

Whispers of Embers Beneath Waves

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Whispers of Embers Beneath Waves

by [lavendarhearts](#)

Summary

In an alternate universe, Sokka is a thief on the run in the streets of the Fire Nation. He and his companion, Momo, are in on this together. He stumbles upon a cute boy in the market one day.

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Ever since Lu Ten, Prince Zuko has been locked inside the palace walls while his uncle tries to find him a suitor/suitress. His friends, Toph and Katara come up with a plan to help him escape. He gets into trouble outside and someone mysterious (and quite handsome) comes along to save him.

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Zhao is appointed Adviser for Firelord Iroh and the Vizier is determined to overthrow him with three wishes. Will his plan work?

Notes

Aang is censoring any swear words as he tells the story but I will put them uncensored anyway.

The characters are aged up from the show. Zuko and Sokka are both 19, Katara is 17, Aang is 116, Toph is 16.

Prologue

Ship horns rung throughout the ocean docks. Little Tenzin, Kya, and Bumi rushed to the deck of the boat, awed and gazing at the much larger ship compared to the one they were currently on.

“Wow, I wish I had a boat like theirs...” Kya sighed, propping her face with her elbow on the ledge. Bumi nodded boredly alongside his sister, throwing small pebbles at Tenzin, who was swatting at his brother.

“Oh really?” Aang rose up from raising the sails. “Because it *looks* better? Kids, this boat has been with us for a long while. It’s been through many storms with us.”

Tenzin knew that tone. He was gonna tell a story. “You telling a story, sweetie?” He heard her mom say as she hung up clothes on the clothes line.

“Sure am.” Aang waved the three kids over to him. “Now, come sit,” He told them. Kya, Bumi, and Tenzin hurried to their seats, waiting for their dad. “I think it’s time that I told you three about Sokka, the Prince, and the lamp.”

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Sokka heard them rush past him as he ducked into a dark alley. Palace guards. To put it short, he was on the run. Again.

Chapter Notes

Bear w me now, the characters are kinda ooc

Sokka heard them rush past him as he ducked into a dark alley. *Palace guards* . To put it short, he was on the run. Again. It wasn't anything major this time, only a few apples, cabbages, and lychee nuts to last the week.

His water clear eyes struck forward and smirked. "It's one jump ahead." He would always say as he pulled these heists with his small fez-wearing companion, Momo. People always thought Momo was a pet but to Sokka, he was a buddy for life.

An exhaling breath let past his lips. It was always thrilling to Sokka. The way the adrenaline rushed like the wind past his ears as he jumped, ran and managed to escape every time. It was like magic.

His legs continued to work overtime, leaping from building to building with his boomerang in hand, chopping down any branches and plants that got in the way. His mind worked a million times per second, calculating his every move to ensure safety. Momo flew beside him with just as much ease. They were almost to the hideout.

It didn't take long for him to reach his so-called house. It was shabby but it was home and that's all it mattered. Sokka sighed, plopping the sack of stolen food down onto the creaky floor boards. He sat himself down on his ragged couch that was really only made with cushions. The view was breathtaking.

Fire Nation sunsets were the most magnificent thing Sokka had laid his eyes on. Only in a matter of minutes, Sokka guessed, the moon would come out. He had always felt an undeniable connection to the beautiful moon. Staring at it made everything better.

Little did Sokka know, far from his hideout stood a tall and gigantic cave, the ones he'd heard hippies and hobo nomads talk about on the streets. Zhao marched up to a pile of stones where the cave was supposed to be, his phoenix, Ozai, flew to his shoulder.

Zhao threw a golden molded cicada beetle into the pile. It began to glow and erupt into a shape that resembled a large owl, bathing Zhao and his bird in glory and pride.

“At last! I have opened the cave.” He cackled aloud like an evil witch. Then, he turned. His finger pointed to his hostage. “You, get in there. You know what I want.” Zhao’s fingers were hooked around the back of the man’s shirt and threw him up to the cave, right in front of the beak.

The mouth of the Owl screeched and groaned slowly as it opened. A golden glow shimmered past. “I am Wan Shi Tong and only one shall enter here, one whose worth lies far within, the Diamond in The Rough.”

“Well? Get on with it!” He pushed the man further. The man, jittering, took a step into the mouth. He winced, expecting something to happen but relaxed once he realized he hadn’t died with excruciating pain. He took another step, then another, then another until he confidently walked, which was the precise moment the cave closed and swallowed him up, drowning his screams of terror.

Zhao let out a scream of frustration and anger. His bird was still sitting on his shoulder, squawking loudly. “Oh, shut your beak up,” Zhao grunted miserably. “We’ve got to keep trying.”

Another scene unfolds as Zhao’s life mission was devoured, quite literally. A place among royals, polished hardwood floors creating clicking sounds as the Prince of the Fire Nation paced back and forth in his room with his head in his hands.

“Ugh! How could anyone as kind and wise as my uncle expect me to marry someone as emotionless as Mai?!” Prince Zuko yelled and vented his problems to his personal helper, Katara. She brushed a comb through Toph’s tangled hair, the blind girl yelping each time Katara separated strands with difficulty.

“Your Uncle only wants the best for you and his country.” Katara smoothed her words. It was easy for her to say, she never had any problem with arranged marriages.

“I wish I could just get married out of love, not be forced into it.” Zuko flopped onto his soft bed and hugged a pillow.

“I get it, Sparky. Being rich and in the upper ring isn’t all it’s cracked out to be. I barely get any freedom from my parents and when I do, it’s only because they allow me to be here. So I’m either stuck home or be stuck with you two,” Toph remarked, her sarcasm and wit had never failed to make Zuko smile, even if it was just a little one.

“Maybe she’s nice when you get to know her?” Katara suggested, pausing her hair brushing for a moment before continuing.

“I wish I could just sneak out, you know? And have fun for once instead of being here doing Prince-y stuff.” The Prince ran a hand through his jet black hair, groaning into his silk pillows.

Toph sat up right suddenly, much to Katara's dismay. "If you wanted to sneak out, why didn't you just say so?" Katara promptly shoved her head back down to her lap and continued to tame her wild hair.

"Zuko, your turn." Katara waved him over after Toph was done. Toph muttered 'finally' and ruffled her hair, completely discarding Katara's hard work. The handmaiden only rolled her eyes at that. Zuko laid his head on Katara's cross legged lap and continued talking.

"You think you could sneak me out? Just one day?" Zuko closed his eyes as Katara brushed her fingers through his hair.

"Of course, I sneak out all the time." She jumped on Zuko's bed and practically caused an earthquake as she crash landed. A cushion fell and hit Azula, Zuko's mean pet turtleduck, making her waddle and quack frantically.

Katara giggled at the sight until Azula snapped her head to her direction. That shut her up and she continued to detangle Zuko's locks, careful to not touch the scar on his face. "Zuko, sneaking out is dangerous. Who knows what goes on out there?"

Zuko, obviously, ignored her. "Toph, before sunrise tomorrow, get me outside of the palace walls."

The blind girl smirked mischievously. "Piece of cake."

That is how Prince Zuko found himself climbing over the stone walls with a cloak draped over him, a blue Nuo mask covering his face. Toph helped him up as Katara held Azula on lookout duty. He looked back once and with that, he jumped and arrived in the city.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Zuko had always been lavished with luxuries presented to him by suitresses and suitors trying to win his favor. But not once in his life has Zuko ever seen anything more beautiful than the view of his future city, one that he will rule soon.

Zuko had always been lavished with luxuries presented to him by suitresses and suitors trying to win his favor. But not once in his life has Zuko ever seen anything more beautiful than the view of his future city, one that he will rule soon.

He wandered around, amazed at the sights. Stalls and stands of merchants selling food, furniture, anything. It was breathtaking. The love grew old quickly, however.

A woman stood close by a fruit stand, her frail hand held the hand of her child. They both looked underweight and were wearing ripped rags. Their mouths nearly watered at the smell and the sight. The Prince took another good look around, only now noticing the amount of people sleeping and starving on streets.

Intrigued, Zuko stalked over. He picked up two plums and handed them to the woman and child. A dark shadow loomed over Zuko. He turned around and came face to face with the merchant, he grasped Zuko's wrist, making him gasp.

"You dare steal from The Boulder's stand?!" The merchant's face twitched with rage.

"Sir, it was a misunderstanding. I was only giving it to the starving family. If you could just *let go* and let me get my money from the palace, I—" Zuko tried reasoning, his voice was muffled by the mask.

"Ha! Nice try. The Boulder is getting the guards." *Who's this 'Boulder' guy he keeps talking about anyway?*

The Prince's eyes widened. Panic washed him over like a wave of the ocean. No, if he got caught, he'll only somehow get even less of a chance to ever leave the castle.

"No, y-you can't! Let go!" Zuko pulled out of the grip of the merchant. His wrist bruised and was sore from this guy's crazy grip. Thankfully, help came.

"Hey, not causing trouble, are we?" A voice called from behind Zuko. By the way the merchant's face darkened more, he could tell this person behind him wasn't well liked.

"You can't be talking about trouble, Sokka. Shouldn't you be running from authorities right about now?" The merchant, Zuko still doesn't know his name, huffed. The Prince turned

around and *holy shit*.

It must've been his lucky day because not only did someone come to save him from this creepy aggressive merchant, his hero was also insanely gorgeous. He came with an adorable lemur as well.

His name is Sokka, that's what he heard the merchant say.

Sokka saw Zuko as he turned around and did a double take, eyes widening for a split second before returning to his cool. "I assure you, Mr. Boulder, no trouble here." Sokka said as he flipped his boomerang back into the holster (It drove Zuko mad). His eyes moved to Zuko's bruised wrist, lingering his gaze there before snapping back up to the merchant's voice.

"Hang on, did you say you would get your money from *the palace*?" Mr. Boulder, Zuko assumed was the merchant's name, peered closely at Zuko. He didn't know what to say.

"Uhm, you see, my buddy here, he has a...very imaginative mind. He didn't mean it, did you?" Sokka piped up. He had a way with words, apparently. Zuko merely nodded along like a lost dog. "Anyways, here, take the ring-" Sokka tossed the ring, which was supposed to be with Zuko, to The Boulder. "-We should really get going. Busy day, bye!"

"Hey, that ring was my mom's-"

"You mean this ring?" Sokka's hand glimmered with a golden ring. Zuko attempted to snatch it but Sokka swiped his hands away. Guards were coming.

Next thing Zuko knew, Sokka passed the lemur to him and directed him to go to the left alley. Sokka distracted the guards, taunting them with the ring and holding it up like a treat for dogs.

"Looking for this?" He yelled past the crowded street to the guards.

Sokka sprinted down the market, sliding across the floor and into the alley when guards from both sides charged at him. The alley twisted and turned as he ran. Sokka spotted a cart of cabbages and jumped over it, kicking it down. Soon, the guards who ran after him found themselves tripping and slipping over cabbages.

"MY CABBAGES!" The owner of the damaged cart yelled.

Sokka walked through the end of the alley. No guards yet.

Zuko spotted Sokka, the lemur still on Zuko's shoulder, and hurried after the lemur's owner when he began to run and swing from ledges. Sokka stood on a long plank that was held up by a fulcrum. He was on the lower end, holding a string that pulled a package up.

The guards' eyes widened with anger. "Riff raff!"

"Try a different tactic next time!" Sokka let go of the string and as the package hit the other side of the wood, he jumped through the air and held onto the balcony railings of a familiar building.

“Sokka, here again?” Suki teased. Five other Kyoshi apprentices watched him with content.

“Hello, ladies.”

Suki flaunted out her sharp fan. She didn’t want him causing trouble here, especially since he caused such a distraction to her other warriors in training. Unfortunately for her, a guard had already made their way up to the room, chasing Sokka in circles before the criminal leaped out the window and landed on a porch canopy, whereas the guard bounced off to who knows where.

When the coast was clear, Sokka fell down to the market’s grounds again, reuniting with Zuko and Momo.

“There are stairs to take, you know,” Zuko commented.

“Where’s the fun in that?” replied Sokka. He held onto Zuko’s hand with one of his own (he blushed so hard), the other held onto a passing cart’s ledge. He pulled Zuko along with him, standing at the back of the carriage. The pair got off the cart and walked through, you guessed it, another alley, though this time, it was much shorter.

Sokka walked with Zuko, calloused hand in soft hand, slowly turning into a slight sprint when the sounds of marching footsteps and yelling voices, one he recognised as Ming, were close behind them. By the sound of it, they had weapons. *Not good, not good.*

Ty Lee, another good friend of Sokka, happened to be passing on the staircase the pair just went up. She blocked the rushing officers. “Sorry, boys. Would you like a free chi blocking lesson instead?” This ended with the guards on the floor, limp and powerless. The last Zuko saw, the girl had cartwheeled away.

Sokka led Zuko up steps built on the side of a building, arriving at the top. “Now, together, on three.”

“On three?” Zuko said, startled and panicked.

“We jump.”

“We jump?!” The disguised prince freaked, his voice a higher octave than he would like to admit.

Sokka climbed on an old wooden crane and directed it to the building opposite them. He got ready. “One, two, three!”

Sokka had jumped. But Zuko didn’t. He couldn’t do it. It was too risky but the guards were already nearby. His panicked eyes casted down worriedly. He couldn’t, he just couldn’t. He swallowed, he felt his breathing become heavy.

“Hey, look at me!” Sokka yelled from the other side. Zuko somehow managed to snap his eyes up to the voice. “*Do you trust me?*” Sokka extended his arms out.

Zuko hesitantly nodded.

“Come on! I’ll catch you!” Sokka called out. Zuko took a deep breath before stepping back and running to the ledge, jumping. He landed softly, not at all what he expected. When he opened his eyes, he was met with Sokka’s blue tunic. *He really did catch me.* “Good job,” Sokka breathed out. Zuko blushed behind his Blue Spirit mask.

Zuko scrambled off of him. Sokka pointed behind a mumty and Zuko nodded, hiding behind the structure. The guards weren’t that far behind. Sokka grabbed a rolled carpet and a rope tied to the roof of the mumty.

Thank the Spirits Momo wasn’t with Sokka at that moment. As soon as he heard the infamous grunts and shouts of the guards leading closer, he jumped off—rope in hand— into a window and threw the carpet into a brick porch canopy.

Even this made the guards freeze with shock. They hurriedly left the rooftop and went to retrieve Sokka’s ‘dead’ body.

Zuko watched the guards part. He came out of the hiding spot. His eyes saddened as he ‘realized’ what happened. “Sokka…” He blinked. Momo frantically looked down the edge of the roof, searching for his owner.

An arm latched to the ledge. It was Sokka! Zuko sighed in relief. His second arm held on as well. “Help me up?”

“This is where you live?” Zuko stared in astonishment.

“Yep. Just me and Momo.”

The lemur squealed.

“I wasn’t calling you, Momo. I was talking to… Sorry, I didn’t get your name.” Sokka looked at Zuko expectantly.

“Lee.” A lie. He offered a small smile that Sokka couldn’t see. “Uhm, thanks for saving me.”

“No problem. I’m Sokka but I’m guessing you already knew that. This is Momo.” Sokka returned the smile. Momo crawled down his arm and sat on his hand. “Come with me.”

Sokka ducked behind a door and held for Zuko to pass. When The Prince saw what was behind it, he found a chance to finally relax. This place, though small and dusty compared to the castle, was cozy in its own way.

Zuko shrugged off his cloak and folded it on the couch, not knowing what to say. He also unclasped the mask, neatly placing it on top of the cloak.

Sokka waved him over to a spot on the balcony—the railing was half crumbled away— and for once, Zuko found a moment to drink it all in. Sokka’s praline skin was smudged with dirt. The color made his eyes stand out even more. He would call them ocean blue but that’s basic. They were much more than that. Crystal clear and could form glaciers in the hottest of weathers. And Zuko somehow had the privilege to stand before him.

“Is your wrist ok?” Sokka asks. Zuko could feel his hand reach to the bruised wrist and brought it out. It was sore and purple.

“I’m fine, really.” Zuko needed everything but for Sokka to touch him again, skin to skin. He had only given that right to his uncle and friends. Besides, Sokka’s hands on him felt like his stomach was going to explode with butterflies.

“No, it’s all purple and swollen. Come here.” Sokka pulled his arm closer. Zuko's heart beat relentlessly like a big love drum, calling for Sokka as his and Sokka’s knees brushed each other’s. Before he knew it, Sokka was...massaging his wrist?! He had to admit, it felt good and was definitely relieving the pain as Sokka kneaded the bruised area gently and with so much care.

“There, better?” His voice pulled Zuko back down to reality. He cleared his throat and responded.

“Yeah. You didn’t have to do that.” The Prince pulled away. His arm was warm in the spots that Sokka held. Without his touch, it felt cold and empty.

“So-” Sokka tossed an apple to Zuko. “-what’s a guy like you hanging around the streets?”

“What do you mean?” Zuko caught the apple. He thought his cover was blown for sure.

A guy like him? What’s that supposed to mean?

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“My uncle...He wants me to marry this girl.”
“Oh. That’s horrible.”

“I mean, it's clear you're not from around here. Your clothing and your pale skin, not to mention your ring. I'd say...maybe you're from castle grounds?” Sokka tapped his finger on his chin, guessing. Zuko's surprised expression meant that he guessed correctly. “So, I was right! You're one of those rich fancy pants!”

“Shhh! Be quiet, will you?” Zuko slapped a hand over Sokka's mouth. “I ran away. I'm not supposed to be here.”

He didn't expect Zuko to openly admit that, especially since it's only been around 30 minutes of meeting. “You don't have to answer if you don't want to but may I ask why you ran away?”

“My uncle...He wants me to marry this girl.” Zuko looked down at the ground, shifting uncomfortably.

“Oh. That’s horrible. Do you even like this girl?” Sokka felt like he was pushing the questions a bit too far. But Zuko answered, still.

“No. I want to have some freedom,” The amber eyed fidgeted with the hem of his red overtunic. “I want to see the world for once, even if it was just this city.”

“Well, I've got all the freedom there is and look where that landed me.” Sokka gestured to himself and around him.

“What about your parents then?” Zuko carefully watched Sokka's expressions.

“Uhm, well, my mom died when I was young and when we moved here to be away from all that, my dad and sister got separated from me.” He paused to hold back a heartbreaking sob. “My dad got drafted for war and my sister...well, she got recruited into the castle's program for servants in training. I've no clue why they didn't take me.”

Momo chittered beside Sokka. He leaned into Sokka with his head, an attempt to comfort him. It always worked. Sokka sniffed and scratched behind Momo's giant flopping ears. Zuko's lips tugged into an amused smile.

Momo stared at Zuko and wandered over to him, straying from his owner. He climbed onto the Prince and—repeatedly—bumped his small hands on Zuko's head until he played with

him.

As Zuko played around with the lemur, Sokka realized how sincere and calm he looked, even with the giant scar on his face. He still looked peaceful and beautiful to Sokka. Forget the sunsets, he could stare at this guy for forever.

All this had to be ruined, of course. A loud fanfare played, the trumpets and drums echoed throughout the city. A Junk had arrived on shore and out came a palanquin carried by four servants, curtains drawn and framed the figure of a girl, a princess, Sokka squinted to see. She had dark hair cut into straight bangs, two buns sat at the top of her head, the back of her hairstyle had two low pigtails to match the space buns.

“Welcome, Princess Mai!” A distant voice announced.

“Oh no! I have to go now!” Zuko turned around abruptly. Sokka followed suit, confused.

“You mean ‘cause of that?” He gestured to the palanquin and the ship. “I thought it was only for the Prince, considering palanquins are only for royals and that’s probably a Princess and...and...and oh my spirits, you’re the Prince!”

“Shut your mouth! I don’t need the *entire city* to know their future ruler snuck out.” Zuko brushed a hand through his messy and so-incredibly-hot-looking hair. Sokka let out a small and breathy sigh at that. “Anyway, I really should go. And, I’m sorry. I lied. My real name is Zuko.”

“Right.” Sokka muttered. “I figured. I don’t think there’s a Prince *Lee* in this kingdom.” He scratched his neck, mind lost on how he could make Zuko stay. If he goes now, Sokka won’t be able to see him again, probably. “Bye, then.” He sounded like a dumbass, per usual. Sokka didn’t even know what he was doing. He had walked over to Zuko and wrapped him in a hug.

“Uh- you too, Sokka. Bye.” With that, The Prince had left.

Sokka couldn’t stop thinking about it. About *him* . That smile, those sharp eyes, and his voice. His eyes wandered over the couch where the former guest had sat when he noticed something.

It’s Zuko’s coat! That means I can probably see him again!

Toph and Katara rushed Zuko back into his room as soon as he snuck back in. “You were gone for so long! You said that you’d be back within an hour!” Katara scolded.

“Sorry, I got...distracted,” Zuko apologized. The girl hurried to get him dressed and prepared for Mai.

“So, what did you see? Was it as *free and magical* as you thought?” Toph asked. She scooted her seat away from Zuko’s evil turtleduck as she waddled closer each time.

“Yeah, it’s pretty free and magical, alright.” He stared out the window that showed a view of the city. *Sokka was in that crowd somewhere, probably.* He thought.

“Oh, I know that look. You’ve met somebody, haven’t you?” Toph teased, a smile so wide it showed all her teeth.

“You can’t even see!” Katara scoffed. Toph promptly threw a pillow at her. Katara was about to throw the soft cushion back to the blind girl when Zuko spoke again.

“I was acting like a complete idiot but he still helped me. I mean, who does that to strangers?!” Zuko said. Katara slipped his hair into a small knot, securing the strands into one place with a small golden headpiece.

“You might see him again, Zu.” The handmaiden finished preparing Zuko. Toph stood as well, dressing herself behind a screen and tying her hair quickly.

“I hope you do. If I have to put up with constant loverboy Zuko for a whole month, I’m telling my parents to cut their war meeting trip short and to bring me home immediately.” Toph complained. Katara cleared her throat.

“We need to support Zuko, Toph. It’s time to go now. Your uncle and Princess Mai are waiting.” Katara stepped off her stool and smoothed out Zuko’s red and golden robes. “Let’s go, Toph.” She called to the girl who was busy having a sneering match with Azula. She’s never even seen a duck that sneered before. It was horrifying.

Katara scooped up Azula into her arms, ignoring the kicks and quacks she gave, and walked with Toph behind Zuko to the meeting room. Zuko dismissed Katara and Toph, though he wasn’t technically allowed to dismiss the blind girl.

Katara released the little demonic turtleduck to the floor. Her small little webbed feet wobbled with Zuko. *This should be good.* Katara thought to herself.

Iroh, who was in the middle of a conversation with Mai and Zhao, turned to his nephew with pride glimmering in his eyes. “Ah, Prince Zuko! I’m so glad you can finally join us!”

“Hello, uncle. Good evening, Vizier Zhao, Princess Mai.” He bowed to Zhao and hesitantly took Mai’s hand to kiss.

“That’s a scary turtleduck you have,” Mai commented. Her tone was as flat and monotone as always. She made the mistake of reaching out to pet her.

“No, I wouldn’t-” Zuko winced as Mai went red in the face, seething with anger and pain. Her fingers were swollen and bright pink from the bite of Azula.

She roared—sighed but it was considered yelling for her—with a fit of anger. “Your duck is out of control!” Mai stormed out of the room, demanding for a healer. Zuko looked away to hide a little grin. Katara and Toph, who were listening at the doors, stifled a laugh.

“My Lord, our enemies are growing stronger every day. You cannot let Prince Zuko turn away any more suitresses,” Zhao demanded, his dragon staff in hand.

“What enemies?” Iroh challenged him to continue.

“The Earth Kingdom continues to amass,” He said plainly.

“The Earth Kingdom is our ally-”

“*Was* our ally!” Zhao interrupted.

“You would dare bring us to war with our oldest-” Iroh was interrupted once again.

“You would allow your nation to die and sink for your nephew’s childhood play pal!”

“Zhao, remember your place!” Iroh never yelled. He never screamed. This is the moment where you know Zhao has crossed the line.

“I apologize.” The advisor forced out. “Forgive, my Lord.” He paced across the room, his back faced the ruler. A smirk played on his chapped and crusty lips. “But-” He turned around, his staff glowed as he regained sight of Iroh. “-if you could just reconsider, I think you will see...”

Iroh’s eyes, so similar to Zuko, stared deeply into the eyes of the dragon staff. He was entranced by it.

“Invading the Earth Kingdom is the correct move to play...” Zhao’s voice echoed and distorted around in Iroh’s mind. He found himself saying words he did not mean.

“Invade the Earth Kingdom...”

“Invade the Earth Kingdom?” Zuko’s voice snapped Iroh out of it. Zhao cursed under his breath and moved out of the way to reveal Zuko standing by the door. He was now in his regular robes.

“Why-” He walked into the room, staring daggers at Zhao. “-would we invade Toph’s kingdom?” He looked to his uncle for an explanation.

“We would never!” The Firelord denied.

“But an ally with Princess Mai and her kingdom’s forces would be an improvement to our situation,” said Zhao.

“Right. Prince Zuko, I think you should give her a chance-” Why was he getting interrupted so much today?

“I can’t marry Mai, uncle. I want to marry with true intentions, not just for an alliance.” The Prince argued. He felt like a fire inside him was about to erupt.

“My soldier boy...please. I am not getting any younger..” Iroh shook his head solemnly. “Ever since Lu Ten, I...”

Spirits, Zuko almost broke.

“What foreigner could help me lead more than I can by myself? I can rule if only-”

“My Prince, you can’t simply rule by yourself. It’s never been done. Our traditions say that you *must* be wed at least once to be a Firelord,” Zhao recalled with a bitter taste on his tongue.

“Please, I’ve been preparing for this my entire life. It’s my destiny.” Zuko was really pushing it. He knew his uncle couldn’t resist ‘destiny’. “I’ve been reading and-”

“Books cannot help you. They can only tell you experience, not give you it. Inexperience is dangerous. One small misstep and the kingdom you swore to rule will be attacked, left and right.” Zhao raised his voice a little. He needed Iroh on his side, not the Prince’s. And it worked.

“Zhao is...right, Prince Zuko-” Zuko scoffed at his uncle’s words. “-you will understand one day.”

The Prince huffed with a raging fire in his soul, storming out of the room. He needed to compose himself. He couldn’t get angry so quickly. *But what if Zhao really was right? What if I wasn’t fit to rule? What if-*

“Hey! Where’d you sneak off to? Katara said she wants to beat you in Pai Sho this time.” Toph appeared out of nowhere behind him. He jumped. How did she always sneak up on people? “Something wrong?” She tilted her head.

“No, it’s nothing. Come on, let’s go kick Katara’s ass in Pai Sho.”

She could tell; he was lying.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

He climbed the wall of the palace hidden in the shadows, almost like he was running from guards again. He leapt over railings and barrel on to columns until finally, the interior of the castle.

That night, Sokka waited for the guards patrolling to pass a blind spot. He had put on Zuko's cloak and blue mask to conceal himself and *definitely* not because it spelled like the special Prince. He climbed the wall of the palace hidden in the shadows, almost like he was running from guards again. He leapt over railings and barrel on to columns until finally, the interior of the castle.

Zhao watched it all from afar in his study, his bird still perched on his shoulder. "Thief in the palace! Diamond in the rough!" The bird squawked. The side burned man grinned.

"Diamond in the rough, you say? Interesting..."

Sokka pressed his back against a column. Two guards patrolling walked past him, paying zero attention to the boy and chatting away. As they went out of sight, he began to run again.

Zuko laughed as he aligned his tiles into a perfect formation. Katara groaned as she lost for the third time this night.

"You never told me what went wrong," Toph suddenly said. Zuko's laughter and smile died.

"Wrong? What went wrong?" Katara hurriedly pushed away the games. *Curse her motherly instincts.* Zuko tsked.

"Nothing. It's just....Uncle wants me to marry Mai, as usual. And he said I can't rule without being wed. It's dumb," Zuko explained. "I just wish he could see that I can be a ruler."

“I don’t see why you can’t just marry the girl and be on with your life. It’s not like you have to talk to her,” Katara reasoned. Her way of ‘reasoning’ was odd, to say the least.

“It’s not that I don’t *want* to marry, it’s just not to some random Princess I can’t even have small talk to.”

Katara grinned, then whispered to Toph. *Zuko has that face again from earlier.*

“You’d prefer that guy you met outside?” Toph taunted. “Exactly,” She said when he didn’t respond. “Move over, loverboy. It’s my turn to play.”

“You can’t even see the tiles, Toph!” Katara exclaimed as the young Princess shoved the Prince to the side and pulled the game back. Later, she was dumbfounded as to how she still lost to a blind child.

Sokka ‘borrowed’ a servant’s uniform and picked up a tray of sizzle-crisps, folding the cloak into a rectangle and draping it on his arm. He was heading straight to the Prince’s chamber. Each twist and each turn of the hallways stretched on forever. Sokka didn’t even know where he was going or how he kept going the right way but eventually, he arrived at Zuko’s room.

Sokka tried to contain his smile and excitement when his knuckles rapped on the door, knocking twice. He heard the giggling chatter behind the door stop. *Zuko had people over? Girls?*

The door opened, revealing Zuko. The Prince’s eyes widened when he saw Sokka standing there. “Snacks for the Prince.” Sokka could hear his own heart.

“Sokka? What are you doing here?!” Zuko yanked Sokka’s arm and pulled him into the room, looking out the door to see if any guards were near.

“I came to return your cloak.” Sokka took the cloak on his arm and handed it to him. “Oh, and your mask.”

“Who ordered the sizzle-crisps?” A girl stood and walked to them. Her voice died at the sight of Sokka. He got the feeling that she’s heard of him before. Sokka couldn’t decide which was creepier, the fact that this girl was alone with Zuko or the fact that she looked identical to him. The same blue eyes, skin tone, face shape, everything. Sokka wondered if Zuko had a type for that.

“Who’re you?” She stared with skepticism, her hands on her hips as if she was a mom.

“Katara, this is Sokka. I, *ahem*, I met him today. At the market,” Zuko made a silent gesture to a clueless Sokka.

Suddenly, her stiff posture faltered. “Oh.” She nodded. Her expression of suspicion faded and was replaced with something painful and worrying. When Katara, the girl, caught Sokka’s eye, seeing he held the same emotions on his face, shook her head and walked away. *Discuss later.* She gestured.

It was like looking in a mirror. Sokka thought.

“How did you get past all the guards?” Zuko stood, oblivious to Katara and Sokka’s silent conversation. He bent down and scooped Azula into his arms when the little duckling got too close to the newcomer.

“The guards? That was nothing. Who’s this?” Sokka switched his attention to the turtleduck in Zuko’s arms. He stuck out a hand to pet her.

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that-”

Sokka’s finger was promptly chomped on by the turtleduck. He swallowed a scream of suffering and pursed his lips, squeezing his eyes shut.

She quacked as if nothing happened.

“Sorry, she doesn’t like new people.” Zuko apologized, scratching the top of her fuzzy head before plopping her down back on the floor. She waddled away into a corner, when a thud and startled yelp could be heard.

“You evil duck!” A young girl’s voice yelled, followed by Azula’s quacking.

Geez, how many girls does Zuko even have here?

The turtleduck stumbled back to Zuko angrily. She looked like she would start fuming of fire if she could. A girl with black and spiky hair trailed closely behind Azula.

“Zuko! Your fucking turtlemonster bit me again!” The little girl complained. “Oh, I didn’t know we had another person. Didn’t see ya there. My name’s Toph.”

Sokka’s jaw almost dropped. “Toph as in... Toph *Beifong* ?! The Earth Kingdom Princess?!” he could faint just about now. How many royals was he going to meet today?

“Sure am. I’ll leave you two for now. But when I come back, Zuko, you better have that ugly duckling of yours under control because I will not be spending another month here with her.” She huffed and stomped away.

Zuko cleared his throat, grabbing Sokka’s attention. “Well, you already returned the stuff. I thought that was the only reason you came back?”

“Why? Don’t you want me here? If I didn’t know any better, I’d have thought you were pushing me away,” Sokka teased. A smirk was permanent on his face and it was infectious too. “I was wondering, since you don’t have anything to do right now, maybe we could go on a stroll?”

Zuko flashed one of his rare grins. “You cannot walk around as if you own the place after breaking into it, Sokka.” His face glowed with amusement. “Besides, what would people say if they saw the Prince and a lowly servant together?”

“Lowly servant? Is that what I am now?” He raised an eyebrow, lifting the corners of his mouth.

“You know what I mean.”

“Well, either way, whether you’re coming on that stroll or not, I’m coming back tomorrow. Goodnight, Prince.” Sokka winked as he backed up and exited the room.

Zuko smiled to himself, his mind raced and his stomach erupted in butterflies. “Why are you guys giving me that face?” Zuko asked when he turned away from the door, coming face to face with Toph and Katara standing side by side, a knowing look on both their faces—though, Katara had to turn Toph around to the correct direction.

“I’m blind and even I can see that you and him have a thing!” Toph threw her hands in the air, exasperated, muttering something about how guys are always clueless.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

“Uh oh.” Sokka backed up, wanting to run but had walked right into two more guards.
“Double uh oh.”

Sokka left Zuko’s chamber with content and with much more than just platonic feelings. He had forgotten all about the fact that he needed a disguise around here.

Above him, a red and black feathered bird flew in a circle. A guard stopped Sokka in his tracks.

“Uh oh.” Sokka backed up, wanting to run but had walked right into two more guards.
“Double uh oh.”

The guards behind him grabbed his shoulders roughly. *They had weapons*, he noted. He’s got no choice but to surrender. The three men brought him to a cell in the deep dungeons of the palace. There, they shackled and bolted him to the wall to ensure he couldn’t escape.

The night moved slowly. Momo, who got distracted and separated earlier from Sokka, followed the scent his owner carried and followed it. There was no way in nor out but not for a lemur, a smart one at that.

The moonlight seeped through the bars of the small window on the wall facing Sokka. Not even looking at the moon could help. He felt helpless. Until, a shadow blocked the gleam of the moon.

“Momo!” Sokka lit up with hope. “Help me get out of this thing.” His wrists strained against the metal. The lemur lifted his hat to reveal...

Keys! Sokka knew he could count on him.

It didn’t take long before Sokka had free hands and legs. “Spirits, thanks, Momo.” His small victory was cut short, though.

Coughs and splutters could be heard in the dark shadowed corner of the cell. Sokka hadn’t even paid any attention to that part of the room, why so many rats had scurried away when they wandered too far, why there was constant shifting in his peripheral vision.

Momo jumped at these guttural noises. He hid in Sokka’s shirt with trembles all throughout his furry body. “Who’s there?” Sokka demanded. He placed a comforting hand on Momo.

“Don’t mind me, boy. I’m just like you, a street rat.” The voice was creaky and old. Sokka looked at him warily. He bit back the urge to say *‘I’m not sure I want to be like you.’*

“I know of a place where we can stop all of this starvation, the homelessness, the days where you risked everything just to steal. Join me and we can put an end to the madness called society.” The old man, at this point, was up and standing. His cane wobbled under his bony hand and his breath wafted through the air like a dumpster. Somehow, this guy had no hair yet still grew sideburns.

Well, damn. Sokka thought. “Ok. I’m listening.” He was hesitant in his words. He had no idea what he was walking into.

“There’s a secret tunnel called the Cave Of Elements. In that cave lies a single golden lamp that holds all the answers anyone ever needs in life.” Then, the hunched back man added, “As long as you don’t touch any of the other jewels, golds, and precious knowledge presented to you, you shall have no problem getting that lamp.”

“But how will we get there? And how would we even get out of this place?” Sokka had so many questions. He knows he shouldn’t trust some crazy grandpa in a jail cell but what better options does he have? If it helps the world become better, then he’ll do it.

“Your mind is so simple. You never see the little things, eh?” The old man hobbled over to a part of the stone wall and tapped a few of the rocks in a pattern Sokka couldn’t decipher. To his surprise, the wall parted like magic and opened up to the outside. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He was free.

“Now, what do you say, boy?” The man was at the exit. It was now or never.

“Let’s go.” Sokka nodded affirmatively. Momo clambered by his owner’s side.

The walk to this so-called “Cave of Elements” was shockingly short. Sokka could only count to about one and a half hours before the two men arrived at the scene. There was just one issue. There was no cave anywhere. All Sokka could see were plains and a pile of gravel.

“Where’s the cave?” The boy tapped his foot on the grassy ground impatiently.

“Give it a moment,” The old man tsked. He dug around his pocket and pulled out a golden cicada beetle. “There it is. Ok now, I just gotta...” He muttered and mumbled to himself. Sokka stood by the side like a fool, per usual.

The man tossed it into a pile of rocks in front of them. Soon enough, the rocks shook and grumbled. It was a wonder nobody heard it as it loudly groaned. More rocks appeared on the ground and built themselves up to create the head of an owl.

“Who dares enter the Cave of Elements, the Cave of I, Wan Shi Tong?” The owl head demanded. It’s voice was low and horrifying.

Sokka looked back at the old man with uncertainty. This was starting to sound like a bad idea. But nonetheless, the crooked toothed man waved him on and disregarded his feelings of

doubt. He had already agreed to this so, why back out now?

With a deep breath and a reassuring purr from Momo, he took a step forward. "It is I, Sokka," He announced with false confidence.

The owl head stared at him, glowering. Sokka felt like his whole body would crumble under that horrifying gaze. "You shall enter. Only touch the lamp," It said.

"Remember! Get me the lamp and you shall have your reward!" The old man screeched over the sounds of the owl head opening its beak.

Sokka walked in, Momo on his head, The tongue of the owl formed stairs for him to descend. "This is it. Our lives could change, Momo." One last look at his cellmate and he walked down those steps like the red carpet, though he wasn't sure what 'red carpet' even was.

Fully down those steps were mountains and glorious amounts of gold coins, gems, jewelry, books, and things Sokka never even dreamed of having. As Sokka and Momo ventured along the polished flooring of the cave, they marveled at the sights. Sokka knew he couldn't have any of the goods presented to him and he planned to make it stay that way but Momo had other plans.

"Momo! Look, don't touch. This is serious!" Sokka scolded his lemur as he flew towards a chest of, well, practically everything. Momo landed on a soft carpet with a thud. "We just need that lamp, then, we can help all the people we want."

Momo followed in suit, not realizing the movements behind him. The carpet he had stepped on had gotten up and quietly floated behind the animal. When Momo turned around, the rug laid flat on the ground as if it was never moving. This game of hide and seek continued for a few rounds.

The carpet, white and patterned with brown arrows, tugged on Momo's tail with one corner acting as a hand. The lemur screeched, his fur standing up on ends. He whipped around only to see nothing. The carpet, once again, decided to play around. It took Momo's little fez on his head and put it on itself, mocking the animal.

Only now realizing this, Momo hissed and whirled around again. This time, he caught it. The carpet went flying, seeing its cover was blown. It hid behind a giant pile of money, peeking out to see that it now gained both Momo and Sokka's attention.

"Woah..." Sokka breathed with fascination. He's seen a lot in the past day but a flying carpet? That's just too much. Sokka thought he was going to faint for the tenth time today.

Momo chirped suspiciously and angrily at the carpet. The carpet, in return, made a gesture that was probably very offensive in rug. "I can't believe it. A flying carpet..."

The patterned carpet was still behind the pile of coins and it seemed to be glaring at the lemur. "Hey, come on out." Sokka waved it over.

It stood there, staring suspiciously as a rug should. It flew over to Sokka and handed Momo the fez back. Momo snatched it up real quick from the hand(corner) of the flying carpet.

“Hey!” Sokka snapped his fingers. He had an idea, a rare occurrence but usually a good one. “Maybe you could help us. We’re looking for a lamp. Know of one?”

The carpet perked up and nodded excitedly. It waved a corner and was gesturing for them to follow as it flew from path to path. Sokka and Momo were quick to follow it. Finally, after being to three different subterranean rooms, all with golden coins and various gems, they had arrived in *the* room. The lamp, radiant with power, was trapped in some sort of ice. Sokka had no idea how it wasn’t melting.

Momo walked alongside Sokka but he stopped the lemur. “No, I have to do it by myself this time. Sorry, buddy. Stay here with carpet,” Sokka ordered. Momo huffed and flew back down. It made Sokka feel a little guilty. He’d never done anything like this without Momo by his side.

Sokka hopped on the stone steps that led up to the giant block of ice. The lamp inside glowed pale white, the ice around it made it seem blue. He brought out his boomerang from his holster and stabbed the frost.

Nothing happened.

Sokka stabbed it again.

Nothing.

The third hit struck a nerve, apparently. A sudden burst of snow shot at Sokka, knocking him down. A crack formed from where Sokka had repeatedly bashed it. The divided ice split apart, bright glowing lights, fog and vapor poured out of the halves.

As the fog cleared, Sokka stared longingly with anticipation until...

A booming voice shook the walls. “You thief!” It was the Wan Shi Tong.

Sokka, confused, turned around and saw Momo with a pearl necklace around his neck, clutching them as though he was a rich 1920’s grandma.

“Momo!” Sokka screamed. The steps that led up to him were already sinking and he needed to act now. Without thinking, he snatched the lamp by the handle and skipped multiple steps. With a final leap, he barreled into Momo and the carpet.

“You will never see the light of day again!” Wan Shi Tong’s voice bellowed. Rocks and pebbles fell from the cavern ceiling as it quaked. Lava bursted from the ice, surfacing from any cracks or holes in the walls.

The carpet was hurried to sweep the two off their feet, soaring with them through the heated air. Twists and swerves, the carpet was able to navigate it all. It was all so blurred, Sokka barely noticed when the carpet brought them back to the entrance; the beak.

Just as they barely reached the outside, carpet was struck by a falling stalactite. Sokka and Momo had held on to a ledge by the entrance, the staircase being melted. They looked down to see that the collapsed rug was stuck under a rock. The lava was getting offily close.

At the mouth of the owl stood the same old hunched man, grinning madly and sticking his hands out at Sokka.

“Help me up!” Sokka cried out over the lava bubbling and the rocks plummeting. His hands were almost slipping now.

“Hand me the lamp first!” The old man demanded. Stubborn as ever and wanting to live, Sokka refused.

“No! Help me!”

“Give me the lamp!”

Sokka gave in and shoved a hand in his pocket to retrieve the lamp for him before returning to holding the ledge. “Now help me up!” He pleaded once more. Then, the man smiled widely, a glint of corruption. “What..”

“You have brought me well, boy!” He laughed. “Finally!” The lamp, now in the robe pocket of the old man, was dangling out. Momo grasped onto Sokka’s arm with both hands, desperately trying to pull him up.

As he had his golden prize, the man no longer had an interest in Sokka. He kicked Momo away with one nasty foot, still with that manic smile plastered on his face.

“What are you doing?!” Sokka’s voice cracked in the heat of the moment. He was slipping quickly. The bony hand of the man had gotten a hold of Sokka’s wrist.

“It is time for your reward. Your final and eternal reward!” With another cackle, the old man raised a dagger over his head, ready to skewer Sokka’s hands like a fish kabob. Momo acted then. The little creature scurried all across the man’s body, bit him on the arm, and jumped onto Sokka’s shoulder when the ancient looking man flung him away. “You wretched thing!”

He’d let go of Sokka. While he was glad to be away from that creep, that had meant he was now falling with no soft landing. The carpet watched this all unfold, if it could just...yes! It freed itself from under the boulder and took flight towards the descending Sokka.

Outside, as Sokka faced almost certain death, the stony head of the owl disassembled, crumbling and closing the last source of natural lighting from the sky. As he was falling, as the owl crumbled, he swore he saw a bright red bird swoop across the night sky next to the old man. Only then did the selfish man realize. He didn’t have the lamp.

“FUCK!”

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The body of the lamp had four symbols on each side. Air, water, earth, fire. All the elements.

“There goes our only exit,” Sokka grumbled. He fell flat on his back on the dirt paved flooring. “Man, that guy was crazy. Everyone alright? Momo?”

The lemur perked up from inspecting a coin and nodded.

“Carpet?” Sokka turned to the flying rug. It also nodded. “Any of you have an idea of a way out?” Momo then held up the lamp at him, squawking and shoving it at him. “Momo! You took the lamp from him?”

The lemur only smiled mischievously, one that Sokka always returned.

For once, Sokka was able to see the lamp correctly. The body of the lamp had four symbols on each side. Air, water, earth, fire. All the elements. The handle of the lamp was shaped in swirls and curves, representing Air. The lid was sharp edged and square; Earth. The bottom of the lamp had suns and streaming fire designs engraved at the base; Fire. And at last, the spout was smooth and had faint markings of waves and whirls for Water.

Sokka’s thumb grazed over the water symbol, nostalgia hitting him like a huge bended wave. As his fingers rubbed over the surface, a blast of orange and yellow smoke shot out of the nozzle of the brass lamp.

Sokka dropped the lamp with shock but that didn’t stop the smoke from coming out. As more orange and yellow poured out, Sokka could hear a faint voice that sounded like a little girl screaming from inside the lamp.

The fumes finished flooding out and Sokka, who looked at Momo for confirmation, made out the shape of either a really short person or a child.

“AGHHHH!” The voice screamed itself out as it came into formation with the smoke. Carpet was twirling in the air excitedly at this. “Appa! I missed you, buddy!”

Sokka squinted. The vapor created the shape of a young man, blue arrows on his limbs and bald head. The top part of his body was normal but trailing down, his feet were the remaining fumes.

“Wow, it’s been a while since I got out. I’m still not so used to this form. When was the last time I went outside? Must’ve been during my Roku phase...”

“Appa?” Sokka mumbled under his breath with overwhelming confusion. The smoke boy took notice of Sokka, finally.

“Oh, hi! Are you the new master? Wow, you look really different from the other old and rusting guy and-” The boy gasped. “-oh my Spirits! Is that a lemur?”

“Uh, yeah. His name is Momo,” Sokka spoke quick but nonchalantly. He was still puzzled, befuddled, even. “Sorry, who are you?”

“I’m Aang! It’s nice to meet you, Mr. What’s-your-name!” Aang shook Sokka’s hand eagerly, energy bouncing off of him like a basketball.

“It’s Sokka,” he said plainly.

“I’ve never seen a ‘Sokka’ before. You must be the first!” exclaimed Aang. “So, where’s your boss?”

“My...what?” Sokka blinked at him blankly.

“Come on. Every scrawny guy (*Sokka scowled*) who comes in to get me always works for that one guy with the ridiculous sideburns. His plans never work, though.” The magic smoke boy elaborated, his hand waved in circles as he talked.

“The old guy?” Sokka cocked an eyebrow. “He left me to die here and Momo stole the lamp.” Then, his hand reached to scratch Momo’s chin. “Smart little lemur.”

“So, you must be the one that opened up my lamp,” Aang gasped and marveled at the deadpanned boy. Then, he began explaining the rules. “Three wishes last time I checked, no wishing for dead people to come back, no wishing for other people to fall in love with other people-”

Sokka almost choked. “Woah, slow down!” He put his hands up. “What are you, um, no offense.”

“None at all! I’m the Avatar.” Aang beamed at him.

All this time, Sokka had thought that the Avatar legend was just a story, a mere fairytale used to comfort kids. But, now, seeing Aang and seeing the lamp, the smoke, everything, he realized his whole life and beliefs were based on lies.

“The...the....” Sokka may just actually faint this time.

“Yeah, I try not to make such a big deal out of it,” Aang grimaced, seeing Sokka’s expression. “Uhm, like I said, I can grant you three wishes. And I can do cool tricks like this!”

Sokka brought himself courage to see what Aang was doing. He had conjured marbles and spun them around in his palm, mid-air. *You’ve got to be kidding me.* Sokka told the universe.

“Anyways, there are only a couple limits to the wishes like making people fall in love, raising the dead, killing, I’m a pacifist myself, you know? Oh, and one more. No wishing for more wishes.” Aang took an exaggerated deep breath from the rants. “So, what’s your first wish gonna be?”

Sokka opened his mouth to say something but Aang began to talk again.

“Wait! Let me guess—money. No, fame! You want to be the Firelord!” The Avatar guessed, clapping his hands together at each guess. Sokka shook his head on every one of them.

“I mean-” He slyly shot a scheming glance at Momo, which the lemur confidently returned. “-being an Avatar-genie-thing, limits just shouldn’t be a thing. I mean, how powerful are you if you can’t even raise someone from the dead?”

Aang scoffed, pretending he wasn’t hurt. “I have lots of power!”

“Eh- I don’t know. I bet you can’t even get us out of this cave,” Sokka continued to taunt. “Let’s go, Momo. We’ll find our own way.”

Momo jumped to Sokka. “Carpet, you coming?” Sokka called it over. Carpet shook its head and refused to leave Aang’s side.

“Hey, I can get you out!” Aang declared. “And, *‘Carpet’* has a name.”

“It has a name?” Sokka was learning new things everyday.

“*He* also happens to have he/him pronouns.” Sokka never would’ve guessed he’d get scolded for pronouns by the Avatar. “His name is Appa, since you didn’t know.” The arrow headed boy side eyed him. “Anyhow!” He called Sokka’s attention back. “I can get you out, no problem!”

With a loud snap and a blink of Sokka’s eyes, they were on Appa’s back. “Appa, yip yip!”

At those magic words, Appa soared upwards to the ceiling of the cavern. Sokka braced himself for impact at the rocky surface, screaming in terror. Until...nothing. They had passed through successfully!

“WOOO!” Aang cheered as they went flying into the sky.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Aang could not believe it. He, a 116 year old Avatar, had just been outsmarted by some street rat.

They landed in a safe place just within Ember Island Beach, a secure and secluded place. “How’s *that* for flying, *Master Sokka* ?” Aang bragged and patted his imaginary muscles with shining pride.

“That was something! Now...” There was that sly grin again. “About my three wishes..”

Aang stopped dead in his tracks and snorted. “Did you say three? As I recall-” He cleared his throat. “-you, good sir, are down to two wishes!”

Sokka stared at the two fingers Aang shoved in his face with a smirk. “Oh, but as *I* recall, good Avatar, I didn’t wish for the way out. You did it all by yourself.” Aang could not believe it. He, a 116 year old Avatar, had just been outsmarted by some street rat. He was impressed. “Fine. But no more freebies.”

“Fair.” Sokka paced around. “Three wishes...” He said as Aang conjured a hammock between two trees and dove into it, Appa laying on top of him. “Well, Aang, what would you ask for?”

Aang stopped swinging on his hammock. Even Appa perked up from his rest. “Nobody’s ever asked me what I wanted before...” He casted his gray eyes to the blue sky above. Finally, he said, “I’d wish to be free.”

Sokka stared at him now with a softer look, instead of the confused and annoyed one from before. “Freedom? But I thought you were all powerful. Can’t you...you know, make yourself free?”

“That’s just not how it works, I guess. It’d just be nice if I didn’t have to go ‘whaddy need?’ every two seconds,” sighed Aang. “The only way that I get to be free is if the current Master wishes for me to be free.”

“Damn, that sucks, Aang.” Sokka contemplated for a minute. A brilliant idea struck him. “Hey, why don’t I set you free?”

Aang shot upright in his seat, almost throwing Appa off. “You’d do that? I mean, not that I would ask you to do that but really? You’d do it for me?”

“Sure I will. But first I gotta make my two wishes,” Sokka said. His mind was so jumbled from this whole day, he couldn’t think straight.

“Sokka, the thing about wishes is that the more you have, the more you want. You’ll keep wishing until you run out,” Aang pointed out. “I’ve seen it a million times before.”

“I’m not that person, Aang.” Sokka paused. “There is this...one thing.”

Those gray eyes darted to Sokka. “Oh, I’ve seen that face before. I’ve heard that tone before too.” Aang suddenly poofed beside where Sokka was sitting. “Soooo, who’s the lucky guy?” He kicked his feet with that dumb smile.

“How did you know it was a guy?” Sokka glared skeptically.

“You had a vibe.”

“Oh.”

“Tell me about him!” Aang begged Sokka. The blue eyed couldn’t help but smile.

“He’s a prince.” Sokka pulled at his collar. Spirits, he didn’t realize how much he missed Zuko, even though they’d met each other not so long ago, throughout the entire day. “He’s clever and caring and-”

“Cute?” Aang suggested.

“Breathtaking! He’s got these golden eyes and this ruffled hair and-” He paused for a moment. “-his voice,” Sokka sighed like an idiot in love, which perfectly describes him.

Aang tsked. “Young love,” He said to Momo and Appa. “Well, Sokka-” He turned to Sokka. “- you know I can’t make anyone fall in love with anyone else.”

“Oh, no. We totally had a connection.” He gushed. His cheeks were faintly red and his pupils practically became hearts.

“Did they?” Aang raised an eyebrow at Momo. The lemur scratched his head awkwardly and looked away. The Avatar nodded as if he knew whatever that meant.

“Ignore that monkey(-Momo shot him a dirty look-). It doesn’t matter anyway. He has to marry...” An idea dawned on him. “Aang! Can you make me a royal?”

“Hang on, loverboy.” Aang poofed back to the hammock. “With wishes, you need to be careful with your words. If you tell me to make you a royal, I could just-” He waved a hand and The Earth King stumbled into the sand. “Then you’d be stuck with *him* forever and let’s be honest, who would want that? Be detailed because that’s where the deal is.”

“Right.” Then, Sokka coughed. “Aang, I wish to become a prince.”

Aang cheered. He clapped his hands twice and removed the hammock, rocks, anything that blocked their way.

Aang pushed the prince-to-be onto a reclining chair and stacked layers of fabric onto him, each a different shade.

“What are you-”

Aang shushed him. “Now, to be a prince....” Aang muttered colors and fabrics to himself. “No, the orange makes you look like a highlighter-” He peeled the warm tone away and noted to stick with cools. “-The green isn’t you....” And again, he peeled another away.

Until finally. “Great! You’re a dark winter so we can get to work with the colors. But,” He stretched the ‘but’. “The blue is too obvious and might blow your cover, red clearly cannot work since it clashes with the Fire Nation theme,” Aang ranted and kept mumbling, thinking to himself. “Aha!”

“‘Aha’ what?” Sokka sat there the whole time, flabbergasted and baffled.

“I’m thinking...a dark gray color with white and tiny hints of purple and blue accents. Just subtle enough to pull away from the blue but still in your area of style. Definitely silver jewelry.” Aang zapped together an outfit of those exact colors named paired two silver rings and a choker necklace. A gray cloak with faux fur, a deep cold purple warrior’s robe underneath, held with a belt. Matching brown boots and pants with an ashy color.

Aang whooped loudly again, celebrating as he hopped on an airball and circled around everywhere. A trail of fire followed him.

“Whoops,” said Aang once he noticed the path of the blaze. He held his hand out and twisted it, whipping a splash of water on the fire to put it out. “There we go.” Then, he faced Sokka again. The newly dressed ‘Prince’ was nervous, afraid that Aang was gonna put him in another ridiculous outfit. “Check it out!”

His finger snapped at Sokka and a mirror appeared in front of his face. Sokka could see himself clearly for the first time since yesterday. His face didn’t look or feel dirty anymore, his hair clean and flowing in his wolf tail and most importantly, his clothes were nearly shining.

He looked so good.

“I like it,” He managed. “Wouldn’t people recognize me, though?”

“Dunno, magic is tricky like that. People will believe whatever you say you are as long as you wish to become it.”

“Ohhh. Thanks, Aang. You’re an amazing friend.”

“Oh, stop it. You’ve never had a friend like me.” Aang flipped some imaginary hair over his shoulders. Sokka rolled his eyes. “But,” He groaned. “It’s still not enough! We need something big, something that says ‘you’re here!’-” Aang made a banner with his hands above his head. “‘Sokka!’” He said it like a showman.

Sokka urged. Though he didn't want anymore makeovers, he was interested to see what the Avatar had up his sleeves. "I mean, it's all yours to create, right? Go nuts!"

Aang pondered, tapping his index on his chin. "Ok. I got it!" He rubbed his hands together and zapped the tips of his fingers at Momo. "Sokka, you might wanna step back."

Momo grew about ten sizes larger than his own form. Sokka could barely make out the shape of a white horse before Aang grumbled and zapped him again. This time, he grew into a camel.

Sokka was about to say that this was enough but apparently Aang didn't think so. Aang had his 'idea' face lit up. He rubbed his hands again, quicker this time, Sokka swore he saw his arrows light up a bit. Then, BOOM!

Momo was now an elephant.

"You-I-What?!"

Momo the elephant still kept his little fez, now even tinier compared to his new shape. He trumpeted, his trunk reached out with eyes widened and small.

"I still gotta work on myself. I mean, I can't go to the Fire Nation with smoke for feet!" Aang exclaimed. He pictured a human version of himself before making a swirling motion in his wrists, poofing himself into a boy wearing orange and yellow robes as well as brown boots, keeping his original features such as the gray eyes and arrows.

"Now, we begin." Aang waved out his hands, spreading them up. A sandstorm conjured the motions of his arms.

"Wait, I thought we were done!" Sokka screamed before the sandstorm hit him.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

A thud. And then another. Fruits rattled off of carts and booths, Firelord Iroh's tea and pai sho game shook, Toph jolted with each vibration of the earth she felt. Something was coming.

A thud. And then another. Fruits rattled off of carts and booths, Firelord Iroh's tea and pai sho game shook, Toph jolted with each vibration of the earth she felt. Something was coming.

Katara opened the window of Zuko's window, peering outside to see the commotion. Far ahead, she saw people of the Fire Nation running from whatever was coming. They spread and parted the streets.

"Clear the way! Clear the way!" Men ordered as they chased the kids away and shouted over the startled screaming of citizens.

"Move out the way!!"

"Go!"

Then, they heard it. Drums boomed, footsteps of about three thousand people in sync shattered eardrums, horses whinnied and for some reason, an elephant.

A tune began. "Make way for Prince Anik! Say 'Hey! It's Prince Anik!'" A thousand men sang out, their voices deep yet poetic. Women dressed in veils, men with swords danced around with perfect choreography.

"Hey, clear the way in the old bazaar," a new voice, one of a bald and arrow headed young man, chanted. "Hey, you-" He pointed to a random bystander. "-let us through, it's a brand new star. Oh, come be the first on your block to meet his eye."

Up at the Prince's balcony, Toph and Katara ushered for Zuko to come look. He reluctantly got out of bed, a pillow still in his hands as he dragged himself out. When he saw what was happening, the pillow almost fell 30 feet to the very bottom of castle grounds.

"Prince Anik, fabulous he, Anik of the Tribes." The singer, whom Zuko assumed to be the manservant of Prince Anik, danced on the parade, his voice captured the crowd. Even Katara seemed stunned and she had to deal with a freeloading Toph on the daily.

An elephant passed through the arch of the marketway, trumpeting happily with an oddly familiar man sitting on the saddle.

“Mighty is he, Anik of the Tribes! Strong as ten regular men, definitely!” The servant sang. Toph, listening intently to him, nudged Zuko with her elbow suggestively. Katara smirked at him, waggling her eyebrows. Zuko rolled his eyes. He crossed his arms, waiting patiently for the performance to finish as he knows he will turn whoever this guy is down.

Iroh and Zhao gathered on the Palace’s main balcony, watching as Prince Anik, formerly Sokka, paraded on his elephant around the kingdom. Iroh jollily danced to the beats and the tunes of the song.

“He’s got seventy five golden camels.” The men in the choreo rang out.

Then some of the ladies sang. “Purple peacocks, he’s got fifty three.”

Katara did the money gesture at Zuko, to which he stared unimpressed. Toph, though she couldn’t see, was enjoying every bit of this show.

“When it comes to exotic type mammals, he’s got a zoo. I’m telling you, it’s a world class menagerie!” The entire group chorused, Iroh found himself humming the song, much to Zhao’s dismay.

“Prince Anik, handsome is he, Anik of the Tribes. That physique-” The valet fanned his face mockingly. “-how can I speak? Weak in the knees!”

Zuko shook his head, scoffing and grinning.

“He charges no fees!” The song continued. Prince Anik gathered pools of coins in his hands, throwing them out to the crows for them to take.

“He’s generous, so generous,” The crowd echoed with gratefulness, with enough money to finally buy some decent clothes or a full meal.

They were nearing the end of the song now. “Prince Anik, amorous he, Anik of the Tribes. Heard your Prince was a sight, lovely to see! And that, good people, is why he got all cute and dropped by.”

Then the whole crowd, maybe even Iroh, sang. “Make way! For Prince Anik!” The final note came to a stop, the parade paused in front of Palace gates as the song ended.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Zuko raised an eyebrow. “Expensive? And what do you hope you buy with this....expensive?”

Katara was bracing for impact.

“You.”

Chapter Notes

Please ignore the dance scene, idk how to write dancing so just imagine the fire nation dance Aang and Katara did in Book 3 but replace them with zukka

“It is lovely to have you here, Prince Anik. I hope your travels have been well.” Iroh welcomed Sokka and Aang, plus some conjured extras, into the castle after their musical number. He had the sweetest smiles that Sokka almost forgot they had to keep up an act.

“It’s my pleasure to be here, Firelord.” Sokka bowed.

Firelord Iroh took note of the Prince’s bow. As a return of respect, he greeted him with a hold of the forearm, which Sokka was surprised to see. He hadn’t seen anyone from outside the Water Tribes use their tribal way of greeting.

From beside Iroh, Zhao cleared his throat to draw attention to himself(Iroh side eyed him). Sokka almost choked as he recognised the same bird from last night perched on the Vizier’s shoulder. “I’m afraid I am not quite familiar. Which tribe did you say you were from?”

“South.” “North.” Both Aang and Sokka replied at the same time.

“We have a south and a north,” Sokka said with the same amount of awkwardness as a ladybug miraculous holder. “I’m sure if you look close enough, you’ll find it.”

“Yes, the world continues to develop, Zhao. Maybe books *can* help,” Iroh muttered the last part. Zuko covered his mouth with his hand to hide the smile.

Sokka was very aware of the glaring duck beside Zuko and Katara. He was careful to not step anywhere close to the scary thing.

“Tell them about the things we have,” whispered Aang.

“Right! We have many gifts!” Sokka announced. “Uh, we have oils and soups! Yes, soups.”

Aang had summoned fake people to come in and present these ‘gifts’. “We also have spices and *many* fur coats.” Sokka continued.

“ *They don’t use fur coats here, it’s too hot,*” Aang gritted through his teeth smiling. Sokka cursed himself under his breath.

“Very expensive soups....”

Zuko raised an eyebrow. “Expensive? And what do you hope you buy with this....expensive?”

Katara was bracing for impact.

“You.” Sokka said it so confidently, he didn’t realize his mistake until afterwards when people, servants, Aang, even that stupid looking bird on Zhao’s shoulder were gasping and dropping their jaws “No! I meant-”

“Are you suggesting that I am for sale?” Zuko commented.

“Of course-”

More gasps. Katara’s eyes widened even more. Toph pursed her lips, struggling to not snicker. Even Azula winced. Aang hid his face in his hands with embarrassment.

“-Not! No! Of course not! I only meant-”

“Please, excuse me. I must take my turtleduck for a walk. Oh, and Prince Anik? I’ll have you know, I am not a prize to be won.” Zuko bowed to Iroh and Zhao, then turned on his heel and started to walk with Azula waddling after him.

“I’m sorry.” Katara mouthed to Aang and Sokka. “It was a good try,” She attempted to encourage.

“It really wasn’t.” Toph was not one for sugarcoating.

“Yeah, don’t listen to that pretty maiden. It was horrible.” Aang didn’t even whisper this time. It was already very clear Sokka messed up.

“I invite you to stay, Prince Anik. The Fire’s Day festival is in four days. I’m sure you can make another attempt to speak with Zuko properly then.” Iroh smiled warmly and bowed. Sokka was so horrified that he forgot to bow back. Aang kicked his shin and he felt like his waist was jelly as he bent down with his right fist against his left palm.

“I can’t believe it!” Sokka verbally abused himself, screaming into the pillow as Aang sat beside him, patting his back and shaking his head.

“You’ll get another chance. He just probably...not used to you yet,” Aang said. Sokka turned his head to face Aang and gave him a glare. “Fine. You did horrible.”

Sokka groaned into the pillow again. He said something else but Aang just could not hear it. “What did you say?”

“The advisor guy is the man that tricked me into getting you.”

“Oh so that’s why he looked so familiar. I thought his face was just easy to draw or something.” Aang shrugged. A pillow hit his bald head and slid off the shining surface.

Sokka groaned even louder into his pillows and kicked his feet like a child throwing a tantrum. “The festival is tomorrow and I need to fix things with Zuko or else this will never work!”

“Relax, loverboy. Things will work smoothly now that you’re with me.” Aang grinned smugly, waggling his eyebrows at Sokka, who promptly shoved his face away.

“Right, as if you weren’t too busy ogling at the handmaiden from earlier.”

The night of the party rolled around quicker than Zuko would’ve liked. He has been avoiding Prince Anik all over the castle for the past few days, running away anytime he sees Prince Anik around. He’d prefer Pai Sho and gossip nights with Katara and Toph than going to overly crowded places where everyone paid attention to him.

“So-” Toph threw a peanut into her mouth, “-are you gonna give that asshat prince a second chance?” She spoke while chewing, crunching loudly, to which Katara would chastise her.

“I don’t know. He seems really familiar but I don’t know where.” Then, Zuko smirked knowingly. “Although, Katara was paying an awful lot of attention to that guy’s valet. What was his name again?”

“Aang.” Then, her cheeks reddened when Toph snorted at her response. The maiden smacked Zuko and Toph with the back of her hand, rolling her eyes. “Whatever,” muttered Katara. She reached to do some final touches on Toph and Zuko’s outfits, then checked her own.

A loud horn blew, signaling for the three of them to make their entrance. “That’s us!” Katara squealed as the guards pushed open the doors to the party.

As soon as Zuko stepped a single atom into that place, he was immediately being pulled by all sorts of people. His uncle, Zhao, Toph, Katara, even people he didn’t know. He was

chatting with his uncle, Zhao at his side, when a noticeable shift in the area caught Zuko's eyes.

At the archway entrance, two clueless newcomers stood there, talking amongst themselves. Zuko nudged Katara with his elbow to her side. She almost whipped around to slap him again but then she saw them too.

The manservant and Prince Anik had arrived.

Unfortunately for Zuko, Iroh noticed it as well. "Ah, our guests have arrived! We must give them a warm welcome, eh?" The firelord waved the two over and Zuko could practically end himself then and there.

"Look, he's calling us over!" Sokka panicked like a child, again.

"Relax, I got this." Aang brushed him off.

"Flameo, Firelord Hotman," Aang bowed his shiny bald head to Iroh. *Hotman? Flameo?* The nation's prince grimaced.

"Er, yeah. Flameo, Firelord Hotman." Sokka just repeated whatever Aang said, since he claimed to 'got this'. Whatever that meant.

Sokka turned his attention to the man of the hour, Prince Zuko himself. Spirits, he could burn himself with those fiery eyes.

He cleared his throat. "Uhm, I apologize for my terrible first impression. I'm not myself-" He caught himself. "No, I meant that, uhm, I wasn't *acting* like myself, so I wasn't thinking and I'm really sorry about the buying thing, it was stupid and-"

"Dance? I'd love to." Zuko interrupted him with sarcasm. He marched away, setting his drink down on the table. Sokka looked around, taken back and sputtered. He didn't know how to dance! Iroh had an award winning smile on his face, encouraging Sokka while Aang urged him onto the dance floor.

"I-I don't know how to dance!" He exclaimed when Aang tried to push him.

"Dancing isn't something you think about. That's your problem. Loosen up!" Aang shoved him some more.

"I'm plenty loose!"

"Just get outta here! Your prince is waiting and I want to get some time to talk with his very gorgeous handmaiden *alone*," Aang muttered that last part.

The music started, the rhythm was blood pumping as people hit the drums, played their dramyins, pipas, and tsungi horns. The melodies streamed in the air, seeming to seep into Sokka's bones. He found himself and Zuko facing each other.

They bowed, putting their arms against each other, one up and one down. The pair spun in a circle before switching arms, repeating this a few times. Zuko's hand held onto Sokka's firmly as the tunes continued. Everybody watched. It was a surprise Zuko hadn't already turned the new suitor away.

Neither of them had any plans to stop. The tension was so thick and sharp that it could puncture the hull of an empire-class Fire Nation battleship, leaving thousands to drown at sea.

Their bodies danced, moving in rhythm together. Neither of them paid attention to anyone else but each other. Zuko and Sokka were so in sync, the audience couldn't dare to release a single breath or look away. They were captivating.

He's so mesmerizing... Sokka smiled at the Prince. He couldn't bring himself to take his eyes off of the one's Zuko had. The ones that look like pure flames that could burn you to a crisp. But also flames that were so alive and brought energy. He wished he could look into them forever.

The fabric of their clothes hurled and swished as they swayed, doing various kinds of flips, Zuko in his own elegant way, Sokka, however, not so much.

The song came to an end, the audience and instrumentalists applauded as the dance of the night ended with Sokka dipping Zuko. They were breathless, the air they inhaled and exhaled mixed and Sokka swore he heard Zuko's heart beat, as if the music was still playing.

Zuko heard the distant noise of his uncle cheering the loudest. He blushed with embarrassment when he also saw Katara and Toph snickering. He and Sokka return to standing position. The look on the other Prince's face was priceless, to say the least. He looked lovestruck, the way you'd see a cartoon character floating after the scent trail of pie.

He excuses himself from the party, bowing his head to 'Prince Anik' before leaving.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

“I can show you the world, Zuko.” Sokka extended his arm. “Do you trust me?”

Chapter Notes

This is the chapter I've been waiting and wanting to post for the longest time so enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I want every single one of you to keep an eye on that royal lowness! There is something wrong, something strange and I will not allow it under my presence. Do not disappoint me, understand?” Zhao’s commanding voice echoed throughout the chambers of his lair. The guards he trusted most all nodded with fear before scrambling apart.

Sokka groaned like a whiny child for the third time that night. Ever since the night of the dance, Sokka had been sulking in his room. The Festival was two days ago.

“He just excused himself and walked away! I mean-” he ran his fingers through his hair, “-how could you just walk off after dancing with someone like that!”

“You’re absolutely right.” Aang’s ass was *not* paying attention. “Hey, quick question. Do you think this would impress Katara?” He held out a bouquet of flowers. Wrapped inside the single blue ribbon held blue tulips, blue felicias, Italian asters, and pink baby breaths all arranged with detail and precision.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.” Sokka swatted Aang’s hand away. A few petals dropped. “I just wish I could impress Zuko effortlessly like you with Katara. He doesn’t like gifts, small talk, riches, and my amazing dance moves!”

“All I’m saying is, maybe try being yourself. Think about it. He’s a Prince who grew up with that type of stuff so I think he needs something real. Who knows, it might work.” Aang tidied his robes, pulled a strand of string from his face, cleaning himself up in the mirror.

“If I had a few minutes alone with Zuko, he’ll see that...” Sokka gasped. “Aang, you have to sneak me in there!”

“Do you ask that as I wish? Because I don’t do favors,” The Avatar deadpanned at Sokka.

“Count it as teamwork. Besides, it’ll involve you distracting a certain handmaid...” Sokka taunted him. Aang almost lit up with fireworks at the mention of having a possibility to talk with Katara.

“Why didn’t you lead with that? Let’s go!”

Katara prepared for bed when a knock sounded at the door. Originally, Toph and Katara had their own rooms but since Toph was here to stay for a month, they decided to have a sleepover weekly in one of their rooms.

She looked at Zuko and Toph, confused. None of them ordered any drinks or food. They weren’t expecting anyone. She opened the doors and the valet from earlier stood there, sheepishly smiling with flowers in his hands.

“Oh, good evening,” Katara tried to remain stoic. *Don’t let it get to you now, Katara. Be serious!*

“Uh, good evening as well, Miss Katara.” Aang felt his face flush redder and hotter by the second. He was fidgeting like a nervous wreck.

“No more ‘flameo’s? And please, just ‘Katara’ is fine. Aang, was it?” Katara was so pretty, it made it so easy to play dumb. When she corrected him, he almost died. He wished he wasn’t so anxious. Ironic to wish, huh?

“R-right. Uhm, here.” He extended his arm that held the flowers.

“No need. He’s going to hate them. Tell Prince Anik that if he wants to win Zuko over then he’ll have to come and do it himself. Is that all?” She flashed a small smile to him.

“Actually, these are from me. To you, I mean.” His light eyes stare hopefully at hers. “If you’ll accept it...?”

“Could you give me a second?” Katara shut the doors as quickly as she could and silently cheered. Zuko ran to give her a high five, Toph with a pat on the back—though the pat was more of a shove—the two watched from the sidelines with support. Katara reopened the doors, her face once again serious and without any hint of celebration. “Thank you for the flowers. They smell lovely.”

“You’re most welcome, Katara. I was wondering...tonight the moon is shining very brightly and maybe you would like to walk? I mean, stroll?” The Avatar stutters and stumbles over his words. *Pull yourself together, you look like a fool!*

Katara giggles a bit at his nervousness. “You’re very charming in a cute way. Excuse me for just another second, will you?” Her hands held the flowers delicately as if they’d break at any moment. She set them down in an empty vase that was conveniently lying around.

Zuko and her almost squealed from excitement but remembered that Aang was still outside. Toph had a sly smile on her face. She was proud of her best friends. The handmaid took a deep breath and calmed herself before returning to the conversation.

“I would love to have a stroll with you. Shall we?” Katara stepped out of the room and closed the door behind her.

“We shall.” Aang held out his arm for her to hold and she gladly clutched onto it.

Inside the room, Zuko smiled to himself, happy for Katara for finally finding someone. They were a wonderful match. Shortly after Toph had left to attend the nightly evening tea with the Firelord, another knock chimes at the door.

“Come in,” Zuko says absentmindedly, reading over the books he sprawled on the table. He waited for someone to come through the door but no one did.

“Actually, I’m already kinda in the room.” A familiar(annoying)voice talks behind him. A big quack from Azula when the voice got louder. Zuko turned around and there he was. Prince Anik.

“Do not take another step.” Zuko’s eyes darted to Azula, who looked like a tiger ready to pounce. Sokka was about to speak again when Zuko interrupted. “How did you get in here?”

“I flew.”

“Oh, haha.” Zuko let out a hollow laugh, laced with much sarcasm. “Come off it, Azula.” He addressed his duck when he noticed her still glaring at Sokka, though that was probably just her normal resting face.

“Well, I just came here to check in on you since you left so quickly after the dance. And also because I noticed you’ve been avoiding me.” Sokka stepped forward to the Prince.

“I’m fine, thank you. I am actually glad you came here. I was having some...trouble. You see, I’ve never heard of a ‘Prince Anik’ from the Northern Tribes at all. I’ve only seen records of a princess. No prince at all.” Zuko gestured to all the scrolls and books on his desk. “Care to point it out to me where it clearly states your being?”

“Are you questioning my existence when I’m right in front of you?” Sokka choked out a chuckle. Zuko didn’t return the laugh. “Right. Sorry.” Then, he whispered into his palm. “Aang, I need you to write a small bit of me into history. Like, now!”

Zuko cocked an eyebrow at him, waiting. Sokka cleared his throat and walked up to the pile of information and paper. “Right here!” He blindly pointed to a spot on the page, praying that Aang had heard him.

“No way, I’ve looked there a thousand times and-” He gasped. There it was. A section that stated Prince Anik, born on April 14 and heir to the throne. “Impossible! How-?What...?”

“What can I say? I just have a natural talent for finding things. Besides,” Sokka walked around the room, “history is boring! What are texts and ink when you can get the experience first hand!” He gestured to the outside, beyond the balcony, beyond the kingdom.

“Yeah, right. Kinda hard to do that when I’m stuck here all day,” Zuko retorted bitterly.

“But you’re a prince! People like you should be free to explore and roam everywhere!” He was not willing to drop this topic. “Have some fun.”

“Oh, really? And how exactly would you expect me to do that when all entrances and exits are guarded to the brim?” Zuko sneered. For the first time, he saw why Azula was his pet. “I can’t fly, you know.”

“But what if you can?” Sokka held out his hand. He was standing on the railing of Zuko’s balcony. Zuko knew if he saw another person with dreamy blue eyes fall off a building, he’d throw up.

Dreamy? Spirits, what is wrong with me? Zuko physically made a disgusted face at himself.

“I can’t. And if you’re up to something, I’m not following you, Prince.” The nation’s Prince turned on his heel, each step away making Sokka yearn for more of his presence. He needed to think of something quick. He quickly turned his head, making sure Appa would be there to catch him if he fell. *Perfect.* Sokka cleared his throat, ignoring the narrowing stares of Azula.

“Suit yourself, Prince Zuko.” Then, he took a single step backwards. He trusted Appa, there’s no way he would die.

Zuko, who had turned back to look at Sokka, now stood witness to yet another person falling down a building. The prince shrieked as he ran to the edge of the balcony, only to see Sokka floating.

As Sokka was falling, he heard the yelp of the prince. That sound made him all giddy and happy. *Spirits, what is wrong with him?!*

“I can show you the world, Zuko.” Sokka extended his arm. “Do you trust me?” His voice came out as a whisper, like a secret that no one could know except them.

“What did you just say..?” Could it be? Zuko’s mind broadened suddenly, now with the possibility that Prince Anik could be the market boy. The Prince on the flying carpet only

smiled at him. Zuko held onto Sokka's hand, marveling with the familiar feeling back again. Appa dipped his other end slightly for Zuko to climb on.

"Stay here, Azula. I'll be back."

"The world is shimmering and shining. It's absolutely splendid," Sokka said as Appa flew the two of them around the Fire Nation skies. At least, it started that way. "Tell me, Prince Zuko, when was the last time you let yourself decide?"

The soft carpet traveled at an easy pace. Zuko had shut his eyes tight. He could feel Sokka's comforting arm around his waist, keeping him close inside the property of the carpet.

The wave of calm to his blaze of rage.

"Open your eyes," Sokka uttered. Zuko didn't know why, or understand how, but he opened his eyes anyway.

"You better not let me drop," Zuko demanded. His hands were trembling from the height.

"Only a fool would drop a guy like you," Sokka mumbled. Zuko blushed as those words sunk in. "Let me take you wonder by wonder, all the attractions of the world. It's a whole new world here. I guess being outside could give you a new point of view, huh?"

"This place is amazing. I can't believe it..." Zuko breathed in the outside air, crisp and soft blowing against his face. He had this indescribable feeling as the two soared through the diamond night sky. The carpet flew over Ember Island and Omashu.

Sokka gripped onto Zuko's waist tighter, wanting to have even more of him than just holding. "Don't you dare close your eyes again," Sokka whispered. His lips were ever so close to Zuko. It drove both of them mad.

"I wouldn't. There are a thousand sights to see."

Appa settled down on top of a small tea shop in Ba Sing Se. Zuko and Sokka sat hand in hand, resting their bodies that fit with each other like pieces of a puzzle with Sokka's cloak hanging on Zuko's shoulders.

“This has to be one of the most gorgeous cities I’ve seen. Thank you.” Zuko’s head laid on Sokka’s shoulder. His nose brushed against Sokka’s neck every once in a while, the touch making Sokka shiver.

“It was my pleasure, Prince Zuko.”

As much as Zuko enjoyed this moment and as much as he didn’t want it to end, he needed to test the waters. Was this guy Prince Anik or Sokka? Or possibly both? On a whim, he pointed somewhere and exclaimed aloud, “Hey, is that Momo flying with the citizens?”

“What? No way, he-” ‘Prince Anik’s head whipped around faster than a Komodo rhino. He earned a knowing look from Zuko. “Oh-I mean-”

“Did you really think I wouldn’t figure it out?” Zuko scoffed. “I’m not stupid, you know.”

“I never said you were! I just-Ugh!” Sokka grumbled into his hands. Why did this happen now?

“So, who are you then?”

“I...” Sokka looked at Appa, signaling for help but the carpet ignored him, throwing apples in the air. “Look, I *am* a real Prince. I just like spending time amongst the people!” He felt proud of himself for that made up story.

“Then how did I not see it before...?” Zuko searched Sokka’s face for any tell. Dressed up like a royal, he couldn’t tell much similarities between the Prince disguise and the street rat facade.

“Well, I like to think that I’m so good with my fashion that no one can recognise it,” Sokka bragged. Zuko rolled his eyes with a click of his tongue.

“Why wouldn’t you tell me? I would’ve understood, Anik.” Why wouldn’t people just tell him what’s going on? Zuko longed for people to include him, to finally tell him things that he has the right to know.

“I’m sorry. I just...didn’t know what to do. I mean-” Sokka grinned. “-it’s not everyday you hear about a Prince disguising himself and running off into the city.”

“Oh, shut it.”

Appa glided through the night, the new couple sitting silently, yet comfortably, on his back as they headed back towards the balcony they once left before.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, then?” Sokka looks up at Zuko from his carpet with a hopeful glance after he drops the Prince off on his balcony.

“Until tomorrow, Anik,” Zuko confirmed. A soft smile on his face, a rare sight to see with him. They leaned in closer. Spirits know what they’d end up doing if not for that railing in between them.

“Zuko...” Sokka’s voice a whisper, Zuko’s breath hitching when he heard his name being so delicately repeated. It was like they were naturally drawn to each other. There was no denying it. “Can I?”

“Please.”

At an instant, their eyes closed as well as the gap between them. Nothing has felt more right in the moment. Sokka didn’t want to let go, fervently grasping for Zuko’s tousled hair and grabbing around his waist. Zuko returned the gesture, pulling the boy in closer as he held his face. The two broke apart for a split second, catching a break of air before going back in. The atmosphere around them felt like paradise.

Neither wanted to let go but Sokka hesitantly pulled away from Zuko. Zuko’s pale skin was flushed red, lips buzzing and burning with Sokka’s lingering touch. “You should go to bed now.” Breathless, dazed, and super gay.

“Y-yeah...” Zuko manages to get out. He turned on his heel to walk back in but then he stopped. Zuko turned again, back to Sokka, hurriedly pressing his lips to Sokka’s cheek before pulling back again. “Goodnight.” Then, he ran back in.

Lovestruck, Sokka falls back onto the carpet, laying there with dreamy eyes and dumb lopsided smile. Zuko, in his room, flops onto his bed and hugs his pillow tightly and buries his face into it, a squeal threatening to spill.

Later that night, when Katara had returned from the evening stroll and Toph from her late night tea with Iroh, Zuko spilled everything to them.

“He told me he was only pretending to be Sokka so he could get to know the place. Crazy, right?” Zuko rambled.

Katara couldn’t believe her ears. Something wasn’t right. The stories didn’t add up. How could Prince Anik be Sokka? And how could Sokka be pretending if Katara was his sister? She needed to find out.

“And then?” She asked with false eagerness.

“We kissed.” Zuko was still in disbelief.

“What?!” Katara shot up from the bed. “Tell me everything. How was it?” The false eagerness was no longer false.

“We just sorta leaned into it and it was all so..right. He kept drawing me in. He was like a magnet.”

Toph almost threw up from that. “You guys are so disgusting.”

Sokka floated back to his guest room on Appa. Aang awaited him with a knowing smirk. “So, how’d it go?”

“I did it. I did it!” Sokka threw his hands in the air and cheered.

“Ooh, sounds like someone had fun. Com on-” Aang summoned tea and a biscuit in his hands. “Tell me all of it.”

“I told him the truth. Sort of. He knows that I’m Sokka but he also thinks I’m Prince Anik. And we...we kissed.” Sokka sighed dreamily. “He’s so attractive.”

“Alright, dude.”

Chapter End Notes

call them jaladdin.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

“Sokka...”

“Katara...”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

This was not definitely how Sokka thought his life would end.

He thought maybe an execution for identity theft or for actual theft. He never imagined it would be by the hands of Zhao himself.

There he was, hands and feet tied, ankle chained to a metal ball being thrown off the nearest cliff into water. Somehow he didn't die from impact of the water. Sokka knew his time was limited, so was his air. Which was exactly what he needed. *Air, Aang. Please.*

He saw the lamp only inches from his touch. If only he could get it. Sokka couldn't help but let some oxygen escape his lungs. He needed air now.

The drowning 'Prince' fought his way in the water. The chain made it all the more difficult. He didn't want to accept it. He will not die from Zhao's dirty hands. Sokka was coughing. He needed to breathe but water kept going in and never coming out. The water seeped into his lungs.

It burned.

It burned so much .

He thought about Momo, his lifelong companion. He thought about Aang and Appa, his new friends. And he thought about Zuko. His hair, his skin, his eyes, his voice. He wanted out. He couldn't stay here. Tears welled up in his stinging eyes, mixing with the ocean water.

“I'm sorry...” Bubbles floated to the surface and popped.

GASP

Sokka coughed and choked, gagging on the sea water. Sunlight burned into his eyelids. He was...alive?

“Sokka! You’re alive!” Aang’s voice cheered from somewhere. Where was he? What happened?

“Aang?” Sokka croaked. His throat felt unnaturally dry after drowning. Sokka still hasn't adjusted his sight to the scorching shine from above. He sat himself up right on the couch. “What...?” He felt a ball of white fr curl up on him and he hugged it tightly. He missed Momo.

“Sokka, you were *drowning* . What happened to you?” The Avatar’s voice was full of worry.

Geez, what was he? My dad? Sokka remarked in his mind.

“It was Zhao, that putrid worm-ridden old man!” Sokka coughed some more water out. “How did-” Another cough. “-How am I alive?”

“You got to me in time. And I may or may not have made you use your second wish.”

Sokka didn’t care. He was *alive*. That was all that mattered right now.

“Zhao did this to you?” A new voice? Wait, no. Not new. He’s heard it before.

“Figures it’d be him.” Another voice. This time, it was sassy and childish. Like a little girl.

Two people move into his view. There was one tall and one short. The shorter one was no doubt Toph Beifong. The same jet black hair and green attire. The taller one stood at the doorway with a towel and blanket in her hands. Her hair was clipped into a half up half down bun, two hair loops at the front. Katara.

It was weird now that they’re seeing each other again. They haven’t really talked to each other since he broke into the palace as himself, not Prince Anik.

The familiar feeling of home and closeness returned. Why did he feel this way? Then again, there was no doubt of why. The way their hair shone of the same hue, the way their nose had bumps along the bridge. A spitting image of each other.

“Sokka...” Katara’s bottom lip trembled. She fought back some tears.

“Katara...”

She dropped the clean towel and the blanket on the floor and ran straight into Sokka’s lying form on the couch. Her arms around his body, pulling him into a hug. “I can’t believe that it’s you. It is you, right? Spirits, are you ok?”

“Yeah, it’s me and yes, I’m ok.” Sokka smiled and hugged her back.

Then, she did what was always expected. She pulled back and raised her first. Sokka received a punch on the arm. “Spirits, I missed you.”

“No kidding. Is this where you’ve been all this time? And you *didn’t* try to find me?” The brother put a hand on his chest with an offended look.

“I thought you died after I left. Who knew you could take care of yourself?”

“Well, I guess people can adapt and learn for survival.”

“I’m sorry. I wanted to look for you but by the time I was promoted to Zuko’s handmaiden, I thought I was too late.” She paused for a moment. “I heard about your kiss, by the way, you sly fox.”

Sokka laughed as Katara nudged him, a smirk playing on her lips. Aang cleared his throat and drew attention to himself.

“You know each other?” He asked.

“Aang-”

“Honey-”

“Twinkle toes-”

A deafening silence.

“Honey? What are you, an old woman? Gosh, you two disgust me.” Sokka fake gagged. Katara rolled her eyes and continued to speak.

“And we’re gonna skip over Toph calling him ‘twinkle toes’? And the fact that she seems to already know what happened?”

“It was kinda obvious.” Toph shrugged.

Katara received an impatient look from Aang. “We’re siblings. He’s my older brother but when dad got recruited for war, I got picked to go into a maid program that was created by Pakku from the White Lotus Council. I hate to think why Pakku only allowed girls in.” Katara shuddered. From what she heard, Pakku was well respected but the respect wasn’t returned. Not to women, anyways. “You should get dry and change into some new clothes. Here.” She tossed the towel she dropped straight into Sokka’s face.

“Gee, thanks, *mom* ,” Sokka muttered as he wiped his forehead and got up to change.

The new crew, now named ‘The Gaang’ by Sokka himself, drew up a plan to stop Zhao. “First, we need to get Zuko on board.”

“Wait, wait, wait. Let me get this as straight as possible. Zhao tried to kill you?!” Zuko yelled. They would’ve told him more and revealed the fact that his handmaiden and the man he was in love with were siblings but they decided it would give him too many shocks.

“Well, when you say it all together, it sounds crazy.” Sokka shrugged.

“It *is* crazy!” Zuko let out an exasperated sigh with disbelief in his eyes. “I mean, he’s always been kind of power hungry but I’d never expect to...” Aang, Katara, and Sokka gave each other worried glances (Toph would’ve looked too but...)

“Do you need a moment? We know it’s a lot to take in.” Aang sat down beside Zuko. Now that Zuko thought about it, he never really interacted with him before. They really only knew each other through Sokka and Katara.

“I’m... fine.” Zuko lets out a deep breath. Surprisingly, he wasn’t lying. Aang’s presence had a calming aura he didn’t know how to explain. “I’m good.” Another deep breath. “Ok, how do we stop Zhao?”

“They’re coming, hide!” Zuko shoved Sokka and Aang behind the pillar next to them. Sokka gave Zuko a peck on the lips before hiding back behind the pillar. A blush crept up to his face, ignoring the grins from Aang and Katara as well as Toph’s playful snort. Sokka had no idea how the blind girl knew they kissed. She scared him.

“Prince Anik has fled the Fire Nation, my Firelord. I heard him talking about invading our Nation with his troops!” Zhao exaggerated as he walked with Iroh into the room, dozens of guards following closely behind. Zuko’s back was turned to them.

“Is that right, Zhao? You *saw* Prince Anik leave and you *heard* Prince Anik speak of such plans?” Zuko turned around. Sokka thought Zuko would’ve made an amazing actor in those Ember Island Plays.

“That is correct, Your Highness.” Zhao has a tight lipped smile.

“Then what, praytell, is Prince Anik doing right here in this room with us?” As if on cue—because it is—Sokka and Aang walked out from behind the column. Gasps coming from every direction, Zhao knew this was the end.

“Your Majesty, your Advisor has been lying to you,” Sokka spoke up. Zuko has never seen Sokka with such confidence and seriousness before. It worked wonders for him.

“Uncle, he tried to kill Prince Anik!” Zuko shouted.

Iroh was baffled. “Zhao, explain yourself!”

Zhao was put in the spotlight. He had only one thing to do. “My lord, you know where my loyalties lie...” He activated the staff in his hand, the eyes of the dragon glowing with red aura.

Immediately, Iroh was entranced. Zuko felt pained to look at this and it must've shown when Sokka gently took his hand, his thumb rubbing over the back of his hand in circles. He gave Sokka a grateful smile.

“Prince Anik...is not to be trusted.” Iroh turned to Sokka, his movements stiff like an animatronic. “You barge into our city with no warning and we have invited you in with nothing but warm hospitality. And this is how you repay us?”

“Uncle, how could you say that?!”

“Enough, nephew.”

Sokka's eyes settled onto the dragon staff in Zhao's grip. He turned on autopilot and took a dive for it. Toph held Zuko back from going with Sokka. She trusted that he knew what he was doing. She could feel it.

Sokka snatched the scepter from Zhao and with a cry of frustration and force he slammed the metal into the floor. The head of the dragon flew off the stick and it broke in half, smoke slithering out of the body of the broken staff.

As soon as that happened, Iroh was broken from the trance. His eyes fell half lidded and fell backwards. Zuko was the first to react and caught his uncle from falling. Aang and Katara helped to drag him to a nearby seat, Toph sitting beside Iroh. She placed a comforting hand on his shoulder.

Iroh managed to order, “General Jee , take him to the dungeons at once.” He nodded to the man. Jee nodded back and placed the cuffs hanging at his side onto Zhao's wrists. He signaled the other guards to continue and they walked Zhao to the cells underneath the palace.

Zuko counted to three before his uncle started his dramatic acts again. “Oh, my dearest nephew! I'm so sorry for falling for his tricks. Will you ever forgive me?” The old man wailed and weeped on his knees.

Zuko sighed at the antics and pulled Iroh to his feet. “I forgive you. There, easy and simple.” Iroh smiled that famous grin that stretched from ear to ear and hugged his nephew tightly.

“And you, Prince Anik, I offer my deepest apologies. Had I known Zhao was capable of such horrid acts, I would've had him banished immediately.” Iroh let go of Zuko, letting his attention be directed to Sokka. “I offer you these words. A chameleon may disguise itself for its own reasons but the true colors will always come out.”

Sokka was in deep shit.

Chapter End Notes

This is where things go south

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

The sound of flapping wings and a squawk echoed in the empty jail, followed by the jingle of keys. Help has arrived.

Chapter Notes

A bit longer than the other chapters just bc
TW: zhao

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Underneath the castle grounds, deep within, the dungeons reeked of rats and mold. The cells had rust and there were leaks in the ceiling. A dim light lit the small chamber Zhao was in. The sound of flapping wings and a squawk echoed in the empty jail, followed by the jingle of keys. Help has arrived.

“So, I’m assuming now that the Firelord himself has approved of this relationship, you’re free to go?” Aang floated aimlessly in the room. It had been an hour after the confrontation with Zhao.

“I-I can’t do it.” Sokka blurted out. “I can’t do this without you, Aang. I’m sorry but I can’t let you free...”

“What?” Aang stopped whatever he was doing and raised his head to Sokka. “What do you mean you can’t? Of course you can!” This was exactly what Aang was worried about. A pang of hurt started in his chest and it felt like his best friend just stabbed him in the back.

“Don’t you get it? I can’t afford to be Sokka anymore!” Sokka threw his hands up with frustration. “I can only be Prince Anik from now on.”

The Avatar stared at Sokka silently for a few moments. From that, Sokka felt like he could see through Aang’s eyes. They were so clouded, not just because they were gray. But now with tears. What was he doing?

“It’s always about you, isn’t it?” Aang spoke again, his voice cracking in the process. “You just never think about how I feel, how other people feel. You haven’t even explained to Katara, your own sister, about all of this!”

“It-it isn’t like that! I’m dealing with it, ok? I care about you but I really need this to work! I thought you would be at least happy for me but all *you* care about is your stupid wish!” Sokka cursed. He hated how Aang couldn’t even look at him.

“If you really loved Zuko, you’d tell him the truth. And my truth to you is that I don’t care about that dumb wish. I care about you and right now, you’re not Sokka. You’re not the humble and caring guy I met in the cave.” Aang stared at the floor and Sokka swore he saw tears fall on the wooden floorboards. “You’re just Prince Anik.”

Aang knew he should’ve known better. He should’ve known better than to trust Sokka and become his friend. It had to end some way or another. He zapped into the lamp and shut himself down. He couldn’t bear to face Sokka-no, Prince Anik- right now. He just needed to be alone.

“Aang’s right. Spirits, I should really apologize to him after this.” Sokka knew what he had to do now. He stood up and headed towards Zuko’s room. He thought about bringing the lamp with him, just in case, but decided against it. The last thing he needed was to bother Aang during his time alone.

Sitting patiently outside on his window sill was Ozai the phoenix, waiting for the perfect moment to capture the lamp.

“Zuko!” Sokka bursted into the room frantically.

“Anik? What’s wrong?” Zuko waved the palace staff by his side away and Katara was off doing Spirit knows what.

“Look, there has been something that I’ve been wanting to tell you,” Sokka began. “I’m-”

“Your majesty, I’m afraid your conversation with Prince Anik will have to wait. There has been trouble.” A guard, Ming, from what Zuko remembered, interrupted. Trouble?

Ming led them to the throne room. The sight inside was horrifying. Zhao sat atop the Firelord’s throne, the jagged fire behind him blazing with intensity and plain anger.

“Zhao, what-” Zuko’s eyes landed on the people beside the throne. Katara and Toph. They were both chained to the wall, wrists and ankles tied together. He also noticed Azula in a hanging cage. It was past her bedtime and Zuko felt a little relieved to see her snoozing in a cage instead of dead and turned into a roast duck dish.

Katara looked tired and worn. Toph, however, was very different. She was yelling, spitting, and cursing at the guards and Zhao. She quieted down when Zuko entered the room.

“Zhao, what are you doing?” Iroh asked calmly.

“Let my friends go, now,” The prince demanded. That side-burned egotistical maniac should’ve left when he had the chance. Instead, Zhao merely laughed.

“Silly Prince.” He whipped out an all too familiar oil lamp from his pocket. Sokka swore under his breath. He knew he should’ve taken the lamp with him. “Avatar! My first wish is to become the Firelord!” Zhao said as he rubbed his hands on the polish of the lamp.

“No...” Sokka heard Katara mutter in the corner as orange and yellow smoke poured from the spout of the metal. “No, no, no!” She cried when the smoke cleared to unveil who the Avatar was.

“Ah, taken a liking to this one, eh?” Zhao taunted Katara, a devilish smile widened on his wrinkly face. Aang was giant sized and had smoke for the bottom half of his body again, just like when Sokka first met him. Even from down on the ground, he could see tears in Aang’s glowing white eyes as he granted the wish of Zhao. Sokka could tell Aang was straining himself. It’s taking him all his power to do this.

“No! Stop this madness, Zhao!” Zuko stepped forward, the wind of power that emitted from Aang swerved recklessly, although Sokka did note that the wind faltered where Katara was kept. Aang’s glowing arrows and eyes faded back to gray when the wish was completed.

“Guards! I am your new Firelord and you shall obey me! Take the Prince to the dungeons at once!” No one moved. “Jee, if I were you, I would pick my side very carefully.”

Jee turned to Zhao and to everybody’s surprise, *he kneeled*.

“Excellent. Now, arrest the Prince.”

The General stood, shaking. He signaled the soldiers closest to Zuko and they grabbed his shoulders. Sokka was quick to reach out, taking Zuko’s wrists before they could do anything worse.

“Anik, it’s ok. I’ll...I’ll be ok.” Zuko gave him a reassuring look, the same with Iroh. He took one last look at Toph, Katara, and Azula before he was forced out of the room.

Zuko has never felt so...powerless. The world around him stopped. Voices of the past echoed in his head. It can’t end like this. It just can’t. He had to do something. As he walked out of the room with the guards by his side, Zuko gritted his teeth, jaw tight with fury. He will not be silenced.

When did he become so speechless?

It was now or never. He has to speak up. Electricity inside him sparked and Zuko felt like he could challenge the sky. He could dare it to strike him down. It has never held back before, so why now?

“General Jee!” Zuko boomed. He turned around and his voice was laced with power and honor as he spoke.

Jee, who was cuffing Iroh next, paused and looked to the source of the voice. Then, Zhao yelled again.

“I said, take him away!”

Jee held up a hand, causing Zhao to stop. In shock or in rage, no one knew. The General waved the two guards by Zuko aside and allowed the Prince to walk back in.

Zuko continued. “When you first came to work as a soldier, you were just 16. You grew up around this palace and you have now risen up to become our most trusted warrior. I have watched you train for years as a child and I know you will do the right thing.” As he said his little speech, he felt every nerve in him shake. Can’t back out now. “So now, you must choose. These men will follow you wherever you go. Make the right choice. Will you choose glory and seek admiration from a man who is not worthy of it? Or will you be wise and return to honor?”

The amount of aura Zuko had right now was pulsing. Iroh looked with a proud grin. His nephew was no longer a little boy and he should’ve seen it before. Jee considers it, his mind fighting conflicted battles. All eyes on him as he makes his final decision.

“My Prince.” He bows to Zuko. The other guards immediately followed his lead, all bowing to Prince Zuko.

Zuko smiled with triumph but it was quick to fade as Zhao stomped his staff to the ground, roaring with anger, the flames behind him soared up ten times the height before.

“I really thought that you would be smarter, Jee. But if no one will respect and cower before me as a Firelord, then I’ll have no choice.” He takes out the lamp again, slowly this time as if to present it to us, daring us to make one wrong move. “Avatar, I wish to become the most powerful sorcerer in the world!”

The clouds around Aang gathered like a storm waiting to blow. His eyes turned white and glowing again, as did the arrows on his head. Katara had her eyes streaming tears like a waterfall as she watched.

Aang pointed a finger at Zhao and another puff of smoke, this time in blue, shot out of his fingertips. Then, Sokka saw it. Something outside of the palace flew past the windows and bursted in without warning. Everyone heard the confused and blood curdling screams of the citizens outside the palace. A dragon, about the size of the current Aang, proceeded to shrink and freeze in gold, solidifying itself as a new scepter for the dictator.

“Such a shame it had to be like this. But I don’t care. Goodbye, General.” A stomp of his sorcerer scepter on the ground and Jee was no more. “Oh, don’t look at me like that. I only sent them to the dungeons. I won’t kill them. Yet.”

“You’re a monster!” Toph kicked and screamed from her bounds.

“SILENCE!” Zhao swung his hand in the air and Toph’s mouth zip closed like magic.

“Toph!” Sokka leaped at Zhao. He needed to break that scepter just like he did the other time. But as soon as Sokka took even a step forward, the sorcerer froze him in his place.

“Ah yes. Prince Anik. Or would you prefer me to call you by your real name?” Zhao’s smile widened even more now. He has been waiting to expose Sokka since the day he arrived.

“Sokka.”

Sokka found himself on his knees in front of Zuko and Iroh. He felt as if a million swords were pushing through his body right now. His clothes weren’t expensive silk or faux fur anymore. He was just Sokka again.

“Sokka?”

“Oh shit…” Sokka heard Katara gasp.

Momo cowered inside of Sokka’s blue tunic. The lemur didn’t understand a single thing that happened but all he knew was danger.

“Zuko, I-I’m sorry-”

“It seems there has been a trespasser in our lands. If you really are ‘from the tribes’ as you say, then you’ll have no issue staying there.” Zhao paused for dramatic effect. “You are hereby banished from the Fire Nation.”

“Stop, no!” and Momo’s terrified screeching was all Zuko heard before a sharp frigid feeling swiped the room. Just like that, the love of his life was gone. The horrifying noise of Sokka screaming for his life replayed again and again in his head.

“For my next order of business, I am aware of the marriage law, so,” Zhao turns to Zuko. “*you and I* shall be wed at sunset.”

“I will never marry you!” Zuko yelled in the tyrant’s face. Zhao only narrowed his eyes and hit the scepter on the ground again, then raising his arms up like he was a puppet master.

Katara and Toph were released from their bounds and were levitated to midair, as well as Iroh. Zuko looked up at them, suspended in the air, not moving.

“For years, I have waited for this moment. You all shall pay for underestimating me, humiliating. I am Zhao The Invincible!” He laughed out loud and the moment he started cackling, the three in the air shut their eyes tight.

Aang, behind Zhao, watched this scene unfold. He couldn’t take his eyes off of Katara and wished desperately that he could help. But wishes are a foolish thing for an Avatar to want.

There was a light nudge on his shoulder and Aang turned around quietly to see Appa. He smiled. The one thing that hasn’t been ruined yet. Aang hugged his oldest buddy goodbye. A small wave and he sent Appa to wherever Sokka was banished to. Hopefully, they’ll find each other.

Toph gritted her teeth with agonizing pain. She didn't like showing herself in moments of torture but it became pretty clear at this point. Her hands were balled into fists, holding herself so tensely that her knuckles were white.

"It's your choice," Zuko heard Zhao say. His voice made him sick.

Katara winced every second, holding back gut wrenching screams and cries while Iroh doubled down on his knees, clenching his jaw. That sight alone cracked Zuko into two pieces.

"STOP! Zhao, stop this! I'll marry you, I'll do whatever, just stop it now!" Those words rang inside Zhao's head. This was working perfectly for him.

"Glad we can cooperate, my Prince."

Sokka shot up. His body felt numb. He had no idea how he kept moving. "Momo..." He needed to find Momo. Shivering and stumbling around, all he could see was plain white and his footsteps. His eyelids were shutting and so was his body. Sokka kept going.

His clothes were heavy with the snow piling on them, the cold flakes seeped through the fabric and onto his skin. The skin of his hands and face were a rough surface, especially the knuckles. A single scrape could end him.

Sokka pushed through the suffocating wind that pushed painful snow into his face. He needed to find Momo. As he staggered in the heavy snow, he felt his foot trip on something laying on the ground.

The 'thing' rolled over and made a skittering noise. Momo! Sokka never crouched down and picked him up that quick before.

"Momo! Are you doing ok, buddy?" Sokka hid the shivering animal inside his tunic as much as possible, just enough to keep him from freezing like an icicle. "We n-need to find a way out..."

For once, the Universe answered his silent prayers. Appa zoomed past them above their heads, circling back and stopping right in front of the duo. Sokka hopped onto the soft rug and they took off at the speed of light.

“Do you, Firelord Zhao and the-” The officiant squinted down at his paper to read the title carefully. “-greatest sorcerer ever, take Prince Zuko to be your lawfully wedded husband?”

“I do,” Zhao said.

“And do you, Prince Zuko, take...”

Zuko’s head was flooded with ideas and different points on how to escape, mapping every area where he could run or jump away. The thoughts drowned out the wedding ceremony. His uncle and his best friends were held down by the guards. Zhao had said that he couldn’t risk two brats and an old gas bag ruining his wedding.

Behind Zhao and his square shoulders, he saw a familiar carpet pattern that held a slim chance of hope left in Zuko. They came back. Zuko had suppressed everything in and out of him so he didn’t celebrate out loud. For now, he just had to play along.

“Answer me!” Zhao’s repulsive voice snapped the Prince back to reality. As much as he hated to do this, he had to. For the greater good, right? “Ugh, repeat the question.”

“Do you, Prince Zuko, take Firelord Zhao, the greatest sorcerer ever, to be your lawfully wedded husband?” The officiant complied, his voice shaking slightly.

Zuko hated himself for what he did next.

He forced every cell of his body to step closer to Zhao. He put on his best smile and put a hand on the old man’s chest, leaning in real close. Iroh and Katara’s jaws dropped. He could hear Toph ask Katara “what’s happening?” when a guard shushed her. Zuko’s other hand crept to his waist where the lamp hung on his belt. Zhao had a very smug smile on his face.

“I...” Zuko said, barely a whisper, so low that even the officiant had to lean in to hear. Zuko’s hand found the lamp and clutched it just light enough for Zhao to not notice. “Do not!”

Zuko’s hand tore the lamp from Zhao’s belt and jumped over the balcony railing. He prayed that Sokka had the same plan and would be there to catch him.

“What’s cookin’, good lookin’?” He heard Sokka’s voice call. Zuko felt like catching on fire—something that has actually happened before. His heart pounded in his chest and he found himself wrapping his arms around Sokka.

“I was so worried you wouldn’t be there to catch me!” A strong sigh of relief washed over Zuko.

“Only a fool would drop a guy like you, right?” Sokka playfully nudged him with a shove of his shoulder, recounting the night of their ‘first date’.

“Shut up.” For a moment, Zuko felt heaven struck as he and Sokka sat, holding onto the carpet while Appa flew over, sideways, and under the streets of the Fire Nation city. Until a

flash of orange and red took the lamp in Zuko's hands. He knew he always hated Zhao's stupid bird.

Momo, now warmed up, spread out his arms and flew in the sky, chasing after the phoenix. A sudden earth shaking crack in the sky boomed. The clouds gathered and covered the sky, Zhao's doing no doubt.

The violent current of air pushed against the magic carpet, the couple aboard held on tight. Appa tried to push through. The wind blew the carpet into a building, Appa was holding a ledge of a building sideways, Sokka and Zuko hanging on for dear life.

The lamp slipped from Zuko's palm and it plummeted down. The same red and orange sped towards it, carrying the lamp back to Zhao.

The carpet, still gripping at the ledge using the corner, was trying. Appa was trying the best he could. The sound of the ripping wool haunted Zuko and Sokka.

Somehow the two of them flew backwards straight into the palace through the balcony Zuko jumped from, the once full of life now life *less* rest of the carpet flying with them.

"Enough!" Zhao bellowed in the echoing and hollow room. His hands bearing the oil lamp again. Sokka went to help Iroh and the two girls up, sitting them at the base of a pillar near Zuko.

Aang's gaze fell onto the limp carpet, tears soaking through the glowing eyes, rage blaring in his head. His whole essence is telling him to be done with Zhao. Get rid of him. "You should have married me when you had the chance!" Zhao echoed again.

Sokka stepped towards him, the look he had was murderous. Zuko put his arm in front of Sokka. "What...?"

"Don't you trust me?" Zuko muttered to Sokka before facing Zhao again, speaking louder this time. "Really? What are you gonna do, shoot some fire balls at me?"

Zhao hit the ground with his staff for the thousandth time that past hour, a shot of lightning flashed in the background sky. "I am the greatest sorcerer this world has ever seen!"

Zuko was desperate to find any solution at all. He looked around while Zhao continued his 'villain monologue'.

"I am able to do the impossible! I-" Zuko did not give a fuck. His eyes landed on Aang. He was the source of power. Zuko thought that Aang could do something to cut off the source. But 'how' was the question.

Anything, anything at all. Aang caught his gaze and showed him his wrists. They had shackles, leading up to the forearms. That's it!

"You may be the most powerful sorcerer but think about it. You're not the most powerful one here. You never will be!" Zuko felt Sokka grab his arm.

“What are you doing?” Sokka asked through gritted teeth.

“I got this,” soothed Zuko. He paced himself through the throne room. Zhao’s face was redder and redder by each second he spoke.

“I can kill you with a snap of my fingers, boy!” Zhao boasted. He teleported Zuko in front of him, grabbing him by the shirt.

“You can. But who gave you that power?” Zuko baited. Aang shot Zuko a confused look. “Think about it. He can always take your power away-”

“He serves me now!”

“But not forever. You will *never* have more power than the Avatar himself. There will always be something, some being, that is more powerful. You’ll always be second best.” The last sentence seemed to tick him off just enough. Zhao let go of Zuko and faced Aang frantically.

“Avatar! My third and final wish; I wish to become the most powerful thing in the universe!” Zhao looked up at Aang. There was a glint of madness in his words. “Just like you!”

“As you wish.” When Aang spoke, his voice was layered and echoed with a million other voices. It was like he was more than just one being. He snapped his finger and Zhao began to grow.

Feeling the power in him surge, Zhao’s eyes widened. His mind was going in a downward spiral, descending to insanity. He laughed and cackled as the energy and the feeling of the room came cold. He was transforming.

Smoke and ash circled around Zhao. He could feel his magic level going higher and higher, reaching its peak. “I AM SECOND TO NO ONE!” He screamed. He boasted and bragged, fire danced on his palms as he tested out the new powers.

CLINK!

“What?!”

“You see, Zhao, there are technical bounds to being ‘just like the Avatar’.” Zuko explained his plan as Zhao grew rapidly unhinged. “Spirit bound with magic, yes. But not a lot of freedom.”

“How- What?!” Zhao’s wrists bore two thick metal cuffs. His fire in his hand died out rather quickly after that. “What did you do to me?!”

“I didn’t do anything. I just read a lot, something you didn’t think was worth doing.” Zuko smiled up at him innocently.

“No, no! Avatar, please! Rule with me! Together, we can break free of these chains and you will be second in command!” Zhao bribed Aang. “Leave these fools and that girl and I will give you cosmic power!”

Aang scoffed. “Why would I choose cosmic power over Katara?”

“No! NOOO!” Zhao spotted a lamp emerging beside him. It was similar to the one Aang had but this time, it was a deep silver with a yin and yang on one side, two koi fish on the other.

The spout of the lamp pulled Zhao’s smoke-filled form into itself. It rattled with the amount it was to draw in. It tugged every last bit of Spirit bound Zhao in, his screams for help was the last they ever heard.

Chapter End Notes

yall don't come at me for making Zuko the hero of the day, I think he deserves it

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

War is over.

The sky had cleared, returning to the beautiful blue it once was. Every weight seemed to be lifted on everyone's shoulders.

War is over.

What Zuko didn't expect was to be grabbed from behind.

"You did it! Oh my Spirits, you did it!" Sokka cheered, shaking Zuko by his shoulders. "I could kiss you right now!"

"I think that would be best to leave that for later. Maybe in private?" Zuko whispered the last part with a grin. Iroh walked over slowly, his smile being the most genuine thing anyone has ever seen.

Sokka immediately straightened up. "Uh- Sir-I mean, Firelord, sir, I-"

"Thank you," Iroh interrupted. "There is no need for apologies. How would you like tea next week?"

"Tea? Next week?" Zuko looked at Sokka expectantly. "Uh, sure."

Momo tapped Aang, now in his smaller form, on the shoulder with one hand, the other holding a ripped up carpet.

"I'm way ahead of you." Aang let out a breath and rubbed his hands together, thrusting them out to the limp rug as sparks of glitter came out of his palms. When the carpet came lively again, Aang sprung onto him, crying. "I missed you, buddy."

Sokka stepped away from the family situation Zuko had and went to his own family. Katara was waiting by the pillar she sat by earlier with Toph. She was explaining it all to her, the parts she couldn't see anyways.

"Sokka!" Katara jumped up and crashed into Sokka, embracing her brother like her life depended on it. "I was so worried you wouldn't..."

"Don't worry, Katara. I always come back." Sokka smiled as they held each other. "Now, I think you should go get your man."

“That can wait. You should probably talk to him first. Who am I to break up the bros?” Katara teased as she pulled away.

“Seriously, do not ever repeat those words to me ever again.” Sokka pushed her as he walked to Aang, her giggling made him smile.

“Sokka, I’m really sorry about our argument. I was really selfish. You should do whatever you want with that last wish.” Aang brushing off the argument was exactly what Sokka expected him to do.

“Yeah, of course. Thanks, Aang,” Sokka lied.

“Ok, I was thinking; you use your final wish to wish away that law about marriage. It’ll be gone just like that!” Aang marveled at his own magic. “So?”

“So....” Sokka said, dragging out the ‘o’ of so. “You have the power to make any rule or law disappear and there will be zero trace of it?”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“Ok.” Sokka pretended to be deep in thought before making his final wish. “Aang, I wish...”

“Ooh, here it comes!”

“I wish for you to be free.”

“Wait, what?” The words had already been said and Aang had never been more happy and in disbelief at the same time. His wrists were free of the metal that wrapped around them, the cool air breezing gently past his skin. His human skin.

There was no smoke for feet, no glowing eyes or arrows. And no magic.

“Sokka, you...oh my Spirits.” Aang laughed, speechless. “I...Thank you.”

“Eh, no biggie.”

There was a surprised gasp from behind them. Sokka turned around and saw Toph and his sister. She took a leap at Aang, almost knocking him over. He caught her in his arms, spinning a turn or two before they parted.

Aang buried his face into Katara’s neck with solace. Both of them were so lovey dovey that Sokka and Toph wanted to throw up.

“Eugh, you guys make me sick.” Toph was definitely not refraining from berating people with her comments now that her voice was back.

“Zuko.” Iroh turned. Zuko opened his mouth, probably to apologize, but Iroh stopped him. He grabbed Zuko and pulled him into a hug.

“Uncle, I’m sorry I acted out against you before.” Zuko wrapped his arms around his uncle.

“I should be the one apologizing. I was a fool for trusting Zhao, which I thank you for helping me see that. I was afraid of losing you like I lost Lu Ten...” Zuko heard Iroh’s voice straining. He sniffed before continuing. “I’m so sorry. You have shown great wisdom and honor. You have found your way, Zuko, and you did it all by yourself. I am so proud of you.”

Zuko felt like curling up into a ball and crying on his bed. He was so lucky to have an uncle like him.

“Your coronation will be held tomorrow evening. You will be the next Firelord.” Iroh took off the headpiece in his hair, letting the gray strands fall to his shoulders. He passed it to Zuko. “Starting tomorrow, you have the ability to change any and all laws.” Zuko gave a small smile as Iroh winked at him. “Now, go get him. He is good for you.”

His uncle patted his hand before he stood up and went out for tea. Zuko watched his uncle walk out the door jollily, humming a song to himself.

“Hey, Sokka,” Zuko put a hand on Sokka’s shoulder, causing him to turn and face the scarred Prince. Even Katara and Aang, who were infatuated with each other, pulled apart to watch.

“Oh, Zuko. I think I sorta owe you an explanation.” Sokka scratched the back of his neck. “Look, I’m really sorry about lying to you like twice in a row. I really am just a Water Tribe peasant. I’m not a Prince and you deserve someone better than me.”

Sokka looked at Katara and Aang with a gaze of goodbye and patted Toph before making his way to the exit. Zuko panicked. This was not how he thought the conversation would go. Katara urged him to go.

“Don’t look at me like this is my fault!” Zuko hissed when Toph deadpanned at him with a tilted head. “You too!” He said when Katara gave him the exact same expression.

“Go get him.” That was all Zuko needed to hear from Aang before sprinting to Sokka.

He took Sokka by the hand and pulled him in without saying anything. Before Zuko could ever think, he gave himself up entirely and kissed Sokka. Seconds blurred past and Zuko was faintly aware of Katara, Toph, and Aang jumping up and down, cheering and whooping, but the only thing he could fully register was the familiar feeling of Sokka’s lips kissing him back.

When they finally let go of each other, their hands still rested at the other’s body. Sokka had a dumbfounded and dopey smile, like he was going to collapse.

“Oh, great. You’ve broken him.” Toph snorted.

“He looks like he drank too much cactus juice.” Aang poked Sokka in the forehead. There was no response.

“And just when I got him back.” Katara shook her head.

“What do you mean ‘just got him back?’” Zuko raised his only eyebrow at his handmaiden. Her eyes widened with the shock and realization that nobody bothered telling the Prince

about Katara and Sokka's backstory.

"It might seem crazy what I'm about to say..." Katara gave him an awkward smile.

When they finished retelling the entire lore, Zuko's reaction was not anything anybody expected.

"You're gonna be my sister in law!"

"I pronounce you husband and husband!" Cheers erupted in the crowd as the officiant, Katara, announced the marriage.

Zuko grabbed Sokka by the waist and dipped him, pressing their lips together, sealing the deal. It had been two years since the incident with Zhao and with Zuko being the new Firelord, things have run a lot smoother. He promoted Katara to the adviser and the Nation's people have never seen brighter days.

Sokka and Katara found more time to spend with each other. They found out where their father was and Zuko was able to pull some strings to get the family back together.

At his wedding, Sokka made the ultimate decision to invite some of his friends from the streets to the ceremony like Ty Lee and Suki, as well as the other Kyoshi Warriors. Appa was the ring bearer and Momo and Azula were the flower girls.

Katara was, as you already know, the officiant. Toph was Zuko's Best Woman, Aang was the Best Man for Sokka. Zuko walked down the aisle with Iroh and Sokka cried so much that the cloth Aang gave him was soaked.

During the reception, Zuko and Sokka were busy with all the different guests. Katara, Toph, and Suki found things they all had in common and got to chatting.

"So, come here often?" Ty Lee beamed up at Mai.

"This is a wedding." The Princess sighed.

"I know! Isn't it so exciting? My name is Ty Lee!"

"Mai."

“Be careful!” Katara yelled up to Sokka as he and Zuko flew off on Appa to their honeymoon.

“Yeah, I know!” Sokka screamed back.

“And use protection!”

“Shut up!”

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

And they lived happily ever after.

Chapter Notes

This took so long to finish on my end bc i didn't know how to end it

“-And they lived happily ever after,” Aang concluded. His children listened intently to the story. “Any questions?”

“Yeah, what does ‘use protection’ mean?” Little Tenzin looked up with a curious gaze.

“It means they’re gonna have se-Mmph!” Kya slapped a hand over Bumi’s mouth.

“Ew, did you just lick my hand?” His sister shook her hand with disgust. “Mom! Bumi licked my hand!”

Katara chuckled as she carried a basket of fruits in her hand. “Now, kids, that’s enough. Bumi, no more licking other people. It’s not sanitary.”

“Listen to your mother. And I think it’s time for your afternoon snack,” Aang agreed with his wife, gently pushing his kids to their mother inside.

“But you didn’t answer my question.” Tenzin blinked at his father.

“Uh...when you’re older, you’ll understand.” Aang hoped and prayed that that was enough to get Tenzin to stop asking.

“...Ok!” He said before running inside to Katara.

Aang sighed with relief. The boat sailed west, inching closer and closer by each tide of the waters. He couldn’t believe they were finally going back. The whole gang will be there, even Suki. After all these years, he wondered if anything changed.

Hours passed and the ship came to a sudden stop. Aang, asleep on the deck, was greeted with whispering and giggling. He opened his eyes, vision blurring as he slowly awoke.

Lo and behold, Firelord Zuko and his trophy wife, Sokka. Toph had a foot on the dip of the starboard, grinning from ear to ear.

“Welcome back, Twinkle Toes.”

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