. Sarah’s arms shot out, cross, twist, but Jet moved and there was another knife. Her side was on fire and Jet was telling her how he was going to make it slow, how “you deserve every minute of it, you magical bitch!” She could feel the warm blood, another line of fire, this time on her back. Terrible pressure and pain. Someone was screaming. It was her. It was in her. It went on and on and on. The weight lifted. Someone was shaking her. Everything went dark.

* * *

When Sarah woke up some time later, she was slightly surprised. The last thing she remembered was being stabbed and this time she wasn’t able to go get Jareth to heal her. Maybe doing this while he was busy with a Runner hadn’t been the best idea, but she was still alive, and so was Jet... at least, as far as she knew. With a huge effort of will, Sarah opened her eyes. Everything hurt, but mostly her side. There was a man standing over her; she tried to flinch away.

“Sarah Williams, correct?” he asked. “I’m Dr. Lawn, and you are at the Hospital, recovering from a
stab wound. Tell me, does this hurt.” He pressed gently on her side and she yelped. “Very good. Now, if you’ll just look this way.” He shone a light in each of her eyes, which also hurt. She seriously considered going back to sleep. Maybe it would stop hurting if she went back to sleep. “Very well, Captain Carrot, she should be able to speak with you, briefly mind. I’ll finish up her paperwork before informing her next of kin.” Uh-oh.

“Karen’s here? Toby?” Her voice was a little raw. She remembered the screaming.

“No, they are not. After a few frantic phone calls and such, she declared that she would have Mr. Sozin acting as next of kin until you woke up or she got here. I had best go pass on the news.”

“Please tell her to not come up? Or bring me a phone so I can tell her myself?” Sarah knew they couldn’t afford the loss of Karen’s hours and the cost of the trip, even if Iroh would put them up and Mr. Garak was a very understanding boss. Dr. Lawn gave her a once over.

“I highly doubt you’re in a position to convince her yourself. I’ll let Mr. Sozin know your wishes. Now, I really must go. Do try to keep it brief, Captain.”

“Of course, Doctor Lawn.” It was then that Sarah noticed the other man in the room. She wasn’t sure how she’d managed to fail to notice him before. Standing by the door he was a big man, six feet if he was an inch and way too many muscles for one guy to have, bright red hair, he was kinda hard to not notice. She blamed the stab wound. With one last nod at Sarah, Dr. Lawn hurried out.

“Now, Miss Williams.” Captain Carrot—that’s what Dr. Lawn had called him, wasn’t it?—said, pulling out a notebook. “I was just hoping you could give me a brief account of what happened. We’ll be taking a more complete statement later on; we’ve already got one from your friends—”

“How long have I been out?” Sarah interrupted, sitting up suddenly and wincing from the pain. Oh please let it not be more than—

“Sergeant Angua discovered you being attacked a little over five hours ago,” the Captain replied, eyes widening. Good, Sarah thought to herself, she still had some time left. Not much, but some. She eased herself back gently.

“Now, miss, if you wouldn’t mind telling me what happened?” Sarah glanced at the poised pencil and decided she really didn’t have the energy to lie. Closing her eyes, she took a breath.

“Would you believe Jet attacked me and my friend Aang because he believes we have magic? And that all magical folk are evil? And we all deserve to die and he should be our executioner? I went out there hoping to lure him into a trap, but then he brought backup, Smellerbee and Longshot, which took out my backup, Sokka, and so I got them mad by telling them I was the beloved of the Goblin King so they attacked me instead of Sokka and then they did attack me and Jet stabbed me and I blacked out.”

“I see,” Sarah heard Captain Carrot say over the sound of careful scribbling. “So you are She-Who-Should-Be-Queen?”

Sarah opened her eyes in confusion. That wasn’t a question she’d expected from the police.

“Yes…?” Sarah replied.

“Very well. Thank you, Miss Williams. This should be enough to start with. We’ll be back to ask more questions and get a more complete statement when you’re feeling better. Thank you for your time. Oh, Commander Vimes said I should give you this.” He reached into his vest and pulled out a little plastic bag, placing it on the table beside her bed. “Get well soon!” And with a brilliant smile,
he was gone. Weird, Sarah thought, but she couldn’t help but like him.

Sarah picked up the bag and saw it held her pendant, her ‘crown’, her ‘as long as you are wearing this, I will come to you’. She put it back on the table. She wasn’t ready to face him yet. She just wasn’t. She knew she’d have to soon, but not quite yet.

“Sarah?” came quietly from her door. She looked over to see Iroh sticking his head in, smiling brightly to see her awake. “May we come in?”

“Iroh!” Sarah said, a huge smile breaking across her face. “Come on in everyone!” she said, raising her still slightly raw voice. That was all it took before they were piling into the room, some crying, some laughing, all wanting to hug her and refraining from doing so, what with her being stabbed and all, except Toph, who put her hand on Sarah’s arm, making sure Sarah was still there in the only way she could. Sokka was a little quieter than the rest.

Sarah gave him a look. ‘We good?’

‘Yeah,’ he nodded, tears standing in his eyes. He’d watched her get stabbed. She might have saved his life, maybe, but she’d made him watch one of his best friends get stabbed. She owed him for that.

Black hair caught her eye. “Zuko!” Sarah cried, cutting off the hubbub. “You’re alright!”

“Katara helped heal me,” he shrugged.

“Since when do you know magical healing?” Sarah asked, wondering why no one had brought it up earlier. Maybe she wouldn’t have had to risk her life and freedom!

“I don’t,” Katara said, looking everywhere but Zuko. “Klio used my… energy to help fuel the spell.” Was she blushing? Stabbed and exhausted, Sarah still wanted the story behind that one. Later, though.

“So…what happened?” Sarah asked. “After Jet…” She trailed off, her side sending out a stab of pain just thinking about it. All eyes turned to Sokka.

“I was hiding in woods with Badger, trying to get a clear view of the clearing when Smellerbee and Longshot got the drop on us. I told Badger to go to Toph and yelled for you to run. I didn’t want you facing him without backup.” He looked away briefly.

“I tried to run, Sokka.” Sarah said softly, not quite able to look at him. “Jet was already there. He nearly stabbed me then, I barely got away. If you hadn’t warned me, I might had died right there.” She felt Sokka’s calloused hand grip hers tightly before letting go. They really were good.

“When Badger showed up, I knew something was wrong.” Toph took over the story, her voice even more flippant than usual. Sarah was touched to know she cared. “Sergeant Angua had found me by then and was helping me look for him. When he showed up without Sokka… Well, I told her what was going on. Then we heard some shouting from the woods and then you screamed…” Her voice grew quieter and stab wound or no, she punched Sarah in the arm. “Don’t go doing something like that again or I’ll kick your ass!” she shouted. Sarah winced and everyone ignored the tears in Toph’s eyes. It had been a long and trying day for them all.

“I’ll try not to,” Sarah smiled, feeling blessed that she had so many people around her who loved her. Which reminded her. “Please tell me that someone’s called Karen and told her to stay home?”

“I called and told her that you are receiving the best possible care. Is this true?” Iroh raised his eyebrows at Sarah. Sarah looked away.
“He’ll want to kill Jet…” Sarah looked at her hands. She had to admit, some part of her was tempted.

“So? He should!” Sarah had never heard Katara sound so furious. She looked up at her patient, if fiery, maternal roommate. “He should! He tried to kill Aang, he nearly did kill you and Zuko! He would have killed us all if he knew! Why shouldn’t he die?”

“Katara…” Aang trailed off, eyes horrified. Sarah couldn’t blame him. She knew Katara had a temper, but this? Everyone seemed taken aback, even Iroh. Everyone except Zuko. He stood quietly next to Katara, saying nothing, but eyes burning, body tense.

“We almost lost them, Aang! We could have lost you! And he wouldn’t have cared! He’s a monster. And I…” She trailed off. Sarah suddenly understood where some of the hate came from. After all, she hadn’t been dating Jareth when he’d taken Toby away. Zuko put his hand on her shoulder and just held it there. Katara didn’t shrug it off.

“Sarah, Jet lost his parents to magic. Smellerbee her little brother…” Aang said, leaving the ‘like you almost did’ unsaid.

“Be that as it may,” Iroh interrupted, shooting Aang a look. “This decision, of what she will ask of the Goblin King, is hers. That being said,” he turned back to Sarah. “Jareth is the King of the Goblins, Sarah. If he does not act to protect those close to him, he puts everyone at risk. Jet must be punished. He, as well as Smellerbee and Longshot, are in custody with a police force that does have something of a reputation in the Underground—their commander once arrested a dragon and even the headmaster of your college—” Sarah blinked. Even?—“but the Goblin King will probably not think that enough and he will be well within his rights to act. What you ask him to do, and not do, is your choice. As the wronged party, you do have some say.” He glanced at his watch. “But whatever you decide, you must do it quickly, your six hours are almost up.”

Sarah took a moment to look at her friends: the rage in Zuko’s eyes; Katara’s rage mixed with hurt and betrayal; Aang hopeful; Sokka, tired and understanding; Toph was blank, holding still and listening; and Iroh was pinning her in his gaze. She imagined Aang lying in some alley, dying of blood loss and iron poisoning. She remembered the way her stomach had dropped when she’d heard that Zuko had been stabbed, the way the knife felt entering her, the way Smellerbee’s eyes had looked as Sarah proved just how cruel she could be. She knew what she needed to do.

“Thanks guys, I think I need to talk to Jareth now. I wouldn’t recommend being in the same room…” Iroh nodded, and, each with a slightly different look at her, they trailed out. Zuko was the last one to leave.

“Come back, or we come get you,” he said with a fierce look before disappearing. Sarah wondered if he knew about what she’d offered to Jareth. And thinking of him…

Sarah reached for the bag on the bedside, took out the pendant and put in on.

“Sarah.” His voice was threatening, possessive and assertive. He stood tall and imposing in his full Goblin regalia, crystal in one hand, sword in another, ready to attack anyone who dared threaten his Sarah. Sarah rolled her eyes. She hadn’t even had time to say she needed him.

“I’m fine, Jareth.” Her voice was still raw and her side sent out a stab of pain, protesting her words. “Okay, not entirely, but can you drop the whole threatening thing and get me to Ner’da please?”

“Sarah.” The sword and crystal were gone and he was by her side, face pale, eyes furious. “What happened?”
“Ner’da first, then we talk,” she said, giving him a level look. This was one conversation she didn’t want a stab wound distracting her from. His eyes flashed and he grabbed her hand.

When she looked away she found herself in the Goblin Castle’s healing wing, Ner’da already beside her.

“Thank you, Your Majesty, if you’ll give my assistants and me some room to work,” she said, standing back. After a moment Jareth looked up.

“The Runner’s time is nearly up,” he said, standing back. “I expect her to be healed by the time I return.”

“Before you go, Your Majesty, drink this.” Ner’da held out a glass and Jareth gave it a suspicious look. “It’ll help revitalize your magic, Your Majesty, after having to leave while there was a Runner.” Jareth glared at her and at the potion and threw the whole thing back in one swallow. He grimaced and handed the glass back to Ner’da. “Still tastes like cat piss,” he muttered under his breath, and disappeared. Sarah couldn’t help but notice he already looked a little brighter.

“Ungrateful…” Ner’da muttered to herself before turning back to Sarah with bright, sharp eyes. “Now, my Lady, what happened to you?”

“I got stabbed?” Sarah offered. “And cut… and my throat hurts from screaming.” And she was about to have to talk a man she had serious feeling for out of murder, but she didn’t think Ner’da could help her with that.

“I see.” Ner’da’s eyes were very very hard. “Am’ya—” So that was Hoggle’s girlfriend. She really needed to talk to Sokka about how the favour she asked him was going— “Alexa, Camis’ta, bring me” and then she started this long list that Sarah didn’t even bother trying to follow. Her head hurt, her side still burned, her throat ached and all she really wanted to do was sleep… Her eyelids drifted closed.

“Rest, my Lady. We’ll look after you. Rest.” And so, already feeling the deep cut start to knit closed, Sarah drifted off to sleep.

Jareth returned to the healer’s wing within the hour, but still far too long for his taste. The woman had been returned to the Aboveground, the boy given to the Lady to be given to a home and now he could focus his entire energy on Sarah. She had been hurt, badly, and he would find who had done this to her and make them pay. Sarah had nearly died; he’d make them beg for death.

He stormed into the healer’s wing, only to be brought up short by Ner’da’s glare, before she curtsied. She nodded to the bed where Sarah was sleeping and then gestured to her office. Jareth nodded to her, but still went to Sarah to do a quick check before following Ner’da into her office.

“What happened to her?” he asked, forcing himself to stay calm. Ner’da was not responsible for this.

“She was stabbed in the side, Your Majesty, her back was cut open, and her throat made raw with screaming. Her whole system is stressed. She’s been under extreme pressure and she needs her rest.”

“I’ll see she has it after I’ve spoken with her,” Jareth replied. Sarah might need her rest but he couldn’t let this threat to his people run unchecked. He didn’t think Sarah would request to see Ner’da first if Toby was in danger, but he needed to judge the situation for himself. He turned to the door, but before he got to it Ner’da interrupted.

“Sire?”
“Yes?” He raised an eyebrow at her, barely repressing a snarl. It was unlike her to keep him from his duties—and from Sarah.

“Whoever did this made our Champion afraid. Made her scream her throat raw. Stabbed her and cut her to make her hurt. I felt my Lady’s scream in the souls of my feet. Whoever did this to our Champion, make them pay.” Jareth had never seen Ner’da look quite so hard.

With a nod, Jareth went to Sarah. Rather than wake her there, he gathered her into his arms and transported himself to his office. He laid her on the couch where they had discussed her Beltane fair. She was still in the very unflattering gown that the mortals had dressed her in. He knew that she would want to be properly clothed for this coming conversation. It would not be pleasant, but he wouldn’t back down. He couldn’t, not with the risk to his kingdom. Having her in a state of undress might be temporarily helpful, but she wouldn’t thank in him in the long run and it wouldn’t be, as she would put it, “fair”. With a wave of his hand she was dressed in the riding leathers. Those should do, even if they were slightly distracting, giving the memories from when she’d warn them last.

“Sarah.” He shook her shoulder lightly. “Sarah, you need to wake up.”

“No—” Sarah shot up, her hands shooting out to push him away, eyes wide and afraid. He moved away, eyes narrowing.

“…Jareth?” Sarah asked, her eyes darting around before finally resting on him.

“Yes?” he asked, staying out of her space. He knew exactly how hard one’s first combat could be and he’d been raised to expect it.

“How did I get into these?” she asked, gesturing to her clothes. Whatever she had been about to ask, Jareth rather suspected that that hadn’t been it.

“Magic,” he replied, feeling a small smile playing at his lips before tamping it out. “Sarah, who did this to you?”

Sarah looked at him. He could tell she was thinking, taking in his expression, his clothes (he still hadn’t changed out of his armour) but not what was going on behind her green eyes. He stayed impassive, waiting for her response. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and, when she opened them, he knew her decision was made. He braced himself. If he had to lose her to save her, he would. He hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

“He’s in custody with the police Aboveground, Jareth,” she said, eyes unwavering. “Jet stabbed Zuko, then I used myself as bait to lure him out. I got stabbed, but it worked. The police have him in custody.”

“Very well. I will return with him shortly and see to it he is dealt with.”

“Jareth—” Sarah started, voice determined.

“No Sarah!” He cut her off, eyes blazing. “I will not leave him be! I will not ‘drop it!’ Every moment he goes without punishment by the Goblin Kingdom is another moment my kingdom appears weak and is thus endangered. I will not leave him Aboveground, near you where he might escape or be let free to come after you or Toby—” he knew it was cruel to use Toby but he did it anyway— “and risk this happening again! He must pay!”

“Jareth—” Sarah tried again, but he was too far gone in his anger and fear.

“You took off your pendant. I couldn’t find you. I couldn’t go to you. The Labyrinth was screaming!
I thought you were dead!” He was yelling and she was afraid. Damnit, she wasn’t supposed to be afraid. He bit down what he had been going to say, forcing himself to get a grip on his emotions. What was it about this woman that always left him so bare? “When the Labyrinth was screaming and I couldn’t feel you… I thought you were dead.” He let that fear and pain colour his voice, remembering the scream that had torn from his throat when he realized she was gone from his senses, her tie to the pendent broken as it had never been before. Thank the God and Goddess that Klio had been there shouting for both the Labyrinth and him to calm down and figure out what had actually happened. The sense of relief and dread when he knew she was stabbed. She was still alive, but she was dying and he couldn’t go to her. It was the worst 5 hours of his very long, long life. “I’ve lost you twice, Sarah, thinking I had a third time nearly killed me.” Her eyes widened at the sincerity in his voice. Why did she find it so hard to understand that he loved her? “I will not lose you again Sarah, especially not to death.” Her eyebrow went up at that.

“I’m mortal, Jareth, it’s bound to happen eventually,” Sarah said. He could hear resignation and a desire to comfort in her voice. She, after all, knew death intimately well.

“Not if you become the Queen of the Labyrinth,” Jareth replied, feeling slightly confused.

“What?!” Sarah looked up at him, eyes wide.

“Not if you—” Jareth repeated, feeling even more confused.

“I heard you the first time!” Sarah said, sounding very very angry. “Why the hell didn’t you tell me that!”

“I thought you knew!” Jareth snapped back. An angry Sarah was better than one who was afraid, even if she was significantly more frightening. Jareth had always like a challenge. “Sarah, did you really think the Labyrinth, after finding Her true Champion in longer than we Fae remember, would let you die after a mere seven or eight decades?”

“So, what you’re saying is if I agree to marry you, it’s for all damn time!” Sarah started to swear so vehemently, in both English and Goblin, that Jareth’s eyebrows went up. He was fairly sure at least half of what she was suggesting was physically impossible. “Alright. We’re going to talk about this. Later. But right now we still need to deal with Jet. Look, Jareth—”

All the humour that had leaked into his expression while she was swearing vanished with the mention of the name.

“I will deal with him. I won’t negotiate on this. You have to—”

“Jareth!” Sarah cut him off with a fierce glare. “Would you shut up for two damn minutes and let me speak!” Wisely, Jareth stayed quiet, but he changed no part of his expression or stance. She needed to be talked around. “Don’t kill him.” Jareth blinked at her, an eyebrow raising. “I understand that, for the safety of your kingdom, you have to punish him personally. I do understand that. I don’t want to put your subjects in danger, but don’t kill him. That’s all I ask.” She looked vaguely ill as she spoke, but she did not waver. “I don’t want his blood on my hands.”

“Sarah.” Jareth felt vaguely horrified. “I wouldn’t ask you to kill him.” Didn’t she know he had executioners, or could carry out himself? It wouldn’t be right to ask someone as unbloodied as Sarah to do this.

“It’s an expression, Goblin King,” Sarah said, looking, if anything, more ill. “I don’t want to be responsible for his death.”
“I see,” Jareth said. “Very well.” There were many things he could do to this Jet without killing him. Really, he hadn’t known Sarah could be this cruel. Death would have been faster and less painful for the boy.

“You won’t kill him?” she asked, emerald eyes searching his face.

“No, Sarah. I will not kill Jet.” He paused. “Nor will I get anyone else to do so,” he added as a sign of good faith. There. What’s said is said.

“All right. …Can you take me back Above please? I need to talk to Toby and Karen, let them know I’m okay, and I don’t feel up to magicking myself around yet.” Jareth snorted at her term.

“Very well, I’ll drop you off in your rooms before going to collect Jet.” He offered her his hand.

“The hospital—where you found me—would be better. That’s where everyone’s expecting me. And I’ll call you again soon. We need to talk about this whole immortality thing.” She shot a glare at him, but took his hand. “Jareth?”

“Yes?” He helped her to her feet, but no further, not wanting to scare her again, not when she was finding her footing.

“Thank you for compromising,” she said. She stepped forward into his arms and laid her head on his breastplate.

“For you, Precious, I’d move the stars.”

* * *

It was some time later when Jareth reappeared on a platform in the Goblin City, the man who had hurt Sarah standing next to him, restrained and gagged. The population of the Goblin City and various inhabitants of the Labyrinth had gathered around the city square sensing the Labyrinth’s anger and their King or Lord’s desire to speak with them.

“Subjects of the Goblin Kingdom! Vassals of the Labyrinth! Hear me!” Jareth called out, the start of the formal address. “Earlier today, Our Lady Champion was attacked. Through the intervention of mortal Doctors and Healer Ner’da and her assistants, she lives!” There was a boisterous cheer from the crowd. Jareth held his hand up and they quieted. He dragged Jet forward, displaying him to the people below. “This is the man who attacked her!” The crowd was silent. “I would have him killed, but the Champion, a woman of strange mercy, has requested I spare his life and, as she wishes it, I shall do so. However, he needs to be punished! The rest of the Underground must know what happens to one who attacks one of us. And so I leave him in your hands! Remember the Champion’s wishes, I will return for him later. In the meantime, it is time to show both Worlds what we are capable of!” And with that, he threw Jet off the platform, loosening the ropes restraining his arms. His subjects were more than capable of dealing with the boy, bound or no. And this way, the boy might have some hope. It wouldn’t last long. Jareth felt himself smile as he watched his subjects get to work. No one touched his Sarah.

* * *

Sarah hung up the phone after the police called to tell her of Jet’s disappearance and warned her to be on the lookout. She felt vaguely ill. She’d made the right choice. She’d saved his life. The Goblin Kingdom and Labyrinth weren’t at risk because of her. It was the right choice. She knew it was.
I'd love to hear your thoughts on this. Please leave a contribution in the little box.
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

I know, I know, I am the worst. I'm really sorry guys. Finding time to edit has been REALLY difficult. Fortunately my beta and I have worked out a new system that will hopefully tide us through and get you new chapters, until we have time to actually edit in person again. Chapter 33 is written and I'm already into chapter 34, so you should NOT have to wait another nearly two months (Dear gods, I really am sorry about that) for the next update.

Thank you for waiting guys. I really appreciate it.

Enjoy 32!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I heard she tracked him down and tried to stab him after what he did to Zuko!”

“No! You’ve got it wrong! She was the one that was stabbed, not him. I did hear that she went to confront him though. Think she’s trying to avenge Zuko? Does she have a thing for him? They are awfully close...”

“Sarah? No, she’s into Katara. And does she look like she got stabbed?”

“Now now, just because you two share a room, not everyone who does is interested in each other,” the dark haired one said, pushing his glasses up his nose. “For example, I have no feelings for Tamaki.”

There was a pause that obviously contained skeptical looks.

“Yeah, ‘mommy,’ and isn’t Katara into Zuko?”

“Wasn’t Katara dating Jet?”

“And either way, Zuko is definitely into Katara. A threesome maybe?”

Banging her head on the table, Sarah found, did not make the annoying twins sitting at the table behind her shut up, but it did cement the decision she’d been considering all week.

“Guys?” she said, lifting her head. Katara handed her a napkin which she used to wipe off the ketchup that she’d gotten on her forehead. “I’m going to visit Jareth this weekend.”

A quick look passed around her friends as she heard the twins start wondering who Jareth might be and wasn’t he dating Merlin? Zuko opened his mouth to say something, but it looked like at least two people kicked him under the table and Katara smiled and and spoke instead.

“That’s great! I’m sure it will be nice to see him again.”

Sarah’s eyebrows shot up and she looked around her group.
“Guys,” she sighed. “I have enough trouble wondering if I can trust Jareth. The last thing I need is having to worry if you guys are keeping stuff from me.”

“Look, Sarah,” Aang started, scratching the back of his head. “It’s just that… well…” He trailed off and looked helplessly around the group.

“Ugh,” Toph snorted. “You guys are useless. Look, Queeney, you got stabbed and are as jumpy as a rabbit.”

“Maybe some time away from the school will do you some good,” offered Aang.

Sarah shrugged, trying controlling the urge to flinch. She supposed it would have been too much to hope that Katara didn’t mention the nightmares. Even if she hadn’t though, Sarah had to admit she’d been on edge the past week, jumping at shadows and… The experience had been weighing on her mind, to say the least.

“I’m not really hungry,” Sarah said, picking up her half-finished plate and getting up. “I should probably just go ask Jareth if it’s okay if I spend the time with him, though I seriously doubt he’ll mind.” And that made one of twins go back to arguing that it was Jareth (whoever the hell he was) that Sarah was in love, or at least lust with, not Merlin or Katara. Sarah considered asking Jareth if he had some Goblins to spare to deal with those two, but quickly decided against it. Either the twins and the goblins would team up and then she’d have to deal with that, or they’d be… over enthusiastic when it came to dealing with someone who was bothering her and either way, Sarah didn’t want to deal with it.

“Wait,” Sokka said, grabbing his own completely finished plate. “I finally figured out a solution that works and finished it up. Let me drop it off in your room before you leave? It’ll just take me a minute to go grab it from my dorm…”

“Oh! Thanks, Sokka!” Sarah said, smiling. Finally a bit of good news. Hoggle would be thrilled.

He waved his acknowledgment as he hurried out of the caf. With one final goodbye to her friends, and a concerned look in return that Zuko masked the least well, and one final punch in the arm from Toph, she hurried off to her own room.

* * *

Sarah held the phone to her ear, hoping she wasn’t waking her mother.

“Hello?” came a voice not groggy with sleep. Good, though what was she doing up so late?

“Hi mom, I—”

“Sarah?” came her mother’s slightly panicked voice, cutting off her daughter. “What’s wrong?”

Sarah suppressed a sigh. She wished she hadn’t had to tell her mother about Jet, but she would have found out one way or another. “I’m fine, Mom. I just wanted to let you know I won’t be able to call to check in this weekend, I’m going to a friend’s place, just to get away from campus, and I don’t want to put the long distance charges on his phone bill.”

“His? Is this the… Friend we talked about on your birthday and Easter?”

“Uh…” Sarah said, trying to think of an excuse she could use that wouldn’t actually be lying to her mother.

“Well…?”
“...yes...” Sarah said, irked at her imagination for abandoning her.

“Well, I must say, I’m glad you’re moving on from Jake. So, is this guy—”

“OH LOOK!” Sarah said, as Sokka stuck his head into the room, raising an eyebrow at her. “Sokka’s here! Gotta talk to him, call you when I get back BYE!” and she slammed down the phone. She could deal with her mother’s prying questions after she’d had a weekend Underground to relax.

“I could have waited...” Sokka said, eyebrows going up.

“No, trust me, I was looking for an excuse to get off the line. She was asking all sorts of questions I didn’t want to answer.” She did not say, ‘you know mothers’. Not to Sokka. “So, do you have it?”

“Here you go!” he said, handing it over and giving her a look. “Won’t scratch up.”

“Thanks so much Sokka! I really appreciate it and Hoggle will love it,” she said, smiling at her mad scientist of a friend.

“Careful though, it still won’t deal well with heat, so I’m not sure what he’ll be able to do for a setting...” He trailed off, frowning, gears seeming to whirl in his head.

“He lives in a magic kingdom,” Sarah said, placing a hand on Sokka’s arm to derail him before he could get too distracted. “I’m sure he’ll be able to think of something. Thanks again for this. I should really be talking to Jareth and finding out if he’s cool with me crashing...” She trailed off suggestively. Suddenly all of Sokka’s attention was back on her.

“Sarah, about that,” He placed a hand on her shoulder. “You should talk to someone about what happened with Jet. I can talk to Katara or Suki, and the rest of the gang will be there for me in a second if I ask. Zuko doesn’t look like it, but I know he talks to Iroh about this, and I think Katara too. You haven’t spoken to any of us, you aren’t speaking to your Mom, or Karen... If you don’t feel like you can talk to us, maybe you could try talking to him?” With a squeeze on the shoulder, he was gone.

Sarah stood there a moment, agog. First of all, she was handling this perfectly fine. She’d been stabbed, Jet had been dealt with, what else was there to talk about? And, second of all, Jareth! Sokka wanted her to trust Jareth enough to talk to him about that? To be that vulnerable? Well, Jareth had been really kind when she’d been mourning her father, but this was different. Sad was different than scared. Not that she still felt scared. Shaking her head to clear it, she grabbed her bag in the hand that wasn’t holding Hoggle’s gift.

“I wish I was in my rooms in the Castle beyond the Goblin City,” she said, focusing on where she wanted to arrive, hoping that would help.

A moment later, she found herself exactly where she had wished, and let her bag fall from her shoulders, suddenly too tired to to hold it any longer. She staggered over to her bed and collapsed on it. She’d find Jareth to ask him in a minute, she just needed a minute. Her eyes drifted closed.

“You know, Precious,” his vaguely bemused voice said, stopping her from actually falling asleep. “You should really be letting me do the interworld travel, at least until you’ve managed to get your magical stamina up.” Sarah opened her eyes to glare at him, but didn’t quite manage it, being distracted by the cup of coffee he was holding. She started to salivate, remembering the coffee she’d had the last time she was here, which really was just unfair. She was willing to forgive him all his sins, (well, nearly all of them) if he would just give her the coffee. That or go away and let her sleep.
Not that sleep had been very restful recently...

He interpreted her glare correctly and handed over the mug. Sarah sat up and was careful not to snatch it from his hands, no matter what his expression said. She took a long sip: hot, but not scalding and exactly as she liked it. Magic certainly had its perks.

"Really Sarah," Jareth asked, his eyebrows climbing, "is it so wise to gulp down caffeinated beverages so... enthusiastically at this hour? You're bound to get nightmares."

Sarah glared at him over the rim of her cup. She doubted her nightmares had anything to do her levels of caffeine consumption, but she really didn't think Jareth needed to know that. After all, as far as she knew, he still had Jet, alive, and, despite everything, Sarah wanted that bastard to stay that way.

"Though really," Jareth continued, "one transportation spell, even if it was between worlds, should not have worn you out like this. I've seen you do two intraworld as well as one interworld before you were quite this tired..." He frowned slightly.

"The Beltane Fair is next week." Sarah shrugged as her excuse for all her strange behavior fell practiced from her tongue. "Getting everything in order, making sure everyone is ready, all the final adjustments, it's kept me too busy to sleep properly."

"So you came here to get away from it all...?"

"Exactly." Sarah smiled and took another sip from her ridiculously good coffee. She could feel it starting to counteract the exhaustion. "Well, that and I need to give this to Hoggle." She opened the hand that was still clutching her gift for him. "So, is it alright if I stay here this weekend?" She smiled hopefully. She really didn't want to have to deal with yet more conjecture all weekend.

"Thanks, Jareth. I mean it." Sarah said, putting aside her suspicions. Jareth hadn't given her recent reason to be suspicious, and if he was just teaching her to ride a horse to get into her pants (and she really didn't think he was) so what? She got to learn to ride a horse and, when she was being honest with herself, she wouldn't mind getting in his either. She smiled at him before getting to her feet. "Now, can you please direct me to where I might find Hoggle? I really should get this to him. He's been waiting long enough."

"Really, Sarah," Jareth said, smiling and shaking his head. "It would be simplest to just summon him here. You are the Champion of the Labyrinth. You can summon whoever you want to see. They will almost definitely be thrilled to see you."

"Well it seems kinda rude to just call him away from whatever he's doing. He's my friend," Jareth's expression went somewhere between annoyed and resigned. "And I'm not about to act like he's at my beck and call. He doesn't always answer me when I call him in the Aboveground, if he's too busy. But I don't see the problem with popping in to say hello and see if he's busy."

"Sarah, you are in no sh--" Jareth cut himself off and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Tell you what," he offered, looking up, "why don't I send him a message that you are here and would like to speak with him, and he can come at his own leisure? Would that work for you?" He was only sort of
glaring at her.

“That would do nicely.” Sarah replied, trying not to wobble. Maybe standing up so soon hadn’t been quite her smartest choice, but she was on her feet and gonna stay that way. Still, she was glad that it would be Hoggle coming to her and not her falling face first somewhere along the way. She didn’t want to give Jareth the opportunity to say “I told you so.” Not even excellent coffee could redeem that offense.

“Very well.” With a flare of the wrist, Jareth summoned a crystal and dropped it on the floor, where it was quickly absorbed. “If you’ll come with me to the throne room, Precious, I believe your ‘friend’ will be there soon, most likely after my head.”

“Jareth…” Sarah asked, her stomach sinking. “What did you do?”

“Precious, you wound me,” Jareth replied, smirking. “I merely made all the vines on the outer wall of the Labyrinth grow peaches, nothing more.”

Sarah glared quite eloquently. Jareth’s smirk widened.

“If we walk, we should get there just ahead of him,” he said, offering his arm. Sarah started walking without it, trembling legs be damned.

“And what, might I ask, is the occasion for such gift giving? That seems like rather a princely gift,” Jareth asked, walking beside her and ready to steady her should she stumble.

“Really Jareth, the walls have ears. This is a secret.” She shot him a look, shoving the hand with her gift into her pocket.

“I see,” he replied, eyebrows going up. “Should I clear the throne room on our arrival?”

“Oh yes, that would be perfect!” Sarah smiled at him, and this time, when he offered her his arm, she took it, letting him take some of her weight.

“Excuse me, Precious,” he said, letting go of her arm when they reached the throne room. “Allow me.”

He disappeared and reappeared in front of his throne, now towering ominously in his black armour over goblins no longer carousing, but trembling in fear.

“Well?” he smirked down at them. “Run!”

The goblins ran, practically trampling each other in their hurry to get out of the room. They parted around Sarah as they scampered and screamed, crashed into each other, and grabbed various chickens, and fled. After a few minutes of the worst commotion Sarah had seen since she first invaded the Goblin City (or possibly Toby’s sixth birthday. Now that was a day she’d almost wish she could forget), the throne room was empty but for her, Jareth, and some chicken feathers gently wafting to the ground.

“Really Jareth,” Sarah asked, leaning slightly against the door frame, “Did you have to terrorize them?”

“Sarah,” he responded, giving her an exasperated look. “To a goblin, surviving adolescence in my throne room is a rite of passage. They would feel cheated if I didn’t terrorize them at least a little. Besides,” he grinned, his canines showing, “it’s fun! Really precious, you should try it some time.”

Sarah rolled her eyes at him. But before she could retort, Hoggle burst into the room.
“Damn you, Jareth! What did you do to her! Where is she!”

“Really Higglespot—”

“Hoggle!” Sarah and Hoggle corrected together.
“Yes, yes,” Jareth waved a hand dismissively, but by then Hoggle had noticed Sarah.

“Sarah!” he cried, running over to her. “Oh, Sarah, what did that rat do to you!” His bulging eyes were full of fear.

“Hoggle, he didn’t do anything,” she reassured him, bending down. “Except play a cruel joke on you,” this she directed at Jareth with a glare. His smug air altered not the slightest. “I came down to the Underground to relax and,” she smiled and pulled her hand out of her pocket, “I hope you kept your promise and not ordered anything, because I’ve brought you a gift.” She heard Jareth’s small snort. Really, she couldn’t help herself. She opened her hand reveal the largest fake plastic jewel she could find in her university town. “I’m not sure how you’re going to set it, plastic doesn’t do well with heat, but I had my friend treat it so it won’t scratch or scuff easily. Think this is good enough for Am’ya?

Hoggle’s eye were wide and he opened and closed his mouth a few times in shock.

“Real plastic?” he asked when he finally recovered his ability to speak, looking at the fist-sized jewel in shock.

“Genuine aboveground Plastic,” she assured him as she offered it to him. “Only the best for my friends and their soon to be fiancées.”

‘Come speak for us,’ a thought that wasn’t hers intruded.

“Sarah?” Hoggle asked, reaching out to steady her.

“Hoggle, Jareth,” she said, looking over to see Jareth’s smugness gone, his feet planted and his gaze very focused on her. “I think the Labyrinth wants to speak to us.”

“The Labyrinth? Me?” Hoggle asked, staggering back, holding his new jewel tightly to his chest.

“Us?” Jareth asked, brows coming down. She looked at him, frowning. She couldn’t manage to force herself to focus on the scene that was actually in front of her. Her walls were itching inside her head. But she didn’t have walls.

“Hoggle, hold onto Sarah,” Jareth said, standing and walking over to them. He took her chin and forced her to look at him.

“At the clearing?” he asked, not sure if he was asking Sarah or the glowing flickers in her eyes.

“Yes!” Her voice was ragged and not entirely her own. Jareth glanced quickly at the dwarf to be sure he’d followed his instructions and transported them into the clearing normally reserved for the King of the Goblins and the Queen of the Labyrinth. Sarah staggered away from them, to a spot directly in the center. There, her back straightened and, when she turned back, her eyes were glowing green.

“Hoggle, Friend of Sarah, our very own Champion,” she said, her head tilted to one side at a strange angle. Jareth wished the Labyrinth would stop taking over Sarah’s body like this. “Welcome to our Centre.”

When Hoggle continued to stand stock still, frozen by terror, Jareth rolled his eyes and pushed the scab forward with his boot.
“You served us well, when Our Champion was last here. You abandoned her, yes.” Jareth was fairly certain that it was only the fact that every muscle in the dwarf’s body was completely tense that stopped him from falling over. “But you alone had your loyalty tested by our Lord. You faltered, but you returned to her, and redeemed yourself. You have proved yourself her most loyal vassal in the Underground. And loyal service is to be rewarded. Give us her gift.”

“You’re not gonna hurt it or nothing, are ya?” he asked, cradling Sarah’s precious gift close. Jareth was astonished he’d been able to speak.

“My little dwarf,” for all that it was the Labyrinth in control, it was Sarah’s smile that shone down at her friend. “We promised you a reward. Give us the jewel.”

Arm s trembling, Hoggle held out the jewel, which Sarah’s body bent down to accept.

“Sarah tells Us you mean to use this to propose to the healer's apprentice, Am’ya.”

“Yes, my Lady,” Hoggle replied.

“We approve. Apprentice Am’ya has always been good to Us, and will make you an excellent wife, Loyal Hoggle.” Sarah’s hands moved and the jewel started floating, green light surrounding it. It flashed blindingly bright, and, when Jareth and Hoggle could look back, Sarah’s body was holding a necklace. The plastic jewel had been put into a beautiful setting, embossed with tiny versions of the pendant Sarah wore. “May your marriage be a fruitful one, Loyal Hoggle, that your children might serve us.” The Labyrinth spoke the formal blessing as she held out the necklace to Hoggle and Jareth could feel the power surging in the words. “You have chosen well. Now go with our Blessing.”

“Sarah will be alright?” Hoggle asked, accepting his bounty from the Labyrinth.

“Worry not, Loyal one,” the Labyrinth smiled down at him. “I will have our Lord look to her. Go prepare yourself for your bride to be.” Finally accepting the dismissal, Hoggle turned and fled from the clearing.

She turned to Jareth. “Our Champion is exhausted, Lord Jareth,” she said, frowning. “She will collapse once We leave her, through no fault of Our own. You must take better care of her!” She glared at him.

“Believe me, Labyrinth, I do try. Your champion is very independent. Would you have her any other way?” he asked, walking toward her, preparing to catch Sarah after the Labyrinth left her body.

“No, we certainly would not!” the Labyrinth harumphed. “Until the next time, Lord Jareth.” And Sarah’s body’s crumpled as her eyes stopped glowing.

“Jareth?” Sarah asked, as he scooped her up in his arms and transported them back to her room. “Do you think we can get the Labyrinth to understand the concept of ‘asking permission’?” Jareth directed his magic at the bed and the blankets pulled themselves back.

“Well, Precious,” he said as he laid her in the bed, “You have always enjoyed a challenge.”

“Damn straight,” the second word was interrupted by a yawn. Jareth smiled down at his love as she curled up. He cast one final spell, switching her into her pajamas. “Good night, Jareth,” she smiled sleepily up at him.

“Good night, Precious,” he smiled. Things had changed greatly since the last time they’d shared such a similar exchange. Back then, he couldn’t have imagined that, in just a few short months, Sarah would be coming to his Kingdom for refuge, willingly, happily. How things had changed.
With that thought, he transported himself to his own room and sleep. Before he could, he’d have to alert the servants of Sarah’s arrival, but he did want to make sure he would be well rested. With Sarah in his Kingdom, tomorrow was bound to be interesting.

* * *

That night, as every night the past week, her Champion was troubled by nightmares. The Labyrinth was upset-- her Champion should not be suffering so. The last time her Champion had suffered, she’d interfered, but with no magical persons in the Aboveground to help her this time, she had been left helpless to do anything. This time, though, this time her Champion was in her demesne and her power was great. Knowing it had worked the last time, the Labyrinth gathered her magic gently around her sleeping Champion, careful not to wake her, and transported her. She was happy to feel her Champion’s sleep settle as strong arms circled her, their owner reaching for her even in sleep. The Labyrinth smiled to herself. For tonight at least, her work was done.

Chapter End Notes

Sarah's experiences of PTSD (which is what I've given her) are based on my own and research I've done for a psych class. However, I am not a psychologist and it's very possible I make mistakes in the representation of her work. My experiences are now, for the most part, only memories and those are so easily corruptible. Don't take this as gospel.

I decided it would be unrealistic to leave Sarah totally untraumatized by the experience with Jet and so this will be coming up in future chapters. PTSD is real and bad and, to be fair to my characters and honest in my writing, I couldn't not give it to her. I might go easier on her than it was on me or the average person, but I thought it was important to recognize that what Sarah went through, i.e. being stabbed, was traumatic and needed to be presented as such.

Hope you're enjoying the chapters and I'll try to have the next one up soon!
Sarah drifted towards consciousness with the reluctance of Toby heading to bed after dessert. This was the first night in a week she hadn’t woken from a nightmare, but drifted slowly awake. Her dreams had been troubled at first, full of knives and blood and hatred-filled eyes (something she’d been growing used to in the past week) but, for the first time, they’d soon moved onto sweeter, calmer dreams. She was actually feeling rested and wanted to milk this reprieve for all it was worth. She moved her head into her pillow, groaning and wanting to get back to sleep.

…Why did her pillow have ribs?

“You’re in the wrong bed, love,” a bemused, yet still smug, voice drifted down to her. Sarah opened her eyes. She knew this chest. “Not that I’m complaining, mind,” Jareth continued, pulling her a little more firmly against him with the arm that was wrapped around her. Sarah groaned again. She really needed to stop waking up in Jareth’s bed.

“I thought I had to make a wish for something like this to happen…” she groaned into his chest.

“The Labyrinth’s magic is all around you,” Jareth replied, the hand that wasn’t wrapped around her started to toy lightly with her hair. “I think you’re right about having to explain to her the concept of permission, though I must say, in this case I approve.”

Sarah considered her situation. She knew she probably should get up and get dressed and get out of a very shirtless Jareth’s bed… But, on the other hand, he was comfy and she was still relishing in not waking up from a nightmare, and he did smell good and have a great chest, and his playing with her hair seemed to be fixing her bed head, so… Sarah smiled as she let her back brain win this fight. She’d had a tough week, and deserved a bit of fun time. She smiled against his chest.

“Yeah, I could do without the body snatching. I wanted to talk to Hoggle about his planned proposal. This though…” she propped herself up on her elbow and let herself take in the view, pale expanse of chest, blankets covering his lower half, leaving her imagination to fill in the blanks, and then back up, across strong shoulders and a sharp featured face with a smirk painted across it, softened by warm, dark eyes. “This isn’t so bad.” Jareth’s eyebrows shot up and his hand paused in her hair.

“Is that so?” he asked, shifting his arm to hold her waist and continuing to detangle her hair. She had to get him to teach her that.

“Yes,” she replied, eyes sparkling. She’d already woken up in his bed, she might as well… “Good morning, Jareth.” She leaned over and kissed him. It was a lazy good morning kind of kiss, the kind of kiss that suggested a luxurious morning spent in bed, cuddling and laughing and sharing kisses until they were finally hungry enough to get up. Jareth’s arm tightened spasmodically across her lower back before relaxing and gently pulling her closer, his other hand cupping her cheek.
“Good morning,” he practically purred when she pulled back, his eyes even darker than they had been. His smile was a smile and not a smirk though. If anything, Sarah thought to herself, as she let herself fall back to rest her cheek on his chest, he looked a little dazed. She started trailing her fingers in vague patterns across his stomach. His muscles tightened and Sarah felt a vibration in his chest as he suppressed a moan. A very good morning indeed.

“Sleep well?” she asked, starting to kiss his chest. She was having way too much fun with this.

“Oh, yes,” he purred, and she glanced up to see his eyes fixed on her, his hand starting to toy with her waist. “You wouldn’t be able to imagine the dreams,” he promised. Sarah’s breath caught in her throat. “Though I’m sure we’d both enjoy a demonstration…” Sarah went back to kissing his chest, trying to ignore the promise in his voice. She knew she could only toy with him for so long, and she planned to enjoy it while it lasted. Her mouth drifted up to his nipple and she actually managed elicit a moan from him. She smirked.

“You know, precious,” he said, his voice a little strained, “I’m starting to think that your concept of fairness might have some merit.”

Sarah paused in her kissing and looked up at him. "Really?"

“Oh, really,” he replied, expression very hungry. “You see, it does seem rather unfair that you get to enjoy my shirtless state—” he moved, and suddenly Sarah was on her back, and he was propped on his elbow beside her, leg thrown possessively across her hips and blessedly gloveless—finally!—fingers toyed at the little skin her disturbed shirt had exposed. He leaned in to whisper. “--When you remain fully clothed.” Sarah shivered at the feel of his breath on her ear, and had to bite back a whimper when he kissed the sensitive spot just under it. Perhaps teasing Jareth had—been the best idea she’d had in a long time, asserted her back-brain.

“I don’t know,” she responded breathily as he started to slowly working his way down her neck towards her collar bones. “You’re wearing pants and all I’ve got is—” her voice caught as she felt his teeth on her collarbone.

“Is?” She could feel him smirk against her skin, the smug, skilled bastard. She gathered her hormone-scattered thoughts as he went back to kissing.

“Is—” and now he was running his hands up her sides, enjoying her curves, thank God it was outside her shirt, “a pair of shorts.”

Suddenly all the blankets were gone and Jareth was sitting up and taking his turn to drink her in.

“And such lovely legs they are too, precious,” He replied, one hand caressing her thigh. He moved down and started kissing up her legs. She gasped and he looked up with that damn smug smirk of his. His fingers traced designs along the skin of her inner thighs, getting her to spread them slightly. His lips and tongue followed the path of his fingers. He stopped at the hem of her shorts—why God was she still wearing shorts?—and smiled up at her, taking a deep breath through his nose. He was… smelling her? That should be weird, but with her hormones going wild and Jareth’s so low on her body, his hands just needing to creep a little higher and he would be—

“I still think it ‘unfair,’” Jareth said, reaching up to toy with the waist of her shorts, “You have two pieces of clothing to my one. Care to level the pla—"

There was a pounding at the door. Jareth’s expression turned from joyful seduction to frustrated fury. He started swearing vehemently, cursing the knocker to their 5th generation of descendants and with very creative suggestions for things those descents could breed with.
“A goose?” Sarah asked, propping herself up on her elbows, suppressing her own frustration and her back brain’s screams of thwarted anguish. “Is that even possible?”

Jareth’s head jerked up to look at her, his cheeks slightly reddened, and he switched to the language that sounded like gargled pebbles, being thrown down a set of stairs. Violently. After one last set of pebbles had been gargled, he gave her a fierce look.

“This time, you will stay here.” He rolled off her and marched to the door, which was still being beaten by a poor messenger, whom Sarah feared was about to be shot.

“What?” Jareth roared as he threw open the door. ‘He’s still hot when he’s angry,’ her back brain sighed as she watched the play of muscles in his back. ‘Hotter when he’s happy, but still…”

“Sire! It’s the Champion!” It sounded like Kelsa, but Jareth’s body was blocking her view, not that she was complaining…

“What about her?” Jareth asked, not looking over his shoulder at her.

“Sire, she’s missing. You told me to attend on her in the morning and the guards swear that no one got passed them. There’s no sign of struggle either she’s just gone!” The poor girl sounded terrified, like she was on the verge of tears. Sighing to herself, Sarah slipped out of bed and went to stand behind Jareth, wrapping her arms around him. After all, it wasn’t a problem when she was pressed against someone else’s back, just the other way around.

“Jareth, please don’t kill my maid, I like her.” She leaned out to look at Kelsa, whose eyes were very wide. “Don’t worry Kelsa, I’m fine. The Labyrinth just has a weird sense of humour.”

“I told you to stay there,” Jareth growled and Kelsa, glancing up at Jareth’s expression, looked even more scared than before. Sarah found herself jerking away,—eyes crazy with hate, her back and side on fire—she shook her head, forcing the images away, and crossed her arms.

“Since when do I ever do what you tell me, Goblin King?” she asked, trying to blow the whole thing off.

“Sarah…” Jareth reached out for her, frowning in concern.

“I’m fine, Jareth. Geeze.” She pulled away from his touch. “Come on Kelsa, I should probably go get ready for the day. Which way to my room?”

“You will not be traipsing around my Castle in that,” Jareth said firmly, giving her a once over.

Sarah glanced down at her pajamas. A loose shirt and some shorts didn’t seem that revealing to her. Jareth’s regular outfits left way less to the imagination, and no one had objected to her little black dress.

“What do you mean, that?” she asked. Jareth pinched the bridge of his nose and muttered something about how Klio had had one job.

“Sarah, your rooms are some distance from mine. I think it would be simplest if I simply transported you there?”

Sarah glared at him, annoyed at him wanting to move her around at his convenience like a piece of furniture.

“I can walk, thank you,” she growled, and then stalked past him out of the room. “Come on, Kelsa,
we’re leaving.

“Sarah,” Jareth called after her in the hall. She whirled around to glare at him.

“What?”

He tilted his head and considered her for a moment. “Join me for breakfast?” He smirked slightly. “There will be coffee.”

Stupid Jareth and knowing her weakness. “I’ll be there soon,” she replied before whirling around and storming barefoot down the hall, hoping Kelsa would catch up and be able to direct her before she came to the corner.

They came to her rooms some time later (Jareth had been right, it had been some distance) and Kelsa hurried over to her closet and pulled out a couple of dresses.

“Here, My Lady Sarah,” she said, presenting one of deep green fabric and another in red. “I described your undergarments to Seamstress Her’ta and she made these to not need a corset. She also made others of course, that still require the corset for more formal wear, in which you’ll look stunning. I’m sure, but we don’t really have the time to help you into a corset, not if you’re to meet with His Majesty soon, so one of these will have to do. I mean, they are very nice, Seamstress Her’ta does only the best work bu—”

“Kelsa,” Sarah said, gently taking the dresses from her, “You’re babbling, what’s wrong?”

Kelsa gave her a wide-eyed look before taking a deep breath and standing straighter. “Nothing, my Lady, now, which dress would you prefer?”

“Kelsa…” Sarah frowned, not really paying attention to the dresses. She could get dressed later. “Kelsa, are you afraid Jareth might hurt you?”

Sarah didn’t think she’d ever seen someone look so flabbergasted.

“My Lady Sarah!” Kelsa said, when she finally got control over her mouth. “His majesty would never order one of the Wished Away hurt. While he might terrify the Goblins, he would never actually injure one. The worst I face is extra chores or…” she trailed off, going back to looking very upset. “Or losing my position.” She looked up at Sarah again, eyes fierce and confused. “But I would never fear being hurt by his Majesty. How could you think that of him, my lady?”

Sarah blinked at her maid for a few minutes. Goblin Kingdom culture made her head hurt.

“Kelsa, the first time I met Jareth, within in the space of ten hours, he threw a snake at me, set the cleaners on me, poisoned me, and set the entire goblin army and Humongous on me. How am I supposed to believe he’s not the violent, vindictive sort?”

“I suppose the Victor would have a different view of him…” Kelsa trailed off, frowning. “But, while his Majesty is merciless when it comes to dealing those who would hurt his people, we have nothing to fear from him, not physically.”

“But, you said you might lose your job? Isn’t that kind of important?” Sarah said.

“I doubt I will be removed from the castle staff but…” She trailed off, shaking her head and reached for the dresses. “Which dress would you prefer? They are both lovely, Seamstress Her’ta has only ever produced such fine work for the king, and on such short notice too. Really, both would compliment you very nicely,”
“Okay,” Sarah held up both her hands, now freed from the dresses. “I’ll pick a dress if you promise to tell me what you’re really worried about, ok?”

“My Lady wouldn’t prefer to focus on getting ready?” Kelsa asked, without much hope.

“Look, Kelsa, I’m from the Aboveground. This is only my fifth time coming to the Underground, and I’m pretty sure the first two times don’t count. Every time I come down here, something big blows up in my face and I’m getting pretty tired of it. I don’t get this—any of this! I… I want to though. Jareth can help some, and Klio too, but, they grew up with this and there’s more that I need to understand. You have a bit of an outside perspective. I just—Just talk to me, ok? I want to understand. If things are going to work in the long run, I have to. And green. I like the green,” she concluded. Damn but she needed coffee. Kelsa was looking rather taken aback and the last thing Sarah had wanted to was scare her. But after a deep breath, she put the red dress back on the hanger and took the green dress off its hanger.

“Does my Lady require any aid with her undergarments?” Kelsa asked, going to the drawer she had stored them away in when she’d received word of Sarah’s arrival the night before.

“No, I’ll get those myself,” Sarah said, grabbing a set before sliding behind the screen in the corner to change out of her pajamas.

“You can start explaining any time,” she said, as she pulled off her top.

“Well, My Lady Sarah, as I told you when we first met, serving you is a very prestigious position. Normally it wouldn’t be given to someone of my age, but I think his Majesty wanted you to have someone closer to your own age serving you… In any case, twice now we’ve nearly lost you under my care, and then this morning interrupting… I can’t imagine his Majesty will be pleased with me and he might be reconsidering his decision…”

“Look, Kelsa,” Sarah said, stepping out from behind the screen and trying not to feel self conscious in just her underclothes. It was different with Katara. “If you want I can talk to Jareth about this, I’m sure you can keep your job. I like you. You—” she paused as Kelsa helped her get the dress on over her head, “You’re nice, and you listen and you want to help me. I don’t want another maid.” Kelsa stepped behind her do up the truly ridiculous number of tiny bronze buttons that went up the back of the dress. “You do good work,” said Sarah smiling, as the last button fell prey to Kelsa’s quick fingers.

“Would you like me to do your hair, my Lady?” Kelsa asked, looking down and blushing slightly.

“Of course,” Sarah said, remembering to sit down properly at her vanity, tucking the skirts and spreading them so they wouldn’t wrinkle. Kelsa smiled with approval before starting to brush out Sarah’s hair. Sarah tried to relax into the feeling, there was something very comforting about having your hair brushed by someone who actually knew how to deal with tangles. She’d had a really rough week, and the pampering, the pretty dress, the royal treatment (and she used that term advisedly, “member of the royal household” indeed), it just felt really good. It was nice to relax. She tried not to think about anything really as she let Kelsa work, just letting her mind drift and trying to focus on stuff like the Beltane fair and not… other things.

“My Lady Sarah?” Kelsa asked as she started separating strands of hair and twisting them.

“Yes?” Sarah asked, coming back to the here and now.

“If you really want to know more about our ways, there’s someone that I think that might be able to help. She also came as an older outsider, but has really found her place here.”
“Really?” Sarah asked, eyes widening. There was that kind of resource lying around and Jareth hadn’t pointed her at it yet? Stupid sexy Fae git.

“Yes, My Lady. Most of us come to the Goblin Kingdom when we are young, or were born into families here, but she arrived here an adult, about a decade ago.”

“Who is she?” An adult Wished-Away? How would that work? Or—

“The Lady is in charge of overseeing the adoptions of the Wished-Away. She helps newcomers adjust and helps run the human village. Everyone knows we can go to the Lady in times of trouble, or for advice. I think she’d be more than happy to help you, My Lady. Perhaps if you asked his Majesty, he’d be willing to arrange an introduction.” She slid the final pin into place and stepped back.

“You know what?” Sarah said, turning her head from side to side to admire Kelsa’s work. She wasn’t sure how her hair was managing to stay in that position, but it certainly looked nice. “I think I’ll do just that.” She got to her feet, skirts swirling around her ankles. She turned around and, much to Kelsa’s shock, hugged her.

“My Lady!” Kelsa squeaked, very unsure what to do. Next time one of his Majesty’s servants complained about the actions of their Monarch, she would surely be able to top them with this.

“Thanks, Kelsa,” Sarah said, letting go of the poor shocked girl. “I couldn’t ask for a better maid. Now, can you escort me to breakfast? I still haven’t figured out the layout of this place.”

“Of course, My Lady. If you’ll follow me.” And with that Kelsa led Sarah down to the dining hall.

After, she knew she’d have to run up to Seamstress Her’ta’s rooms, and then see if she could get people together to move her Lady’s things tomorrow. Surely one day would be enough to air out the seraglio, right?

***

Sarah marched into the breakfast room, ready to fight. If Jareth wanted to reassign Kelsa he had another thing coming. Jareth was already sitting—well, lounging in his chair, really—but waiting for her to start eating. The smell of coffee wafted deliciously down the table. At least he followed through on his promises.

“I want to keep Kelsa as my maid,” she said, not looking at the delicious breakfast that lay before her. Kelsa came first.

Jareth’s eyebrows went up.

“What, grown so attached already, precious?” he asked.

“I like her. She does good work. I want to keep her as my maid. It’s not her fault the Labyrinth keeps messing with me and leaves her holding the bag. I don’t want anyone else suffering because the Labyrinth decided to drag Magic back into my life with a vengeance whether I wanted it on not!” She was a little out of breath by the end of that sentence, but her glare was just as fierce.

“Do you truly regret Her actions, bringing you here?” Jareth asked, his tone almost academic, for all that his eyes were hard.

“I want your word, Jareth. Kelsa stays as my maid.” She made no move to sit.

“Very well, Sarah. As you wish.” His lips quirked. “Now, would you please join me for breakfast?
Your coffee is getting cold.”

With one last glare, Sarah slid into her seat, taking the time to adjust her skirt, for Kelsa’s sake if nothing else. And to do justice to Her’ta’s work. The dress was beautiful.

“Really, Precious, I had had no plans to remove her from her position in the first place. No one in their right mind would ask someone to manage to curb all disasters that occur around you. Really, she’s handled all the situations quite well. Although,” his eyes darkened and he smirked at her. “I could have done without the interruption this morning. I can’t blame her though, as she did exactly as she should if you were to actually disappear.” He ate a forkful of eggs. “You say you like having a maid? I’ll admit, I first assigned you one as it wouldn’t do to have someone of your status without one—while as a King I can, and often do, ignore the opinions of others, I would so hate to have anyone speak badly of you, Precious—but I didn’t think you’d take to the idea. You are rather independent.” His eyes danced as he took a sip of his own drink.

“She’s nice, and apparently serving me helps her out,” Sarah shrugged, pushing her eggs around her plate. “Besides, she’s mostly willing to explain things to me, help me understand what’s going on.” She made herself take a few bites before drinking more coffee. Coffee wasn’t a problem. “That reminds me, there’s someone she suggested I talk to. ‘The Lady’, from the human village?”

Jareth’s eyes stopped dancing, and he sat up straight.

“Sarah, I’m not so sure that’s wise…” he said. He’d used her real name, this must be serious, but Sarah didn’t really care. There was a resource and she was tired of having things hidden from her.

“Damn it, Jareth, I’m barely treading water here! You want me to love you and marry you, and you know what? That’s between you and me, but you rule a damn Kingdom and you’re asking me to rule next to you. I’m an outsider here, I know that, you know that, everyone knows that. I just—” she took a deep breath, getting control of her recently even more explosive anger. “I’m just tired of being lost all the time, alright? Kelsa thinks she can help me understand, she came here as an adult too, right? She’ll be able to help me. Please, Jareth.” She reached out and placed her hand on his wrist. He closed his eyes, and let out a long breath.

“Very well, precious. I’ll arrange for a meeting later today.” He opened his eyes, blue and piercing and strangely vulnerable. “I could discuss things with you as well, you know. Tell you of our ways.”

“Look, Jareth, you probably could, but you grew up here, in this culture. There are gonna be things that are so obvious to you, so ingrained, that you wouldn’t even think of explaining it to me, and then I’ll mess up and look like a complete idiot, probably at the worst possible moment. This ‘Lady’ grew up in my world, and apparently has a position of power that she fits into quite well. Hopefully she’ll be able to help me.”

“I see.” Jareth seemed to relax slightly back into his chair. “Well, you should probably know before you meet her. You see, The Lady is—”

A messenger burst into the room, and bowed.

“Yes?” Jareth asked, his attention now entirely elsewhere.

“Sire, I’m sent by healer Ner’da. She says that it’s Al’ma and it’s time.”

“Al’ma?” Sarah felt pulled into Jareth’s worry. “But she isn’t due for another two weeks!”

“Ner’da reports that it all should fine, but she thinks that both Al’ma and Fel’keic would be calmer and things would be simpler if you were to arrive soon. The labour is over, but they are both still
worried for both the health of the child and of Al’ma.”

“Very well. Thank you, Hal’ma. That will be all.” With another bow, the messenger hurried out of 
the room. Jareth got to his feet and downed the last of his coffee. “I’m sorry, Sarah, I fear I have to 
attend to this. I will return later, no longer than an hour.”

“Jareth, what’s going on?” Sarah said, rising with him.

“One of my subjects has gone into labour early, and I have to go.” He ran his hand through his hair. 
He wanted to explain to Sarah but his people needed him and he could not leave them in need.

“Take me with you?” Sarah asked, not sure if it was entirely appropriate, but interested nonetheless. 
Besides, it would give her an excuse to have not finished breakfast. Jareth blinked at her in surprise. 
“I mean, I don’t want to intrude, but I am curious.”

“Very well.” He offered her his hand. “Hold on.”

* * *

They appeared in a little house in the Goblin City—fortunately not the one she had taken refuge from 
the army in, Sarah was glad to note—with barely enough room for them to stand. Sarah watched as 
way more glitter than normal, which was really saying something, settled on everything in the room, 
including her. It was going to take forever to get out of her hair and it would almost certainly clog up 
the drain. Stupid flamboyant Fae.

“Well?” Jareth asked beside her, every inch the Goblin King. Sarah tried to look more regal herself 
and was glad she’d decided on one of Her’ta’s dresses rather than a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. Comfy 
as they were, regal was never a word that would be applied to them.

“Everything is fine, Your Majesty,” Ner’da said, smiling at them both over her shoulder as she 
finished tucking a wrapped bundle into the arms of the goblin woman in the bed. Sarah felt both 
moved and like she was intruding, looking at the look of wonder and love on the normally more 
terrifying face of the Goblins. She glanced up at Jareth and saw the warmth in his eyes and the 
corners of his mouth just slightly turned up.

The husband—Fel’keic, hadn’t his name been?—took the baby from his wife and brought him over 
to present to Jareth. Jareth bent down and took the child into his own arms.

“How?” he asked, rocking the newborn gently back and forth.

“Sel’mieic,” smiled his mother tiredly.

“A good name.” Jareth nodded to the parents before turning to the child. “Welcome, Sel’mieic, to the 
Goblin Kingdom. Grow strong, and become a good and loyal subject, as your parents have been 
before you. You have my blessing.” He bent and carefully placed a kiss on the newborn’s forehead, 
leaving a faint trace of glitter?

‘Labyrinth?’ asked Sarah, knowing She would know what Sarah wanted.

‘But of course. If We may?’ Sarah could deal with the fact that the last question had had a sarcastic 
tone, at least She had asked this time.

‘One sec.’

“Jareth, Al’ma, Fel’keic, if I may?” Jareth looked at the couple, who looked at each other before
nodding hesitantly. An eyebrow raised, he very carefully handed her Sel’mec, checking to make sure she was supporting him properly. This time she didn’t shy away from the thought, ‘He really would make a good father’.

‘Now,’ Sarah replied. She felt the flow of the Labyrinth into her mind, mixing, intermingling, not overpowering. Sarah kept her own against the impossible power of the Labyrinth. Feeling Her power mix with Sarah’s voice, she spoke the simplest, best blessing she could think of.

“Live well, Sel’mec.” And she bent and placed a kiss next to the one Jareth had left, giving this tiny, fragile, new life the best gift she could. She looked up, feeling the Labyrinth’s presence in her mind retreat, to see everyone in the room wide-eyed, Jareth looking like he was ready to grab her and the baby, should she collapse. Shooting a look at him, Sarah walked over to the new mother and carefully handed over the baby, who looked like he was considering getting fussy.

“Thank you, my Lady Champion,” the mother whispered, tears in her eyes as she held her baby close.

“We’ll leave you two to rest,” Jareth said, offering his arm to Sarah. “Shall we?”

“Actually, Sire,” Ner’da said, interrupting him with a curtsy. “There’s something I’d like to speak to you about, before you go.”

“I had planned to escort Sarah to see the Lady,” Jareth said, not lowering his outstretched arm. “Can this wait?”

“I can take her,” Fel’keic spoke up immediately, before glancing in worry towards his wife. Sarah followed his gland and frowned.

“It’s the least we can do for Our Lady Champion,” Al’ma assured him and Sarah.

“Great. Jareth, I’ll meet you at the castle,” Sarah smiled, and headed for the door.

“Sarah, wait.” Jareth said, frowning again.

“I’ll head back as soon as I’m done talking to her. Quit worrying, come on Fel’keic.” And with that she was out the door. She was tired of dealing with his stalling tactics.

“Sarah!” Jareth called after her before biting back a curse, mindful of the baby’s ears and the magic still very present in the room. “Go after her,” he told Fel’keic. “I don’t want her to get lost.” With a quick bow, Fel’keic hurried from the room after Sarah. If she didn’t want to listen to him, it was her own fault she’d be blind-sided.

* * *

It was a little later when they arrived at a large, that was to say, human-sized, cottage on the edge of the Goblin City. Fel’keic knocked at the door.

A lovely woman with long black hair, pale skin and amber eyes opened the door.

“Yes? Oh Fel’keic! How’s Al’ma doing?”

“Actually, Lady, the little Sel’tecic was born this morning and has already received the King’s blessing— and the Champion’s.”

“Congratulations,” The Lady said, smiling warmly, before her brows creased. “But what are you
doing away from your family so soon. Wait, you said the Champi—” It was then that she seemed to actually notice Sarah standing a little way behind the goblin.

“Sarah,” she breathed, her eyes going wide.

“Yes, Lady. The King asked me to accompany her here.” Fel’keic said.

“Thank you, Fel’keic. Sarah, do come in.” And with that The Lady disappeared into her house.

“Thanks Fel’keic,” Sarah smiled, and then turned to follow The Lady, whose face felt annoying familiar.

“No, My Lady Champion. Thank you.” He bowed, then turned and ran as fast as his small legs could carry him toward his wife and son.

“Take a seat,” The Lady instructed as she bustled around the cozy, if still roomy, cottage. “Can I offer you some tea? Have you eaten breakfast? I’m just making some oatmeal, if you’d like some. It’s good to finally speak to you properly.”

“I’m sorry, Lady.” Sarah said, taking a seat at the kitchen table and feeling like she’d missed a whole lot of something. “Do I know you?”

The Lady looked over her shoulder from where she was rummaging in a cupboard for something.

“You mean you haven’t guessed? You don’t see the family resemblance?” she said, smiling.

Sarah searched her memory for this face, but nothing came up. Family resemblance? Who…

The Lady’s smile faltered and her eyes became sad and angry.

“I suppose it might be less clear, after what his father did to him. We looked more alike when he was a kid.”

Father had done to him?

The Lady with the amber eyes that, with the blazing anger, Sarah did recognize. But how could—-

“It’s nice to meet you properly, Sarah Williams. My name is Ursa Roku. I’m Zuko’s mother.”

Chapter End Notes

So! We finally know who the lady is. Also, you guys get to be frustrated by how much I enjoy interrupting Sarah and Jareth when they are alone together. And how much the Labyrinth ships Sarah and Jareth. If they ever get around to it being an issue, she’d totally mess with their contraceptive methods... She and Sarah REALLY need to have that talk about consent...

So, how do you feel about the whole Ursa thing? About the fact that I keep denying Sarah and Jareth Shmexy times?

Tell me all about how you feel in the comment box. Come on, you know you want to...
“You’re alive?!” Sarah cried, once she got her jaw off the table and working again. “But Zuko said…”

Ursa’s—Zuko’s mom’s?—smile faded slightly. “As far as he knows, I am,” she said sadly.

“I—but—he—how?”

“I suppose I should start from the beginning,” Ursa sighed. “Let me just finish the tea.”

Sarah stared flabbergasted at the woman as she moved gracefully around, putting a bit of this and a bit of that into a couple of mugs and pouring boiling water into them from a kettle that was hanging over a fire. How could a mother abandon her child—children like that? Didn’t she have any idea how much she’d hurt Zuko when she left?

“Here.” Ursa came up and put down a mug in front of her. “Let me know if you want milk or sugar.” She pulled out a chair. How could this woman abandon someone she loved like that? Sarah didn’t know much about Zuko’s life before university, but she could make some of the story out in the silences. And—what his father had done to him? For all that Zuko spoke highly of his mother, when he spoke about her at all, Sarah couldn’t help but wanting to rage at this woman who had hurt her friend so much and let him be hurt.

She took a sip of tea to stop herself from saying something unfortunate.

“Are you alright?” Ursa put her cup down and looked at Sarah in concern as Sarah’s sip of tea went all over the table.
“Fine,” Sarah managed to get out between her coughs. So that was where Zuko got his skills at making tea. She wondered if she could find a tactful way to spill all of it without Ursa making her a fresh cup. “Please, tell me what happened.”

Ursa frowned and took a sip of her own tea, not seeming to notice the god-awful taste, and began.

“It all began twelve years ago. No, wait, that’s wrong. In many ways, it all ended twelve years ago. You see. No—I’m going about this all wrong.” She put down her mug and frowned. “I’m sorry, I’ve never had to tell all of this story before. Not from the beginning. Alright, from the beginning…

“I guess the real place to start would have been at University. I met Ozai, the man I married there, during the first year of my undergrad and his second. We shared a class and he sat next to me and would make me giggle all through the lectures, commenting on the lecturer, who was fairly ridiculous. But Ozai, he was…” her eyes softened and the corners of her lips turned up. Sarah got the feeling Ursa wasn’t seeing her anymore. “…incredible, rich, funny, and he chose me, a girl away from home for the first time, from a small town in the middle of nowhere. He asked me out, he made me feel beautiful. I don’t think anyone was surprised when we eloped at the end, except his family. I hadn’t met his father, though Iroh knew about me. After we got married, I moved in with him, to help him with the family business.” Her lip curled into a snarl. “It was only then that I learned exactly what ‘the family business’ was. Marriage always requires an adjustment, my mother told me that, but finding out that magic was actually real and that I was now part of something so ugly as what the Sozins do… It was a little more than I’d expected.”

Sarah found herself leaning away from the expression on the woman’s face. Ursa blinked and seemed to remember that Sarah was there, and with apparent effort forced her expression into something calmer.

“At least if you marry His Majesty, you’ll have had a much closer view of his personal life. I’ve heard you’ve even met the Lady Kliora and his family. I know you speak to Kelsa frankly—she came to me during your first visit in a little bit of a panic,” she explained at Sarah’s raised eyebrows. “I advised her to be frank, firm and patient.”

“Oh,” Sarah said, smiling a little and bringing her mug to her lips without actually taking a sip. “I think she listened.”

“It’s good that you’re getting a more complete view of him. Honesty is important in a relationship. It’s the only way, if the relationship is to last.” There was a razor edge to her voice as she spoke.

“I still haven’t agreed to marry him,” Sarah said quickly, feeling very uncomfortable.

“Why not?” Ursa asked, her voice calm again as she took a sip of tea and looked at Sarah with all-too-knowing eyes that reminded her far too much of Karen and Linda. Where did mothers learn that look anyway?
“I…” It should be about love, she knew that. She’d promised Buttercup that it would be about love. At this point, she even wanted to love him. But love couldn’t really exist without…”Don’t trust him,” she finally finished. That, she knew was true.

“Really?” Ursa put down her mug and leaned forward, eyes fierce. “Because I trust him with more than my life. I trust him with my son’s. Twelve years ago, Azulon, my father-in-law, made a deal with a Fae house. There was a mortal family that had offended them and the Fae wanted their son. They wanted to kill him to punish his parents. I still don’t know how, but somehow Zuko overheard what was going to happen and went to Lu Ten, his cousin. If they had come to me, or to Iroh… but by then they knew we wouldn’t do anything. The two of them interfered. They got the kid out, yes, but the family found out and demanded justice.” There was a snarl in her voice on that last word.

“You’ve known Jareth long enough by now, you must know the stories about the Fair Folk and their justice. They demanded the lives of one of the interfering children, in exchange for the one who got away. And by then my father-in-law… He wasn’t right. He was furious that anyone had interfered with his deal, and it wasn’t going to be Lu Ten—I sometimes think Iroh and his son were the only two people Azulon cared about. He ordered Ozai to gather up Zuko and hand him over to the Fae. I heard about this from my daughter, of all people, after overhearing her tell her brother that their father was going to kill him. Azula spent far too much time with her father and grandfather, too much time seeing things no child should ever see…” She shook her head, clearing visions of what Sarah didn’t want to imagine, but found herself doing anyway.

“I went to confront my husband, finding him sharpening a knife. ‘It’ll be quick. It’s more than the little runt deserves’. I asked him to give me time. He’d always been ambitious. If I could find a way to get him into power, would he spare our son? He was so easy to manipulate. Of course he agreed. I had that night and no longer to save my only son’s life. I knew Ozai would never touch our daughter. She was too like him, too ‘valuable’.” Sarah could hear Ursa’s rage at her daughter being thought of as only valuable, and not a person. “I went to Iroh, told him what I’d overheard. He was horrified. We realized we needed to get both of our children out of there, away from there, away from all of this insanity. I think that was the tipping point for Iroh, making him want to leave the family business as well. We needed to get our children away.” She took a deep breath and smiled.

“And everyone knows about the Child Taker. But, Lu Ten was too old and I didn’t want to take Zuko away from everything he’d ever known. I didn’t want him thinking... Thinking I had never loved him. Still, Iroh had heard stories, whispers, of deals being struck, to keep a child safe, favours being exchanged. And so we called for him. The Child Taker, the Goblin King. Iroh arranged to have Lu Ten disappeared. He knew he would never be able to see his son again. Not if he wanted to keep the angry Fae family from him. He traded being in the Goblin King’s debt for that, a favour at some future date. If I were going to have my 10 year old relocated, I might as well have wished him away. Instead, I traded my life for his. My life in service to the Goblin Kingdom, in return for keeping Zuko safe from all attacks from the magical community. Before I left, though, I made my father-in-law a cup of tea that would put him to sleep and ensure he’d never wake again. I would have liked to sink the knife into that bastard’s neck, but I didn’t want Zuko seeing that. Far too much blood.” Sarah shivered. “No one threatens my children. I left a note saying that a life had been given, the exchange made. Then I went with His Majesty to this house, and looked after all the children he brought me, knowing he would be looking after mine… or at least one of them.”

“But, when Jet stabbed him…” Sarah frowned. Ursa, who had been taking a sip of tea, sprayed it all
over the table.

“My son was stabbed?!” she cried.

“Um… Jareth didn’t mention that?” Sarah said rather weakly, dabbing at the drops of tea that had gotten on her dress.

“What happened? Is he alright?” Ursa’s eyes were wild and her fists were clenching and unclenching.

“He’s fine, really,” Sarah said as quickly as possible. “Jareth sent Klio up to heal him and she used my friend Katara’s energy to help heal him and he’s as good as new. Really, he is. It was last week and he’s shown no bad signs since then.”

“This happened last week?” she asked, seeming to have gained control over herself. “Tell me, Sarah, exactly what happened to my son.” Sarah tried not to feel scared for Jareth as she spoke. It felt strange to be talking to someone who had so casually admitted to murder. For all that she wasn’t sure if she loved Jareth or if she wanted to marry him, she was sure she didn’t want him dead.

“I see,” Ursa said, taking a sip of her remaining tea. “No, Jareth would not have been bound to save Zuko from that. Jet is not part of the magical community. Thank you, Sarah, for saving my son.”

“He’s my friend,” Sarah said. “And it was my fault that happened to him.”

Ursa’s eyes flashed for a moment, with something Sarah didn’t have the time to identify. “Do you really think so? Because if that were true, you are the Beloved of the Goblin King, She-Who-Should-Be-Queen, Champion of the Labyrinth. I can’t really think of a mortal who has more qualifications as a member of the magical community. If you were truly responsible for this, Jareth would have had to stop you, and I would have to kill you, something I find myself with no desire to do.”

Sarah shrugged, trying to shake the feeling that this woman might kill her at any moment. “If I hadn’t been so obvious with magic, Jet wouldn’t have targeted my group of friends. He’d been dating Katara for months without him realizing anyone had a connection to magic, so yeah, it’s on me.” Sarah really wasn’t sure why she felt the need to convince this woman with murdering tendencies that it was Sarah’s fault that her son was endangered, but…well, it was true, after all.

“Sarah, you can’t be blamed for his actions,” Ursa said, reaching out to touch Sarah reassuringly. Sarah found herself flinching away, and a deep sadness filled Ursa’s eyes.

“I’d be happy to listen, if you want to talk,” Ursa said. Sarah looked at her tea, not able to look the
“Zuko will be so happy to know you’re alive. I can’t wait to tell him.” The way she talked about her son, Sarah thought that would be a good change of topic.

“You can’t.” There was no give in Ursa’s voice.

“What do you mean, ‘I can’t’?” Sarah exclaimed, eyes snapping up.

“He can’t know I’m alive, Sarah. His protection depends on it. I owe His Majesty the rest of my life in service. If Zuko knew… He can’t know. I need to know that he’s in the Aboveground, protected from all harm the magical community might do him. As a Sozin, away from the protection that that family might have provided him, he’s a target. I need to know the Goblin King will look after him. I need to know he’s safe.”

“Him knowing won’t stop Jareth protecting him!”

Ursa frowned. “Sarah, I gave my life. In many ways, my children were my life. I can keep nothing from that time, or the deal is void.”

“Bullshit!” Sarah shot to her feet, trembling with rage. “He’d be happier knowing you were alive! Knowing you were happy! Do you have any idea what I would give to find out my dad was alive! Even,” her voice caught, and she forced back tears. “Even if I could never see him again. Even if it meant putting me in danger.”

Ursa stayed calm, looking at Sarah with hard eyes.

“When my son was thirtee years old, his father held his face to an open element on a gas stove and held him there as he screamed. If I hadn’t made my deal, if the Goblin King hadn’t been watching out for my son, then I have very little doubt he would no longer have an eye, or most of his face, or possibly even his life. My husband was a powerful man and a sadist. He couldn’t very well have a useless interfering child around. His Majesty saved my son’s life, even if he couldn’t save him from the scar—there was a Runner at the time, and he made it clear that he would send someone in his stead if he couldn’t make it himself. He kept his word. He is a Fae—he arranged it so that Zuko went to his Uncle’s. Iroh may have left the family years ago, but even today, Iroh Sozin is a name to be reckoned with—but not enough of one. I will not risk putting him in more danger. I ask that you respect my decision. He is, after all, my son. I get to see him once a year, Iroh tells me about him when I come to his shop, and with you being in His Majesty’s life, I get to hear more about him. He’s about to become an adult, he’s got a woman who’s in love with him, a group of friends who love him, a real chance at a future. All things come at a cost, Sarah, and the price of keeping my son safe is never seeing him again. This kind of magic, this kind of trade, it requires a sacrifice to work. I still get to see him once a year. I’d rather he be sad that I’m not there, a loss than he can recover from, rather than dead, a much more permanent state.”
“You’re the Lady!” Sarah said, dots connecting in her head as she tried to process all this new information.

“Well, yes,” Ursa said, eyebrows drawn in, “that is what the people here call me. You would have heard Kelsa address me as such…”

“No—Well, yes,” Sarah said trying to get her mouth to move as fast as her brain, but making more sense. “I mean, the Lady. The one who comes in every year and never gives a name! The one who actually likes Zuko’s tea!” She found herself happy she’d solved the mystery at long last.

“There’s something special about my son’s tea?” Ursa asked, continuing to look confused. Sarah glanced at her own, mostly untouched cup.

“Er… no?” she offered weakly. Ursa’s eyebrows went up and Sarah decided a strategic conversational retreat was in order. “What do you mean, he’s got a woman who’s in love with him? He isn’t seeing anyone or anything…” Well, at least as far as Sarah knew he wasn’t…

“Sarah, you said yourself that Katara—a wonderful girl from what Iroh has told me—used her energy to heal Zuko.”

“So? I get wiped out all the time trying to do magic. It uses up my energy, that doesn’t mean I’m love.” Unless it did? Oh God, had Jareth known all this time and just not told her? Had she really been lying to herself for that lon—

“Sarah,” Ursa cut her off before that train of thought could end in calamity. “That kind of magic is different. It’s the emotion driving the spell that provides its power. Your power comes from your will. But Katara was providing extra energy to the Lady Kliora in her healing spell. Love is the best and most powerful fuel for that kind of magic. Everyone knows that.”

“Everyone but me!” Sarah growled. “That’s the whole reason I came here. This is only the fifth time I’ve been to the Underground, including my Run, but everyone expects me to know everything about how things work! They don’t seem to get that I’m not from here! That I only know this stuff from stories, I didn’t grow up with this and, this isn’t how I’m used to functioning! Everyone seems to expect me to know how this works and to fit into it seamlessly, but I don’t and I can’t and I need someone to explain this.” She paused and took in a deep breath. “Kelsa suggested I talk to you.”

“Oh,” Ursa said, eyes wide. “Yes. I can see how that would be problematic… Sarah, there’s far more to Underground society than I can explain in a single afternoon. His Majesty should have thought of this.” Sarah couldn’t help but agree. “Even when I came down here, I’d been part of the Sozin family for over a decade. Even if this is—quite literally—a different world, it gave me a place to start.” Ursa stopped, frowning. Sarah decided to let that train of thought go where it was headed.
without derailing it with an interruption.

“I’ll be happy to help explain the Underground to you, with the perspective of a once-outsider. And I’ll tell you things you should know, but I need some time to think of the best way to start and the best way to explain. I don’t want my help to confuse you more than it helps.

“Actually,” Ursa frowned, “Aren’t you attending U of F with my son?”

“Um, yes?” Sarah wasn’t sure how her academic pursuits were relevant right now, but she decided to humour the lady with murdering tendencies.

“Well then why don’t you just take their Underground Society and Culture course? It’s offered by the Sub-Anthropology department. You have to get special permission from the head of Inadvisedly Applied Magic, but I doubt you’ll have a problem getting that. If you do I suppose you could have Jareth have a word with the Dean.”

“My school has a course in that? And a Sub-Anthropology department?” Sarah asked resignedly. She’d stopped being surprised by this kind of thing.

“Of course, U of F is where everyone sends their children to receive higher education. It makes sense that they would learn not only mortal things, but the history of other kingdoms, from the Sub-History department. Culture, even languages… Are you alright?”

Sarah stopped banging her head on the table. “Fine, thanks. I’ll start the paperwork when I get back.” And think of some lie to tell Karen about her new and improved course load. Thankfully she already had most of her core program credits, in both her majors.

“Very well…” Ursa said, sounding rather unsure. “On the other hand, I don’t want you to leave empty-handed. Would you like me to explain the love as a source of power thing?”

“Yes,” Sarah said, leaning forward. Even if she didn’t agree with how the woman was dealing with Zuko, the opportunity to talk to someone who actually wanted to explain was not one to be passed up.

“Well, you see,” Ursa began, smiling slightly at the young woman’s intensity. “While magic is directed by words, it’s fueled by emotion. The stronger the emotion behind the spell, the stronger the spell is. Magic can be used without an emotional backing, but for a spell to have the strongest possible effect, there has to be emotion and will behind it. There are very few emotions as powerful as love, and for something like healing, hate would not be ideal. If Zuko was back on his feet that quickly after being stabbed with an iron knife, and Katara provided the ‘energy’ to fuel the spell, then she must love him. She probably could have used Iroh’s love for a boy I knows he sees as his own, but the Lady Kliora has something of a reputation as a matchmaker. Which reminds me, it is
possible to use someone else’s emotions to fuel a spell. It’s part of why spells cast in groups are more powerful, there’s more emotion fueling the spell.”

“So you’re saying that, if Jareth loves me—which he hasn’t actually said, so I don’t have that whole, ‘what’s said is said’ thing going for me—and he decides he wants to trap me down here, his spell will be even more powerful than it would be otherwise, and harder to break?” Sarah practically growled. What wonderful news this was.

“Sarah,” Ursa said, giving her a look. “You, I, Jareth and practically everyone in the Kingdom knows he has no power over you, so he couldn’t keep you here by magic anyway. And even if he could, if he tried to keep you here, it wouldn’t be you he loved, so much as the idea of you. Any spell fueled with that emotion would not be nearly as effective at trapping you. There is a large difference between the two emotions.” Ursa’s eyes went hard. “Believe me, I know.”

Sarah repressed the urge to shiver, and Ursa’s eyes softened again. She started to reach out, but brought her hands back to her lap, before Sarah could flinch away.

“Sarah, you need to figure out if you trust the Goblin King or if you don’t. If you don’t trust him, then why are you still seeing him? And if you do, then what are you afraid of? Love and relationships are hard and complex and require great amounts of trust. I should have left Ozai the minute I found out he’d lied to me about the ‘family business’. There was no trust, after that. If you truly believe the Goblin King doesn’t deserve your trust, then I advise you to get out, and get out quickly. On the other hand, I trusted him with my son’s life, a trust he has never betrayed.”

Sarah sat there feeling rather speechless. Before she could think of something to say, there was a knock at the door.

Ursa left the mildly flabbergasted Sarah at the table as she went to see who it was.

“Your Majesty,” Ursa said, falling into a curtsy. Sarah turned to look straight into bright blue mismatched eyes.

“Hello, I was rather hoping I could collect Sarah for lunch. Neither of us really got the chance to eat much breakfast.”

“Of course, Your Majesty. Sarah and I had just finished talking.”

Sarah put down her mug, still thinking over what Ursa had said. Jareth frowned.

“Are you alright, Precious?” he asked. Sarah shook her head to clear her thoughts.
“I’m just fine, Jareth. Though I’ll be better for some food in me. Let’s get going, shall we?” She got to her feet, brushed down her skirts and marched over to him. “I’m hungry.”

“Your wish is my command,” he smirked, before turning back to Ursa. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“Of course, Your Majesty,” Ursa smiled and nodded. “And it was very nice to meet you, Sarah. Do come again.”

“Let me know when you’ve figured out a place to start,” Sarah replied, before reaching out and grabbing onto Jareth’s arm. “Now. Food.” And with one final smirk from Jareth, they were gone.

Ursa put the mugs in the sink. She’d clean them later. She went to the hooks by the door and wrapped her cloak around her shoulders, and put on the belt that held the dagger that had been intended for her son. She knew that there had been a boy brought to death’s doorstep by angry Goblins the week before, as he had attacked their soon-to-be Lady. Now she knew that he has also stabbed her son. She also knew that Sarah had asked that he not be killed, but she was not the Goblin King. Expression firm, she closed the door behind her and headed towards the palace. There was work to be done.

Chapter End Notes

When I started this, I had no idea Ursa would be so much fun to write, but dear gods she is.

I also decided, when I wrote her, that Azula is also her mother’s child. If there is light and dark in everyone, then there is in everyone.

Hope you enjoyed!

Please leave a contribution in the little box!
... Four months....

I know...

If I even complain about another author's update schedule again, please smack me.

This summer I should be quitting my job, and the ridiculously intensive school I currently attend ends in July. So, hopefully I'll be posting more regularly then. Chapter 36 has been written and is just waiting on my beta (who is still recovering from end of semester. Be nice) and I've started work on 37 too.

Anyway, sorry it's so late, but please enjoy!

Sarah and Jareth reappeared in the dining room. The table was set, food already set out. It looked delicious, smelled delicious, but suddenly Sarah didn’t really want to eat. She knew she needed food, but… mostly it didn’t appeal much right now.

“Before you say anything,” Jareth said, pulling out a chair and giving Sarah a slightly amused look, “I did try to warn you. I hardly think it would be ‘fair’”— he smirked at the word, the smug bastard —“to blame me for your insisting on running off without giving me the chance to actually explain.”

“On the other hand,” Sarah replied, giving him a look as he took his own seat at the head of the table to her left, “you could have just flat out explained that you had Zuko’s mom living in the Underground. Or that my school had a department for learning stuff about the Underground where I could have weird Underground cultural stuff explained to me?” Now her look was more like a glare. She was starting to feel kinda pissed that apparently everyone knew this and no one had bothered to tell her. Had they enjoyed watching her flounder in these situations? Who knew her friends were all so sadistic…

“You didn’t know?” Jareth’s eyebrows shot up.

“How in either world could I have known?! It’s not like it’s part of the advertising! ‘Come to U of F, enjoy our large green campus, our top quality professors and education, not to mention our departments that specialize in the world of magic, something you know isn’t real.’” She was angrier than she should be, she knew, but she’d been like that a lot this past week and knowing didn’t really help stop it. She forced herself to take a deep breath. Exploding wouldn’t help. And Jareth’s expression seemed more confused than amused. It seemed like there was something she was missing.
“But they do adver—Hoggle said you were going in part because of its extensive Celtic Studies Department, and you were interested in studying… Sarah, did you not see the moon writing?”

“Moon writing?” Sarah blinked at him.

“It’s how most magical writing is passed around unnoticed in the Aboveground. Those in the know know to check for it, but even so, the institution of an Aboveground school has been in existence for millenia. I attended in Constantinople for a few years, myself. Magical families who can afford it have been sending their children to whatever form the School takes in their generation. The moon writing is to reach out to those who have lost touch with the community. Also, to include details on what form the school has taken in this generation. Really, as the Champion of the Labyrinth, it was only natural you go to the School and—Sarah, Precious, you’re going to get soup in your hair.”

Sarah looked up from the table which she’d been banging her head against and gave Jareth a look.

“I take you didn’t see the moon writing,” he said, eyebrows raised.

“Alright. I get it. I go to a magical school. I’m the only person who didn’t know that I go to a magical school. I can learn about culture and history and all sorts of interesting things there. Believe me, I’m going to see an academic advisor in the know before picking out my courses for next year. It’s a shame I have so few credits left. I wish I’d been able to take more courses about this before. But then again, before you waltzed back into my life at March Break, there was no reason for me to take those courses… Still, it would have been nice to know more going in. Only one year left to learn so much and I still have a few program requirements to complete…” Sarah frowned, annoyed at the wasted opportunity.

“Can’t you just apply for another year?”

“It’d be nice, but I can’t. My scholarship is only renewable for one more year and it’s the only way I could afford to keep going after dad…” She looked down at her soup and forced a few spoonfuls down, trying to distract herself. The last thing she needed to do was focus on more distressing things. Jet and where there should be scars on her back was more than enough.

“I could pay for the additional year,” Jareth offered, offhandedly. “The education of the hopefully future Queen of the Labyrinth and Lady of the Goblins is an important investment.”
“You aren’t paying for my education,” Sarah told him flatly. There was no way she was going to feel like she owed him that much. There was already enough, with Karen and Zuko, she couldn’t take much more. If she decided to marry him, if she loved him, if she could trust him, then it needed to be on her terms. And besides, “My parents helped pay, but I earned that scholarship fair and square and I worked hard for it. I’m not letting you take that accomplishment away from me. Paying for most of my education, I earned that.” He was smiling at her. Why was he smiling at her? A feeling of cold dread played through her stomach.

“Jareth, did you have anything to do with me getting my scholarship?” Never mind one year, she hated to think she owed him all four. The thought made her feel kind of sick. Both his eyebrows shot up.

“Sarah, I have no power over you, remember? At the time you got your scholarship, I had even less. I couldn’t have possibly had anything to do with the application. As a matter of fact, your scholarship isn’t even one of the ones reserved for magical students. Really, precious, have a little faith in yourself.”

“Oh,” was all Sarah could manage, looking at the soup she’d been stirring without really noticing. ‘Idiot.’

“Precious, is something wrong?” Genuine concern, and something darker, were in Jareth’s tone.

“I’m fine!” Sarah replied, head snapping up with a bright smile. From the look he was giving her, she was pretty sure he wasn’t buying it. “So, I know I can take theoretical courses at school, but do they teach actual magic? You’ve mentioned getting my magical stamina up, so I can actually do transportations without being totally useless later, classes seem like a good place to start.”

“They don’t teach magic in the Aboveground, or at least not at the School.” Jareth didn’t seem to be convinced by her smile, but he was letting her get away with the sudden change in topic. “You’re expected to learn magic at home. I had private tutors for years in all sorts of subjects both before and after I attended School Aboveground. I’ll be the one to teach you magic, precious, if you want to learn.”

"So, about breathing fire?” she asked, before forcing down another spoonful. "You said you'd found a spell that might work...?” Not even all the complications and bad things that were happening in her life could negate the innate coolness of being able breathe fire.
"Ah, not quite, allow me to explain," 'finally' "You, as every other Queen of the Labyrinth before you—"

"I still haven't agreed to marry you, Jareth," Sarah cut across him.

"Believe me, Precious, I am well aware of this fact, but the magic that is a part of you doesn't seem to care. You can take it up with the magic, not me."

"But what no one knew," Sarah quoted, eyebrow going up, "is that the Goblin King had fallen in love with the girl and had given her certain powers."

"Do you want me to explain magic or not?" Jareth glared back, entirely ignoring Sarah's point. If he didn't have anything to do with this then she was... How long had she been stuck on this path? Instead of answering that question, she gestured for Jareth to continue.

"As I was saying, you, like every Queen of the Labyrinth who has come before have two kinds of power, an internal, fae magic and a slightly more external one. However, the way you use those powers is... Different than a fae Queen would." Sarah had a million questions, but she decided to save them for the end of the lecture.

"Fae magic, the magic that, for the most part, I use, is complex. I will be teaching you that and we can begin with the basics over lunch. The other is the magic of the Labyrinth, the magic of wishes. That... I've been speaking to my mother and the Labyrinth about it and I think that you should learn from them. I can teach you the basics, but after that, you should speak to them."

"Wait, what do you mean, you can teach me the basics? I thought it was only the Queens of the Labyrinth who had this... Other kinds of magic." OK, maybe she wouldn't wait for all her questions.

"Perhaps what I said was slightly misleading. You and I both find ourselves in a rather peculiar situation when it comes to magic. No Goblin King is supposed to be able to wield the Labyrinth's magic, but, on the other hand, no King is to rule without a Queen. When my mother and father abdicated before I found my own Queen, long before you were even born for me to find, I was left in a bit of a conundrum. Who was to hear the wishes, when a child is wished away? Who was to merge with the Labyrinth, and guide her changes as the Runner tried to do the impossible? All those were the responsibilities of the Labyrinth's Queen, not merely her Lord. Or at least, that's what I thought. The Labyrinth, it seemed, had different plans." He smirked and took a sip of his drink. Sarah knew a storytelling technique when she saw one, and while she enjoyed watching someone else being a master storyteller she wanted answers. He put down his glass and began speaking again before she gave into the temptation to shake them out of him.
“I have a closer connection to the Labyrinth than any Goblin King has had before me. So long as there is no Runner, I have the connection of any other Goblin King. I can only speak to Her in Her centre. I cannot move her. However, as soon as a Runner enters the Underground…” he trailed off, eyes half-lidded. “Well, you’ve felt that kind of power, though to you it must feel more natural. The first time was rather overwhelming.”

Sarah blinked at him. She remembered being overwhelmed her first time, but she had had no experience with using magic at all. Was that a lot of power? It wasn’t like she really had a frame of reference…

“Just how powerful is the Labyrinth?” Sarah asked.

“You know, that question, more than anything, makes me realize exactly how little you know about this.” He frowned at her. She suppressed a growl, deciding that she wouldn’t kill him until after he’d explained things to her. “Which brings me back to the first kind of magic, the one you will have to learn to do, rather than just do instinctually. You have magic in you, a rather large amount, similar to that which a fae Monarch would. Possibly more… as I’ve said, there hasn’t been a true Champion of the Labyrinth in time beyond remembering.

“Fae magic, it’s using magic to make your will manifest.” With a flick of his wrist there was a single rose lying in front of Sarah on the table. She picked it up and took a careful sniff. She frowned when it smelled very clearly of lavender.

“In its first most basic form, it’s good for something fairly simple, perhaps with a few added flairs. One has to hold in one’s mind exactly what one wants for the entire duration of the spell and its creation. If the spell has a time element involved, then one has to focus one’s mind and magic for the entire length of the spell.” In her hand, the rose petals began to slowly fall away, until she held a rose stem with a sprig of lavender attached at the end. Another sniff confirmed her suspicion. It smelled of roses.

“Spoken words can help focus the mind. It is what you picture that your magic will create. If you cannot maintain your focus, the magic will create whatever you imagine. If you imagine the spell going wrong…. There is a reason I would not normally being teaching a fire breathing spell to someone learning magic, but more on that later. Without a crystal, I can do things more than just a simple flower and a few tricks, but this is to demonstrate scope.

“Which brings me to the crystal.” With another flick of his wrist, there sat a crystal in his palm. He casually threw it onto the table. Suddenly the table was covered with… the first word that sprung to mind was ‘flower arrangements’. There were vases, yes, but they were made up of what looking like
roots and small branches, woven delicately together. They all seemed to be from different kinds of trees, in slightly different colours and barks. And as for the flowers… delicate crystal structures, in all sorts of different colours and kinds. It was backwards and gorgeous and so entirely Jareth. She was entranced. She reached out and gently touched one of the flowers: it was warm.

“Crystals can contain large amounts of magical information and spells can be subdivided into crystals. The more complex the spell, the more crystals are needed. Crystals can also be a way of letting people large spells together. The difficult part is creating the crystal, activating it requires next to no effort at all. To give you a sense of how much magic a crystal can hold…” He trailed off, frowning. “I could tell you that one hundred crystals made by three Monarchs were required for the great working at the Battle of Tär, or that the stopping of the Flood of Ùll took thirteen, but I doubt you have any idea what either of those are.” She shook her head when he glanced at her. “Well then. The spell for the Crystal Ballroom took four crystals.” She suppressed a flinch. The Crystal Ball, what he’d done to her, what he might still be capable of still doing to her, was not a pleasant thought.

“I know it's something we'd both rather not dwell on, but it does give you that sense of scope. Crystal magic is the harder of the two, but it is also, in most cases, the more useful. It is faster to create and a crystal can be made and held in reserve. Once the crystal is created, it no longer requires the focus of the magic user to act. However, the creation of a crystal is much more complex. You must hold the entire spell, the part of it you wish that crystal to hold, in your mind at once. Colour, sight, sound, shape, size, duration, any changes you want to occur during the spell, all of it. And you must be able to hold everything needed in your mind for the time it takes”—he flicked his wrist in the gesture she'd seen him use—“to conjure a crystal.

“I've spent so long using magic that that kind of focus is almost second nature to me. You, however, like all beginner magic users, must begin by learning how to work magic without the crystal, learn what to hold in your mind and how. Actually, the first thing you need to learn is how to control the amount of magic you actually use to perform a spell. Currently you use far too much. It is as though you are using the force needed to lift a solid oak table when what you really need is the amount to raise a tea cup. This is why you grow tired so quickly. The trick to building your magical stamina is learning to use the minimum amount of magic and thought required for a spell.”

“That's stamina?” Sarah asked. It seemed more like finesse to her. Or practice. Or control. Or something.

“Oh Precious, nonsensical terminology is not limited to mortals. But do you understand the concept?” Sarah groaned to herself. You’d think that people who worked by ‘what’s said is said’ would have terminology that made at least a little sense. Still, if she wanted to breathe fire, and all the other cool stuff, she’d have to work to understand it anyway.

“So, essentially, I need to try less hard?” Sarah tried. She hadn't realized she was trying at all.
“Not exactly...” He frowned. “I think the best way to explain this is through you doing it. I'll explain as you go.”

“Alright. So, what do I do first?” Magic! She was about to do actual magic! And on purpose this time! While she'd been using magic for a while now, this time she was using it because she wanted to. And she'd probably not be knocked on her butt exhausted afterwards. Jareth’s eyes sparkled with an enthusiasm to match her own, though he hid it behind a serious, teacherly expression.

“First, you must find the place where magic resides inside you. There should be a part of you that you can sense when you use magic. Perhaps it is a buzzing or prickling sensation? It's different for everyone. The center of that sensation is where your magic lives. See if you can find it in yourself.” Sarah nodded and closed her eyes. She thought about the wishes she'd made, and how it actually felt to make a wish. She cast around in herself, trying to find something that felt different, but nothing was working. Everything just felt like her. It wasn't like she used magic enough to have it feel so natural, was it? No wait, that gave her an idea.

“Labyrinth? Am I using magic to speak to you?”

“Of course you are! What did you think you were using? A paper and pen? Really, if you'd taken much longer, We would have had to say something.”

“But isn't this the kind of magic that I'm not supposed to be learning? Do I have another centre of magic I need to find, for regular Fae magic?”

“All magic is the same, Champion, and you have far more than you know. It is only how you chose to use it that differs. Tell me, My Queen-To-Be, can you feel how these thoughts are different from your other ones?”

“Yeah, they... Aren't entirely inside my own head.”

“However you interpret it, it is your magic. Now, attend to your lesson. And marry your teacher.”

Ignoring that last part, which seemed more like an afterthought on the Labyrinth's part, Sarah opened her eyes.
“Found it,” she said, looking at Jareth, who was studying her intensely.

“Very good. For our first attempt, you will try to conjure something. Pick something familiar to you, that you can imagine in every detail. To begin, nothing too complex. A book, for example, might seem simple, but to conjure, not just summon, one must be able to think about the book, its contents, the number of pages, and so on. Can you think of something?”

After a few moments, Sarah had it. The first Bowie poster she'd ever gotten. God knew she'd stared at enough, memorized the way the lightning bolt fell across his face, how his eyelashes looked, the liquid gathered at his collar bones. She'd even sketched it a few times. She knew it backwards and forwards. It was exactly what she needed.

“Got it.”

“Excellent.” He smiled, about as excited as she was, she suspected. “Now, keep your idea of it clearly in your mind and, a little bit at a time, add magic to it. It's harder to explain than it is to do. Go, give it a try. You'll know when you've gathered enough to conjure it.”

Sarah closed her eyes again, it was easier to do all of this without being distracted. She focused on her mental image of the poster and slowly, a little bit at a time, she added magic to it. Somehow, adding magic to David Bowie seemed natural.

No, adding the magic wasn't the hard part, the hard part was the “a little bit at a time”. That other part of her that she now knew to be magic had a mind of its own. It could feel that she wanted to create something and wanted to throw all of its considerable force behind it. She understood what Jareth had meant about lifting an oak table. Adding only small amounts to her image took ridiculous mental willpower. But she was the Champion of the Labyrinth; willpower she had in spades.

Even so, when ever she reached for the magic, more came than she wanted. She wasn't in control—

Blood, trickling down Sokka’s arm. A knife in Jet’s hand, moonlight glinting on knife and metal both. She was afraid, she was so very afraid—

“NO!” She threw all her mental force into the scream. Any control over her magic was gone as it flooded her, backing up her desperate desire to get away from the memory.
“Sarah.” Her name cut through her panic and she managed to open her eyes. She was breathing way too fast and she couldn’t slow down and the memory it just wouldn’t—

“Sarah, Precious, look at me,” the voice said again, pulling her back towards the present. The voice, didn’t belong to the memory. She found a pair of blue eyes and they held her gaze. “Sarah, you are safe here. Now breathe.” He started breathing deeply, eyes not letting hers go, and she found her breath slowing to match his. “Are you alright?” Jareth asked, after at least a minute of deep and steadying breathing.

Shakily, Sarah nodded. She’d had to deal with the memories before, but never had it been so intense. She still didn’t feel like she could speak.

“I take it that that was not what you meant to conjure?” He gestured to where a bloodied knife was embedded point first in the chair across from her.

“I—” She couldn’t speak. The knife had blood on it. Sokka’s blood. Her blood. She couldn’t look away. The terror was pushing its way back up her throat.

“Really, Precious, one might almost think you found a pedestrian dagger more attractive to the eye than me.” The terror transformed into a snort and she rolled her eyes at him, seeing him preening and looking at her with far too perceptive eyes.

“Precious—” He cut himself off, frowning. “Sarah, did you speak with the Lady about what happened with Jet?”

“Er… yes? I guess that’s why it’s on my mind right now…” She was lying and they both knew it. Still, instead of pressing her on it, he frowned and conjured a crystal, staring into its depths at something she couldn’t see. His frown deepened before he looked up at her.

“Unfortunately, there’s something I must deal with at once. However, I’d prefer to not leave you alone at the moment. Would you like to examine the library with… Ludo I believe his name was, to keep you company?”

“You’d let Ludo in a library?” Sarah asked. And she’d thought it would be difficult to get him onto the grounds at all for some quality hug time. The stress of Beltane was really getting to her.
“Not exactly moving the stars, Precious,” he smirked.

“Then, yeah, that does sound nice.” Sarah smiled faintly. It would give her a chance to get her composure back.

“Excellent, I’ll leave you to finish eating then. When you’re done, call for a servant and they will show you to the Library. Your friend will be waiting for you. And, Precious, I’m sorry that I have to deal with this now, but should you want to talk about this la—”

“Don’t you have some emergency to deal with? Don’t worry about me, I’m fine.”

He frowned at her, then at the crystal. “Very well, I’ll come to you once I’ve dealt with this. It shouldn’t take long at all.” And with what Sarah suspected was a forced smile, he was gone. And without explaining the damn fire trick. She’d have to get it out of him later…

Sarah eyed her soup with loathing and called for a servant. She didn’t feel like eating, and besides, Ludo was waiting for her. She could read some books and get some snuggles and unwind. It would be great. Really. It would.

Chapter End Notes

My poor, poor Sarah. Why must I hurt you so? >:) *cackles*
“I’m sorry, Lady, but His Majesty was very specific. Only people who he has approved in writing and in person can be admitted to see the prisoner. I have neither of these permissions for you. You could try to get an audience with him and then get him to give you permission? With your position, Lady, it shouldn’t be hard to get to—Your Majesty!”

“Kel’fic, Hel’fa, as you were. I’m here to check on the prisoner. Ursa, join me.” Jareth stepped forward and the guards moved out of his way, giving him access to the heavy wooden door that led to the scum’s cell. He pushed it open and the shape on the floor flinched at the sudden light. His cell was normally kept completely dark. Jareth gestured Ursa in ahead of him and closed the door firmly behind him. He knew no sound of their conversation would escape the cell, not if screams didn’t. He conjured a crystal to illuminate both their conversation and the state the boy was in. It hung in the air between them.

Ursa eyed the man on the floor and her hand slipped under her cloak.

“I can’t let you kill him, you know, so you may as well let go of the dagger,” he said, almost offhandedly, leaning casually against the door. His eyes were sharp.

Ursa froze in place, hand still under her cloak. “He tried to kill my son.”

“Technically, he tried to kill your son’s friend and my Sarah.” He held back his rage. He could come visit this pitiful excuse for a human again later. After he’d had Her’ta heal some of the damage from his last session. After all, he couldn’t risk death. But even so, he could be incredibly sure that this boy would never be able to hurt Sarah ever again. He would also make a fine example to anyone who dared think of doing so. “Your son just got in the way.” Ursa’s shoulder tensed and he prepared his magic, but before she did anything rash, she took a deep breath, turned around and smiled at him with a soft, concerned look. Jareth could feel the rage boiling just below the surface.

“Exactly, Your Majesty. He nearly killed your beloved. Doesn’t someone who would commit so awful a crime deserve death?”

Jareth snorted. “I am not your husband, Ursa, and I have played this game for much, much longer than you have been alive. Don't think I'll be so easily played.”

Ursa’s calm facade slipped and she looked about ready to spit poison. She tightened her grip on her dagger. Jareth conjured a crystal and let it dance across his fingers as he continued to speak. “You see, I would normally agree with you. Were it my decision alone he would be dead. It would have been a long and painful death, a death that would make it very clear what would happen to anyone who even tried to hurt my Sarah, but he would be dead. However, this decision is not mine. Sarah, She Who Was Wronged, my beloved, has asked that he be kept alive.” He dropped the crystal and it rolled across the slightly slanted ground and into the body that lay curled there.

Jet’s screams were horrible, soul-wrenching screams of pure agony. Jareth smiled grimly. The spell he’d chosen to inflict would be especially painful with all the bones he’d broken. Jareth thought of
the terror on Sarah's face as she used far too much magic to drive the memory of the knife and all its
associated memories away from her. He would not flinch from this task.

After some time, he let the spell fade and the screams turned to choked whimpers.

"The only reason I agreed not to execute him is that his life was the only thing she requested. There
are many things I can do to him that leave him alive." His expression was granite. "If barely."

Ursa turned and looked at the shuddering mess on the floor. If looks could kill then Jareth rather
thought he'd have a lot of explaining to do to Sarah.

"For what he did, for what he tried to do, he deserves death, Your Majesty. Not this." Jareth cocked
his head and considered her.

"You were the wife of a Sozin, Madam Ursa, surely you of all people know that there are fates
worse than death. And in any case, he must stay alive. My Lady does not trust me, despite the fact I
cannot lie. If he were to die while in my care, I doubt she would ever come to believe it wasn’t by
my order, in some way. And there are ways I could arrange for him to die, if I so wished it.
However, I will respect her wishes, and so will you."

Ursa’s hand tightened on the dagger. Jareth began to grow tired of not getting through to her. When
it came to her children, the woman could be rather… focused. “Madam Ursa, if you force my hand, I
will kill you before I let you kill this boy. Sarah is too valuable to the Kingdom, to the Labyrinth, to
myself to allow you to drive her away. You would have given your life in service to the Goblin
Kingdom, your son will remain protected by the agreement we struck, but you will be dead and he
will still be alive. If you ask me, it does seem like rather a needless waste.” He let his tone soften.

“I would rather you stay alive, Madam. You’ve been a wonderful resource, helping the Wished
Away get settled, and all those children look to you for guidance, no matter how old they eventually
grow. Finding someone new to do this job, someone who would do it as well, who would love them
as you do, someone who makes them feel safe in this new and strange land they will call home,
someone whom they will love and respect as they do you... well, it would be difficult and time
consuming and such a waste.

“However, he does need to be punished for his crime. I return to check on him regularly, as he is,
after all, my prisoner. I have had centuries to come up with tortures to administer and hundreds of
examples to make. It is not a part of my job that I take much joy in, but it is one I have become quite
good at. However, even with all of my years of experience, you were once Ursa Sozin, and the wife
of Ozai. It is possible you know of things I have not imagined. I could add you to the list of his care-
givers, under supervision, of course, as well as a spell to ensure that you would die before you could
kill him. Nevertheless, you would be able to repay him for the harm he did your son and his friends.”
He cocked his head to the side, considering her as her eyes flicked between him and the boy and her
hand tightened and relaxed on the dagger. Almost.

“Well, Ursa Sozin, will you use what your husband taught you, finally find something—good—to
make it into? Your response?"

She shot the boy one last poisonous look and let go of the hilt of her dagger. “Very well, Your
Majesty. I leave him to you and your centuries of experience.” The corner of Jareth's lips quirked up.

“In that case, let us get out of this pit. I would have as little contact possible with... this while Sarah is
in my kingdom. She doesn’t need to be exposed to any more reminders.” He reached out and
plucked the crystal from the air and pressed it into door, which swung open. Once again, he gestured Ursa ahead of him, followed her out and shut the door behind him, cutting off the continued sounds of whimpers.

“Kel’fic, Hel’fa, keep up the good work.” Jareth said, turning to his guards. “Madam Ursa will not be returning.” Ursa nodded and smiled at the guards, no trace of her murderous intent left.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go bathe and change before returning to my Lady. No part of this should come near her. Carry on.”

He started to picture his library, ready to transport himself to his waiting lady.

“Your Majesty?” Ursa said, stopping Jareth where he stood. “Thank you.”

“You know,” Jareth replied, smirking, “I believe I once heard someone say ‘never forget who you are’. It struck me as good advice,” and with that, he transported himself to his room, to get all traces of her attacker away from him before returning to his lady’s side.

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“How the hell was there a flood of Apples?” Sarah asked, when Jareth appeared behind her. How she’d known he was there, she wasn't sure, but when she turned around and looked, there he was, frowning down at her.

“Flood of apples?” he asked, as Ludo sat up and dislodged Sarah from the couch.

“King!” Ludo cried, looking at Jareth with a huge smile, his tail starting to wag and threaten Sarah's hair.

“Ludo!” Sarah cried, giving him a shove. He lumbered to the side and turned back to look at her.

“Sowwy Sawah,” he said, helping to pull her up. Sarah brushed her skirts back down as Jareth gave her a look showing he was clearly wondering why on earth she insisted on counting Ludo as one of her friends.

“It's alright, Ludo, don't worry about it. I had a lot of fun cuddling, seriously, but I need to talk to Jareth now, so maybe we can hang out more some other time. Alright?”

“Yeah Sawah. Bye.” He pulled her in for another hug.

“Ludo,” Jareth called when he let Sarah go.

“Yes, King?” Ludo asked, turning to face him. He would have knocked Sarah down again if she hadn't taken a practiced step back.

“Catch,” Jareth replied, throwing him a crystal. Ludo caught it with a happy, curious expression, and promptly vanished. “I merely saved him the walk back to the Labyrinth and all of us dealing with the screaming terror of my subjects,” he reassured her before she could even open her mouth to ask. She was glad for the reassurance, even if she was more curious than worried. Spending time with Ludo had been nice. He felt safe and he didn't ask any questions she didn't want to answer and he was more than happy to be a great big pillow for her if that was what she wanted.
“Sarah.” Jareth frowned at her and she tried not to flinch. Of course good things couldn't last and he was using her name and she didn't want to deal with this. “About what happened at—”

“You still owe me an explanation about a flood of apples. And why twelve crystals were needed. This book,” she picked up the book that had fallen with her when Ludo moved and held it out. “Made very little sense. Your librarian recommended it when I wanted a book on the subject, nice guy, by the way, but seriously, it was like a drunk guy wrote it in between vomiting bouts,” not that Sarah, the college student, had any idea what a paper written by someone in that state looked like, of course not...

Jareth frowned and took the book from her, scanning through it.

“Really? I've always found Katheniel to be an eloquent and succinct writer. If you want something truly complex you should have seen the books on the subject my tutors made me read. Thank the God and Goddess for father slipping me this for bedtime reading, the other texts made no sense whatsoever...” He flipped through a few more pages before seeming to find the passage he was looking for.

“The rains had not let up for two weeks and the canals that the kingdom had built were not strong enough to contain and divert the deluge. The spirits of the Apple trees had claimed the hill Cnoc na Ulla as their own, and they had begun to grow there; but on the fourteenth day of heavy rain the canal at the top of Cnoc na Ulla was beginning to collapse and wash the hill away. The waters began to work away at the roots of the—”

“That's so not what it says, how is that what it says?” Sarah interrupted him and took back the book and scanned where he'd been reading.

“The vertical river went sploosh lots and the veins could not contain the life blood given to it,” she read aloud, incredibly confused. Jareth frowned at her and looked over her shoulder. She suppressed a flinch and tried to subtly move so that he wasn't at her back. She suspected he noticed anyway, given the way he moved to the side, so that he was no longer behind her.

“I can assure you, Sarah, that nowhere on this page was anything you just said.” He frowned in thought and Sarah took a moment to admire him as she watched the wheels of his mind turn. Deep in thought was a good look on him, she decided. Her life might feel like it was going to hell in a very lively hand basket these days but at least her.... um... yeah... was attractive.

“Sarah, what alphabet does this seem to be written in for you?”

“The English one?” she asked, the ‘duh’ obvious in her voice. Saying it aloud made her realize the problem with that statement. “So, what language is it actually written in?”

“Fae,” Jareth replied, amusement colouring his tone. “It would seem that the Labyrinth’s skills in translation mostly apply to only spoken languages. Should you decide to stay, we'll have to work on your reading of the language. That or we could assign you a reader, someone to read you documents in languages you can't yet read. However, I know you well enough to know that you'd prefer to be able to do it yourself. Perhaps a combination of both to begin with, and then you could transfer to reading more on your own as you get better at it. We can discuss it more should you decide to stay.” He smiled softly at her and took a step away giving her some space. Giving her space? Remembering it was her choice and that she hadn't said yes? Who was this guy and what had he done with Jareth?
“So, the great Apple flood?” Sarah asked.

“The short version?” Jareth asked, taking a seat on the couch. Sarah nodded as she took a seat herself. Not next to him, but not away from him either. A careful balancing act, much like the rest of their relationship. “Well, the Dryad Kingdom suffered much more severe rains than was expected one hear. Their complex and well-maintained irrigation and flood control system—they are, after all, a kingdom of trees—could not handle these rains. One key canal overflowed and risked wiping out an entire hillside of apple trees. Nearly a hundred lives would have been lost, and the death of a dryad who has been separated from their tree is not a pretty one. The King and Queen of the realm had several crystals waiting in case of just such an emergency and managed to act quickly enough to save the trees and divert the flood.”

“This is known as a great work? It's something you study?”

“It's an excellent example of careful planning and monitoring of one's Kingdom going well, as well as emphasizing the importance of resource management and being prepared for emergencies. The Flood of Ùll is something most monarchs in training will study. Perhaps some time when you aren't here to retreat from school work, we can go over its implications. Your summer vacation begins soon, correct?”

“Exams should be over in about a month, yeah,” Sarah replied. “And then I'm heading home for the summer. You know, away from school?”

The corner of Jareth’s mouth quirked up. “Then perhaps after you've had a chance to unwind from school. Although, should you take his course, I understand it's a topic Professor Rincewind covers every semester. And, of course, you could always do—” he paused mid-phrase, head cocked to the side. He quickly conjured a crystal and stared into its depths before looking up at Sarah in a way that reminded her of Toby on Christmas.

“Another unexplained emergency?” she asked, feeling confused.

“The exact opposite, precious, and I am sorry that I had to run off earlier. My kingdom does seem to enjoy throwing me emergencies at inopportune times, especially when I'm trying to spend time with you. If the Labyrinth hadn't been quite so... Explicit in how much she wanted you as her Queen and my bride, I might accuse her of interfering.” He glanced at the crystal again and, if anything, his smile grew. “This is a rather pleasant surprise I was hoping would happen while you were here.”

“What is it?”

“Now now Precious, that would spoil the surprise. Can you trust me?”

He held out the hand with the crystal on it.

“If so, you need only touch the crystal and remain quiet, for it is important we stay unobserved, and I can keep us invisible but sound is harder to do. Well?”

Sarah looked at him, at the crystal, and back at him. He'd been respecting her need for space, he'd been respectful, really, he'd been pretty wonderful since she got here. She decided she could trust him for this. And if she was wrong then by now she knew she was more than capable of transporting herself away and all the way to the Aboveground if need be. She reached out and placed her hand on the crystal.
She found herself in a clearing in the Labyrinth. Jareth placed a single long finger over his lips and gestured towards the center of the clearing.

There stood Hoggle and Am’ya. Hoggle was looking very nervous and speaking.

“-it's been some time, now, Am’ya, that we've been courting, and I know I'm asking for a lot, but, well, you’re the most beautiful, wonderful woman I know, and,” he reached into an inner pocket of his vest with a trembling hand and pulled out the necklace that the Labyrinth had created for him with Sarah’s plastic gem the night before. “Am’ya, will you marry me?”

Sarah had to suppress a squeal and smiled hugely at Jareth. He wasn't paying any attention to the scene in front of them. He looked only at her.

Sarah didn't have time to waste looking at attractive fae men, she had a friend to silently root for.

Am’ya reached out reverently for the necklace.

“Hoggle, this is plastic... How did you manage to get...” She looked at him with wide eyes.

“Oh, I have my ways,” he replied smiling at her, nervousness emanating from his whole body. Her dear friend had come a long way over the years, but this had to be at least as scary as going against Jareth, even if Sarah could see that Am’ya was clearly going to say—

“Oh, of course I'll marry you Hoggle!” said Am’ya, throwing herself into his arms and knocking them both to the floor. Sarah felt like her smile was going to split her face. She was so happy for her friend, so happy that at least one of her friends had something so good, so wonderful, so pure happening in their life. It was so good to see something that was just purely good. She felt the magic shoot out of her feet and into her Labyrinth. All over the clearing, vines sprung to life and the most incredible flowers burst out and covered all the walls. Jareth's eyes shot up, but he smiled at her, and flicked his wrist in a familiar gesture. A cloud of glitter appeared and fell softly over the couple.

“Hoggle! Look!” Am’ya said, sitting up and cupping her hands, letting the glitter gather in it. “The Labyrinth has blessed our marriage!”

“I know,” Hoggle said distractedly as he looked around suspiciously.

“You know?” Am’ya replied, rounding on him. “Just what do you mean, you know?”

“Well, you see, last night I was called to the throne room,” Hoggle started to explain to his curious fiancée. Jareth stepped into her field of vision, careful to make no sound, and offered her his hand. Smiling, and glad to have seen it, she took it.

She blinked and found herself back in the library. Throwing herself forward, she wrapped a surprised Jareth in a hug. The surprise didn't stop him from quickly returning the hug, though.

“Thank you,” she said, leaning back and smiling up at him. “Thank you for letting me see that.”

“Oh, of course, precious. It is lovely to see you smile.” He smiled down at her with such warmth and an expression she didn't care to name. She wasn't ready to face that yet. “Now,” he continued, letting her pull out of the hug. “Would you care to join me for an early supper? It would be nice to share a meal with you that was actually—” There was a knock at the door. Jareth glared before finishing, “Uninterrupted. Come in,” he called.
A servant stepped into the room and bowed.

“Sire, Lord Klibdus is here to see you on most urgent business. He awaits you in the throne room.”

“Did he say what this business was?” Jareth asked, keeping his voice fairly level. Sarah was impressed.

“No, sire, only that you would want to know immediately, and that he has found something that he thinks will be of great use to you.”

“Very well, thank you, that will be all,” he waved the servant away before turning back to Sarah. “Sarah, precious, it seems that I must deal with this. Hopefully it will not take long. I'll rejoin you here, once this is dealt with? You can ask the librarian to direct you to our selection of English books. I know we have at least a small collection.”

“And then we can do dinner,” Sarah reassured him. “Go on, I'll find someway to entertain myself.”

With a final nod at her he was gone and Sarah wondered off to track down the librarian.

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Klibdus stood tall and proud in the throne room, hands clasped behind his back and refusing to give into his urge to pace. He was running a risk doing this, but for his friend and especially for his sister, it was worth it.

Jareth appeared in his throne and gave Klibdus a rather irritated, if curious, look.

“Klidbus, what urgent matter demands my immediate attention. I am entertaining a guest...”

“Would that guest be your mortal Champion?”

“Sarah does not belong to me, Klibdus. She belongs to no one but herself.” The impressed and nearly reverent tone his old friend used to speak of the mortal bemused Klibdus, but his friend had always been strange.

“And you have no power over her, I am aware,” Klibdus continued, not wanting to put off the reason for his visit any longer than he had to. “But what if I told you you could? What if I told you I have a solution to all your dilemmas. Something that would solve the situation you find yourself in with my sister. A way for you to keep the mortal forever.”

“What in all the worlds are you talking about?” Jareth asked, leaning forward, eyebrows drawn down.

With one last deep breath Klibdus reached into an inner pocket and pulled out a vial full of potion. He watched his friend's eyes zero in on it and smirked. This would work, all the preparations, all the risks, it would all be worth it.

“Klibdus, what is that?”

***
“Champion, there is something you must see,” the Labyrinth spoke in Sarah's mind, interrupting her reading. Trust Jareth to have a copy of Rosetti.

“Where do you need me to transport myself?” she asked.

“Allow me, and remain absolutely silent, Champion. They cannot know you are there. You need to see the outcome of this.” Carefully Sarah put the book on the table.

“Alright, let's go.”

Sarah found herself in the throne room. Jareth was sitting in his throne, leaning forward, an expression of interest on his face. He was looking at another man in the room—’must be Klibdus’—who was holding a bottle filled with a strange red and black liquid aloft between them. The bottle was obviously the focus of the conversation. Klidbus opened his mouth to answer a question Sarah had missed.

“My dear friend, it's a love potion.”

Chapter End Notes

About the beginning. Sarah and Jareth are experiencing culture clash. Remember, when Sarah asked that Jet be kept alive, Jareth was surprised at her cruelty. To Jareth, what he's doing might be regrettable, but it is also completely justified. He doesn't feel guilt about this at all. He isn't human, and this creature hurt something that was his. There's a reason that scene is disturbing.

Sarah, on the other hand *would never allow this to happen*. This is not what she wanted at all. The idea that it would be done for her, in her name, would horrify her beyond belief.

This will cause tensions later on....

Also, in slightly worse news. I have recently developed a temporary syndrome that requires me to wear a wrist and thumb brace 90% of the time. The other 10% the night a week I wash it and the times I'm doing exams. Unfortunately, it makes typing awkward and painful, so I'm really not sure how long till the next chapter. It's about a third done, but since I got the brace, I've barely written anything. Sorry guys, I'll have it to you as soon as I can!
Sarah's hands covered her mouth as she shook her head, eyes locked on the bottle. She needed to get away. They couldn't know she was here. *She couldn't let him trap her again!*

“*Wait!*” The Labyrinth’s voice cut through her panic. “And watch how he responds.”

Sarah dragged her eyes away from the bottle that contained her personal hell and towards the man that, despite everything that had happened in the last few weeks, she was afraid would try to force her into it.

Jareth’s eyebrows had shot up.

“*Klibdus, do you have any idea how illegal that is? What the High King and the Council would do to you if they knew you had tried to get it, nevermind that you actually had it?*”

“It's worth it. For you, for my sister,” there was a lot of complex emotion behind that last word. Worry, frustration, confusion, love, a desire to protect, Sarah was familiar with them all as sibling herself. She felt some very unwilling sympathy for the man that wanted to drug her. “*It was incredibly difficult, but I think you'll agree it was worth the effort.*”

“Effort wasted.” Jareth frowned “*It wouldn't work. I have no power over her, remember?*”

“Believe me, Klio has complained about listening to you complain about that fact more than enough to drum it permanently into my skull.” He complained about that? She'd known she couldn’t trust him. (“*Hush,*” the Labyrinth instructed.) “And I’ve also heard of her rumored immunity to all Underground poisons. Whether or not that one is true—you can never be sure, Klio has informed me that she is definitely *not* ten feet tall, nor can she breathe fire. Really Jareth, I can't imagine what you see in her—I have also found a way around that.”
“Indeed?” Jareth asked, leaning forward, inviting Klibdus to continue. Sarah felt sick.

“Yes. If it was true about the Underground poisons, then I needed to use only Aboveground ingredients. Difficult, but doable. However, the ‘no power over her’ was much harder to bypass. After all, you are a monarch. There are very few creatures you have no power over. There are the Kings and Queens of other kingdoms. However, there are none I know as well as I know you. I would not trust them to not try to turn me into the council to gain favour. However, there are a select few Fae whom you do not have power over. Fae who will have practice doing complex magic with only Aboveground things.”

“An exile,” Jareth said, voice very flat. “You dealt with an exile.”

“Brilliant, I know,” Klibdus replied, smirking. “Of course, this only works because it is a potion. No magic is required to activate it.”

“Brilliant, indeed,” Jareth replied, eyes bright. He leaned forward and put out his hand. “Let me see it.” Smiling victoriously, Klibdus handed it over. Jareth lifted it to eye level and regarded it carefully.

“He took the damn potion! What more do you want?!” Sarah screamed to the Labyrinth in her mind. She'd been right to not trust him. He didn't want her. He didn't love her. He did just want a fucking submissive whore. Being right shouldn't hurt this much, she couldn't help but think.

“Your patience,” the Labyrinth snapped back. “I have watched him grow for two and a half thousand years. Now attend.” Frowning and terrified, despite the Labyrinth’s words—after all, she'd made it very clear how much She wanted Sarah to stay and be Her Queen. Would She side with Jareth? Force her to stay against her will? Jareth had no power over her, true, but everything she'd heard suggested that the Labyrinth was more powerful than him, so, did that mean— “This is not attending. And, besides, We want you as Our Queen, not what that love potion would make you. Now, attend.” Fighting down all her terror, Sarah forced herself to actually listen to what Jareth was saying.

“—feel the power even through the gloves and container,” he finished, considering it carefully. “Tell me, could you get me a second dose, should something go wrong with this one, or one dose be simply not enough to subdue her significant magical resistance?”

She wanted to cry. She wanted to scream. She held still and quiet instead.
“Now, Jareth, I’d like to think you wouldn’t be so careless as to let something go wrong with the love potion. While A Midsummer’s Night Dream is a wonderful play, and it would be quite amusing if you managed to tag another mortal—watching them destroy themselves at the command of the magic would be quite the show—the council did rule that love potions were illegal on even mortals, and it will be both of our necks on the line.”

“I think you underestimate her powers, Klibdus, a mistake you shouldn’t make, even once.” He frowned, probably recalling all the castle repairs and Goblin City clean up that she’d left him with the time he’d made that mistake. “I’ve seen her eat Banshee’s Call and be completely unaffected. There are things I could do to lower her magical defenses, but they are not exactly subtle. There’s a risk she’d notice. A second dose would be so much simpler.” Jareth threw a leg over the side of his throne, and let a gaze that seemed casual and disinterested swing between the potion he still held and Klibdus.

“Jareth, there are more than enough power enhancers in there to ensure that she will be your loyal, loving slave until long after you’ve married my sister.” Sarah could hear the dismissive exasperation leaking into his voice.

“Nevertheless, can you get your hands on another dose.” Jareth’s intense eyes belied his relaxed pose.

“No. Probably not,” Klibdus replied, frowning in annoyance. “And even if I could, the dose would be nowhere near as powerful.”

“Excellent,” Jareth replied, throwing down the bottle and smashing it on the floor. Standing, thunder in his face, Jareth stalked towards Klibdus. “How could you, who has known me for well over a thousand years, possibly think I would use this.” Jareth looked like he couldn’t decide if he wanted to strike Klibdus or strangle him. “This is the vilest form of magic. Even if I did not love Sarah, which I do, more than you could possibly comprehend—and the Sarah I love is the woman who beat my Labyrinth, my challenger, my champion, my equal, not some fucking submissive whore! To use this on someone, to force their word, that you would even—” he cut himself off, his hands twitching at his sides.

Sarah hadn’t ever seen him this angry. Not even with Jet. She could feel the dark cloud gathering around him, just waiting to be used. She flinched back, afraid of what she was about to see Jareth do. Klibdus almost cowered before him. “Go,” Jareth finally managed, holding his hands still. “For the love I bear your sister, I will not tell the Council of your actions. Now leave, and I’d suggest staying out of my sight.” Eyes wide, Klibdus turned and fled towards the door.

“Oh, and Klibdus? Stay away from Sarah, or I can assure you—” his voice was soft, but his smile was one that had appeared in Sarah’s most terrified imaginings “—you will live to regret it.” With a
wave of Jareth’s hand, Klibdus vanished.

“Now, I believe there are some things you and my Lord need to speak of, yes?” the Labyrinth whispered in her mind. “I’ll leave you two to it then.” And Sarah felt the Labyrinth's magic unweave itself from her, leaving her alone in a room with the man of her dreams and the man of her nightmares. Funny, how they’d turned out to be the same person.

“Sarah,” Jareth whispered, eyes snapping towards her as she faded into sight. His eyes widened, then he frowned. Finally his face went very carefully blank. “Stay away from that, it's dangerous,” he said, tone and eyes guarded, as he pointed to the shattered glass and splattered potion by his throne.

“You think dangerous is a serious enough word for a love potion? Wouldn't horrific or even evil be more accurate?”

“So you heard.” There was very little inflection in his voice.

“I heard enough to know that you might wanna rethink your taste in friends. Not that I wanna tell you who you can hang out with, I mean, I wouldn't react well to you trying to dictate who my friends are. Then again, none of my friends have suggested drugging you.” She paused, frowning. “Well, except Toph that one time, cause she was annoyed at the lack of dirt she had on you, but Katara talked her out of it.” A puff of air escaped Jareth in a small laugh and the corners of his lips turned up for a moment. Sarah felt herself relax a little at the sight. Perhaps this wouldn't be so hard after all.

“I also heard the part where you told him no.” Another breath, for luck, for courage, for no turning back, “and the part where you said you loved me. Me, all of me, the me you have no power over, I heard that too. You’ve never told me you loved me before.” She crossed her arms, leaned back and raised an eyebrow. “As a matter of fact, you still haven't. You've implied it, sure, and now I've overheard you confess, but I don't think that counts. I mean, I know ‘what's said is said’ is how you guys work, but it's hard to take comfort in that when you won't say it.”

The transformation of Jareth’s face from guarded to hopeful warmed her heart. Yes, it was time and past time for both of them to heal a little.

“In that case, Sarah Williams, allow me to give you peace of mind.” He offered her both of his hands, and, fighting a smile and the voice in her head that still thought this was a trap, somehow, Sarah placed her hands in his. His eyes were bright, and his breath a little fast—she wondered if his hands would be sweaty if he weren't wearing the gloves. “I love you, She-Who-Should-Be-Queen, Champion of the Labyrinth, Ruler of my heart,” he smirked a little as he said it, but what was said was said and there was no going back now. Not for either of them. “Sarah, you are the woman I love, the person with whom I want to spend the rest of my rather immortal life with, the partner with
whom I want to raise our children—inevitable arguments about parenting styles and all. I want to wake up next to you every morning, and stand by you and marvel and support you as you continue on the journey to become the person you will be. I love you, Sarah Williams, with all my heart.”

“Well.” Sarah blinked at the conviction in his voice. He really did love her. It really was time and past time for them both. “I just want to say, this doesn't change my decision on marrying you, I still won't agree without the negotiations, but, I think I'm ready.” She stepped in towards him, and leaned up to kiss him, soft and slow and sweet. “Really, the only question left is,” she leaned back a little and winked at him, “your bedroom, or mine?”

He gaped at her for barely a second, but it was more than long enough for her to decide it was a good look on him. She wanted to make him look like that again. But too soon the gaping was converted to something between a smirk and a smile that Sarah decided she liked just as well. He gripped her hands a little more tightly.

“Oh, mine, Precious.” He released one of her hands, summoned a crystal and dropped it at their feet. Sarah blinked and when she'd opened her eyes again, she found herself in Jareth's bedroom. “My bed is bigger.” He smirked.

That it certainly was. This might be the third time Sarah had been in this room, but she'd never really bothered to look around before. The two previous times she'd been...otherwise occupied. It was quite a spacious room. There was no closet, but she bet at least one of the doors along the wall lead to a walk-in-closet. Probably more than one, knowing his taste in clothes.

There were plenty of bookshelves around the room as well. That was all she'd really had time to notice, before Jareth’s lips caressed the side of her neck. At some point, she’d actually look around, but that, she decided firmly, could wait. She leaned back against him as his hands slid around her waist, holding her close. The whole time, he never stopped teasing her neck. Her hormones were right, she decided, as she let out soft moan. It had been way too long since she’d done this.

“Sarah,” he whispered into her ear, before trailing a slow line of kisses down her neck. Too slow. He held her tenderly, lovingly and—and—and it wasn’t what Sarah wanted. It wasn’t what she needed. She wanted to heal, to move on, yes. But she also wanted to lose herself in this. She needed to be so overwhelmed that thoughts of Je—of what had happened couldn’t interfere.

She turned in Jareth’s arm to face him and reached up and kissed him. She pressed her lips against his, her urgency bleeding into the kiss. She clung to him and let her hands explore him in turn as she poured herself into that kiss, pushing everything else away.
Eventually, they ran out of breath and pulled apart. Jareth looked at her with dark, dark eyes and raised an eyebrow.

“Eager, aren’t we?” he asked.

“Yes.” Sarah gave him a shove and he fell back onto his bed. Good. Him in bed was better. And besides, he was gaping at her again and she really liked that look on him. It switched quickly to a look of indignation mixed with a sort of smugness. Even if he wasn’t used to getting pushed into bed, he didn’t seem to mind. She got on the bed and straddled him, before going back to kissing. The kisses were starting to get more and more heated on his end too. Good. Sarah felt she could drown in these kisses. It was what she needed.

His mouth tore away from hers and he rolled them over and started kissing her neck again, this time more frantically, if just as skillfully. His tongue teased at her pulse point and his teeth nipped along her collarbone and she whimpered. It was good, it just wasn’t enough. The sound she made encouraged him, and one of his hands moved down to tease her at her waist. If she was in her normal clothes, this would normally be around the time in the proceedings where she took off her top, but, no. Today of all days she’d had to decide to wear a complicated dress that it would take a miracle to get her out of quickly.

A miracle… or magic.

She closed her eyes, feeling for the place she kept her magic and pictured the dress crumpled on his floor (for all it was a gorgeous dress, she couldn’t help but think it looked better there) and herself no longer in it, under Jareth on his bed. It was a good image. Not wanting to be exhausted after, she tried to keep her magic in check. Not a lot, just enough to get her mostly naked. At least the image was easy to keep clear in her head. She almost had it—

Then Jareth ground down against her and the magic swelled in her. It spilled out and away from her, doing her will. It felt better this time. She wasn’t really afraid, even with the loss of control. But nonetheless, the feeling of using her magic did call up the memories. The knife. The blood. The fear. The pain.

Jareth froze above her, and the sudden stillness brought her firmly back to the present.

He slowly raised himself off her and remarked with an unconvincing calmness, “You know, Precious, it is considered a little rude to remove your partner’s clothing with magic without even asking first.” It was then that Sarah realized that, not only had she managed to remove her dress, she’d gotten rid of Jareth’s clothes as well, leaving him in just his underwear. She hoped she’d
managed to land all the clothing on the floor. She’d thought they’d all look better there. “Though as you are still just learning magic and the outcome of this is such a pleasant one—” he took a long moment to look down her now almost bare body, eyes lingering on the places still covered by cloth, and then smirked up at her. “I’ll forgive you this once.”

Jareth. Almost completely naked. Sitting above her. Sarah decided she could get used to this. The only problem was he wasn’t touching her… Well, that could soon be fixed. She propped herself on her elbow and reached over to run her fingers down his finally bare chest. His eyes fluttered closed and he practically purred as she let her fingers trace out the lines of him.

“Thanks,” she deadpanned. “You’re too kind.”

One of Jareth’s eyes cracked open, to give her a very half-hearted glower.

“Really, Sarah—” Sarah’s hand slid from the skin of his abdomen to cover the half-hard shape of him through the cloth. His head fell back and as she started to rub her hand against him through the cloth, and he began to swell. He rolled off of her to lie on the bed and let out a low, guttural moan, continuing to harden under her hand as she kept moving. She sat up in turn to look down at him. Her Goblin King laid low before her, arching slightly into her touch. For the first time in a week she truly felt powerful, felt in control. She’d missed this.

She stopped stroking him and moved her fingers to the waistband of his underwear. She hoped they’d stretch enough to come off. Did the Underground even have stretch fabric? She decided they must, given the way his pants had looked painted on, and didn’t have any fastenings she’d ever noticed. Unless he got them on by magic? Her fingers slid easily under the waistband. Stretch fabric was a thing after al—

Jareth’s hand grabbed her wrist, vicelike. Her head snapped up to look at his face. His eyes were so dark, his muscles taught.

“My turn,” he growled, before quickly flipping them so he was on top. Sarah gasped at the sudden movement. Before she’d even settled fully on the bed, he was dancing kisses along her jaw, down her throat, across her chest, but never crossing the boundary of her bra. Damn Fae git. Why did he have to pick now to get all aware of personal boundaries!

She whimpered and futilely tried to direct him to one of her actual breasts. He, however, seemed to very content teasing just the skin she’d exposed with her spell. Bastard.
“Jareth,” she practically whined as he once again kissed just along the line of her bra.

“Yes, Princess?” he smirked up at her between her breasts. She was reminded of the morning, his head between her legs. Things had felt so much simpler then. Easier. Then, she’d wanted to enjoy it. Now, she wanted to lose herself in it. She grabbed a fist full of his hair and glared at him.

“More,” was all she said.

His smirk widened into a genuine smile. This wasn’t about conquest. He gently slid a single finger just under the edge of her bra.

“If I may?” he asked, smile confident, eyes hungry yet patient.

“Yes.” It was all that needed to be said.

As his smile turned joyful, she felt the power surge out of him and her bra just melted away. Sarah blinked down at her now exposed breasts, before narrowing her eyes at Jareth.

“That bra better be unharmed. It was one of my favorites.”

“But what those things are called?” He kept talking before she could reply. “Not to worry, love, it’s on the floor with the rest of our clothes.” He sat partially up and moved his hands to cover her breasts. Skin to skin, she arched up into his touch. He shifted so his thumbs toyed with her nipples. Electricity shot through her and she moaned. He bent his head and started to toy with lips and tongue and teeth, making her writhe. All the while, his mouth would switch between her breasts, the other hand would keep toying and teasing. Sarah let herself get lost in the sensations, let them push every other thought out of her head. Thumb of one hand circling one nipple, on the other, a sharp pang of teeth, quickly soothed by his tongue. His free hand was supporting him above her. Still supporting himself, he moved up her body. One hand tangled in her hair, he kissed her passionately and tenderly all at once. He pulled back far enough to look down at her.

“You’re beautiful, Sarah Williams, and I love you.” The truth of his words blazed out from his eyes. She felt them hit her, like the heat from a burning building. She reached up and pushed him over, away. He fell back, next to her, a concerned frown on his face. Sarah ignored his expression and climbed on top of him, bending down to kiss him fiercely. She had a lot of emotion to pour into that kiss, and she did. She let her hands explore his chest, his shoulders, run up to tangle in his hair to change the angle and deepen the kiss.
When she pulled away they were both panting, eyes hungry. She slid down his body and ran her fingers along the edge of his underwear. Her head close to his body, she looked up at him. “If I may?” she echoed him. Eyes locked with hers, he waved his hand and his last piece of clothing disappeared.

Sarah looked down at him and smirked. Well, the pants certainly had not lied. She wrapped her fingers around his base and started kissing along his length. A groan slipped between clenched teeth and he twitched in her hand. She smirked. It had been a lovely sound, and she needed to make him make it again. She started moving her hand up and down as she wrapped her lips around him. His hips twitched up as let out a grunt. She started moving her head up and down and his hands formed fists in the sheets.

“Sarah…” he panted. She started moving faster, losing herself in the rhythm and the sounds he was making.

“Sarah, wait!” he growled. She stopped, frowning up at him.

“My turn.” he growled, taking her by the shoulders and guiding her up. Smirking, she hooked her thumbs in her underwear and started sliding them off. It was nice to be with a partner who understood taking turns.

They’d traded places, him between her legs, her looking down at the Goblin King, cloud of soft white blond hair tickling gently at the inside of her thighs, looking at her with an absolutely reverent expression. His fingers gently opened her, spreading her wetness and making her insides tense up. He drew moans and whimpers from her as he skillfully moved his fingers and studied her reactions, his bright blue eyes attentive and curious.

And then he bent his head and started teasing her with his tongue and she was gone. It was all so intense, building her up and up and up, but he wasn’t giving her enough to tip over the edge. She was so close she could almost taste it. Fucking Bastard. She needed more.

She drew up all of her willpower, and reached down and tugged on his hair. He pulled away from her, looking both confused and smug and unfairly good. He licked his lips and she shivered.

“Yes, Pet?” he asked.

“Kiss me.” And suddenly he was on top of her kissing her, and he tasted of her and she was kissing
him back. After a few moments of reveling in the kiss, she grabbed his shoulders and, with a slightly modified version of a move Katara and Zuko had taught her in training, she found herself on top of him, straddling him. Good, but not quite enough. She bent down and kissed him. It was a passionate, sloppy kiss, of two people who just desperately wanted each other.

He twitched beneath her, and suddenly it was just right, and she slid down onto him. They both moaned, and held still in that one, perfect moment. Then it was passion and movement and holding on for dear life. She was so, so close, whimpering with sensation. Then Jareth slid his hand between her and stroked her with the rhythms of their thrusts and she was gone. She cried out as wave after wave of pleasure rolled through her. She collapsed against him as he slowed slightly, helping her ride out the waves of the orgasm.

He gently rolled them over and started picking up the pace of the thrusts again. Sarah somehow found the energy to meet his thrusts, as he covered her neck with kisses. He was tight as a strung bow, above her, his thrusts irregular. And then he melted against her, radiating warmth and contentment. Sarah reached up to run her hands gently through his hair. He propped himself up a little, saying:

“I really do love you Sarah Williams with all my— Precious, what’s wrong?” He frowned down at her.

“What do you mean?” she replied, confused. This was the first time in a week she’d felt truly relaxed and safe. The orgasm had seemed to take all of her anxiety and fear with it.

“Precious, you’re crying,” he replied, pulling out of her and lying beside her. She missed his warmth.

“But don’t be ridiculous,” she scoffed, hand flying to her cheek as she turned to face him. “I’m not…” But her cheek under her hand was wet.

“Sarah, I’m here for you, you can talk to me and I’ll listen.” He didn’t ask what was wrong. She suspected he knew.

“I—I keep seeing, Jareth,” Sarah said, the words feeling pulled from her as the tears came more freely. “I keep seeing his eyes and I can feel the knife. Nerda did an amazing job, there isn’t even a scar, I’ve checked. There isn’t a mark on me, I survived but I keep getting dragged through it over and over again…” She was crying in earnest now. “Every loud noise—I try not to lean on walls—I wake up from nightmares every night and I thought I was going to die and I’m just so scared all of the time!” Jareth opened his arms to her and she grabbed him and held on as she cried and cried and cried. He held her gently, rubbing her back in slow, soft circles, doing his best to comfort her. He spoke words in languages she couldn’t understand, so she could hear his voice and know she was not alone as she cried for the first since Jet had tried to kill her.
They stayed like that until she had cried herself out and still lay in the warm circle of his arms. They fell asleep like that, too, the Goblin King and She-Who-Should-Be-Queen. A Fae furious at how the world had treated his lady, and a woman who was tired of being afraid. Jareth and Sarah. Two people in love.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys. Sorry it's been almost an entire year. It's... It's been a long one. There was a death in the family and sickness and... Well, we're all getting through :) But yeah, I'm sorry this has taken so long.

I'm really really happy with how this chapter turned out. And I really love these two characters. They've come a LONG way in 6 weeks. So far in this fic, only 6 weeks. Crazy, huh?

ANYWAY, THEY FINALLY KNOCKED BOOTS (Pika is an inspiration to us all). Thank you to all of you who have stuck around and waited for this to happen. I know my little brother has been after me about this scene SINCE I STARTED WRITING TSHP. Seriously. THREE YEARS of every chapter being responded to with "Great chapter sis, but when will they have sex".

I hope you guys enjoyed that scene. It was nice to get that out and both of them healing.

I hope to see you all in significantly less than a year!

See you next time with the next chapter of

*plays theme music*

To Serve Her Purpose
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Sarah woke peacefully for the second time in what felt like way more than a week, she was greeted with one of the strangest sights she’d ever seen. And considering her history, that was saying something. She blinked and shook her head slightly, trying to see if it really was what it looked like, but the scene before her refused to change. Jareth really was asleep next to her.

It was the first time she’d ever actually seen him asleep. The morning on the anniversary of her father’s death didn’t count. She’d been far too freaked out to even start to take it in. But this time, she had actually chosen to sleep and wake up here, so that wasn’t terrifying. It really was just him that was so… off. Sarah knew that Jareth slept, but it hadn’t quite occurred to her what that meant.

He looked… different, when he wasn’t there in his head. He was supposed to be this larger than life character, one she could never really keep her eyes from. But, asleep he looked almost… cute? There was something utterly wrong, but strangely endearing about the Goblin King looking cute. He was utterly relaxed in his sleep, probably deep under. There wasn’t a hint of the usual calculation that always sat in his eyes. He wasn’t trying to get something out of her or anyone, he wasn’t weighing options, he wasn’t keeping track of anything, not in his sleep.

She supposed that was what made it so weird. For the first time in their… relationship (they’d slept together. He’d told her he loved her. He’d held her when she cried. This was definitely a relationship), he was actually vulnerable. There were plenty of times he’d been somewhat vulnerable in front of her, but she couldn’t help but always feel like it was at least slightly calculated. It wasn’t like he didn’t have anything to gain from humanizing himself to her. There were times when she wondered if it were all an act, but last night…

He’d said no. He could have had her and kept her and never let her go. He could have crowed his victory over her for the rest of time, if what he said about Labyrinth keeping her was true. Then again, from what the Labyrinth had said, She might have interfered on Sarah’s behalf. Hell, she actually had, hadn’t she? If the Labyrinth had been wrong and Jareth had decided that he would take the potion after all, the Labyrinth had made sure she was there to see it. But he hadn’t. And that was it, wasn’t it? He hadn’t known she was there, she could tell from his expression when she’d appeared. He’d done this not to earn brownie points with her or to earn her trust, but because he’d been livid at the very idea of it. ‘How could you possibly think I would use this,’ he’d said. He’d meant it. He didn’t want her trapped down here. He really did love her.

With that happy thought, Sarah smiled and snuggled in close to his side.
“Mh?” he murmured blearily.

“Morning, Jareth,” Sarah said, smiled pressed into his skin.

“Sarah?” His voice was still bleary from sleep. She could almost hear the confused frown in his voice.

“Yes, Sarah.” She couldn’t quite suppress the laughter. And she had to revise the description of cute. This was adorable (another word she’d never thought she’d associate with Jareth). “Really Jareth, after last night, did you expect to find me anywhere else?”

There was a blur of movement and suddenly Jareth was on his side and she’d been pulled in close, her face against his chest, his arms tight around her, just this side of comfortable.

“Sarah,” he breathed. It sounded like an answered prayer. “Nowhere else, precious.”

Sarah’s eyes were itching again, which was dumb. She’d done enough crying already.

“How did you sleep, Love?” he asked, not loosening his grip in the slightest.

“Really well,” she said, turning her head so her nose wasn’t quite so squished. “It’s nice to sleep without nightmares again.”

Jareth hadn’t been moving, but something in him stilled anyway. “Sarah, precious—”

He’d said enough things that he knew she wouldn’t like that she recognized the tone in his voice. She rolled away from him and he let her go, though he kept his hand on her arm.

“Sarah, please listen.” There was the barest hint of pleading in his voice. A concession from him. And he’d used her name. She sighed and rolled back.

“What?” she asked. It was harsher than she’d meant it to come out. God, what was wrong with her these days?
“Sarah, what happened with Jet is clearly still affecting you.” After her crying jag last night, even she had to admit that, however much she didn’t want to. “I think you should consider seeing a soul healer.”

Sarah blinked.

“A what?”

“A soul healer. Someone with whom you can speak, who can help guide you through the healing process.”

“You…” Sarah blinked. “You want me to go see a therapist? Jareth, as soon as I open my mouth to explain everything that happened, they’d lock me up!”

Jareth opened his mouth and Sarah held out a hand to stop him. “No. Let me guess. U of F has… people who specialize in situations like mine?”

“No one is in a situation quite like yours, Precious,” Jareth said with a smirk. “However, as there are several students from the Underground who are Aboveground for the first time, and dealing with various bits of culture clash, the Dean decided it was best that they have… someone specialized to speak with, should the need arise. There are people there who would believe you, Love. People who could help.” Jareth held his breath as he waited for her answer.

“I’ll… think about it,” Sarah finally said. “I’m not making any promises, mind you, but I will think about it. So, what are our plans for the day?”

“Well, I had had a morning spent exploring the library and figuring out the limitations on your Labyrinth gifted translations, before lunch and your fire breathing demonstration,” Jareth replied, taking the sharp conversational turn without batting an eyelash. “But somehow I feel a relaxed morning with breakfast in bed is called for instead.”

“Do you?” Sarah asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Oh yes, the testing of your skills can wait, and I can explain and work on the plan for the fire
breathing demonstration here as well as anywhere else. Besides,” he said, letting a hand slide almost tentatively down to her hip, “last night I found us particularly hurried. I’d like a chance for us to take our time.” It was a statement, but she could hear the question from him.

Before she could decide on her answer, her stomach growled, loudly reminding everyone within earshot that she had been through quite a lot with no food at all since lunch yesterday. “Get me breakfast, Goblin King,” she decided. “Then we’ll talk.”

“In bed?” he asked, gently biting his lower lip.

“It is pretty comfortable here,” Sarah allowed with a gently teasing tone, rolling onto her back and stretching luxuriously.

“As you wish,” he said with a smile, flicking his wrist to summon a crystal, then sending it towards the door to fetch some servants with, Sarah hoped, delicious food and even more delicious coffee. With a deep breath, Sarah settled down, and got ready to let herself be looked after.

* * *

Sarah stood behind the platform, refusing to pace nervously even though she was out of sight of the crowd she could hear waiting for her appearance. Instead, she focused on the wish she and Jareth had worked out after they’d finally gotten out of bed.

‘I wish that I could breathe fire in a sufficiently dramatic way, without hurting anyone, including me, for the duration of 10 minutes. I wish that the flames be completely under my control, including whether or not they burn, and that they only appear when and how I will them to.’ They’d tried a version of it that was a minute long in the privacy of his bedroom, with Jareth having fireproofed everything around them and standing by to put out any flames should something go wrong. Fortunately, for the first time in what felt like a while, it hadn’t. If only she’d been able to do it when everything had gone so horribly wrong with Jet! Maybe it would have turned out better...

“Feeling nervous, love?” Jareth asked, not quite lounging beside her.

She still hadn't figured out his trick of lounging without lounging against anything, but someday, she would. Was that something she could get from her magic with the Labyrinth...?
“No,” she lied, straightening her back and giving him her most ‘piece of cake’ look.

“Excellent,” he replied, raising an eyebrow at her. “After all, it would be such a shame for everyone who came to see the Champion of the Labyrinth herself brought low by stage fright.”

The look she was giving him turned into a glare. “Isn't it time for you to announce me or something?”

They'd decided that he'd make the best, most properly dramatic introduction for her. He summoned a clock and gave it a critical look.

“Yes, it would seem it is. Break a leg, love. Preferably someone else’s.” He reached out to give her cheek a gentle caress before disappearing up the steps to the platform proper. She read the wish in a whisper, listening to Jareth address the crowd.

“Subjects of the Goblin Kingdom! Vassals of the Labyrinth!” Jareth's voice called out over the sudden silence. 'Vassals of the Labyrinth,' Sarah noted. Vassals that would be her subjects, if everything worked out. She wondered for the first time which ones her friends were. “With wit and skill, kindness and bravery, she fought her way to the Castle beyond the Goblin City, to take back the child we had stolen. Now, the Champion of the Labyrinth, She-Who-Should-Be-Queen, has returned to us from the Aboveground to show all who doubt her ability to breathe fire how wrong they are.” Sarah glared through the platform at the place she thought Jareth was standing. That was the most twisted-but-still-technically-correct way of saying that she hadn't wanted to let Al'fiec down that she could imagine.

“All Hail the Champion, Sarah!” Well, Sarah had been in enough productions in high school to know a cue when she heard one. She pulled her shoulders back, lifted her head high, and climbed the stairs into the roaring cheers.

There were more people than she'd thought there would be. The square was packed with Goblins, denizens of the Labyrinth and humans alike. Goblin and Human children sat on adults’ shoulders, or leaned almost dangerously far out of windows of the houses that lined the square. The roofs of the houses were covered in the small fairies that she'd met at the gates of the Labyrinth and other winged creatures. And they were all looking at her.

Well, you weren't raised by Linda Williams without learning how to put on a show.
She raised a hand and the cheering cut off suddenly.

“Years ago,” she began, “I wished my little brother away to the Goblin King. Like every other Wished-Away, the Goblin King came and took him. Like every other Runner, I was given the choice. But unlike any Runner before me in time beyond remembering, I won my brother back.” The crowd was so silent you could have heard a pin drop. Sarah prayed she was on the right track. “So impressed was he with my run, that the Goblin King fell in love with me.” She waited for the enthusiastic cheer she’d half expected at the mention of Jareth to die down. “More than that though,” she continued, knowing with some reservation what this crowd needed to hear, “with my Run, I proved to the Labyrinth that above all others, I am the true Queen of the Labyrinth!” The roar this time was deafening. Sarah spotted Kelsa in the middle of the crowd, clinging to John from the stables, looking like she was yelling her lungs out with pride.

’Oh, so you’re finally admitting it?’ the Labyrinth asked, sounding crotchety.

’Hush,’ Sarah replied, giving the Labyrinth as fierce a mental glare as she could manage without breaking character.

“And, as I am Her Queen, She has given me certain powers. Behold!” And with that slightly overdramatic ‘behold,’ which frankly, she’d earned, she threw her head back and breathed fire. This wasn’t anything like the small lick of fire she’d breathed in Jareth’s bedroom. A pillar of fire erupted from her mouth, climbing higher and higher into the sky. Sarah took a moment to be glad she’d specified that nothing could burn without her wanting it to. She suspected the gasps from the crowd would be slightly less awed if they found themselves suddenly pelted with roast-whichever-birds-happened-to-be-flying-over-the-square. Nevertheless, she could feel the heat of the flames against her face as they roared into the sky.

She eventually ran out of breath, but she still held the fire in her magic, and she had an idea of what to do with it.

“Can I?” she asked the Labyrinth, sharing the image of what she wanted to do.

“It’s magical fire under your control,” the Labyrinth replied. “What do you think? And before you can complain that that wasn’t an answer, yes, yes you can.”

Smiling, Sarah took a deep breath and gathered all the fire together in the sky. She tried to keep the flow of magic to the bare minimum needed, after all, collapsing at the end of this trick wouldn’t make for a good finale. She compressed it denser and denser, the fire growing a deeper and deeper red as it went. Finally, when she couldn’t make it any smaller without destroying some of the fire, she held it
for one moment longer, and then, the crowd holding its breath, she let it burst. Small jets of fire shot out from the central ball and split again and again as the central ball got smaller and smaller until they seemed to cover the entire sky over the Goblin City and then, at the ends and all the places the streams had split, the whole sky exploded with fireworks. It would have been better against a dark sky, Sarah couldn't help but think, but the crowd seemed to think it was impressive enough, judging by the shocked gasps and oohs of appreciation.

“It could be an illusion!” called a voice from somewhere in the crowd, cutting through the noise. Sarah identified him by the way there was suddenly space around him as the crowd drew back and glared at him. She thought she recognized him as the Goblin she'd smashed a bottle on during the battle of the Goblin City. She couldn't really blame him for being a heckler.

However, before she could think of a way to properly respond, Al’fiec’s voice cut through the silence.

“How dare you doubt our Lady!” he cried, shouting in the general direction of the heckler. He wasn’t tall enough to see over the crowd, but at his words, it melted away between them. “How dare you doubt the true Champion of the Labyrinth!” Sarah kept any guilt she had that this whole thing had started because she’d been unwilling to tell Al’fiec that she couldn't actually breath fire strictly off her face. “I'll show you the truth of her fire!” he said before turning back to the stage and jumping at the edge of the platform where Sarah and Jareth stood. His fingers just scraped the edge and he fell back, bending his legs for another jump. Before he could, though, the rock he was standing on lifted out of the ground, bringing him level with the platform’s edge.

“Thank you, your Majesty,” he said, brushing himself down slightly before taking off his vest and profferring it to Sarah.

“Burn this, my Lady Champion, and show him what's what.”

“But, your vest...” Sarah hedged. She didn't want to ruin what looked to be his good clothing. How much did a vest cost in the Goblin Kingdom, anyway?

“Don't worry, my Lady Champion. I can think of nothing I'd rather have it destroyed for, and enough people have brushed against it today in the crowd that once you burn it up, no one will dare call you a liar,” Al’fiec said, shooting a glare at the heckler.

“Thank you, Al’fiec,” Jareth said, coming forward and taking the vest from him. “For your loyalty and sacrifice, I will have Seamstress Her’ta herself make you a new vest in honour of this event.”
He nodded to where, when Sarah followed the gesture, she saw Her’ta standing with Stephen and a couple who must be Stephen's parents. Her’ta was returning the Goblin King's nod, Stephen was bouncing slightly and his parents were giving the heckler disapproving looks. Ner’da stood with them, giving Sarah an encouraging smile and nod. Suddenly, Sarah started searching the crowd for other faces that she knew. And she found them. Ludo wasn't there, (probably for the best, given the heckler), but she spotted Sir Didymus on Ambrosius, his staff raised in salute. Near him stood Hoggle, and Am’ya beside him, necklace sparkling proudly on her chest. She found Fel’kiec and Al’ma with him, holding a bundle that was probably Sel’kiec close to her chest. And, scattered here and there, faces she recognized from around the castle, and her walk through the Goblin City, even if she didn't know their names yet. And all of them were looking at her with such confidence and joy. Her.

“Ready, love?” Jareth breathed, just loud enough for her to hear.

Sarah turned back to face him, heart settled.

“Let it fly!” she commanded, and, with a bright smile, Jareth threw the vest as high as he could.

It wasn't very aerodynamic, but still, it flew high, and its unusual path didn't matter when Sarah had complete control of the fire.

She blew out a deep breath and the fire reached up, racing the vest as it flew. It overtook the vest and burned it, fire licking at the fabric until it was only ashes, raining down on the crowd. But Sarah wasn't done yet.

Up raced the fire, even as she let it break from her mouth. She held the image she wanted to create firmly in her mind, a yellow flame for the curving horns, a deep red one for central disk, a brighter orange for the symbol.

High above the Goblin City, high enough that anyone in the Labyrinth, anyone in the city who wasn't packed into the square, anyone for miles and miles around who looked would see, the symbol that Sarah and Jareth both wore from a leather thong around their necks blazed.

For a long time, she'd thought it the Goblin King's symbol alone, but now, she knew better. It wasn't the symbol of the Goblin Kingdom alone, or only or of the Labyrinth. It was a symbol of their partnership. King and Queen, Lord and Lady, both working together.
And yes, she wouldn’t stand for things as they were now, she could never be a part of ripping families apart like that, but he had agreed to negotiate, and, like Former Queen Buttercup had said, maybe what the two of them could agree on was what this place, these people, really needed.

Magic could be fueled by emotions, Jareth had told her, and the fire above all of them burned with that hope.

“All Hail King Jareth of the Goblins!” cried out Al’fiec’s voice, almost startling Sarah out of the concentration needed to hold the shape in the sky. She felt Jareth’s magic slip in around hers, solidifying the shape and holding it steady. In his magic, she could feel his joy at the sight.

A raucous cheer bellowed forth from the crowd. When it started to die down, Al’fiec cried

“All hail the True Queen of the Labyrinth!”

This time the roar actually shook some fairies off the roofs.

Chapter End Notes

Hehehehehehe.....

So, a year on the dot, huh?

Well, at least I didn't go over....

Thank you to everyone who still reads, leaves kudos and comments. You get me to keep writing even when things are really hard.

But! In the last year, I've left a situation that made me miserable, started a job I love and find fulfilling (and gives me more time to write! Woo-HOO!) and on Saturday I'm moving in with my partner.

To Serve Her Purpose has helped me figure out so many things in my own life, and in my relationships with my partner. Now that my partner and I are moving in together, it seems appropriate to be returning to Sarah and Jareth, as the take the next steps in their lives together too.

I won't make any promises this time. I'm working on getting better, taking my meds, going to therapy, and I need to focus on that, before I can produce the kind of quality
content you guys deserve. Still, I think I'll be coming back to this more once the damn move is over.

God and Goddess knows Sarah and I both have plenty of stuff to work out right now. Seems about right we should work it out together.

I'll see you guys as soon as I can!

Please leave a contribution in the Little Box and thank you for reading

*Plays Theme Music*

To Serve Her Purpose

End Notes

A/N: I hope you enjoyed, because more is coming. I've already written the first 5 chapters and have started on the sixth. I have the entire plot planned out and plan to be posting weekly on Tuesdays. This story is made possible by my wonderful Beta who I love dearly and shower hugs upon (B/N: Not enough hugs :( A/: SORRY *HUGS* the things I do to keep her happy B/N: I'M SITTING RIGHT HERE A/N: Oops. Can you tell we're sisters?). None of this would have happened without her. I'd also be eating more regularly and sleeping more if it weren't for her releasing surprise attack bunnies at me... grumble grumble grumble. Well, my loss is your gain. Enjoy and please Review!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!