Glass Labyrinth

As it set, the warmth of the sun seeped behind the distant horizon, the last rays casting over the quiet city created twisting shadows that beckon in the cold night. The world began to settle with the night life, everything breathed anew while Jane lay in her bed motionless. The coldness of the world permeated the room; a hopeless loneliness persisted through her being, resting heavily on her body as if a thick veil of brine consumed her. The still, deafening anxiety of the room was disturbed by a shrill ping, a message from her friend. Jane checked her phone and a heavy sigh escaped her lungs. '28 *unread messages, 3 missed calls.’*

As she read the message her ears rang with a persisting buzzing; ‘Hey, how are you feeling? I came by earlier, but you didn’t come to the door and wouldn’t answer your phone again. I know that things have been hard but please get back to me sometime, okay? I’m worried about you and just want to help.’ ~ Ava

Jane wanted nothing more than to talk, to let herself feel for more than a moment but she couldn’t, the pain was too much. Every time she tried the thought alone made her throat tighten and imprison her words as her eyes would well with tears. It was frustrating And embarrassing for her to feel this way.

“God, I can’t stand this anymore. I just can’t…”

She buried her head under the covers, allowing the sheets to consume her as she began to sob hot, painful, burning tears that slid down her face and soaked into the linen sheets. She cried for what felt like hours as the sky faded into peaceful twilight; the sun and the stars dancing for the small moments before her exhausted teary eyes slowly closed, beckoning her into a deep sleep. The overwhelming fatigue pushed her downward, sinking her into the mattress, bringing her closer and closer to a deep slumber. The sweet breath of sleep filled her as her worries and sadness pulled back allowing her to rest. The feeling of respite was calming and her mind slowed.

Then, a voice. A soft, comforting and familiar voice spoke to her.

*“Are you lost? Please don’t cry. Come, darling, I’m here. I’ll keep you safe…”*

Jane stirred and as she did the blackness of her closed eyes lingered. Confused, she felt for her phone only to realize that she was no longer in her plush bed but rather on rough, cold, stone ground. Fear overwhelmed her as she realized she was alone. unable to see in an unknown place, she frantically called for help.

“Hello? Is anyone there? Please, help! I can’t see anything; I don’t know what’s happening to me!”

A moment passed but no reply came. She was completely alone.

Trying not to panic she felt around, grasping for anything she could use to orientate herself when she brushed past something fragile and metallic. She picked it up and as she held it, the strange shape was unmistakably a pair of glasses. She turned the object in her hand and an idea entered her thoughts.

*Wear them.*

Jane placed the frames around her head and when she peered through them the world gained form; the blackness became colourful and although blurry, she could see towering shapes around her. Before long, her vision settled, and the blurriness faded giving way to her new world. She was surrounded by large glass walls, glimmering like crystals in the sunlight. When she looked up, she saw the world blanketed in the twilight sky, the stars sparkling across a rich blue and orange canopy as they awaited for the blackness of the night to encompass them; trapped in an eternal sunset.

Jane had never seen anything like the scene before her, It felt as though she was in a painting. It was beautiful, Magical even. and yet she could not help but to think.

*Where am I?*

Jane examined her surroundings and noticed a soft glow around the walls. It didn’t come from the walls themselves, but rather something within. The lights sparkled as if it was moving; it almost looked alive, like a pool brimming with life. Entranced, she slowly moved her hand to touch the smooth wavy surface. It was warm. A comforting kind of warmth one would feel from a hot drink and warm home after coming in from the cold. it soothed her nerves and she felt calm for the first time in months, tears of relief falling without sound. Her hand rested on the surface remembering her pain, all of the lonely nights and unyielding heartbreak.

After some time, the lights moved faster and with a sense of urgency. She was quick to remove her hand to see the glowing lights within the wall swirl frantically when it suddenly burst into sparks and gemstones, the lights flying out into the open air. In the rubble of broken glass, she noticed something.

She pushed the misshapen chunks aside as occasional sparks flew from them until a ring with a blue gem was uncovered. The silver band had a dragon head carved into it, made to look as though it was eating the small stone.

It felt so familiar to hold, It meant so much to her although she could not understand why. She had forgotten something, but she didn’t know what; all she knew was that this ring, this small shiny circle made her feel so alone, she did not want to abandon it.

Keeping it in her grasp, she stood and gazed at her new surroundings. A large grassy meadow surrounded by a lush forest; a cool summer breeze blew past her hair like a gentle whisper. The atmosphere was still as the soft chirps of crickets melded with the rustling of grass. this world was beautiful and calm, something that Jane had so dreary craved.

She stood there, unsure of what to do next.

Then, she began to walk.

She chose to go forward, to walk away from the glass octagon that she awoke in hopes to discover where she was and why she was here. She must have been walking for only a short while when she heard a strange noise, it sounded like a small bell or like the noise that you hear when glass clinks together. Then a small sparkle from before began to dance around her head. It flitted and buzzed warmly in front of her face before flying off.

Jane chased after it, all the while she couldn’t help but feel like a child again as though she was running after a lightning bug; filled with a naive curiosity that seemingly never left her. She kept running, giggling to herself with childish joy when suddenly the earth began to rumble and the ground around her split open in strange, jagged patterns.

She Kept running, this time in fear as giant walls of glass sprang up from the earth in all directions. Jane was running so fast that it was hard to avoid the walls sprouting in front of her path. The sudden rush of fear and adrenaline made it so that her lungs wouldn’t hurt while she gasped for air and that her legs, although shaking, wouldn’t give out in this dangerous situation. She was flustered and scared, mindlessly running praying for this to stop when she ran full force into a wall, immediately blacking out.

Jane opened her eyes, the lenses of her glasses now cracked. She sat up and looked around to find herself surrounded by these glass walls once more. She stood up and looked around. The walls were different from before, they were completely sheer, smooth, and see-through.

She peered through the wall to her left and saw something in the distance, it looked like a giant hedge.

Jane walked down the long hallway and turned the corner to find that there were more turns and openings. The reality of the situation hit. She was trapped in a giant maze.

She felt hesitant to continue but where else was there to go?

And so, she took a deep breath and began her trek down the long pathway. With each step she felt an anxiety reach her spirit, something was wrong, but she kept walking, moving forward, taking an occasional turn using the giant hedge as a reference until she found herself at a dead end. When this happened, she would turn back and take the opposite turn from before. She slowly got closer until she was near the very end. No matter what way she would go she kept getting stuck in a dead end, one after another until the thought of being trapped sunk into her stomach.

Jane slid to the ground stuck in her own fear and confusion. Tears silently slid down her face and onto her hands as the feelings of helplessness overwhelmed her.

After a few moments of fear, a silver glimmer caught her eye: the ring.

She relaxed her hand and gently caressed the ring. Something about it was comforting and reassuring. Turning the ring in her fingers, it flashed once again, a small light flickering towards her heart. Jane felt her chest when she felt something hard. she grabbed the shape and pulled it out of her shirt to reveal

*My locket? I didn’t realise I had it on.*

The locket in question was a simple silver oval with floral patterns adorning it, it being hung from a simple sterling chain. Removing it from her neck, she opened it and gasped. Tears spilled down her face, and her voice cracked with soft sobs. Inside the locket was a picture of her wife Marina cradling a small white cat.

The words ‘Happy anniversary! I have a question for you...’ were engraved in the locket when Jane remembered the ring.

She hastily fidgeted the ring, looking at the inner band. ‘Will you marry me?’

All at once, powerful and long since unfelt emotions drowned her senses. It was HER ring; it was Marina’s promise to her. That day almost three years ago filled her mind as she remembered what she felt for the first time in forever. It was all too much, and Jane couldn’t hold it in any longer as she cried out a heart crushing wail.

And for a moment, the world was silent. She was silent.

Everything was silent.

Jane opened her eyes and pleaded in her head.

*Please, let me out.*

And as if it heard her plea, the ground shook and the walls around her began to explode, shattering outward in a rippling effect creating giant swirls of cascading stardust. The dust fluttered around her like a flurry of snowflakes drawing her attention to the space behind her; a beautiful wall of roses with an arch in the centre leading into a warm light. The glass dust gently floated into two billowing rows leading Jane to the archway, inviting her in. Jane, still on the ground, swallowed her nerve. She stood up, dusted herself off, closed her eyes and went in, locket and ring in hand.

As she entered the arch a bright warm light cascaded onto her skin and the air tasted of salt. When she opened her eyes, she found herself at a beautiful white beach, stuck in the same endless twilight as the maze before. The waves crashed onto the beach in a beautiful orchestra as soft clouds hovered far above, reflecting the vibrant colours of the sunset.

Jane was stunned by the scene when she saw a familiar silhouette.

Clenching her hands to her chest, she took a step forward, stopping in surprise. Looking down, her soft and baggy pyjamas were replaced with a long white dress that hugged her figure before fanning out to a train.

Before she could react, the figure spoke.

“It’s your wedding dress, remember?”

The voice, it was- But it couldn’t be...

The figure turned and walked up to Jane. She wore a navy-blue suit with a matching necklace to the one that Jane grasped onto for dear life.

Marina took Jane’s hands in hers. They were so warm and soft as they took the locket from Jher shaking hands.

She reached up and clasped the necklace around Jane’s neck before she caressed her face in her hands and gave her a soft, passionate kiss. And as she did Jane melted into her touch.

“My love, you are so beautiful.”

Jane was frozen in place, she couldn’t believe what she was seeing. All she could do was let go, sobbing hard as the tears in her eyes spilled out. Marina held her in a deep embrace as she wept into her chest.

“Oh darling, I’ve missed you so much. You have no idea how much I have craved to see you once more.”

Jane wanted to say something but before she could even think of what to say she was suddenly lifted into the air as the thunderous laughs of Marina shook her soul.

“Come on! I have to show you something.”

Marina grabbed her hand and dragged her off to wherever as the pair laughed and giggled with pure euphoria in each other's company.

Marina slowed down as they approached a giant willow tree on a cliff side that overlooked the ocean. She walked Jane the rest of the way up, stopping to look at the sun.

“It’s beautiful, Isn’t it?”

Jane nodded.

“Come on, let’s lie down for a bit.”

Marina led Jane to the base of the tree, allowing her to rest her head on her shoulder as she listened to the strong rhythm of her heart. They stayed there for what felt like hours. Before long, Jane noticed the sun beginning to sink further down the horizon.

Jane opened her mouth to speak but Marina started first.

“I know, I see it too. My love, we don’t have very much time left to be together and as much as I would love to stay here with you forever, we can’t. Not yet. Jane, I brought you here for a reason and I need you to understand something very important.”

Marina lifted Jane by the shoulders so that they were face to face once more. She then took Jane's hand and took the ring, putting it on her bare finger before lifting her hand to her lips and giving her a gentle kiss.

Marina caressed Jane’s face once more, tears threatening to spill out of her glassy green eyes.

“My wonderful, beautiful, caring, gentle, loving, indignant, nerdy wife. You are the love of my life and without question, my soulmate. For every hour of pain I have lived through, one second with you washes it all away. My precious girl, please, don’t let yourself suffer anymore. I have watched over you as you let yourself, your body, mind, and soul, rot away as you live in your grief. Jane, please, don’t kill your soul anymore.

When the earth shatters and the sun dies in a spectacular show of fire, when the stars collide and the universe turns warm and white, when all is finished and life has run its course never to start again, we will spend eternity together. Forever as nothing more than a shared grain of sand in the desert of history, our love blooming into small traces of life. But until then, live. Live for me and more importantly, live for yourself. Thank you, for remembering what you could not before, for remembering what it is to love and to be loved. Listen, I’m almost out of time, but I need you to promise me something. Please, promise me that no matter what you will continue to live. That you will fight for every breath, for every day that you are alive because even if the world feels like it's ending, it’s worth it to live through every agonising heart break for the small moments of pure joy and love.

Our love will never fade, it will remain strong but only if you live a happy and fulfilling life. My love, I need you to live for me so that when we do see each other again we’ll have something to talk about. Okay? Do you promise?”

Jane looked at her wife’s face, remembering every single detail. She didn’t want to say goodbye.

“...I promise.”

“I love you Jane, never forget that.”

“I won’t.”

“I know.”

Marina caressed Jane’s face, leaning forward kissing her deeply before grasping at her glasses.

“I love you”

Without warning she removed the glasses.

Jane awoke, tears staining her face. The room was partially lit by a small beam of light passing through her window blinds. Jane sat up, her heart in more pain than ever as she began to feel the pain of losing her for a second time.

“Marina…”

A tiny mew snapped her out of her trance as her cat rubbed against her side.

Jane petted the soft white fur before she heard a faint buzzing filling the air. Jane grabbed her phone and answered it.

“...Hey Ava.”

Her voice was gravely and stained and it occurred to her she hasn’t used it in the past few months.

“Jane? Oh, thank god, I’ve been trying to reach you for forever.

“Yeah, I know. Can I ask you something? I need… I need help.”

“Of course, anything.”

Jane took a deep breath as she looked out the window watching the sunrise chase away the shadows that it had once so effortlessly created.

“Can I come over?”