"Jack has been alone for three-hundred years, the other spirits never seemed to care."

In which Jack wasn't able to keep himself sane for his lonely three-hundred years and ends up with a nasty case of psychosis.
Jack has been alone for three-hundred years, the other spirits never seemed to care.

It started when he was fifty, he tried to kill himself. He’d tried to stab himself in the chest, but all that got him was a bunch of gaping, bloodless wounds that took a full century to heal and scar over.

When he was eighty he tried again, desperate to end his loneliness and escape the constant rejection received from the other spirits. This time he tried to freeze himself. It was much to his dismay that the moon refused to let this happen, and shattered the ice much as he did the lake surface as Jack was being raised.

“All work and no play—”

Jack walked aimlessly through a town, the only emotion showing when he cringed as someone walked through him.

“-Makes Jack a dull boy.”

No one could see him.

No one could hear him.

No one could touch him.

And those like him wanted nothing to do with him.

It was maddening.

Jack couldn’t help but laugh. And laugh. And laugh-

And then he couldn’t stop, even when he started to cry.

---

Guardian meeting, 2012, three days ‘til Easter.

“-Jack Frost.” North said curiously, eyeing the figure showing before him carefully.

“Wha- Jack Frost!? He doesn’t care about the children, he’s insane! Delusional! Last time I saw the bugger it was the Blizzard of ’68 and he called me General Fluffybuns. The kid is an irrational, crazed, lunatic-” Bunny was cut off before he could finish.

“Guardian.”

“I mean, as long as he helps protect the children?” Tooth sounded uncertain.

Bunny only scoffed at the two of them, all three Guardians went without noticing Sandy’s knowing stare at the glowing blue figure that was shown above the crystal. “Jack Frost is many things, but a Guardian is not one of them!”

---
Burgess, nighttime

Jack lovingly caresses a small box that he has had with him for many years now, filled with what could be his favorite creation of human kind. They were steel razors, each one, aside from whichever one Jack is favoring at the time, is as pristine and shiny as they day they were stolen. The winter spirit gave the box a crazed, pained, and addicted grin, cracking it open and pulling out the razor he’s taken to favoring. It’s just like him, old and worn and dull. It’s rusty as well and if he COULD bleed he has no doubts that it would be absolutely soaked in old, dried liquid life.

He starts chanting silently as he pockets the box and takes the razor to his wrist, where hundreds upon hundreds of wounds and not-quite healed scars lay.

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” He croons.

“Jack is a dull boy.”

“Very dull boy…”

His breathing picks up at the seventh cut, his eyes dilating and suddenly he’s carving bloodless flesh down to icy bone. The cuts become more frantic as time passes and Jack is so completely overwhelmed with his wrists that he doesn’t even think to notice the horrified stare from below his perch on telephone wires.

“Dull boy-”

A gouging cut.

“Dull boy-”

One so deep it cuts into the bone. Jack hisses at the sensation.

“Dull Boy-”

Ice creeps up the razor and melts, the erratic cycle being the reason for its rust.

Bunnymund snaps himself out of his horrified daze, just pushing himself to go along with the plan. There was no way this kid was stable enough for Guardianhood, but he was sure the others would see that if they met the blighter.

Jack stares at the blur as it rushed passed. Quickly Jack places his razor where it belongs and grabs his staff, bolting towards the creature that interrupted him.

“All work and no play-”
There came a day where Jack realised he felt very little when it came to emotions, not that he cared too much- why would he care, he was always this way. Right?

Yes, as far as he could... remember... he'd always been this way.

There wasn't any other explanation for it.

His weather was less forgiving, his snowball fights not as enjoyable, and whenever he was nearby children seemed nervous.

Like they knew something was watching, but couldn't figure out what- or who.

Jack found that rather curious.

---

**Workshop, 2012, 3 days 'til Easter.**

"Why?"

That was the fifth goddamn time that Jack asked that question, though this time around he seemed less curious and more infuriatingly amused at his own antics. Aster had certainly had damn well close to enough of the crazy spirit's games and was tempted to job the bastard into next millennium if he kept going. "Because Man in Moon said so!" North said jovially, though for the life of him Aster couldn't understand why he didn't mention that, to begin with. Jack seemed to freeze at that statement, looking for all the world like something had just messed with his perception of reality. None of the Guardians escaped the shock at the tone of Jack's oddly tentative question.
"Man in Moon.... he talks to you?"

Tooth was the first to reply, giving a small nod. "Yes, he's looked up to by many spirits for his guidance...." There was a pause as she pondered on something, then with a concerned gaze continued to speak; "Has he... Has he never spoken to you?"

The dark look in Jack's dull blue eyes is all the confirmation she needed, but his verbal reply is what made her heart sink. "Dark, cold, scared, invisible. Only once three-hundred years said my name and left me on my own..." The word 'invisible' was stretched, his gaze locked onto Bunny. The pooka couldn't help but cringe internally at the things revealed in that look.

Broken, shattered, and hopelessness all in one.

He'd deny it if asked, but the thought of that made his heart ache. "Jack, walk with me." North piped up, gently ushering the winter child along when he tensed and tried to hide his sudden paranoia behind a disturbingly wide- but obviously fake- grin. The three remaining guardians watched as Jack's feet left thin sheets of ice with every step he took.

North studied the boy while they made their way through the workshop, and so far he's noticed a few things about him.

1. Jack is very paranoid, but his equal curiosity leaves him twitching spastically when he's wary of but also wants to get close to something.
2. He was moving constantly, like if he stopped moving he'd stop existing.
3. He moved slowly, which North thought was just because of his curiosity.
4. When they passed Phil, the head of the toymaking department, Jack must of said 'Hey Phil' seven times.
5. Finally, Jack had started mumbling incoherently to himself about utter nonsense once they came to his office.

"Fruitcake?" The Cossack spoke with caution, even him being able to see that there was something very wrong with the winter spirit that was sent to them. He did, however, simply toss the fruitcake carelessly behind him when the boy denied the offer with a vaguely agitated 'No- No- No- No no.' He wasn't thinking much either when he decided upon the 'unwittingly threatening approach'...

"Alright, now we get down to tacks of brass." He'd spoken while cracking his knuckles, foolishly paying no heed to the alarmed expression on Jack's face. "Who are you, Jack Frost? What is you-AugH!" North barely managed to dodge a large blast of ice that crashed right through his window. It was after a long pause and quick examination of Jack's defensive posture that North finally spoke again. "Ебена мать." Jack tilted his head curiously, but suddenly showing to be rather unphased by what just occurred. North was about to try talking to the boy once more when Bunnymund burst through the door and a colourful blur zoomed passed the busted window.

"Problem at the Tooth Palace."

Chapter End Notes

Am I depicting psychosis well at all? I have a pinned tab for psychosis symptoms and
I'm trying to let it show what Jack has.

(The Russian is probably inaccurate but it's supposed to say 'Holy shit')
Not the First Meeting

Chapter Summary

"It's spring you know, Jack. You know you shouldn't be in places you don't belong...." The winter spirit's eyes watch intently as he comes into view, a smug grin plastered upon his grey pallor face. "But then again, you don't really belong anywhere, do you?"

In which Pitch is an asshole and you get a glimpse of past events.

Chapter Notes

*cackles* FINALLY, HAIhasieh my procrastination really kills me sometimes y'know. BUT! Oh well, I have fun writing whenever the procrastination passes. Also?? Idk if I did okay with portraying the characters in this chapter aghusheih especially Pitch.

There was nothing in this world that could possibly be worse than this, nothing as terrible as coming to terms with the fact that something is wrong- Terribly wrong HORRIBLY wrong- but you can't do a thing, not yet, and have to sit back and watch as a poor soul tears themselves apart bit by bit. This was how Sandy felt: Helpless to an obvious issue that nobody else seemed to be addressing, pushing aside the problem like it wasn't there. It infuriated the Sandman to no end, sand steam pouring from his ears the whole ride to the palace, regardless of possible notice and questioning. Why should he care if anybody realises his foul mood and then sought to find the source? He certainly didn't! Let them ask, the idiots! There was something so glaringly wrong with the mental state of one young- oh, so young- Jack Frost, who was currently in the process of muttering to empty space, seemingly hallucinating a conversation. How could he possibly help, if he didn't know the what, when, or why of the issue?

It hurt to think that maybe there was nothing he could do.

----::Confrontation::

Twitch, step, twitch, step.

"A dull boy Jack is, the dullest boy around, the dullest boy in town...."

Step, twitch, step, twitch.

"What a dumb, sad, dull boy Jack is..."

Jack walked along the streets, eyes focused blankly on nothing in particular as he meandered around aimlessly. His mutterings were whispers, barely heard and hardly spoken.

"What Jack would do to not be so dull..."

He stopped short at the edge of the town square just as it began to rain. He looked to the cloudy sky in awe and admiration, the water steaming hot in comparison to his below freezing body
temperature. A shadow crossed his vision and obscured the sky a short time after his wordless
watch began. "Well, if it Isn't Jack Frost." Comes the too-smooth and ever irritating voice of one
pompous shadow king. "It's spring you know, Jack. You know you shouldn't be in places you don't
belong...." The winter spirit's eyes watch intently as he comes into view, a smug grin plastered
upon his grey pallor face. "But then again, you don't really belong anywhere, do you?" Jack's eyes
narrow dangerously, his grip upon his crook tightening enough to make it creak under the force.
"Pitch." He grits out through clenched teeth. "What do you want? No beds to hide under?" The
look he receives would send anyone else running, though the winter spirit feels only irritation in
place of fear. That greatly irritates Pitch, whose expression shifts from simply furious to enraged.
"How? How is it, Frost, that you feel absolutely no fear of me in the slightest? I am the Nightmare
King! All spirits, excluding Mother Nature, fear me to some degree! What makes a pathetic little
sprite such as yourself so special to this case?" It does nothing to ease the King of Nightmare's
upset when all the emotion that Jack shows is disdainful irritation. "What reason do I have to fear
you, Pitch?" It was directed as a challenge of sorts, a silent declaration made every time Pitch
found it in his interest to confront Jack. 'Show me what you've got'

Pitch would be a horrible liar if he said that he never looked forward to that challenge.

A sly, predatory grin stretches its way unnaturally on his features, distorting his frame in the sort of
way you'd only expect to see in especially vivid nightmares. "Oh, Jack.. I'll give you plenty.."

---::Present Day::

Jack's flailing panic attack at the mere sight of the hoard of nightmares made it difficult enough to
get to Tooth on time, the way he shot at everything and anything he possibly could. In fact, the
only good thing Aster could note was the saving of a single fairy by blasting a nightmare out of the
air and startling the little sheila onto the sleigh's deck in her attempts to avoid becoming a
fairycycle. The morale-boosting reunion of Toothiana and her fairy was cut off however by the
irritatingly familiar voice of Pitch Black, his smugness palpable and ever-present as he mocked the
Guardians.

"Oh, do my eyes deceive me?" His disembodied voice came with a tone of amusement and
followed by a fur-raising cackle. "Jack Frost! What on earth are you doing here with these weirdos,
hmm?" The spirit in question flinched violently as he was addressed, spinning to meet the terrifying
face of the Nightmare King himself. "Pitch..." The false bravery could be seen from miles away,
how he shook and his voice wavered. Pitch clearly took insane pleasure from this, as that
disturbingly wide grin of his grew only wider at Jack's reaction. The Shadow King seemed to loom
over the boy, deliberate in his every solitary movement. "Are you friends with them, Frost? You
really should watch the company you keep... Don't you remember what happened last time you met
a Guardian?" The fear flashing across the winter spirit's face sends Pitch into a fit of maniacal
laughter. "Oh, how precious!" He exclaims triumphantly. "You really are such a pathetic excuse
for a spirit, Jack." His expression turns cruel and unforgiving and he turns to walk away. "I think
I'm going to just ignore you... But you're used to that, aren't you?"

Aster springs into action at that last comment. "Oi! Get back here you stinkin' ratbag!" Pitch
vanishes out of view just as Tooth takes action and attempts to attack him head-on, snatching a
boomerang from Aster and charging to where Pitch appears next. Black watches her with
amusement as she charges with a battle cry, only to be stopped abruptly by the appearance of a
Nightmare. "Woah, woah! Easy girl, easy..." Pitch chuckles darkly as he soothes the oil slick
equine, locking eyes on Sandy whilst he holds out his hand. "Look familiar Sandman?" He grins as
he speaks, as Jack tries to return to reality, as Tooth stares shellshocked at the creature at Pitch's
side. Sandy puts two and two together, anger evident on his features when he does so. "It took me a
while to perfect this little trick... turning dreams into Nightmares..." He appears calm. Smug, but
calm as he treats the sand-creature with disturbing affection. "Don't be nervous, it only riles them
Aster scoffs, gladly taking the offering of his boomerang whilst he confidently tromps forward. "Fear? Fear of what, you? Nobody's been afraid of -you- since the dark ages!" The Nightmare King sighs with nostalgia, looking into the distance with a reminiscing expression. "Oh, the dark ages... Everyone was frightened, miserable! Such happy times for me, oh! The power I wielded." His face falls, warping into one of infuriation as he spoke his next words. "Then the Man in the Moon chose you to replace my fear with your wonder and light." Pitch snarls, his tone mocking. "Lifting their hearts and giving them hope! Meanwhile, everyone wrote me off as just a- bad dream! 'Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of, there's no such thing as the Boogieman!'"

Golden eyes glared down at the gathered Guardians, walking forward on his perch. "Well, that's all about to change..." The Palace shakes as he finishes his speech, and a pleased expression settles on his face. The Boogieman chuckles lowly as he watches everything begin to fade and disintegrate.

"Oh look, It's starting already..."
One to Remember

Chapter Summary

Jack's stomach lurched with thinly veiled disgust as the man's smile grew even wider, seemingly coming off his face completely as it did. "Oh, but how could I not?" He spoke with a low, foreboding tone that hinted at both curiosity and malicious intent. "Everyone knows your name, Spirit of Winter, and I can't help but feel curious."

Tooth suspects, Jack's grip on reality wavers, and Pitch is a creepy bastard.

Jack stood there as the world around him fell apart, crumbling slowly into dust and nothingness. He could hear voices just beyond his consciousness and desperately he tried to listen, listen and decipher and return to the crumbling world. 'Escape escape run away the shadows taunt you' You, you, he thought about himself as if he was referring to someone else. Was that his voice? His thoughts? Were they someone else's? Can he read minds now, or is someone talking to him? But why, why would anyone talk to him? He was invisible, unwanted, treated like filth for what he was even though he never chose it. He never chose to be this, deranged and only capable of cold and death.

Or did he?

Did he?

He doesn't remember.

It's the sound of war cries that snap Jack from his jumbled thoughts, and an additional vice of dreamsand that gets him to move along with the others in pursuit. The Nightmare King had already retreated into his element just as the Sandman's sand had brought him to the ground, near a pool of water that reflected beautifully in the light. The pool sat calmly before a mural, within being tooth babies and children, as well as the Queen Tooth herself. "I'm sorry." Spoke the dazed winter spirit without a thought to his words.

"What was that?" Came a soft reply, paired by the beat of dragonfly wings and a curious hand on his shoulder. Jack reacted violently to the touch, jumping away and cowering against the far side of the crystal pool. "D-D-Don't. No. No touching me, no touching." He whimpered his distress, momentarily forgetting his prior apology. Toothiana backed off in her surprise, all four Guardian's faces twisting to express their varying levels of concern; Though in Aster's case, it was merely irritated exasperation. "I'm so sorry Jack, I won't touch, okay? I'll stay right here." It took a small pause from the winter child, but he calmed after a moment and watched ever-dully as Tooth smiled. Her eyes told a case of quiet calculation as she examined Jack's actions; Something was off about that reaction, about the boy in general. "What was it that you told me before that? Do you remember?"

Jack gave a small nod, standing as he repeated himself. "I'm sorry." Confusion was written all over her face. "Sorry? Sorry for what?"

"Sorry, sorry fairies. Tooth babies? Sorry. they left, taken, sorry for panic." He was, he knew he was, maybe, somewhere deep inside his mess of thoughts and feelings he was.
At least he knew he would be.

Maybe.

"Oh, oh it's alright." And it was, for now. They had some tooth boxes saved from thieving Nightmares, and one of her fairies were safe. There was also the European division to collect teeth as well, so all was not lost. After a moment's contemplation, she decided to speak her thoughts. "One of my fairies is fine, there are few spared tooth boxes, there's still hope." ...Possibly, she could feel the belief leaving rapidly now.

The moment she said 'tooth boxes' however it seems Jack's interest peaked. "Tooth boxes? What is that?" He followed after her curiously as she fluttered to the mural, ice forming beneath his feet so as to keep him on the surface. "I do more than just collect teeth, Jack." Toothiana started, peeking back at the child just steps behind her whilst she spoke. "The teeth, they hold memories, and it's my job to protect them. I have everyone's memories here." She turned away from the mural, smiling softly at Jack (whom of which was staring at her with a vastly innocent gaze, showing just how young he really was.) "Even yours."

----::First meeting::----

Nightfall was fast approaching, with children all indoors and watching the sun fall to the horizon, men retrieving wood for their hearths, and women tending to the needs of the home. It was midwinter, and with the snowfall came Jack. Jack, who was growing ever weary of his invisibility. Jack, who was distraught and dysphoric and unfocused. His chest tightened in unexplainable agony whenever he was near the villages, near the families and children and big brothers playing tricks on their younger siblings. He always told himself that it was because nobody could see him because he was invisible and couldn't so much as say a simple 'hello'.

Something in him kept saying that was a lie, though. At least partially.

It was then that Jack found himself watching as children grew fearful, frightened gazes drawn to the sky and the swirling storm clouds. This was the part he hated about his apparent duties when he would have to bring terrible storms to places like these, where people were sure to starve and freeze to death in the chill of harsh winter. The only reason he committed to such a duty was at the demand of Mother Nature, a formidable woman who seemed wholly uninterested in anything but her duties, giving orders to the seasons from her canopy home and nothing much else. Jack was caught unawares when an unfamiliar voice sounded from behind him (though seeing as how he only knew four other spirits by name, and none of them cared in the slightest about him outside his winter duties, it wasn't all that surprising.)

"Ah, fear is a lovely thing, Isn't it?" Asked the stranger, cloaked in shadows and looking for all the world like a living nightmare- with an ever-present air of arrogance to boot- Oily black hair was slicked against the head of the man, whose skin was grey as ash and whose body seemed unnaturally thin. Yet still, there was a sense of well-hidden strength hinted in the confident stride the man took as he walked to Jack's side, well ignoring the look of surprise and subtle irritation. "What about fear of a season meant for slumber, rebirth, and fun is a good thing?" Jack inquired with narrowed eyes, his naivety leaving a disturbingly wide and pointy smile of amusement on the stranger's face. "Because it is also about death, cold, and hardship. Fear of it is only natural, Jack Frost." The winter child's eyes went wide, taking a defensive stance and glaring pointedly at the man with the too-wide smile and darkness in his cold golden eyes. "How do you know my name?"

Jack's stomach lurched with thinly veiled disgust as the man's smile grew even wider, seemingly coming off his face completely as it did. "Oh, but how could I not?" He spoke with a low, foreboding tone that hinted at both curiosity and malicious intent. "Everyone knows your name,
Spirit of Winter, and I can't help but feel curious." The man's eyes narrowed, the smile retreating into a sly smirk as he stared with eerie stillness at the defensive posture of the winter child before him. "I-" He suddenly pointed to himself. "-am Pitch Black, the Nightmare King." Slowly and very much deliberately, the stranger- Pitch Black, circled him, a malicious grin returning to distort his face. "My curiosity has grown immensely, I must say."

And then he was gone.

Until Jack saw golden eyes watching from the shadows. "I'll be seeing you again, Frost. I look forward to it."

-----::End First Meeting::
"Gently, Tooth brought her hand to Jack's shoulder, slowly and calmly, keeping eye contact with him while she did. There was a quirk to her mouth, and she smiled a little wider when he tensed but did not pull away. "Kids, huh?" She asked teasingly."

In which Jack is confused and the Guardians finally get a bit of a clue.

"Mine?" Jack asked, bewildered and skeptical of what he had heard. Him, having teeth in the possession of the tooth fairy? He had all his teeth!

As far as he was aware anyway. But he was... mostly sure. Maybe he should check?

The sound of Tooth's voice pulled him from his thoughts. "Yes, from before you were Jack Frost."

No, no he refused to- no. "Wasn't nobody, not anybody before this." Jack claimed with a stern tone and conviction in his voice. He took several steps back on his bridge of ice, expression shifting rapidly between emotions. Toothiana sadly did not appear to notice and continued on heedless of the sudden turmoil boiling inside the twisted frost spirit. "Of course you were, everyone was someone before they were chosen." Confusion laced her pretty features however with the way Jack was acting. "What?" He asked, voice barely a whisper.

"You should have seen Bunny!" The Cossack called with an immense amount of obliviousness to the situation, earning him a whispered warning from the Pooka in question. "I though we agreed never to talk about that!" The interaction between them was glossed over, however, by the one between the boy of frost and queen of the fairies.

"You mean, I- I had a family?" He couldn't say anymore, dare not say another word, for fear it would be a lie. He was already so broken, and any small piece of him still coherent always tried so very desperately to keep him whole.

::Tooth::

Toothiana was stunned; he didn't remember? Jack believed he was nobody before he was a spirit? That he was never someone who was seen and loved and cared for? She felt sick, pained, and she suddenly had the urge to hold Jack until all his problems melted away. He was such a young thing, still a baby in spirit terms, and it was becoming so very clear as every second passed just how
tortured and broken this poor boy was. She saw how Sandy eyed Jack, calculating and worried and with single-minded focus. She noticed the twitches and the odd things the boy did, though it was only now, when her fairies were almost all gone and she was at her weakest and most helpless that she noticed.

There was something very, very wrong with Jack Frost.

"You really don't remember?"

::End|Bunny::

He was becoming less and less capable of holding ill will towards the child- and that's all he really was, honestly, a child. It was unnerving, especially when he'd held such a powerful grudge all these years. The kid wasn't even a thousand years old yet, and he was a seasonal, the Winter Court's babbling figurehead, mentally broken, and on top of all that he was apparently closely aquainted with the Boogeyman. Pitch Black, the Nightmare King, the destroyer of the Golden Age and genocidal maniac.

Really, when he tried putting two and two together it makes a pretty bold and bright flashing red four.

"You really don't remember?"

That snapped him out of his meandering thoughts, doesn't remember what?

"Remember, remember... I- No- What-" Jack gripped his head, letting out a short but pitiful keen that made the Pooka want to scoop the distraught boy up and protect him. When he was upset Jack really did look his age; so very young and still so fragile, even moreso by the state of his mental health.

"I want to remember, want to know- show me- wait- no..."

::End|North::

Watching this transpire was a bit disheartening for North, his face falling saddened and grim. He'd gathered, after some careful watching, that something was amiss. He still did not know what, other than Jack's mental health was being put into question. He stared intently at the interaction before him, gears turning in his head as he finally took a moment to assess rather than put all his focus on Pitch and his plans.

"I want to remember, want to know- show me- wait- no..."

His heartstrings were being plucked willy nilly by this boy, he finds. It was heartbreaking to see the way he curled in on himself, the way he seemed to try to separate from reality itself.

"Jack- I can't, Pitch has them."

Oh, and the way Jack was utterly terrified of Pitch was a definite warning sign.

::End|Sandy::

Things were starting to piece together, and Sandy was ever grateful for the small bits of information he was managing to gather on the state of the boy.

For now, he kept watching, putting two and two together and silently promising Pitch a slow death.
It had been half a decade before he saw the Nightmare King again, in that time he had tried everything to die, to disappear forever. At one point he even spent four months with a rusty sword poking through his abdomen before he gave up on that idea and pulled it out - it hurt, big time. Like, really badly. No blood doesn't mean he doesn't feel the pain of his injuries. After the whole ordeal of repetitive suicide attempts, the elusive Boogeyman decided to show his face, earning him an unapologetic blast of ice from a startled winter spirit.

"Warning, please!" He had cried in indignation, only gaining a faintly alarmed and amused laugh from the man of shadows. The man's face was lit up oddly in the fading light of dreamsand as it retreated to the Sandman's cloud, leaving nothing but the faint light of the moon and stars. "Warning? You really expect a warning from me? Come now, Spirit of Winter, I am the Nightmare King, you can't really think I'm going to warn you of my presence." There was a glint in his eyes as he spoke, his attention divided between speaking and what looked like very intent staring, a brief flash of anger showing in the golden orbs. "Ah.... You don't fear me though, do you, Jack?" Pitch begun as he circled the peeved young man before him, still so young and learning. It was true, he was not afraid, not even remotely. Startled, creeped out, wary even, but not afraid in the way Pitch prefers. It infuriates him.

"Why would I be, Nightmare King? Honestly, why should I be? I don't see a reason, really." The boy had the audacity to smirk at the absolutely livid expression that the King of Nightmares was directing towards him. "You're of no concern to me, no worry of mine. Just a shadow with a desperate need to be seen, heard, feared. I'm not afraid of you, Boogeyman."

And oh, how he would regret those words centuries later, when he was near broken and teetering on the edge, when Pitch had pushed and pushed and pushed at his psyche with vivid waking nightmares and delusions and smooth, confident words that washed over him like a polluting sludge. He would regret, and Pitch would appear, triumphant and smug, to push again, and break Jack just that little bit more. Pitch scowled now, eyes blazing and filled with fury, with the cogs turning in his head. How will he get this boy to fear him? To run in terror at the mention of his name? To crumble with paralyzing fear whenever he showed his face, or when something moved in the shadows? There was a grin, a flash in molten gold orbs, and that was all Jack saw as darkness overtook his vision. "Oh, Jack... Why don't I show you?"

::End Meeting::

Tooth couldn't believe she was doing this, out in the field for the first time in centuries. It was exhilarating, even in light of Pitch's less than friendly actions. She was a bit embarrassed, too, for having doubted her friends and Jack could do this, but was eternally grateful for their aid. She was fast, but she certainly could not gather all of these teeth with just herself and Baby Tooth- Jack had decided upon that to address her as, after randomly deciding that 'Tooth Baby' wasn't right for this particular fairy. Nobody argued with his reasoning at this point, considering what they've seen and what they suspect.

"They're everywhere!" She cried joyously, zooming about and consequently ramming into a large sign. Ouch. "Tooth alright?" She looked up and smiled at the winter child, his face twisted up in concern. "Oh yes, I'm fine. It's just been such a long time since I've been out in the field..." Jack's head tilted, somewhat like a dog when they were curious. "How long?" He shook his head, frustration on his features. "No- wait- how long, is a long time?" Tooth found herself very briefly confused, though her demeanor spoke bashful embarrassment when she caught on. "Oh... four-hundred and forty years, give or take."
Her concentration was cut off at the sight of another tooth in the distance. She gasped, pointing at it, before giddily buzzing away towards it. Jack squinted, looking over to the newly dubbed Baby Tooth, who just shrugged awkwardly as if to say 'that's just how she is' and Jack left it at that.

After that time flew by, they all chased each other around going after the teeth, stealing and freezing and doing whatever they could to out-collect the other. Bunny with his tunnels and North with the chimneys, Jack with his ice just wreaking havoc on the others as he so pleased. It was entertaining for the lot of them, and they'd admit as much if asked. In no time at all Jack had found himself in the room of a very familiar little boy. One that not that long ago he had watched and played with. Jamie Bennett slept peacefully in his bed, tooth snug under his pillow. Toothiana smiled humorously at the winter spirit while she took the teeth from under the bed.

"Jamie Bennett, lost a central incisor in a freak sledding accident. I wonder how that happened, hm?" Jack fidgeted, watching the boy carefully. "Frustrated, very frustrated. He got hit by a couch..." he lifted his gaze to Tooth, a faint but nervous smile on his face. "He had fun, laughed.." Gently, Tooth brought her hand to Jack's shoulder, slowly and calmly, keeping eye contact with him while she did. There was a quirk to her mouth, and she smiled a little wider when he tensed but did not pull away. "Kids, huh?" She asked teasingly.
Chapter Summary

"My my, Frost, you sound rather peeved. Is something the matter?" The shadow man said with faux concern, though his smug expression would have gave his insincerity away all on its own. "What oh what could have happened for you to call on me of all people, hm?"

Hushing, Shushing, and Pitch is a stalker

Chapter Notes

I'm terribly sorry for the late update, lots of stuff happening lately that has been keeping me busy, but here it is now! I love writing for this series, it's really fun.

"I'm sorry about your memories, Jack- I could have helped you.." Tooth spoke suddenly into the quiet of the bedroom, her voice soft and light, but heavy with guilt and remorse. Jack all but forgot the persistent sensation of a small hand on his still tense shoulders once her words registered in his fogged mind. "I-" he began, second guessing himself just as the words started to leave his mouth. A moment later he tried again, voice softer and more sincere. "Just get you fixed up, you're more important." Alarm bells went off in Tooth's mind at those last words 'I'm more important? He's the Winter King, how can it be that I have more importance than the embodiment of a season?'

Just as she was about to go on about how important he was, North came stomping in through the window, Sandy in tow. "Vat are you doing, slowpokes? There are much more teeth to collect!" he spoke loudly, causing young Jamie Bennett to stir under his covers. Tooth turned to him and held a finger over her mouth, Jack copying the action himself. "Shh!" they warned in unison, Jack taking the liberty of directing North's attention to the sleeping child. "Oh- Sorry!" he whispered in reply, regaining composure after a moment of embarrassment. "How are you feeling Toothy?" The Cossack inquired in a softened tone, the gentlest of smiles on his face as he regarded the fairy queen. Said queen's feathers fluffed slightly in her joy, a bright smile on her pretty face. "Fantastic," Toothiana replied with carefully quieted enthusiasm. The Cossack's smile widened into a joyous parody of his previously calm demeanor. "That's what I like to hear."

Just as North was going to continue, Bunny popped up from the far corner of the room, a typically grumpy expression on his rabbity face. "Oi!" Called the Pooka as he bounded from the tunnel and over to the four spirits congregating near the bed. "I see how it is, teamin' up so the bunny gets last place!" He was quickly shushed by the others when his loud tone caused Jamie to once again stir in his sleep, and Aster responded in kind by a whispered apology and the slight lowering of his ears-which quickly raised again as Jack approached him. 'What does the bugger want?' he thought, and looked a tad confused as the winter child produced his tooth bag from behind him. "Look, fluffybuns." Said Frost eagerly, an almost hopeful smile on his face. The bag itself was miniscule, but Bunny took the eager presentation as a boast, and smirked as he brought forth his own bag, filled heavy with children's teeth. "Y' call that a bag o' chompers?" He spoke smugly, shaking the
bag he held for emphasis. "That's a bag o' chompers, mate."

Shortly Aster was pushed from his small boast when North approached him with a mildly disapproving expression, clapping his shoulder a small bit too hard as he was addressed with normal joviality. "Now, now, we are doing dis for Tooth, is not competition Bunny!" The Cossack said joyfully "But, if it was-

-----::Waking Nightmares:::

He couldn't even go one hour sleeping without waking up halfway through in terror. Every single time he tried to rest, every time he started winding down from his near endless duties, he was woken up by horrible nightmares that then decide to screw him over and he ends up hallucinating for several hours after. It was torture, a torture he still can't stop- he's pretty sure he knows who is the reasoning for these nightmares too.

"PITCH!" Jack Frost screamed at the top of his only habitually functioning lungs as he stood atop a mostly burnt-down hovel, lonely and blackened in the countryside. He knew well enough that the shadow walker stalked him frequently, it was obvious with how Pitch always knew where he was, what he was up to, and had a habit of letting Jack know he was being watched via whispered and menacing 'hellos' and the flashing of golden orbs in the dark.

Golden orbs that he saw staring at him from the burnt hovel's shadow the moment he stopped shouting.

"My my, Frost, you sound rather peeved. Is something the matter?" The shadow man said with faux concern, though his smug expression would have gave his insincerity away all on its own. "What oh what could have happened for you to call on me of all people, hm?"

The shot was quick enough that Pitch almost couldn't dodge out of it's trajectory, almost. "What is your intent here, Pitch? Why wont you just leave me alone!?" Jack screeched in rage as he wrought a frozen hell down upon The Nightmare King, the force of the attack leaving his antagonist with a few scratches from failed attempts at avoiding being hit. "Why in the name of this forsaken rock should I tell you my intent, Jack!?" Came the snide reply, still so haughty and smug despite the onslaught. "Especially when by now it should be crystal clear what I want from you, Winter King!"

"Crystal clear? You?! You're as opaque as a three foot thick brick wall! You're very purpose is to be sneaky and to plan every step you take! Just leave me be, you slimy bastard!" Jack's rage was so great he didn't notice the black blur that rushed up behind him and knocked him out cold.

"Oh Jack..." Spoke Pitch as the relentless snow and ice dissipated, a small and creepily fond look on his face. "You're far too much fun to leave be."

-----::End Waking Nightmares:::
Sand Horses

Chapter Summary

"Do enjoy yourself, Jack." he spoke coolly as used the living shadows to harshly toss the small body into the abyssal darkness below.

Jamie meets his heroes, Jack lets loose, and we see Pitch's perspective

Chapter Notes

I deleted all I wrote before now and redid it all at once today. Holy shit I feel good.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were some things that Jack had a fair bit of tentative coherence in, and other things he did not.

This? This was an example of a gray area in both regards. For starters, Ol' Saint Nick got too loud, too fast. The part of Jack that keeps his cracked mind together would find it hilarious that the turn of events after even happened to begin with.

Second, the little boy was the only thing keeping him from icing the entire room. He wasn't all there, but he was well enough- always well enough- to do what he could for the only good thing in his life: children. However that didn't deter him from trying to spear the obnoxiously loud and startling Russian, who was currently running about and shielding himself with his bag of teeth.

He might have some issues, he realized, then promptly ignored.

"Jack, Jack! Calm down, it's okay!" Tooth yelled unhelpfully. Unhelpful in regard of her current lack of knowledge of a little thing called an 'inside voice'. A thing that would both potentially placate the frantic looking boy in blue, and allow for the continued rest of one James Bennett. Maybe. If Nick and his hollering didn't already ruin that.

"The Easter Bunny?" came a still sleep heavy voice, already becoming alert with sudden excitement.

Oh, good.

Jamie Bennett vibrated in his bed, flashlight on and blinding. "Sandman! Santa Clause, the Tooth Fairy, you're here!" the little boy crowed with joy and wonder at the sight before him, hero worship and anticipation alone keeping him from clueing in on the awkward smiles of the guardians.

Toothiana wrung her hands nervously, eyes darting over to monitor Jack, who had at least stopped trying to freeze over North, though was no less fidgety as he stared at the little boy with a sense of wonder. "Heheh, we're here!, y-yay...?"

"Sandy, knock 'im out." said Bunny unceremoniously.
Sandy, to his credit, was at least technically doing as asked when he pounded one tiny fist into his other, equally tiny hand, his expression completely serious. Aster nearly choked at how literally the little man took what he said. "With the dream sand ya gumbies!" he cried in reproach, barely a moment before a very displeased greyhound leapt up onto to bed, teeth bared and growling.

In a moment of panic Jamie went forward and grabbed hold of the dog Abby's collar, upset in his voice as he called. "No, down Abby! That's the Easter Bunny!"

It would've been better if Aster hadn't tried playing brave.

It also would've been better if the others had remembered that they had a particularly troublesome, morally gray Winter King amongst them.

It would have saved them the anarchy.

Maybe.

----::Shadows consume:::

Pitch had taken to kidnapping him for varying periods of time, just after his season ended and he gave his report detailing every weather event. Sometimes for a day, other times a week, and on occasions that he particularly grates on the Boogeyman's nerves he'll see nothing but dark for months at a time. He doesn't even give him nightmares, just leaves him in silence and darkness and the terrible feeling of being alone.

He hates it.

And so, when the next time his report comes around and spring takes over, Jack runs.

He doesn't get far.

"Oh, you poor naïve boy... So much power, yet so little common sense. You know I watch your every move, and you know you can't get away." Pitch grinned with all the twisted, smug joy of a madman, eyes glowing menacingly and face visibly contorting to contain the too-large toothy grin. Jack could only spit obscenities at his deranged captor as he struggled uselessly in the inky black bindings of living shadows, cold and slimy as they were; like the dark shadowed corner of a wet and I'll tended concrete basement.

"You're insane, you slimy rat!" oh how he sounded just as he did that first day they met, his anger the only thing allowing for the lovely skittish persona the boy had developed to be set aside in light of blind, winter rage.

The man of fear and shadow ignored the foul mouthed boy in favor of his thoughts as they transported to the dreadful murk and slime of his dark lair.

He'd admit, in the beginning, to only be looking to observe the boy and plant the seeds of fear, at least caution, of himself. Though as time passed he grew.... Overzealous, to say the least. Nightmares and hallucinations, fights and confrontations, the tortures subjected brought unto him through his greatest fears.

Pitch no longer wanted to just make him feel fear, he wanted to taste his terror, see him cower at the mention of Pitch's name, witness the speed at which he flees as the Boogeyman saunters into view.

He didn't just want the fear, no.
He wanted to break dear Jack Frost, and watch him be torn asunder at Pitch's calloused, wraith like hands.

"Do enjoy yourself, Jack." he spoke coolly as used the living shadows to harshly toss the small body into the abyssal darkness below.

Perhaps five months, this time, just because he can.

----::End shadows consume::

Jack found himself riled up enough to chase down a Nightmare, much to his dismay when he thinks back on that moment later.

"C'mon, Sandy!" he crowed as he took off full speed towards the dark figure flitting amongst the shadows. Soon after he left, Sandy came to follow, though he was far behind.

The winter child grinned with wild, cold excitement, the season he rules coming out in response to the stimuli of the night's joyful occurrences. There was a flurry of movement from the blue boy, and the nightmare screeched terribly into the night air as it tumbled and lost form, becoming no more than an icy black stain of sand on a random rooftop.

The Winter King- and in that moment it was he, if twisted by his years and the cracks in his psyche- cackled and dropped to the concrete roof, tapping on the Nightmare's chilled, glittering obsidian remains with his crook. "Bad pony, no scary." he quipped cheerfully.

All sign of emotion other than fear slipped from his face rapidly when he heard a voice he both despised and dreaded.

"Jack? Oh, you stupid boy." came the chilled words

"You really, really should have stayed out of this."

Chapter End Notes

Well, here's the seventh chapter! God I had fun writing this one, thank you all for your patience!
Dreams and Nightmares

Chapter Summary

Jack felt alive. Wonderfully, brilliantly, completely alive and bursting.

The chapter where what canon there was diverges.

Chapter Notes

This has to be the fastest update I've ever dished out. I hope it doesn't feel rushed to the readers, but I myself find pride in this chapter. And, yes, a deal of Jack's affliction was through Pitch's intentional exposure of the raw power of fear onto poor Jack, leaving him with shadows his own to leech and keep him in the state of mind Pitch enjoys to see him in.

Sandy shuddered, wracked with a despair he rarely felt. He'd almost died, he'd almost- and Jack...

'I told you, Frost, I told you to watch the company you keep!' Pitch snarled in outrage, his face the definition of malice and the cruel intent of one that thought themselves a god among men. 'It's your own fault for whatever happens next....'

It was terrible, witnessing what Pitch had done, hearing the crimes he committed against a lonely eternal child. Pitch was evil, Sandy would not deny that fact, but he had hoped that Pitch would have given up on a scant few horrors after his confinement to earth. Naïve though it may seem for a being older than can be counted.

Jack screamed in agony, limbs contorting at odd angles, bloodless wounds etched into exposed skin and through now shredded clothing. 'You're so very bothersome in spite of the absolute joy I take in breaking you apart.' with a disturbed gleam to his eclipse eyes Pitch kicked Jack across the roof, oblivious to the little man of golden sand shaking with fury behind him.

He shuddered again, reminding himself that Jack is alive- not with them, no, Pitch made sure of that- but he was alive and they would rescue him. None of the guardians would abandon a child in need, especially one so tattered and in need of a love they'd never known before.

It was just a matter of Easter, and then Pitch would get his.

Darkness clouded over the Winter child's vision, bleak blue eyes sliding shut as Nightmares slithered their way into his tired mind. However, the glow of dreams made the fear rear back and retreat to its master, whom of which just barely had the time to dodge an attack launched in blind rage. 'Sandman, just the man I wanted to see!' the Nightmare King cackled as he summoned a scythe of the very sand he'd had the gall to steal unabashedly.
'I'm very displeased, you seem to have pulled my little plaything into where he doesn't belong..'

**Plaything**

He was going to kill Pitch, necessities of fear be damned.

-----::A Little Push:::

He doesn't know how long he's been there, but it's been long enough for the power of Winter to leak out and work it's magic on the world without him to shepherd it. A decade at least.

Mother Nature must be livid.

He found he didn't quite care.

"Jack, Jack! Why so glum, hmm? You're getting company for once! You'd think you'd be joyous..." The gray pallor man grinned at the involuntary fearful flinch and false bravado scowl he received.

Jack spat at the man's feet defiantly. He got a slap for his efforts. "You are in my care now, boy, so you'd best watch yourself. We wouldn't want an accident, now would we?" when there was no reply, he grabbed Jack by the neck and slammed him into the wall with enough force to crack the solid rock.

"I said... We wouldn't want an accident, now WOULD WE?" the sound of wheezing and the sight of closed, unconscious eyes were all he received in answer. "Pht, pathetic." he growled and dropped the limp boy to the cold grimy floor.

~~~~~

Terror clouded his mind, made colors fade and shapes distort all around him. Over there, a monster, and there a trap.

All that he feared, petty and grandiose, swarmed his rattled mind. Tearing at him, confusing him and twisting his thoughts up.

'where am I?' he asked himself. 'what am I?'

A voice to his left- or was it his right? Below him, above? Which way? And again the voice, somewhere, muffled and distant, dark and cold.

'what is that?' his thoughts came again, the voice coming closer. He feared that voice, he knew. It hurt him, watched him, tortured him and locked him up somewhere quiet and dark.

Terror, he realized.

A surge of pain, slimy and wet coiled around his wrists, flinging him. Light in the distance-freedom? A tugging on his mind, an order, wood in his hands, **pain**

'I'm coming for you' a voice provoked.

He screamed.

~~~~~

Pitch watched from the safety of the shadows as the storm overhead devastated the land, killed those unfortunate enough to be outside, and ruined a coveted day. A smile worked oddly across his
features, unnatural and sharp.

Oh, this will be the one Easter he enjoys wholeheartedly.

----::End A Little Push:::

Jack lifted his groggy head, wheezing and groaning at the slightest twitch. He ached terribly and found himself too pained to move more than he had to, barely holding his head up to examine his surroundi-

Dark, cold, and quiet.

"No." Jack whispered mournfully into the darkness.

He woke with a start, not much time had passed away and he found himself watching Sandy struggle to battle both Pitch and his Nightmares. The Nightmares made Jack want to scramble away, to run and hide, but he didn't. He couldn't.

He didn't quite know why.

The Winter child ran amok in the suffocating shadow, struggling in his desperate efforts to find a way out, any way out. He had to get away.

"Leaving so soon?" Pitch said in mock inquiry, voice coming from all directions at once. Jack found himself frozen in mortal terror at the thought that if he took one, just one wrong step, he'd end up running right into Pitch.

He feared these monstrous beasts like no other, hid from them every chance he got. What was he thinking, fighting them like he was? Like he had some vendetta or a score to settle?

Regardless of the reasons he fought he still hooted with manic glee as he froze the heads right off three unsuspecting equine beasts, grinning in triumph as their decapitated bodies fell limply to the hard ground below. Something familiar yet so achingly far away tugged at the back of his mind. Something.... That was missing before. And if anyone had been looking at him at the time, they would have noticed a shadow lift from his gaze, and witness a peek of the boy he used to be.

"I'm pleased to know that your trauma is at least partially my own effort and not entirely that of the shadow's influence" The horrid man of shadows appraised, voice still thrown, unable to pinpoint. "You were too strong willed, I had to take measures to ensure success in regards to my desire for your total fear of me."

Something in him grew, red hot and bursting, making Jack feel something new and familiar at the same time; a burning, smouldering hate. He'd only felt that one other time recently.

Jack felt alive. Wonderfully, brilliantly, completely alive and bursting. Something just felt right, fighting back and peevish Pitch like no tomorrow with his defiant antics. It felt good to turn those Nightmares to grains and freeze them to rooftops.

Then he saw the bow.

Jack had never moved faster in his life, sudden anger at Pitch's nerve searing him and turning his vision red. He knew what the bastard was planning, knew it from who he kept in his sights, his separation of the guardians, and without a second thought he absolutely bellowed in red hot rage as he slammed harshly into the Nightmare King's side. Just as he was nocking the arrow.
There was a shout, alarmed cries, and a sudden cold pain that blurred his vision and sent him reeling. The last thing he saw was a terrifying visage that promised pain yet to come as he slipped quietly into unconsciousness.

Jack growled. A feral sound. And through grinding teeth and a sneer, spoke. "I remember you, and I am going to make. You. pay."
"Jack was fucked.
Everytime he had any assurance that he was a safe, far distance from Pitch, he could hear the creepy bastard travel through shadows with a soft, strange sifting sound. Whereafter he would taunt in a very I'll fitting sing song tone how bad Jack was at this, how he needed to try harder if he wanted to get away.

And honestly, it was infuriating."

Wherein Pitch fucks around, Sandy helps with eggs, and Bunny deals with a child without the aid of joy filled snowflakes

Ah! It's another chapter! I'm so glad I kept writing this instead of stopping because of lack of confidence, there were a few times I considered doing so, and then if log on and remind myself that there are people that like my work. I don't think I can ever say thank you enough, I'll probably become the equivalent of a trillion broken records by the time that happens.

While poor Jack temporarily broke free of the fog that held his mind hostage, under the duress of adrenaline and a slowly dwindling fear, the remaining four of the heroic group found themselves standing silently in the overly large globe room. The only sound was that of the yeti and elves, all smartly working away on the far end of the shop in their attempt to allow the Guardians space to think and to register the earlier occurrence that left them shocked.

"I'm going to kill that smarmy bastard." said a quietly enraged E. Aster Bunnymund, currently glaring with all his might at the moon that sat calm and worthless in the starry sky. "I'm going to kill him, and then I'm gonna wring that glowy idiot floating about in the sky's chubby little neck."

"No! Bunny, Man in Moon must have reason for his actions!" North cried, though his voice was shaky and unsure, instead of the conviction he was going for. "We cannot even be sure it is true, was Pitch that says these things!"

He was the only one, besides Tooth, that believed Manny had a good reason for what he did. They were in denial, and at the moment seemingly nothing would be able to change their opinions on the matter. Sandy, on the other hand...

The slew of rather graphic pictograms spoke his feelings loud and clear, though his beyond enraged glare at the traitorous moon would have done that well enough on its own. "You said it, Sandy." Bunnymund agreed grimly "Reason for it or not, it's beyond treasonous to bring a spirit into existence and then abandon it with no more than a name."
"We knew, because Jack said as much, but none of us really thought bout it til it was shoved in our bloody faces. I dare ye to say that you didn't just assume the kid was one a the ones that can't hear the Tsar, regardless of how much they try." he still refused to look at the others, his entire optical focus on the big satellite in the sky. "Think about it, North! MiM hasn't spoken a peep for three hundred years, just charades. The rat bastard pulled a fast one on the poor kid."

Oh, how he wanted to deny it with all his being, but North couldn't lie to himself, really. One glance at Toothiana's crestfallen face told him she came to the same conclusion. With a large sigh of resignation, the Guardian of wonder let himself be swept up in their target goal.

"Then tell us, Bunny. How will we save Jack, and defeat Pitch Black?"

~~~~~~~~

It was a maze of monstrosities, a horrific mess of Pitch's own twisted design. Jack's goal? Escape, find Pitch, snatch the tooth box, and fly faster than he ever had before.

What happens if he fails?

Pitch tortures him until his barely-there coherence fades into oblivion for the last time.

"Tick tock, Frost! If you want the faintest chance of getting away you really must make an effort." Pitch taunted shamelessly, voice distant and getting closer. Right. Escape first. Then get the drop on the shady piece of shit behind him. Jack hovered with little wind at his disposal, he moved with a constant speed and kept his eyes trained on the inky black walls of the maze Pitch had cowardly raised when Jack had made his threat. It was pathetic really, when he saw the shocked, distant gold orbs widening in what might have been mortal terror.

Unlikely, but one can hope.

"You aren't quite fast enough are you?" came the oil slick voice of Pitch, sounding far, far too close compared to not that long ago. Shit. "I suggest you speed up..."

~~~~~~~~

Having Sandy along to help with the preparations was probably the best turn of events they could have hoped for, honestly. Sure, the tin lids would be fast asleep by noon, but with the golden sand to add a bit of shine to the eggs, as long as all went well this would probably be the best Easter in ages. "Gung ho, mates! We've got ourselves an Easter to prepare for!" called Aster in his holiday jitters.

Then came the disembodied peeps of distress and thousands of tiny pitter patterring feet. "what is wrong, Bunny?" inquired North in concern. Aster twitched his ears in all directions, concentration on his features. "There's something in the Warren."

They all drew their weapons, prepared for a fight. Bunny himself was well resigned to the idea that Pitch, in his strengthened state, could find a way into his home. Though at the same time something in the back of his mind told him the ruckus may well be something else.

A little girl with choppy blonde hair and fairy wings strapped to her back was not what he expected in the least. After hiding their weapons and starting for a long, uncomfortable moment, North was the first to speak.

"Sophie Bennett?"
Jack was fucked.

Everytime he had any assurance that he was a safe, far distance from Pitch, he could hear the creepy bastard travel through shadows with a soft, strange sifting sound. Whereafter he would taunt in a very I'll fitting sing song tone how bad Jack was at this, how he needed to try harder if he wanted to get away.

And honestly, it was infuriating.

"You? You are an ass!" Yelled the royally pissed off Winter King, his wind building up and launching him ahead at full speed. screw it Jack thought I don't care if he has a monster waiting around every corner, If I want my freedom I have to move faster.

He only went one minute worry free before he rammed into a living nightmare.

"Oh, Jack Jack Jack. You really should watch who you insult. So very petty and immature, don't you agree?"

Jack's mind fell into a familiar blankness, and he screamed.

~~~~~~~~

Things were going... Well, they were going rather well, considering the interruption of a tot in pajamas tormenting the eggs. Or googies as Aster called them. Tooth herself was having a bit of fun painting them and watching the Pooka slowly fall into an old rhythm, one they'd all seem to have forgotten in a way.

He let little Sophie corral the googs into the dye river, showed her the paint flowers and the spiral vines that swirl little designs onto the eggs. He even showed her around while letting her ride on his back. (which Sophie hollered in joy during)

It was sweet.

But even she knew that as their task came to a close, little Sophie would have to be taken back home.

"Hey Sandy?" Tooth turned to her sparkling gold companion, who was at the moment spreading his sand onto the eggs, their paint still wet. He turned to her after a moment and presented the Fairy Queen with a question mark. "It's about time to take Sophie home, could you go and put her to sleep?"

Sandy, aware it would be in the little girl's best interest to get home before her parents wake, nodded his confirmation and left his work to do just that.

Tooth sat there, smiling, wondering why she suddenly had a bad feeling in her gut.
"Jack sobbed. The monster grinned."

Warning for graphic or semi graphic descriptions of torture.

Jack is in pain, Pitch watches, and Sandy is ready to make good on his promise to kill Pitch

Chapter Notes

O hey guess who is inspired again! It's me! And writing this chapter almost made me cry, poor Jack will never be the same.

Thwack
Blood oozed liberally from his arms and legs.

Thwack
Screams of agony ripped themselves from his red raw throat.

Thwack
He swore he could hear a distant cackle of glee through the terrible ringing in his ears.

Snap!
The only sound that escaped his mouth then was an unearthly howl of pain.

His eyes opened.
Blood dripped lightly to the rock below, and he could only shiver as sadistic red eyes bore into his own shattered blue.

Jack sobbed. The monster grinned.

~~~~~~~~

Bunny had taken to the little girl curled up nice and sweet and small in his furry arms, her smile bright as the sun and filled with a sleepiness she was trying to fight. "Ye should be getting ta sleep don'cha think, sheila?" He spoke softly and with warmth. Sophie giggled.

"No sheiya! 'M Soapie!" she cried mirthfully despite the tired glint in her precious green eyes.

There was a soft amused huff from Aster, and he nuzzled the top of her head. "Well a'right then,
Soapie." she giggled again, softer this time, and gentle as a spring breeze she fell asleep. Aster's smile grew as he saw the dream sand form into him, painting and playing with a little girl with choppy hair and fairy wings.

~~~~~~~~

There was a horrendous, disgusting wet crunch. He couldn't feel it, couldn't wouldn't let himself see it. The thing tormenting him didn't care, not about the pale and heavily bruised boy's refusal to look at what the monster was doing. What it cared about was that Jack had stopped crying and begging, that was unacceptable as far as it was concerned.

"You ssssshouldn't allow yourself to relax, boy." it whispered as sweetly as a creature that lives in shadow and speaks with many voices possibly could. "It would not bode well for you, dear thing, if you sat in my presence without misery weighing in your gut...."

The Winter child's vision went white with pure agony as the slimy, nasty, bloodied claws of the monster dug into the gaping wound just above his left elbow. He heard an ear-splitting screech, and it took him a painfully long moment to recognize the sound as his own. Sharp appendages dug and scraped and gouged the tattered flesh of his arm.

Jack blacked out from the feeling before he could hear the sibilant hiss of the monster praising how beautiful his fear and pain is.

~~~~~~~~

"Sandy, are you sure you'll be fine?" Tooth fretted over her golden friend terribly, that heavy, uneasy feeling that settled into her gut threatening to claw it's way out in her jitters. "This plan to save Jack has to be timed perfectly, and we aren't well prepared for the real possibility of an ambush before we even make it out of the tunnels."

Sandy's vigorous nod didn't do much for her nerves, though with her reassurance was a difficult thing to give. The Sandman playfully signed a bunny, hopping at high speeds through some grass. Toothiana giggled; Sandy always had a way to ease her thoughts.

Aster just rolled his eyes dramatically. "Oi, just get it on with and take the ankle biter home. It's crunch time about now and we need all we can get." North pat his sandy friend's tiny shoulder. "Yes, Sandy my friend, you must go fast as our Bunny and return so we can take care of Pitch."

In a flurry of golden grains, Sanderson ManSnoozie was gone.

~~~~~~~~

Even in sleep Jack was haunted, faces and places he should remember, dammit but doesn't, because he can't, because it's always too far beyond his grasp. Sounds kept him straining, noises he heard but couldn't decipher. What were they? What did they mean?

Unfathomable pain wrenched him from tormenting slumber. His dull eyes opened carefully and he watched as golden irises admired the mess he was. "You really are good for nothing but entertainment, Jack." he says softly, almost distracted. "Your pain, your fear." golden orbs disappeared for a long moment before materializing once more. Jack choked at the feeling of his bone snapping completely, making him writhe in agony as his left arm, mangled as it already is, was quickly torn from his body.

Pitch's gaze seemed almost remorseful. "Maybe now you'll have learned your lesson, hmm?"
Sandy smiled at the little girl as he watched her sleeping face, little cute snores escaping her every now and then. After a moment he turned to leave for the others, but a thud stopped him.

There she was, curled up on the floor.

Sandy silently huffed in amusement, taking a blanket and a stuffed toy and tucked her carefully before floating out the window.

Then he heard the screaming.

Jack couldn't see anything, could hardly feel. His body was bruised and broken, his world was reduced to red eyes and a golden gaze and an endless, terrible darkness. Blood dried thick and tacky on him, slicking his hair and contrasting against his skin.

He didn't respond when the eyes watching him left.

He didn't respond when a golden glow rushed towards him.

Sandy looked on in horror at the poor boy before him, missing an arm and covered in wounds, looking near to death and limp.

He heard a chuckle in the distance.

He'd never moved so fast.
Fall Back Again

Chapter Summary

"Jack remembers seeing the moon."

Thoughts, Pitch has emotions other than disturbed and obsessed???, Sandy is fucking pissed

Chapter Notes

Poor, poor Jack. *evil laughs in the distance*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jack remembers seeing the moon.

It was big and so bright, and it took away all his fear. When he looked at that great white sphere all he could feel was love, even in his darkest days when he wanted to spit and curse and seethe at the moon for all his pain. For all his agony.

It used to placate him knowing that the moon thought him worthy enough to create, that he had to mean something, but as time wore on and shadows crept up on him, he found himself wishing he could die.

"Why" he'd ask some nights, tears in his eyes and a cold that froze even him settling in his blood. In his bones.

"Because I can" was always the answer he'd receive. "Because I want to see you suffer"

And then he'd wake up.

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Pitch would never admit to the discomfort he felt when he'd ripped away the torn and shredded flesh of Jack's arm, the squelching and the sound of tearing, bone popping and snapping viciously. It didn't matter that he was the scourge of the Golden age near its untimely end, something about personally removing one's appendages with brute force alone made an almost forgotten part of him shudder. It was during his attempt at pushing the foreign feelings aside that a plump little man with fury in his posture and death himself in his honey gold eyes.

"Oh my, Sandman! What brings you here hmm?" Pitch spoke snidely once he realized there was an intruder ready to castrate him into oblivion, and he was beyond shocked to find that his unwanted and foreign remorse didn't bleed through in his voice. What didn't surprise him, was the flare of furious light and following snap of deadly sand whips. Ah, he must have found the boy. Lovely.

"Now now, old friend-" Pitch started, only to be harshly interrupted by the crack of garish golden grains just mere inches away from his feet. "Testy!" the shadow man cried in false bravado as he
danced away from the point of impact. "Don't even consider me a friend anymore? How terribly sad..."

He did not find it in the least bit sad.

"How was he, the frost sprite?" came a slithering, oily voice from all directions once the Nightmare King had seated himself securely in the shadows, careful to mind the Sandman's rapid lashes at his element. Furious sand images were his only answer, to which he scoffed and lashed out with cold wet shadow in reply. "You'd really sit there and tell me the consequences of torment against a child, even a spirit child when you are just as guilty?" Pitch left his security to slash at the beams of warm dream sand with the ethereal black muck that was his tool and master before disappearing once more at the first sign of retaliation.

"Three hundred years, Sandman! He was alone, and oh so sad. He spent years with foreign objects sticking from his frozen corpse of a body, hoping illness or infection would take and he would die." He cackled triumphantly once he clearly saw and felt the absolute, sheer horror dear old Sanderson was trying to suppress in the midst of battle; with the Nightmare King, there were no weaknesses allowed, lest it ends in the madman's terrible victory. "What fun it was to watch him unravel himself just the smallest bit, without my help at all! Just torment after torment and nightmares I had no part in making, lines on skin that never bled, a look in his eyes that spoke of nothing but pain."

At that, the Sandman raged.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Where was he? Where was he!? was all that ran through the fairy queen's mind. When Sandy hadn't returned, they began to run out of time, and nervously they had to proceed without his or Jack's aid. The remaining three had barely left the tunnel to their first destination when Nightmares struck and began to obliterate every egg attempting to make their way above ground before the light of day even touched them. It had been a horrendously unbalanced fight with an equally terrible outcome, and Bunny was crushed beyond belief. It was terrifying to think that this may be it. 'This was our last chance. This was all we had planned, what are we going to do?'

"B-Bunny?" Toothiana's voice shook heavily, her wings drooped and feathers flat, their colors dulled and even graying at the edges of some. "Bunny, please-" She couldn't finish what she was going to say, the despairing look sent her way making her voice croak and lips slam shut.

Every egg, every last one, gone. Their hope, gone...

Pain and resignation washed through her as she registered the meaning of all this.

Pitch won.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Jack was absolutely delirious, Sanderson finally decided, when for the fifteenth time the boy had said nothing but nonsense and babble. It was beyond him how he was even alive- though what Pitch had said during their battle gave him a few clues- and the extent of damage was devastating. The Nightmare King had apparently heated the Winter Spirit's body considerably through careful means like one would if they were trying to boil a live frog. It had caused the blood that was now once again solid in Jack's veins to flow freely at the expense of the boy's long term health. With blood able to flow for the first time in what had to of been centuries Pitch would have likely enjoyed watching the old liquid seep from the many wounds he was covered in. Small and large
the cuts and gashes were surrounded by the tell-tale rust brown.

This poor boy has been through so much.

Sandy carefully scooped him up in a cloud of sand, keeping a close eye on his surroundings: he may have won the battle with Pitch just moments earlier, but he knew the shadow man was watching him, probably licking his wounds and ready to make a comment or two just to play down his weakness. It mattered not to the Sandman how many believers he had - he was one of few that didn't truly need them anyhow, and he already had so little, to begin with. Sandy was more the one who helped the others keep their believers steady, and as his job deigned he also protected the dreams of children. He was never significantly affected by the loss of believers, and it showed especially so when he was as angry as he is now.

A chuckle came from behind him as he made for the exit.

"Run along, Sandman, to your friends- but oh! They seem to be in quite the pickle~"

A blast of light and sand behind him, he witnessed the hunched figure of Pitch limp into a tunnel, and with Jack in tow he followed.

And found himself staring in horror at the sight of thousands upon thousands of shattered egg shells. "Happy Easter, Sanderson~"

Chapter End Notes

I headcanon that although Sandy seems to be generally even-tempered, when you push the right buttons he can bring absolute hell down on the person or persons that set him off. Long fuse, big explosion.
"Pitch had done so much damage, Tooth could feel the pain of losing so many believers in such a short timespan, and it was dreadful."

The Guardians see what happened to Jack, Sandy barely keeps things together, and Tooth gets real sad.

Recently hit some more inspiration, and I've also been reading several books for authors and writers. Aaaaaanyway! Who else wants to destroy a certain shadow man? I do!

There was darkness, and then gold light.

And there was the sun.

Pitch had done so much damage, Tooth could feel the pain of losing so many believers in such a short timespan, and it was dreadful. "North.." She whispered weakly, turning to the large Russian, currently supporting himself upright with one of his sabers. He acknowledged her wordlessly, no wonder twinkling in his eyes as he regarded the Fairy Queen. "Where could S-Sandy have gone? D... Do you think Pitch got to him?" The thought terrified her. Out of all the Guardians, Sandy was the only one that she spent most of her time with, the little King of Dreams always visited her, every night. Whenever the moon was at it's highest, Sandy would be there, giant sand cloud in tow, just so he could see her... If anything were to happen to him, she-she didn't know what she'd do. Seeming to sense her panic- it likely was written all over her face- Nick limped over and gently patted her crown, the feathers mussing up at the touch despite the care taken.

"Do not worry, Toothy- I am sure Sandy is all right." He spoke in a small, tentative, almost... cautiously hopeful voice, hopeful that what he said might actually be true. Toothiana smiled wanly, voice caught in her chest from trying to hold back a panicked sob. This was so unlike her, she mused, and she felt so weak.

'Please, Sandy- Please be alright, and please let Jack be alright too.'

It took her a moment to register what she was seeing a moment later when Sandy entered her view in a panic, a bloodied and horribly battered body that was all too small and frail looking floating on a cloud of sand behind him. It took her a moment longer to register her world falling to pieces at the realization that the body Sandy had with him was Jack's.

"No."
Sandy was barely containing his rage at what Pitch had orchestrated so *infuriatingly* perfect. From start to finish he was toying with the Guardians shamelessly, angering and breaking down the big four in turns. The Nightmare King was merciless and cunning, and the lack of remorse made it no better.

What could he possibly do?

Help Jack, and hope for the best.

Nicholas could do nothing but stare in absolute horror at the sight before him—Sandy covered in tacky, seemingly frosted over blood, looking for all the world like a man kept from bloodlust by the thin tether of a family member in need. Behind the man of sand lie Jack. Poor, sweet Jack who they’d barely known for two days and yet had somehow managed to worm his way into their hearts at lightspeed. He was broken, and battered, and shredded in some places. Worst of all? The boy’s arm was missing, leaving nothing but tattered flesh behind. Flesh that, Nicholas noted absently, seemed as though it was frozen almost completely solid...

"Sandy- W-What ha-" He was cut off by a furious shake of the tiny man's head, his plump face stuck in a frantic expression of worry and urgency. It would have to wait, it seems.

"Come, we shall take snow globe to North Pole- Were it not for the Warren's current state I would suggest we go there, It is far better stocked for such things." Nick said solemnly, to which he received a simple nod of understanding.

Bunny was simply in shock, for once having nothing to say.

He was quiet all the way to the infirmary.

There were buzzing and distant chirps.

And the stars on a moonless night.

With Sandy still alive and well it was easy to stick around a while longer to help Jack, though the sand being in question had a very difficult time keeping things relatively stable enough for the other three Guardians to so much as get out of bed after hours of now very necessary sleep. It was exhausting for the little man, but it had to be done for the sake of not only his longtime friends but the boy they had left alone for far too long. It was time to make amends, despite his fear that it may well be too late for that.

Sandy really hoped that it wasn't too late.

The Sandman spent most of his time orchestrating his dream sand idly from the infirmary room that Jack lies in, silent and all too still. It was hard, seeing the boy like this. Sandy felt so much guilt and pain just thinking about all they’d done to let this happen. Or, more accurately, what they *hadn't* done. There were so many missed opportunities to swoop in and prevent Jack from falling as
far into despair as he had, so many moments where those opportunities were practically thrown in there faces, and all they'd done was take the route that ended only in poor Jack's suffering. Sandy wondered if the Guardians could ever be forgiven if the battered and bruised boy that lay just a few feet away would ever be able to live normally and without pain. Three centuries did a lot to a person, and the winter child's fluctuating mental state was a prime example of this.

"Sandy?" Toothiana called in a voice that was too quiet, too strained. Sanderson turned from the window where steams of golden grains rushed by unaware of the turmoil its commander was going through, and the plump little man suppressed a shudder at the weakened state of the Fairy Queen. Her eyes were sunken and dull, feathers bent and falling off in places, wings drooping and the Queen herself looking far too ashen and gaunt. She smiled wanly at the pained expression the normally jovial man wore. "It's fine, don't worry about me, Sandy." The pain lacing her voice just made him all the more angry with himself. He should have been there, he should have- but no, if he had been there then he wouldn't have found Jack, he wouldn't have heard his screams and the poor child might even have lost more than just his arm. He was upset that he wasn't able to help his friends, but he was at the least happy that Jack was safe from Pitch's evil grasp.

"How is he?" Toothiana asked, likely to defuse the tension that had slowly been building since she entered the room. "Is his blood still frozen?"

Sanderson nodded, his face pulled into a troubled expression. He signed his worries to the Fairy Queen and patiently waited for her reply. Tooth just looked sad, so very sad, and when she spoke her voice was almost a whisper. "The way his body is, Sandy, I- we both know what that means, we both know the reason he doesn't remember his life before he was Jack Frost." The man of sand just turned his honey-gold gaze to the still figure that lay in the infirmary bed, breathing despite the fact that his heart does not pump blood, his lack of a pulse. Yes, they both knew why Jack didn't remember his life before spirithood, and his figurative heart ached at the realization.

Jack Frost, Winter King, was dead.
Remembered in Sleep (Forgotten by Morning)

Chapter Summary

"The child of winter woke to a blinding light that shocked him both with its unexpected appearance and unnerving familiarity"

Jack screams, Tooth is distraught, and Someone new prepares to join the fray

Chapter Notes

This chapter is more of an interlude, and just a few words short of 1,000. I'd like to know if those who are actively reading AWNP want me to start doing longer chapters, or if you all prefer the current 1'000 or more words per chapter.

Poor Jack. I say that a lot.

They have a history of solitude, duty, and war. They know their boundaries as spirits, as do the others, and it is beyond them both to consider something more.

Then why does this connection persist?

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The child of winter woke to a blinding light that shocked him both with its unexpected appearance and unnerving familiarity, leaving him confused and fearful because no that was not possible, he was hallucinating or maybe being set free into the world just like that fateful Easter just decades before. 'Has it been decades?' his thoughts came from some distant place he dares not try to uncover, coherent when he should not be, sane where he simply cannot be. Bad things happen to him when he is free of his mental shackles, punishment for improvement, pain caused by unwanted clarity- why should he want it? Why should he, when it only caused him suffering? It was far safer to let numbness flood his being, it was far safer to just. not. think.

"J-Jack?" Came a soft voice, one he remembers and at the same time can't recall. 'What?' his mind asks dumbly from the deep corner the winter child locked it away in, still strong despite its shadowy cage. What was that voice? Who did it belong to? Somehow Jack should know, and yet he cannot. "Jack are you awake?" It comes again, louder but still soft and sweet and he can't help but sigh shakily as unbidden tears slip from between closed lids, building behind them and bursting through on a sob he fails to stifle. "Why why why why why why w-wh-y whywhywhy-" Jack hears the gasp of alarm and the rustling of feathers but all the winter child can see is downy brown hair, big, soft, brown eyes just like her mother's, and a birthmark just below her left eye.

"Jack!"

"NO!"
Laughter, snow, the lake.

"Sandy!" "Jack, please!"

Fear, pleading- 'I have to save her!'

He hears the rapid movement of sand sliding against sand, but the screaming of his name as he falls is louder

'cold, so cold, why am I cold?'

A scream, incoherent babbling, devastation on a face that could only ever be suited for smiles-

And then everything is silent, the moment is forgotten and pushed away into the winter child's mind where it cannot be found in consciousness, and he slips back into a calm slumber.

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Toothiana stood there in shock, her heart clenching as she watched poor, sweet Jack finally relax into a deep sleep once more. Sandy was sitting beside the child's head, just holding him and weaving his sleeping thoughts with healing dreams as golden grainy tears stream down his face.

"Y-You-" The Fairy Queen swallowed nervously, eyes never once leaving Jack's now calm face.

“You saw that, didn't you? I-I felt it, Sandy- he-" Sanderson cut her off with the gentle caress of sand over her crest, a comforting touch that instantly eased her distraught emotions. She needn't say it out loud.

Jack remembered, but she knew it wouldn't last.

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North hadn't the time to relax, despite what his body was trying to tell him. He could not, he would not cease until Mother Nature responded to his requested summons. Anger is what fueled him now, and with the right words he knew that Mother Nature would cooperate in helping them defeat Pitch.

As Seraphina has said before; There is nothing like a daughter's hatred for her father.

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Aster would wait, wait and for once in his life just go with what was happening without going ballistic with the need to plan every step he took. He hadn't taken the time to visit Jack as of yet-though he knows he probably should, just to make sure he's still there, still breathing.

It didn't matter if Tooth said he didn't have a heartbeat, it didn't matter what had happened in the past. All Aster knew was that Jack needed a family, and he'd do what he could to make that happen.

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It was hours since Nicholas had sent for her, she imagined, or maybe days- years, perhaps?- Before the message sent to her by North came via old mortal magic. Instantly she suspected something was wrong, for the Nicholas Seraphina knew was no longer privy to old teachings as a method to send a message, he preferred flair in the form of idiotic elves and Yeti and overly ornate scrolls instead of letters. Lots and lots of flair. What could possibly have happened to cause North's uncharacteristic actions? 'I'll find out soon enough, I suppose.' She thought momentarily pushing
her work aside in order to open the letter she'd received. "How plain," Seraphina opened the letter to reveal the typical winter holiday theme of holly and gingerbread printed across the parchment, and yet she found herself increasingly perturbed by the shakiness of the handwriting, the apparent urgency that presented itself in a lack of greeting and an uncharacteristic use of her formal title 'Please, Mother Nature, come to the North Pole.'

Sera frowned, with irritation rather than any form of concern in regards to all the red flags she was seeing. "What have you gotten yourself into, you old codger?"

Reading through the short, sloppily-written passage hastily scrawled upon the festive parchment, however, left her radiating an unyielding rage only one person could provoke from her at the mere mention of their name. "Pitch." Seraphina practically snarled as she rose from her seat amongst the bottled 'seeds' of seasons and weather phenomenon.

Hell was certain to freeze over if the murderous look upon her ethereal face was anything to go by.

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Somewhere, far, far below the surface, near a little town in mid-spring, a man made of shadows and madness shivered as though sensing the storm brewing in the heart of someone he'd long forgotten. Pitch's lips tilted downwards a fraction at the sudden unease that washed over him.

"How odd."
Calm Before the Storm

Chapter Summary

"They'd do better this time, and now that they have him, they won't ever let him go."

Seraphina thinks, Tooth hums, Jack sleeps

Chapter Notes

Note to self: Music is your best friend

This chapter was especially fun, I tried adding more to the different sections, more paragraphs and the like. Enjoy!

There wasn't a day that went by where Seraphina didn't mourn the loss of the man who she looked up to, not a single moment passed without her burning rage towards the thing that wore his face, the **thing** that destroyed her father and left nothing but an empty shell of a puppet. She was so distraught the day he went off to stand guard on some barren world several stars away - so far away from her daughter, so **far** and so **alone** in that prison meant for two. Yes, she never saw her father as a heroic warden to the shadows and their many forms, all she ever saw was an innocent man placed into a battle of wits that nobody, not even the hero of light could win. Kozmotis Pitchiner was lost to Seraphina the day he left her for his duties, tears in his molten silver eyes and a mirthless smile that told her all she needed to know; he knew, he **knew** that he'd never see her again, he knew that the monsters he fought would destroy him. All he could hope for was that they never made it off the planet where they had been caged, that **he** never made it off. For his little girl's sake, always for her. She knew, young as she was then, as he walked away with nothing but the clothes on his back and the little golden locket in his hand, that his adoration for her would be his downfall.

She had held a funeral for him in the back garden of their home that very afternoon, knowing that her Father was as good as dead.

Sera shook herself from the memory with a shaky sigh. *Focus, Seraphina, there are more important things to focus on than fading remnants of the past.* She grabbed her satchel, filled with all she would need for her new task, and with the rush of wind, she was gone.

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Sandy found himself forced to leave Jack's side more often than not, caring for his friends who grow weaker with every moment that passes. Oh, he still kept a very close eye on the frozen boy that lay quiet and still within the infirmary, but his priorities had to be changed because of the upsetting state of the other three Guardians. Nicholas couldn't leave his bed, Bunny was small and overwhelmingly fragile, and Toothiana - oh, **Toothiana**. It hurt for her to walk on her dainty legs, the waifish limbs so unused to supporting her weight, and her skin was so ashen, her feathers all a dull yellow or green and their former iridescence gone. It was some time ago that she had chosen to
lay in a bed close to Jack so she could be reassured that he was okay, as well as to provide sandy with a pair of eyes to watch over him when he was helping with Nicholas and Aster. She would never admit to breaking down over their situation, no matter how many times he walked in to see her face covered in tear stains and eyes reddened.

Nick had told him a week ago to keep watch on the globe room in case they had a visitor, since he recalled, with some uncertainty, contacting Mother Nature for aid. In Sandy's opinion that was the best thing, he could have done, despite her tendency to let personal feelings get in the way of the bigger picture. So he agreed readily and kept a close eye on the globe room, where Seraphina was likely to appear when she arrived.

When she arrived, she was radiating impatience and fury.

"Sanderson, I'm glad that it's you who came to greet me." She spoke in a forced calm tone, her towering and powerful figure doing absolutely nothing to intimidate him. He'd known her since she was a little girl, had helped her escape when the Golden Age collapsed, there's nothing she could do to actually intimidate him let alone scare him. Sandy smiled amicably, the first time said expression was genuine in quite a while, before directing her with his sand towards Nicholas. Seraphina sighed and followed.

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Jack was restless again, Toothiana noted upon waking, and Sandy was nowhere to be found. 'He must be taking care of North and Aster.' She groaned in agony as she went to sit up, having to try several times before succeeding, the whole time feeling her now fragile heart split in two at the sound of Jack's fearful whimpers. "Shhh, shh sweet tooth," Tooth said, "It's okay, you're alright, it's just a nightmare. Hush now." Whimpers of pain punctuated her last word as she forced herself to stand, wobbling over on delicate legs to sit by the winter child's crying form. Gently, the Fairy Queen brushed her tiny hand through chilled snowy locks, humming a soft tune as she attempted to comfort the sleeping boy. Slowly, much to her relief, Jack calmed and slipped back into a dreamless sleep. "That's it, Jack, just sleep."

Too weak to move to her own bed, Tooth carefully laid down beside the too-small boy and rested his head against her feathered chest. A regretful tear slid down her ashen face, smiling weakly as Jack pressed closer to her warmth. 'I'm so sorry, Jack, we should have been there sooner.' She thought sorrowfully as she, too, fell back to sleep.

They'd do better this time, and now that they have him, they won't ever let him go.

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There was nothing but pain, so much pain, and so much darkness. He was scared, he realized, scared of opening his eyes. Scared of the world, scared of the dark, scared to know and scared to be ignorant and- Just, terrified. The boy whimpered in fear, clutching an appendage he somehow knew wasn't really there, the skin wet and red and warm. All his world consisted of was the shadows and two pairs of eyes- blood red and glowing gold. 'Nononononononononononono-' No what? He didn't like the eyes, he didn't like the darkness, but it was familiar. It was safe, even with all the pain those things caused. The sound of scuttling turned him into a whimpering mess, curling into himself and sobbing in fear. No one cares, no one will ever care. He's alone, with the dark and the eyes and the agony.

And then suddenly he's warm, there's something small carding through his hair, and Jack swears he can see a color other than red and gold right in front of him. He wants to reach out, but he doesn't, he can't, it's not familiar. The only thing stopping him from running from the warm touch is the
unexpected feeling of comfort and calm. He hears a voice, soft and lilting and laced with something he's all too familiar with. 'Pain, she's in pain.' his mind supplies before being forced away once again, bad, thinking was bad.

"That's it, Jack, Just sleep" Jack hears the voice fade and he almost wants to stay, but he's tired, so tired, so he lets himself slip away into a darkness that wasn't as oppressive as the one before. A moment passes in quiet as the warmth curls up against his side, and he seeks it out, he wants the calm, he wants the comfort, he wants the safety.

....Safe....
Indifference to Regret

Chapter Summary

"She supposes she could have been more like a mother to him, once upon a time."

Seraphina's penchant for memory lane, Jack wakes, Pitch plots

Chapter Notes

Oh! A chapter! If anyone has questions or critic about what's going on and where this story is going, please feel free. I try to answer every comment I get, no matter how long it takes to do so, so don't worry about me not giving you a response. I hope you all enjoy! Oh and, if you haven't noticed, Pitch has lost whatever was left of his waning sanity- not that he had much, to begin with considering he's dedicated three-hundred years to torturing an actual immortal child.

It was something she'd only admit to once, and only to the sorry sight before her. With weak moans of anguish and marks that told of a torture specifically tailored to living corpses and frost spirits, Jack writhed in the throes of an unshakeable nightmare the likes of which Seraphina could sadly imagine with alarming accuracy. What pain this child has suffered, what a great failure that has befallen her with her inability to find the very embodiment of winter, the obliviousness when another did not appear and the winds eventual return to their smooth movements as the seasons progressed. How did Seraphina not realize? Was she truly that blind to her little Winter King?

She supposes she could have been more like a mother to him, once upon a time.

*What ill luck she had, losing yet another winter spirit due to a lack of will to live- in the middle of the season no less! What could it be that lead the hateful little beings to beg for the sweet release of fading? Death was displeased with her, foolishly claiming that it was *her* that caused their anguish and sorrow! Hah! She doesn't coddle the cold, she tempers and springs it about the world for their duties, winter was harsh and deadly. It was only the children with their play and the holidays their parents celebrated that made the unforgiving nature of ice and snow seem calm. Seraphina did not hate winter, though, as the spirits of Summer, Spring, and Autumn often believed. It was a cherished time, for it gave rest to the sleeping fauna and flora, it resets all that it reached and lets it grow anew as the chill melts away. It was danger, it was sleep, it was- oh, my.*

"Can- Can you see me?"

She would try to gain his forgiveness, pray with all her might that he may see her regret and know the pain she felt. What good were her duties if she neglected the spirits that kept the world she loved in balance? Nothing, if the broken shell of a boy before her was anything to go by. "How long has he been asleep like this? Has he woken at all during that time?" Her voice was soft, as though to hide her inner turmoil. Sandy, however, knew her too well. In lieu of pointing it out, the plump little man of sand gave her the estimated time for how long Jack had been stuck inside his
head. "A month?" Seraphina's voice raised an octave, shock on her otherworldly features. "You fools! He needs to be woken immediately, how daft are all of you, honestly!" Embers flew about and dusted her hair in an expression of her anger- if the heavy scowl on her face was not enough of a clue.

"What a strange spirit." She mused, looking the skinny boy up and down, his eyes wide and sparkling with something akin to admiration and awe. It made Seraphina uncomfortable. "Stop looking at me like that, boy." She said harshly, not caring about the almost violent flinch he gave in response- someone was talking to him, someone saw him!

"You can! You can see me!" Came his gleeful shout as he sprung into the air on a powerful gust of cold winter wind. Sera couldn't help her little smile at the childish act, but just as quickly as it had appeared she schooled it into a no-nonsense scowl. "Of course I can see you, boy, you're a spirit. One of four very powerful spirits as well..." And he absolutely reeked of the Tsar's magic. Wonderful, just what she needed, a fun, hyperactive child to disrupt his position with play and joy. 'Damn you, Tsar Lunar.' Seraphina thought bitterly.

Oh, how wrong she was in assuming Jack would ruin his season, not take his duties seriously. He had proven himself time and time again, year after year mixing fun and work perfectly to balance the danger of cold and the possibility of light that it held. She huffed and shook herself free of those memories, she had something to do. "Time to come back to the land of the conscious, Jack Frost."

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Jack was screaming, crying, begging for the pain to stop don't nononono don't hurt me anymore - but it wouldn't and he couldn't move. "Just lie still, little Frost, and take your like a good boy" The voice that was too smooth, too calming told him; but he didn't want to! He didn't want the pain! He didn't want to hurt anymore! Jack could hear snarling in his ear, the voice was angry, the voice would hurt him even more now. "I said, lie. the child of winter screeched in agony as he was impaled on a spike, right through his too warm abdomen. He watched in horrified fascination as crimson red trickled down his pale skin. "There's a good boy, you'll behave now, won't you?" the voice was sickly sweet, too gentle and parental. Jack sobbed and nodded his head weakly. "Good."

The nightmare was too much, and he sobbed uncontrollably even as he jolted awake, the overwhelming power that came with the cold and nature itself shocking him from his feverish slumber.

Tooth sobbed with him, cradling the boy's head to her chest, waiting for him to realize he was awake, that he was safe. "Shhh- shhhh, sweet tooth, it's o-okay."

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Deep down, below the earth, a man of shadows and darkness plans to destroy the Guardians for good. "They're weak, barely holding themselves together, Sanderson's frantic spreading of dreams and belief is testament enough to that." The Shadow man spoke to his army of Shades and Nightmares, a devious twinkle in his eyes being the only indication to his utter glee at the prospect of winning. "They are vulnerable, and I have a special task for you all- I've enough fear to last me the rest of this pathetic excuse for a war, so you'll be finding me something very... particular." Cold silence took over the cavern, the quiet overwhelming and powerful as Pitch eyed his army with an undeniably crazed expression, a hunger that made even the fearlings shiver in fear and anticipation. "Bring me, Jack Frost."
He wouldn't deny it, couldn't any longer, he got a sick sort of glee out of destroying the innocent little thing that soaked up positive magic like a sponge and radiated the Tsar's magic like a beacon of optimism. Annoying, sickening optimism. Of course, the child himself was far from optimistic, he'd ensured that. Pitch made way to the surface and gazed with glee at the waning moon, its light dimmed as if its inhabitant knew he'd finally failed. "I'm going to finish what I started with him, Lunar, you're little child of winter is going to go catatonic with some final coaxing from me, and then I'm going to let the fearlings have at him. The next time you see that boy he will be what I failed to make you, all those fateful years ago..." A mad chuckled escaped him as he faded back into the shadows.

"Enjoy the show's finale, Lunar."

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High above in a place many see as a hunk of rock in the sky, a stout little man lets himself wallow in self-pity for a scant few minutes, before lending all his belief in his Guardians that he could possibly spare. They would win, they would have to.
Chapter Summary

"He was safe, the feathery lady was nice, safe and soft and warm and gentle."

The shadows move, Jack is held, Seraphina makes a choice

Chapter Notes

And here is chapter 16! As always, Jack is barely coherent, certainly not being helped by our resident Boogeyman. Anyone willing to bet how the end events of this chapter will turn out in chapter 17?

I wonder where Aster has been lately...

Shadows stretched and writhed northward, darkness clouded the sky and children that couldn't sleep screamed for their parents at the horrifying sight of distorted silhouettes and the sound of monstrous screeching in the distance. They had a mission, they would not fail.

~~~~~~~~

Jack wept and wept into Tooth's chest, his heaving breaths and choked whimpers filling the room along with the Fairy Queen's shuddering words of comfort. He was awake, finally, but that wasn't to say he was alright now that the waking world has reclaimed him. It was disheartening for Toothiana to see Jack virtually break apart in her small arms, hearing him choke on his own tears. What was she to do? What could she possibly, sensibly do right now but comfort him? It left her feeling all too helpless, all too powerless in light of the little Winter King's suffering.

"Shhh, Jack, it's okay- you're safe, you're alright." She whispered gently into his ear, her voice forced to be unwavering despite her current fragility. It was much to her relief that the child's breath hitched then, clouded blue eyes clearing ever so slightly as he focused on her dainty face. Jack seemed awed, like an infant opening their eyes for the first time and seeing their mother. It was... heart-melting.

"That's it, you're okay, Jack. You're safe here." Whether it was her voice or just that confirmation that convinced him, she'll likely never know, but nonetheless, Jack relaxed, going limp in her gentle grasp and letting out a shaky sigh of relief. He stared off to the side as Toothiana gently ran her little hand through downy soft white locks, conversing with a visibly upset Seraphina. The Fairy Queen knew what she was feeling, a sense of guilt, loss even; A loss of time, opportunity, and a loss of faith in themselves.

How cruel fate can be, sometimes.

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Jack made a soft gurgling noise, the knowledge of speech escaping him for the moment. The lack of speech, however, had no effect on his ability to think.

Safe safe safe safe safe safe s-safe...

He was safe, the feathery lady was nice, safe and soft and warm and gentle. Like a mother, his mother? But he doesn't have a mother. Maybe the lady would be his mother? Safe and soft and warm and gentle. His foggy gaze sharpened ever so slightly as he looked up at the woman holding him, every ounce of his focus placed solely on her presence. She looked back curiously, running a tiny hand through his hair, and Jack found that he liked the touch. It was familiar somehow, and he felt a phantom touch on his shoulder that went away the moment he acknowledged it.

T... T... safe, soft, warm...

T...

~~~~~~~~

Seraphina had led Sandy from the room shortly after feeling the Fairy Queen's gaze upon her, uncomfortable at the moment with the attention. What would she have seen, were she to gaze back at the deceptively delicate woman? Knowing? Fury? Quiet contempt? It was a clear thing where her beliefs lie in regards to the seasons and their duties, and there were a fair few who openly disagreed. Namely those of winter, or those ambiguous to seasonal affiliations. It didn't help with the fact that Sera never once truly paid any mind to the fact that her Winter King was still but a child in both body and mind. In the presence of guilt-ridden Guardians with their affinity for children and the feeling of failure in their current desperate situation, animosity was sure to build.

The look that Sanderson gave her upon regaining the woman's wandering attention was telling.

"Oh, don't you try to lecture me, Mansnoozie. My wandering mind, my insecurities, all of that is none of your concern as of the moment." Seraphina scowled, though her eyes told of deep contemplation. "Your concern right now is the winter child and the Boogeyman, not me, understood?"

She hated this, the concern that Sanderson always offered her. His fatherly demeanor just reminded her painfully of something she'd long since lost. Something she no longer felt she deserved after all these years of forced solitude and animosity. How was it, she wondered often, that of all the people she'd once known so closely, it was the absent-minded star pilot who still treated her the same as he had all those millennia ago. Seraphina blinked away the wetness in her eyes, expression stony and closed off.

Ignoring the worried frown on a pudgy golden face, she spoke evenly and without hesitation. "I will aid you, for the shattered memory of my father, and for my regret at neglecting the young Jack Frost." Sandy's frown deepened at her wording, and Seraphina returned it with a sad glint in her eyes. "I am not that good of a person, Sanderson. I have not been wholly 'good' for a long, long time. I will not help out of the kindness of my heart, but for the sake of my conscience." The disappointment that radiated from Sandy made her flinch, feeling oh so very young again. It made her want to cry.

"Don't expect me to change just because I have acknowledged a great injustice of mine." was all she graced him with as a response, before turning away and making her way to the Workshop's main entry.

She had guard duty to perform now, and Sera would never miss an opportunity to catch a possibly
overzealous Boogeyman by surprise, were he to come their way.

~~~~~~~~

Hours passed with nothing but the sound of footsteps as Elves or Yeti made their way about the Workshop, with nothing to do but loiter and monitor their boss's condition. There was little power they had over the situation, and it bothered them greatly.

Then the screeching happened, and chaos came soon after.

~~~~~~~~

The wards were weak, the Guardians were weak. Their current pathetic state was a great advantage for the invading darkness, allowing them the liberty of throwing out all thoughts of subtlety. What good was something like that to them? Such a strategy was below them when they were stronger than ever! This, this would be easy. Or so they believed until they foolishly swarmed the front entrance, where a formidable foe awaited them.

"And just where do you think you are all going, you monstrous demons of deep space?" Came Mother Nature's chilled inquiry, a deceptively gentle smile on her face that did not reach her eyes, leaving them dead pools of haunting verdant green. Those smart enough to watch their step reared back in a wave of shadow, red eyes peering from everywhere within, narrowed in agitation and wariness as they contemplated the unforeseen obstacle. This did not escape Seraphina's notice, and her smile turned into a scowl, eyes blazing. "You dare to step foot here, to step foot anywhere but the darkness of your lair." She spat at the inky army.

"Do not let them bother you, Seraphina. Just make them suffer.'

"Well?" She asked coldly, staring down the one thing even she felt somewhat cowed in the presence of. "Let our battle begin, hm?"

The Nightmares charged first.
Chapter Summary

"Soft, warm, safe, warm," Jack said absently, broken blue eyes trained on the Fairy Queen's own amethyst ones. Then he smiled, innocent and oblivious to the sounds of distant screeching, and said something that made Toothiana’s eyes widen in shock.

"Mother."

Chapter Notes

I'd like to apologize for the time it took to dish this chapter out, I've just had a big lack of inspiration since the last one and I've also had family matters to attend to. But, now that I've finally gotten this chapter out I'm hoping that you'll enjoy! Oh, and another apology for it being shorter than I normally write them, even though it's only by a couple hundred words.

The disgusting creatures Pitch so adored fell like flies, retreating to reform or turning to dark piles of sand at her feet. Though, Sera would be a very big liar was she to deny the damage being gradually done to her own person, both bodily and mentally.

'Focus, Seraphina. You're giving them openings.' Mother Nature thought harshly, turning on a dime to wrap thick roots around a charging Nightmare. 'The Nightmares are simple to dispose of, but I can't seem to put a dent in the swarm of fearlings.'

wave after wave of shadows was bombarding her at every turn, sand piling and leaving herself at risk fighting among the grainy substance that seemed to slow Seraphina down.

It didn't help that the damnable creatures were taunting her in their hissing, croaking, disgusting voices. Talking about their goal like an overconfident villain, so sure of their success that they believe there was no consequence to detailing everything to their sworn enemies. It was both pitiful and surprisingly intimidating, for it was becoming increasingly difficult to fight with her injuries, allowing the shadow demons a steadily growing upper hand. As she weakened, knees buckling and doubt clinging to her thoughts like poison, Seraphina began to wonder.

Where was Sanderson, and why did she feel like something big was coming her way?

~~~~~~~~

There were so many.

He'd only just convinced a minuscule, weak Bunny and Tooth to not follow him to the intruders. Tooth was easy enough with Jack chittering and cowering against her tiny feathered form, but Bunny was harder, if only because his recent fever led him to be slightly delirious and he was overconfident in his currently nonexistent abilities. For him, Sandy just sprinkled a bit of
dreamsand and Bunnymund was out like a light, and then with an inaudible sigh, he made his way down as fast as he could in the direction of the Workshop's front door.

And again, there were so many of them, swarming the front doors like a dark, looming mountain of darkness, writhing and hissing taunts and demands at the sluggishly moving figure before them.

When he saw the injuries adorning the now collapsing frame of Seraphina, Sandy saw red and unleashed upon the shadows the full power of his sand. All that could be seen was Mother Nature's prone body and a wall of golden sand. All that could be heard was bloodcurdling screeching. All that Sandy cared about was the Fearlings' pain and Seraphina's safety.

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Tooth, her name was Tooth, she said, and he believed her. She was gentle with him, she wasn't the shadows, but he still feared. Would the Tooth lady stay gentle? Was she lying?

No, No, she was safe. Safer than shadows, safer than the Boogeyman. He wouldn't trust her just yet, but he wouldn't leave her either. 'Soft soft, warm and soft feathers, safe.' Jack sighed softly and snuggled into Tooth's warmth, which earned him a smile from said woman.

"Jack, is there anything you remember? From before you woke up?" She asked quietly, holding her breath when she felt Jack tense at the inquiry. His eyes glazed over for a moment before clearing, and he looked up at her.

"Pain. White, Darkness, Color, Pain." The Winter King replied for that was all he could do to explain his memories. Emotions, not events. He almost felt sad when Tooth seemed to deflate at his vague answer, but then thought otherwise and reached up to pat her face. "Soft, warm, safe, warm," Jack said absently, broken blue eyes trained on the Fairy Queen's own amethyst ones. Then he smiled, innocent and oblivious to the sounds of distant screeching, and said something that made Toothiana's eyes widen in shock.

"Mother."

~~~~~~~~

Her heart fluttered in her chest when Jack called her 'Mother', and oh that innocent look made her want to cry. He didn't remember much, it seemed, and she could only wonder what Pitch had done to him in the time he'd been taken from them, rigid with shock and face filled with so much fear. What was she to do? How was she supposed to respond? Did she want to let him keep that innocent fantasy, or did she want to pull away from that tentative bond? She wasn't his mother, but he seemed willing to pretend that she was.

So, maybe, for now, she'd let it be. Just until she can figure it out for herself.

"Okay, Jack, okay." Tooth whispered, pulling him closer to her and resting her cheek on his cool head, but not before seeing the blinding smile of a boy who keeps retreating farther and farther into his mind, who subconsciously just wants to be loved and cared for and wanted. 'Oh dear.' The Fairy Queen thought. 'I'm a goner, aren't I?'

And then she heard more screeching, much, much closer than before.
"I \mathcal{T}_p \eta_2 i^n \frac{k}{z} w_\omega s h^= a f l^3_{3/2}"
What a Mess

Chapter Summary

Mother Nature lay there, superficial wounds healing slowly. 'I have duties to this world and this world alone, but yet I am here, fighting for the protection of a winter spirit... I fear that I would not give a second thought to abandoning Jack again, were he not the embodiment of the season of death and sleep.'

Seraphina sighed, ever-conscious of her flaws. "What a predicament I have found myself in."

Chapter Notes

This is a chapter that is likely to be revised at some point, there are parts where I just feel things were rushed or forced- or made to seem as a 'fix-all' even if that isn't the intent. I also feel as though Pitch is a little too off compared to previous chapters.

Reviews would be appreciated, I'd like to know your thoughts on what I could do to improve, and what I may need to change.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He clung to her tightly, shaking like a leaf and keening. He knew what lay beyond the door, the creatures that took their precious time, no doubt just to torture them. Tooth found herself wishing desperately for her strength, for she couldn't dream to defend Jack in the pitiful state she was currently in. In fear, Toothiana simply watched.

"So yes, I'm a k's a h e s a y s, s o y e r y."

Said one dark, hazy figure. The other chuckled deviously in reply, eyes of red flashing as they both stared at the two cowering on the bed.

"The man was open armed by our onslaught. He against the old one's daughter, they did not seize a piece of each made s lip away.

"The king is strong on a, or, you is has his, turned one, o. i. to back e e a the knees, s.

Came the other's voice, its gaze settled intensely on Jack. Toothiana pulled him closer.

"I need to right a i n m o p."

Jack shuddered violently and suddenly, the sound of cracking ice filled the room. His expression was of pure terror, but his eyes glowed fiercely. "No. No, no no no no no no no no no NO!"
Sandy flopped heavily to the ground, eyes wide and thoughts muddled. His attention was focused on the battered form of Seraphina, bruised and bloodied- but still breathing, still breathing, Sandy had to remind himself. She wasn't well, she wasn't unharmed by a longshot, but she was breathing, alive.

"Sanderson."

Sad honey gold eyes regarded her, worry and exhaustion evident on his face. Sera had to wonder, then, what Sanderson really thought of her. He pushed all her buttons with his fatherly actions, the familial love he showed her that Kozmotis no longer could, the displeasure when she did something that the plump little man did not approve of, almost disciplinary, as much as he could manage at least. And if she had been a mother to the Frost child, would that mean Sanderson would be a grandfather of sorts? Maybe so, maybe not so, it didn't matter either way, because this connection between her golden companion and herself didn't need a definite label. It didn't need to be described. It just was.

It just is. "Sanderson, I will be fine. I am the essence of this planet, remember? I am the weather and seasons, the animals and way of life. Go check on Tooth and Jack, I need the time to contemplate."

He was hesitant, obviously, and though he knew Seraphina could heal most of her injuries, they were both aware of the long-term consequences and the lingering side effects. Just as he was about to refuse her command, the sound of Jack screeching in rage set him off in a flurry. Mother Nature lay there, superficial wounds healing slowly. 'I have duties to this world and this world alone, but yet I am here, fighting for the protection of a winter spirit... I fear that I would not give a second thought to abandoning Jack again, were he not the embodiment of the season of death and sleep.'

Seraphina sighed, ever-conscious of her flaws. "What a predicament I have found myself in."

Anarchy is the most accurate word he can find to describe this, a blotch of void frozen in ice, the room painted blue and white with the makings of winter. The shadows writhe in their prison, hissing words he cannot understand and unable to escape; how had he missed them? Sandy turned to Tooth and Jack only to find himself still, eyes widened in shock. Tooth was flying, her wings were working again! But how? In her arms was a twitching Jack, clinging to her like a scared toddler after a nightmare, and then it clicked.

Jack was still young, physically and mentally. That would lend even more power to any generating of belief in some form if you consider the mental age regression he's shown... The Fairy Queen seems just as surprised, a look of awed disbelief on her face. "S-Sandy... He called me his mother, do you think...?"

And then she gasped, amethyst eyes wide and filled with hope. "It- it's not much but, I feel better than I have in the past few months, do you think that we could- could really start trying to gain back belief?" The Fairy Queen looked at Jack, who was staring back at her. "He believes I'm his mother, he's connecting things that associate with his life to what he knows, what he can remember. He doesn't have the memories, but he does have the concepts, the innate knowledge from before he was a spirit.

"Sandy, we need to get believers, we need to get Bunny and North stronger. If we can get just- just some kind of foothold! Maybe we can help Jack then, get his memory box and give him the peace
we all know is missing.” Gently she held the winter child closer to her, letting him hide his face in her feathers and carefully ignoring the incoherent mumbling for now. Sandy took a moment to think about it all- memories couldn't fix Jack, not after all he had been through, but maybe it would bring him back to the fragile reality he had when he first joined up with them. If they could negate whatever influence Pitch has over Jack using the certainty that he was loved, once upon a time, it would make things so much easier for everyone involved.

But, of course, they needed to strengthen themselves first and foremost. Show people the Guardians exist, prove that they were real.

First, the chubby man looked at the ceiling as though he could see the moon through it, expression determined to try every avenue they could, and then he turned to Tooth, flying and still so very shocked by this turn of events. Sandy nodded to her, a clear decision made. The Fairy Queen smiled with her usual awkwardness.

"Now we just need a plan."

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"You-" He didn't bother to finish, they didn't deserve to hear his rage- they needed to feel it! With that Pitch grinned nastily, the darkness that shrouds him distorting it into disgusting, unnatural proportions like that which one would see in the dead of night. His teeth gleamed with a yellow tint, his eyes blazing as he pulled the fearlings and nightmares into the center of his copper globe, illuminated by a light with no source. They keened pitifully at the intense pressure, their ever-shifting bodies forced into a set form, pressed together and howling platitudes to appease their master.

Suddenly bored, The Nightmare King released his manipulation, watching with a detached smirk as his little demons of darkness flung multiple directions and rebounded harshly off the walls of his lair. Today was a bad day, it would seem. Pitch's usually poised and gentlemanly persona shattered completely by this... unpleasant turn of events. Seraphina... so she was back with the big four, aiding in his downfall. It was a terrible circumstance for him, as he could no longer pull the Father card, the embodiment of earth itself was finally far too bitter to let it stun her. Besides; she's made it clear that she has long believed her father to be dead.

"This has just been made far more convoluted than it needs to be."

Chapter End Notes

For anyone that has the intent to stay with this story and series to the end, I've decided on a name for the next installment of Great Flaws and Shattered Glass!

'Mr. Sandman, Bring me a Dream'

I know 'The Chordettes - Mr. Sandman' has to do with romance, but honestly, I really like the song and that one line in particular, so there's your title!
Remembrance and Quiet

Chapter Summary

The first work in 'Great Flaws and Shattered Glass' Is complete! It was inconsistent, messy at times, and I always struggled with what I wanted to do with the story. But here we are, and pretty happy with the outcome. Thank you to everyone who has stayed with this fanfic. I'm very grateful for all the amazing support.

Stay tuned for 'Sandman, Bring me a Dream'

Jack stared curiously at his missing limb, space where it was torn still red and the flesh frozen stiff, far more rigid than the moment in which it was ripped from the rest of his body. It was a morbid Fascination that he had with it and he had previously not noticed the absence after waking, as he was a bit preoccupied with other, more pressing matters. Carefully, he took one finger from his still attached hand and prodded the stump with interest. Upon noticing, Toothiana quickly pulled the wandering limb away, taking the rappings that Jack had, prior to examining the stump, removed from their position and thusly exposed it to the open-air.

The fairy queen lightly chastised him in a heavily contrasting tone that made her seem more calming, rather than correcting. Understandable, considering her concern about unnecessarily upsetting Jack with negativity, even to correct something like messing with a wound. "Jack, please don't pick at it, okay? You'll aggravate it by doing that, and that could cause to get worse," Even though it was frozen, lifeless flesh that neither rotted nor festered, meaning that any injuries would not necessarily mean infection or further injury. It just gave her peace of mind, so she went ahead with preventing the possibilities. Using the wrappings now in her possession, she got Jack to stay still while she re-wrapped the bloodless yet still gory-looking injury. That was a major concern for both her and Sandy, thinking about how the damaged Winter King- so much responsibility for such a fragile mind, it broke her heart- would adjust to the loss. "You haven't made any noise for the past hour," She expressed "Is something bothering you, Jack?" It was more likely that he was just preoccupied with his own world, far into his mind as he is, but knowing for sure was a safer course of action.

"Thinking," The boy stated simply, turning his wandering attention to Tooth's downy feathers. No longer were they fragile as they were just hours ago, but still lacking their normal luster and gleam. "No bad, thinking okay, safe for now."

The Fairy Queen smiled softly, kind and warm. Chilled fingers carefully ran through her feathers, an inquisitive glow to otherwise expressionless blue eyes. Keeping the Winter Child occupied was far easier than it would have at first appeared. Tooth was immensely grateful for Jack's attachment to her at that moment, but her mind still reeled with recent events. Jack could produce belief, he could even produce enough to bring her into good health again! It amazed her and gave her some hope. They would win this, Sandy and Her would work together to get Nick and Bunny into shape, then they'd all plan their next move. Pitch would get his comeuppance, she'd be sure of it.

And the matter of Jack believing her to be his mother-

"The Tooth Fairy?"
Quickly Toothiana spun around, eyes wide as saucers and dragonfly wings fluttering furiously. It was a little boy, one with brown hair and eyes, a round face, and he was wearing clothes instead of pajamas. Was that a backpack and lunchbox? "Jamie Bennett..." She mused before frowning at the boy. "What on earth are you doing young man? It's the middle of the night!"

Jack simply stared at Jamie, and Toothiana seemed to not realize that Jamie could see her. The boy in question's expression twisted around awkwardly a bit, as though deciphering what to do, before finally settling on amused. He laughed into his hand, trying to stifle the noise. "My first time meeting the Tooth Fairy, and she's asking me what I'm doing out of bed." The boy looked up at her with an examining gaze as a golden glow came up from behind, to which Tooth appeared to catch up with the circumstances, raising her hands to her mouth and gasping in excitement.

"Sandy!" She squealed rather high-pitched. Jack startled in response but for the moment he went unnoticed, silently relaxing as he watched everything unravel. The boy, in particular, intrigued him, some faint emotion rising to the surface the longer he stared. Frozen water came to mind, and the distant thoughts telling him the boy was supposed to be something else. Odd, Jack concluded, allowing himself to blankly stare at the brown-haired child talking animatedly with the two Guardians. "This is amazing" Toothiana squeaked, her own thoughts a bit erratic as she tried to calm down. Before Sandy seemed to have only kept the children's belief for the duration of their sleep, used to only enhancing the belief that had once been there, to begin with. And what's better, Jamie seemed aware of Jack's presence, shifting now and then to get a look at him, briefly frowning in concern, before turning his attention back to them.

"How did this happen, exactly?" She asked the child, curious as to how a solid basis of belief managed to find its way into his heart again, even in the midst of a terrifying reign. Jamie shuffled a bit, rubbing the back of his neck as he thought and still eyeing a blank-faced Jack when he could.

"Well," He began. "I was asleep, having a nightmare about the day I couch-surfed through town. I'd been having a lot of them about that lately, but I also got thinking. There was ice showing up as I flew by! I wasn't, like, really conscious of it at the time y'know? But there was ice popping up, and when I woke up from the nightmare this time, I realized that there had to be something that made that much ice, that fast!" And here, Jamie turned his full attention to Jack, making eye contact and biting his lip awkwardly. "The only thing I'd ever heard of making ice that fast, in the path I was going down, was Jack Frost. I looked him up the day after mom told me not to let Jack Frost nip my nose, and tonight it just kind of... Clicked."

By this time the Winter Spirit in question was wide-eyed and tilting his head around like a confused puppy. "You said name, my name."

Tooth carefully reached out to him, rubbing a tiny thumb against his shoulder. The monotone of Jack's voice was offset immensely by the shakiness that bled into it briefly, making it heavily apparent that he was feeling something about being seen, and she thought about how he could probably feel the belief now that he'd been made conscious of it. This was a good start, Tooth imagined, for both Jack and the future of the Guardians. A believer to get them one step closer to beating Pitch finally, after months of being unable to move hardly at all, weak and incapable of defending themselves, and a believer for Jack, who'd likely lost hope for such a thing after his mind began to degrade. One step closer...

Sandy waved his hands frantically in the air and catching Tooth's attention, she watched his sand move and flow together into images that she could decipher. "You think Jamie can help us gain more believers?" The Fairy Queen asked after a moment, thinking over the proposal. If Sandy's images were anything to go by, then Jamie was as strong-willed and likely as pure-hearted as their dear Katherine had been. It was promising, but the thought of putting another child in Pitch's path...
"I don't know..." Her words sounded uncertain, something Sandy could understand fully. In response he communicated his own feelings, easing her mind with the assurance that Pitch had pulled the final straw. Fear might be a necessary element for the world, but the Nightmare King's approach was constantly tilting the balance.

'He won't be getting out of this one.'

And Tooth couldn't help but believe him.

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Mother Nature was doing her own part, significantly weakened and still healing as she was. It was a simple task, one that required her to simply stay where it was safest for now; the North Pole, where she’d keep an eye on the two Guardians that remain at the location. Again, simple. All she needed to do was watch them, feed them, and make sure they didn't completely fall apart. She also took the time to meditate on her situation once again. Constant evaluation, imagining all possible outcomes, overthinking.

It was easy for her to do, overthink things. But what else was she to do? Her thought process kept her on task with the duties she was burdened with. Seraphina sighed as she finished braiding the sleeping North's beard, tying it off with a bright pink bow that she had located somewhere on the ground near the obnoxious elf hovels on the first floor. 'I am not willing to change my view of the world for the sake of redemption,' Sera thought to herself, moving on to childishly paint North's nails with the toy paints. It was an odd sight, considering her regal stature and completely serious expression. 'But I am afraid that I might be feeling more inclined to change my attitude for Sanderson, and Winter...'

Seraphina frowned, setting down the small brush and paints in favor of losing herself in her thoughts. 'The boy has brought a new emotion to the season, forced me to see it differently. I ignored him, set him aside like all the others that he succeeded. I wonder, now, if I could have prevented his fall by paying more attention to him, by putting aside my reservations and just caring for the boy. Would it matter? Am I capable? I do not know, aside from the fact that I fear I would have, in the end, done nothing for the boy. No, not... not boy. Jack. I would have done nothing for Jack.' Oh and what a strange feeling that gave her, a fleeting ache in her chest that she squashed down like any other feeling or emotion that might help her grow as a person. It was something she could acknowledge, the lack of growth unless pulled into it kicking and screaming like a petty child.

That was what she was in the end, though.

Seraphina's breath quickened as she brought herself back to reality, and realizing that the floorboards around her were burnt, her eyes wide and face coated in... Tears. Carefully, delicately, Mother Nature raised a finger to her cheek and wiped, finding it covered with the salty liquid. She stared, quiet, her mind for once empty of thought, of contemplation and emotionally distanced recollections. She stared, and then she let go, a dam opened.

Seraphina wept, and wept, and let only four words enter her thoughts. Words that proved that she truly was just an emotionally stunted little girl on the inside, forced to mature in order to survive, to perform her duties.

'I miss you, father.'

She'd never truly come to terms with any of it.
The seven children were lined up, nervous and unsure. They seemed like they were almost hoping that this wasn't a dream, that it was real. "So, we just have to chant a lot?" Caleb questioned, incredulous. "That sounds an awful lot like something cults do." Continued his brother, Claude. Toothiana bit her lip awkwardly, stuck somewhere between surprised laughter and uncomfortable shuffling. Sandy stepped in for her when he noticed, waving his arms to garner attention before meticulously spelling out words with his sand. That, by far, was one of the hardest things for him to accomplish. He would respectfully wait till after everything had been set right to pat himself on the back, however.

The stocky girl, Cupcake, responded to his explanation first, a bit of an understanding expression forming on her face. "So, it's just supposed to be old, really simple magic? No cult stuff?" Sandy chuckled silently at that, and confirmed to her that no, there was no 'cult stuff'. At that all the children seemed to visibly calm, perking up soon after and forming a circle on the grass.

The seven of them held hands and concentrated as hard as they conceivably could, youthful faces contorting as they did so. After several moments of silence, in unison, they started to chant. "I believe, I believe, I believe!" At the same time, Tooth was already near done with collecting teeth, the morning light soon to be beyond the horizon, and Sandy spread his sand as far and wide as he could. Jack, as he'd been found prone to for the past hours, watched quietly, almost calm. Sandy was sure to keep an eye on him, not wanting to risk anything happening if anyone were to look away.

Unbeknownst to them at the time, a man of shadows was feeling the fear subside in large increments, starting with Burgess and the dreams of many amplifying the power of seven very special children. Kids would wake to quarters under their pillows, and within the hour would find presents and eggs within their homes.

Enraged, said man gathered his massive army of fear to him and set out from his current position planting fear across the world.

Jack's mind reeled, watching the children play in his snow, the light dusting that he'd conjured to cover a small section of the park. They saw him, believed in him, they saw him! What, what did that mean? Surely he wasn't free, terror still clung to his core like a strangling vine, slowly choking the tree it rest upon, but there was a tranquility, a click of a puzzle piece into a space that had been empty. Jack watched the children with rapt attention and intrigue.

"Jack, come play with us!" the Jamie-boy said, boyish grin spread along his features. Jack felt a small pull, something telling him that it was okay, that this is what he's truly meant for, to play and spread gentle chill. Before a choice could be made however, a familiar dread crawled up his spine and froze him in place.

Only one thing could do such to him, and it wasn't good. Jack turned to face the east, staring at the sky. It was as if all things peaceful perished in that moment when the winter child locked eyes with none other than the Nightmare King.

Some sort of progress had to of been made, Seraphina supposed, face the absolute definition of unamused and annoyed.
What other reason would there be, logically, for a fairy that had mysteriously disappeared some time in the past months to suddenly appear to her with feathers mussed and voice frantic?

"You were captured?" a small nod

"I am thoroughly surprised that no one but myself noticed. Perhaps the Guardians are understandable, but surely Sandy would have taken note of such an occurrence." a sharp chirp, almost berating

"Do calm yourself, little hummingbug, I would listen if you would get to the point." the little fairy twittered rapidly, and Mother Nature's face was marred with a frown. "He's taken all of the fearlings and Nightmares with him?"

It would seem she was needed elsewhere, but luck would be on her side as St. Nick and the Space Rodent were looking far better than nearly an hour prior. "Find your Queen, and warn her of the coming army. I have business to attend elsewhere. Off the little fairy went, while Seraphina psyched herself up in preparation for the task of entering the underbelly.

Pitch's lair.

She would never tell a soul how she knows its location, it was a story best left untold. For now.

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The earthly image she possessed clashed harshly against the bleak shadows as Mother Nature emerged from an archway of birchwood and thorn. The woman's nose upturned in disgust as dust wafted about with every step. The air was stale, so much so that a mortal would not be able to breath it without suffering consequences. It was cold in an unnatural, very unwelcoming way. Seraphina's every breath produced diamond dust, every step left a smooth print on uneven stone.

Observing, she came across a mass of weak fairies in cages, a table with an empty, tipped over cage, and a mass of what Seraphina assumed to be tooth boxes. Carefully she picked up the small cage. "So this is where he kept her..." she noted upon seeing the feathers lining the metal floor and the telltale signs of an enraged fairy via bent cage bars.

The powerful woman snorted softly at the thought of such a tiny, frail thing managing to bend iron bars thicker than her little birdlike neck.

Considering the circumstances she quite needed a good chortle.

A soft chirp catches her attention, and she raises her head to examine the flightless hummingbug several feet above. Seraphina raised an inquisitive brow.

"She is unique, isn't she?" she questioned softly. A small nod was her answer.

"and might you elaborate on her individuality?" the series of chirps after made the woman hum curiously. A fairy that wasn't of the Queen's own flesh, a creature of her own, not a clone of their dainty mistress. The little thing, dubbed 'Tooth baby' or 'Baby Tooth' by young Jack just... Appeared one day. Strange indeed, she mused, but not the point of her task.

"Surely your strength must be returning to you, so I must request that you and your sisters fly swiftly to your Queen once your wings are in working order." she didn't bother to wait for a nod of acknowledgement, favoring instead the task of searching for a very particular tooth box.

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It was chaos.

They had been lucky for Tooth's fairy to have warned them, and for he and Nick to have arrived just in time to boost belief with a few prezzies and googs before Pitch arrived. Jack was hidden safely with the other children, fearful for his and the little tin lids lives.

The Boogeyman refused to speak to them, too far into his icy madness as he was. The ruler of fear had not taken the toll his power would have on himself in the long-run regarding his thoroughly terrorized charge into consideration.

Something that would shortly prove to be their saving grace, distracted as the man was with giving the Guardians a right beat down.

Left and right, Aster kept himself from thoughts of pain and fading through the calming activity that was beating the snot out of fearlings. Ashes were all that remained of the little blights brave enough to come to him.

"Bunny!" he suddenly heard Jack's horrified voice, and the shock of Jack calling for him to help would have to wait when he turned and saw it.

Pitch, slimy fingers wrapped tightly around Jack's throat and Nightmares advancing on the children standing behind him. He felt his blood run cold as the winter child's eyes rolled back into his head, black tendrils creeping under his crackling skin.

"THIS IS THE LAST TIME YOU GET IN MY WAY WITH YOUR BUFFOONERY, YOU PATHETIC EXCUSE FOR A SPIRIT!" the shadow man screeched in rage.

Aster was almost at Jack's aid, when Pitch was blasted backwards by a flurry of gold sand.

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The children pulled Jack to a safer location, all of them helping in heaving the frozen boy across the ground.

Soon after propping the winter king against a brick wall, Seraphina walked through an archway of maple and jade, startling the seven children that stood protectively in front of their fellow kid. Three-hundred years old or not, they had heard enough from him whilst hiding to know when there was someone who shared their mindsets. Jamie glared harshly at the new person, wariness palpable even faced with a strange beauty such as her.

"Who are you?" the boy demanded, to which Seraphina huffed and gave no reply, instead ushering the children away, ignoring fearful protests.

"Find another place to hide, young ones, I will not harm your dear Jack." she spoke in a shockingly reassuring tone. 'No more than I already have with my neglect.'

Unable to do anything, the seven begrudgingly ran towards a group of Nightmares. They hoped that their maybe-trust in the woman's word was worth it.

Attention returned to Jack, Seraphina gently rouses the boy from unconsciousness, careful to note the grey flesh around his neck, the black tendrils that sprout from there, reaching to the sides of his face and into his eyes. She barely contains her rage at the sight of his eyes as they open; blackened sclera and irises barely a shade different, Nyacinth rather than cyan.

She was unworthy of the boy, yes, but nobody gets away with tainting a seasonal. Seraphina would
personally see to Pitch's overdue demise. "Jack, I was informed of certain plans before your departure. I would like to return to you something of yours."

Carefully, with gentle hands and with a calm unfitting of the battle, Seraphina placed Jack's tooth box into a quivering lap, took hold of a trembling hand, and placed it upon the surface of the intricate object.

And Jack remembered.

"Jack!" Joy, warmth, a toothy smile on a perfect, wonderful face.

"Jaaack!" a giggle, teasing, a scolding tone when he falls from the branches.


"You can't catch me!" his world, his everything, that little girl who stole his heart as a baby.

"C'mon, big brother! You promised!" soft doe eyes, a petulant pout. He remembers when she was born, red-faced and wailing. Calming when she was put into her big brother's arms for the first time.

"Jack..." a gummy smile, chubby hands reaching out-

"...I'm scared." a look of love only a baby could give, awe and adoration. A tiny, oh so tiny hand fisting around his thumb-

And so much love. Love. Love. A need to protect and to cherish forever, a beautiful treasure.

The ice cracks, her little face fearful, tears threatening to fall and she's scared. She doesn't wanna die.

"It's going to be okay." and it will, he promised. Waking up in the middle of the night to see her, looking down on her in her cradle. A promise. 'I'll protect you, Emma. Always.'

He grabs her, saves her, doesn't even realise where he's standing. He smiles, satisfied.

A broken promise. 'I'll always be there for you, you'll never be alone.'

The last thing he ever hears is her gut-wrenching scream as the ice gives way and he falls to his death.

But there was always love. Love. Love. Always for her, everything for her.

"JACK!!"

When Pitch woke, it was in darkness.

At first, he thought that he had dreamed it all. But then he remembers. He doesn't sleep. "Where am I.??"

"You're facing sentencing, you are in Mother Nature's domain."
That voice... "Ah, Jack. How are you, hm?" his question is met with a scoff, and a vicious kick to the ribs. He finds that it actually hurts. Curious.

"Calm down, Jackie." says a gruff voice. The rabbit. "Remember what we talked about?" a sigh, shuffling feet.

There's no reply, but Pitch gets the odd feeling there's no need.

Suddenly he can see, finding that he had been blindfolded. Before him are the guardians, the seasonals, and..

"Seraphina."

He gets no response.

Pitch knows what is happening, finds himself unnervingly okay with it. His eyes are silver.

"Pitch Black," Booms Seraphina's voice, so much power in just two words. "you have committed your last crime, and will receive no trial. Today is your sentencing, and only that.

"Your transgressions are many, among them being the extended torment and manipulation of a high-ranking spirit, and the tainting of a seasonal. Winter is forever marked by your actions." Mother Nature turns to the four surrounding her, awaiting their say.

A moment passes, all but one wearing bored expressions. That one being Jack, his visage marred by Pitch's own two disgusting hands. He has the strangest sensation if guilt.

The moment ends with one word, spoken by all the seasonal present. The tone used is almost calming, despite what is said.

"Death."

And what more does a man like him deserve? Pitch silently requests last words as Mother Nature stands to take his life. It is begrudgingly granted.

"I'm sorry, my little star child." and he closes his eyes.

And all too quiet death for such heinous crimes. But if anyone were to pay attention, they would see the shock and pain in Seraphina's eyes as she did her duty, the tears that fell as she recognizes what those words meant.

She'd been granted her wish ever since coming to this wretched planet.

One last goodbye.

~FIN~

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