Roll With the Punches

by GreatestChange

Summary

When Asami finds out that her former best friend Korra is back in town and involved with an illegal, underground boxing club, she immediately seeks her out for answers, and to finally know why Korra left in the first place. But the answers she gets may not be what she expected or ever wanted to hear.

Past revelations and newfound feelings unfold. But after everything that happened during their emotional rollercoaster of a relationship, will they ever be able to move forward?
“KNOCKOUT!!!” the announcer shouted into the microphone.

The crowd erupted with multiple reactions, ranging from very pleased, to a full on upset and calling for a rematch. The declared winner stood over his unconscious opponent, welcoming all of the garnering attention on him as his arm was raised in the air by the referee.
Asami placed one hand over her ear as she made her way through a sea of people screaming their heads off. She was positive that when she woke up in the morning she’d be partially deaf.

Some of the people moved willingly, while others gave her dirty looks and once-overs, but she ignored them. She didn’t look like she belonged in a place like this anyway.

Originally, the place had been an old, nondescript warehouse on the outskirts of Manhattan. It still appeared that way on the outside, but when you reached the inside it was like entering some sort of secret portal that transported you to the actual place (Asami had been watching too many sci-fi movies lately).

The warehouse had been remodeled, looking like a club space more than anything with all of the multi-colored lights coming from the ceiling. There were also tables and booths set out near the walls for anyone who actually wanted to sit down, but most of the people stood. No one wanted to miss a single moment of where the action was, which happened to be in the center of the room where a large, octagonal ring stood higher than anything else.

The two fighters that just finished their match were making their way out now; though, the person who was knocked out needed three people to assist him.

Asami winced when she saw the blood oozing out of the loser’s nose. She couldn’t fathom how anyone would find this so entertaining: two people beating the shit out of each other just for the thrill of it. Then again, she couldn’t fathom a lot of things: like how and why she was there in the first place.

There were only a few times in her life that she felt unsure about herself, and coincidentally, all of those times had the same common denominator. It made her ill to think that someone could still have such an affect on her. She was Asami Sato, after all: The entrepreneurial businesswoman and engineer who now ran one of the biggest tech industries in the world. There was never a time since she took over the company that she doubted herself. So why couldn’t it be that way now when she was finally ready to face one of the many skeletons in her closet?

She was bitter—oh was she bitter—but she also needed closure to something in her life. If she didn’t have the courage to do it now, then she’d most likely never go through with it. Even if it did end up being the worst thing for her, at least she would know for sure.

She clutched onto the bag hanging off her shoulder and continued to shove through everyone. The energy in the room never diminished. It only grew more intense as the crowd became impatient and eager for the next fight to start.

After what felt like an hour, she was finally able to make her way through them all and to the very far side of the room, opposite from where the only exit was. It was a roped off V.I.P section with a large bodyguard standing in front of the entryway with his arms folded over his chest. The only acknowledgement he gave Asami was a lifted eyebrow.

“I’m here to see Varrick,” she yelled over the noise.

“Name?”

“Asami Sato. He’s expecting me.”

He looked her up and down and then stepped to the side, giving her permission to pass. It felt so over the top that she almost rolled her eyes.

Behind the guard was a long table with a few couches set up around it, making it look like a
lounging area. It only took a second for Asami to spot the man she was looking for.

Iknik Blackstone Varrick was on one of the couches, sitting thigh to thigh with a brunette haired woman while a group of people sat close by. His voice could be heard from where Asami stood as he spoke to his private audience who seemed to be hanging onto his every word.

He was one of the shadiest businessmen Asami had ever heard about. Apparently the guy was notorious for making illegal trades all over the black market, and yet somehow he wasn’t behind bars right now. Rumor had it that the police could never find a solid lead that traced back to him. It was probably also why he had very few enemies.

But seeing him now for the first time in person, it would have been impossible to put two and two together. He looked normal, relaxed, and boyish as he laughed at something someone made a comment about to him. It put Asami at ease to know that she was going to meet him while he was in a good mood. After taking a deep breath and smoothing a few wrinkles out of her dress, she walked over.

“Um, excuse me,” she interrupted.

Varrick, as well as the rest of the group, turned her way and stared.

*Shit,* she thought. How could she completely forget her manners? It was probably extremely rude of her to interrupt. She almost flinched when she noticed that Varrick was squinting at her.

“Ahh. Miss Sato,” he said, recognizing her after a long minute. “I was beginning to wonder if you would show up. Please come have a seat.” He patted the empty cushion beside him.

Asami was surprised by how formal he sounded, even in an environment where it was as chaotic and loud as this one. She practically had to climb over people’s knees to get over to where he was, but she managed to do so without embarrassing herself. After sitting down, she looked over at Varrick and realized that he had been watching her the whole time.

“Zhu Li, do you mind getting us some drinks?” he asked the woman on the other side of him, and then looked over at Asami again. “What would you like? It’s on the house.”

“Oh, just some water would be nice,” she said and glanced at the woman named Zhu Li.

“Thanks.”

“Just order my usual.” Varrick started waving his hand as if he were trying to remember what it was called. “You know. The one thing.”

“Yes, sir.” Zhu Li nodded and then made her way out of the V.I.P section.

“Assistant?” Asami asked.

“Eh. Something like that.” He turned toward her a bit and smiled. “To be honest, seeing a person like you in a place like this is highly amusing. Weren’t you just named the top most influential business leader of the year *two* times in a row?”

She shrugged. “I’m just full of surprises, I guess.”

“Well, you’d have to be if you’re risking your entire company and career meeting with someone like me. What was it you needed again exactly?”

Asami looked around at everyone watching them, and then back at Varrick. He understood the
message she was trying to send and clapped his hands.

“Okay, everyone, disperse! This woman and I have some business we need to discuss.”

It must have been a record time for how fast it took for people to gather their stuff and leave the section in order for them to be in private.

“Wow,” Asami said, genuinely amazed. “You’ve got them in the palm of your hand, don’t you?”

“They’re mostly just a group of people hoping to gain something by being in my inner circle,” he said nonchalantly.

“That doesn’t… bother you?”

“I’d do the same thing in their position. Besides, watching how hard they all try to please me is pretty fun.”

The woman named Zhu Li came back with three drinks and set them out on the table.

“Zhu Li doesn’t count, though,” Varrick said just as Asami was about to make a snide remark. “She’s different.”

Zhu Li looked between them both but didn’t say anything, choosing to sit down and sip at her drink instead.

“Anyway. Now that we have some privacy, why don’t you tell me what it is you wanted from me.”

Asami straightened up and gave Zhu Li another glance. “There’s someone I’m looking for.”

“And I’m the only one who can help you find them?” he queried.

“You own the Blackstone Fighting League, don’t you?” she asked an obvious question while reaching over to grab her glass of water.

“You’re darn tootin’ I do! We’re rated number one for a reason.”

“Then I’m sure you can help me.” Asami took a sip and then placed the glass back down on the table.

“Well, Miss Sato—”

“Just Asami, please,” she corrected him.

“Well, Asami.” He winked. “I would love to help you!”

“Thank you,” she said, giving a soft sounding sigh of relief.

“Just as long as you hold up your end of the deal.”

She felt a chill run down her spine at how his demeanor instantly changed. Gone was the energetic, boyish charm that she saw a few minutes ago, and replacing it was the cold, criminal mastermind that she heard so much about.

Taking a deep breath, she reached into her bag and hesitantly pulled out a vanilla enveloped folder and handed it over to him. He took it and looked inside, then smugly looked up at her.
“Ya know, Asami. I’ve read a lot about you, your company, and all of the groundbreaking stuff you do. I’d be very interested in building a working relationship.”

“This was a one time thing only,” she said warningly.

“Who knows? Maybe the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Your father should know a thing or two about working with bad people, shouldn’t he?”

She balled her fists at her sides and tried to contain the instant rage she felt. It was probably what Varrick wanted—to have her blow up on him so that she’d never get the information she needed.

So instead of falling for the bait, she calmly pulled out her phone, unlocked it, then opened up her photo album and clicked on a saved picture.

“This is who I’m looking for.” She showed him. “I know she fights for your league, so just tell me where I can find her.”

Varrick pulled his glasses out of the small pocket in his jacket and put them on. He took the phone out of her hands and looked at it for only a second before bursting into laughter.

“You’re in luck, kid. She’s the main event for tonight.”
Part 1: Meeting Again

“Are you ready?”

“Almost.”

Korra was leaning against the wall, slowly unraveling the last of the athletic tape around her knuckles. Once she finished, she flexed her fingers and made sure they were secured but not too tight, then she threw the finished tape to the side.

“Remember to use every inch of that octagon to your advantage. This may be the strongest opponent you’ve faced, but you’re definitely faster.”

“You think I don’t know this already?” she snapped at the woman beside her.

Kuvira gave a quizzical look just then. “You’re nervous.”

“Ha.” Korra came off the wall and started shadowboxing to warm up. “You wish I was nervous.”

They were in a dark hall, beside the entryway leading out to all of the madness going on. Korra saw from the corner of her eye that Kuvira had turned away from her to look. She was dressed in a pair of dark jeans and a jacket that covered up the white t-shirt underneath. Her long hair still looked wet from taking a shower, but it was neatly plaited back and out of her face. To anyone outside the warehouse, it would have been hard to tell that she was in a fight just an hour ago.

From what Korra heard, it was one of the best fights of the night. She was unable to watch because of the mental preparation she had to do for her own, but it was a no-brainer that Kuvira would win. She was Korra’s coach, after all.

Her fists moved fast as they punched through the air, striking her invisible opponent with as much power and force she could put behind them.

Kuvira turned back to her. "Don’t tire yourself out.”

Korra stopped on command and took a few deep breaths.

“You good?” Kuvira asked.

She nodded and rolled her neck.

In all honesty, she wasn’t. This was her first time being the main event, so of course she was freaking out just a little.

Almost two years passed since she joined the Blackstone Fighting League as an undercard. She was the latest talent that everyone was talking about. Not only was she known as the 'rookie,' but she was also known as the rookie who hadn’t lost a single fight since arriving. And now she was going to be known as the rookie who, for some reason, was able to do a main event while still having the undercard status. There was absolutely no pressure at all...

“Just make sure you lay off her right side,” Kuvira told her. “If you do that, then it’ll make things a hell of a lot easier for you. She plays it off like that isn’t her dominate side, but once you’re in
there, you’ll definitely notice it. I’ve seen her fight before and she’s a stylist at best.”

Korra already heard that before, but she nodded anyway.

They were interrupted when a guy in all black appeared in the entryway and locked eyes with her.

“Two minutes,” he said, and then disappeared back into the chaos that was waiting for her.

Korra felt that familiar rush of excitement that always came before a fight, making her almost electric. Her heart pounded fast and she could almost feel the blood pumping in her veins.

“Hey.”

Looking over, she saw Kuvira holding out a pair of red gloves.

“Give me your hands,” she commanded.

Korra extended her arms and showed her hands, her palms facing upward as she let Kuvira put the gloves on.

“Good?” she asked.

Korra gave a sharp nod, then she closed her eyes and started pacing in her spot. Her stomach fluttered at the sound of the crowd getting antsy. Some people were even chanting her name.

“You’ve got this in the bag,” Kuvira told her.

“Are you only saying this because you’re my coach and you have to, or because you actually believe in me?” Korra asked, still pacing.

Kuvira gave her a look.

“WHO’S READY FOR THE MAIN EVENT???” The ring announcer’s voice boomed from the speakers.

The crowd thunderously cheered, stomping their feet and making so much noise that it practically shook the place.

Korra let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. When she felt hands on her shoulders, rubbing at them, she opened her eyes.

“You're tense,” Kuvira mumbled. “Relax and focus.”

Instantly, Korra sighed and shook her head, trying to clear her mind of her thoughts. After doing that, she looked at Kuvira with determination and fire blazing in her eyes.

Kuvira smirked back at her. “That’s my girl.”

The ring announcer introduced her opponent first: Yunko. It was some woman affiliated with the Triple Threat Triad, a group that Korra held a grudge against.

Most of the crowd booed the woman as she came from the opposite side of the room and got into the ring. She was dressed similarly to Korra, with a yellow sports bra and tiny shorts that showed off her toned legs. If the crowd reaction was getting to her, she didn’t show it. The expression on her face was cold and furtive, matching with her overall physique. She was taller, and a bit beefier than Korra, but instead of feeling intimidated, Korra felt another rush of excitement at this new
**“AND NOW LET’S MAKE SOME NOISE FOR HER OPPONENT. GIVE IT UP FOR THE UPSTARTER! OUR UNDEFEATED ROOKIE! KOOOOORRA!!!”**

“Open your mouth,” she heard over the noise that erupted in the building. When she obeyed, Kuvira slipped the mouth guard in, and then gave her a firm pat on the back.

Taking that as her cue, Korra ran out. A spotlight fell on her as she did, causing the crowd to separate and clear a path for her to walk through. As she passed by, she heard people yelling on all sides of her, but that didn’t break her concentration. She kept her eyes set on her objective.

She removed her socks just before walking up the steps and entering the ring. Once her eyes met Yunko’s, she saw that the other fighter was giving her an icy glare. Had it been any other person, they would have flinched, but Korra stood tall, even smirking a bit, which only seemed to piss Yunko off even more.

*Good*, Korra thought. One thing Kuvira taught her in their training was about learning how to keep her own composure, and she knew that starting off a fight the way this person was only gave the other opponent the upper hand. So when Yunko tried to advance on her, clearly ready to start the fight, Korra came forward with a taunting look in her eyes. Unfortunately, that was when the referee came between them and pushed them apart.

*“Woah! Easy, ladies!”* The announcer sounded from one corner of the ring. *“Give a guy the chance to get out of the ring first!”*

Korra glowered but backed off, choosing to hop from side to side on the mat while knocking her gloves together.

*“Now before we begin our main event of the night, let’s all give a warm thanks to the man behind all of this: Varrick!”*

The crowd whistled and hollered. For a moment, the lights went away from the ring and over to the V.I.P section where Varrick more than likely was.

Korra didn’t bother to look and kept pacing back and forth, trying to keep the blood and energy flowing in her legs.

The lights came back on the ring a second later and the announcer exited, leaving only Korra, her opponent, and the referee between them.

*“Okay, ladies, you know the rules,”* he said. *“No punches below the belt, kicking, or headbutts are allowed. The winner will be declared when it’s obvious her opponent can no longer continue. Let’s have a clean and fair fight. At this moment, you can choose to touch gloves or go back into your corners until the first bell goes off.”*

Korra gave her opponent a knowing look, which was only returned with a sneer. Needless to say, they didn’t touch gloves, and she was okay with that. People who fought for the Triple Threats were the lowest of lows and deserved no respect.

She walked over to her corner, giving her gloves another good knocking and rolling her shoulders back. Kuvira was right there waiting on the apron of the ring. When Korra came up, they shared a long look before Kuvira reached for the back of her neck and pulled her forward, knocking their foreheads together gently.
“She’s only an obstacle to your goal. If you can pull this off, I guarantee you’ll have nothing else left to prove.”

Korra nodded and pulled away, not giving those motivational words much thought because her mind was buzzing with so much pent up energy that she needed to let out. She watched Kuvira hop down from ringside before turning around, facing the center of the ring once more. Yunko was also over in her corner exchanging a few words with the person she brought with her. It was a man in a business suit, and Korra instantly recognized him as a Triad member. Every once in a while he would look over in her direction as if she were the dirt under his shoe.

Korra ignored him and decided to close her eyes again. She searched for that inner balance that she always struggled to find and drowned out the roars of the crowd to focus on her breathing. Her mind instantly cleared, leaving nothing else but adrenaline running in her veins. She took another breath…

*Ding!*

Yunko wasted no time and advanced on Korra immediately, taking aim at her jaw. Korra dodged it easily, moving her head and upper body to the left.

A reasonable amount of space was between them now and they began to circle each other. Korra took a guess that her opponent was used to dominating a fight early on in a match, but so was she. This time, she took the first swing at Yunko’s left—taking Kuvira’s advice to lay off her right side. Yunko dodged it just barely, only to mistakenly leave her face unprotected. Korra immediately went for it and landed a clean hit to the cheek. Her opponent stumbled back but recovered easily and came forward to strike at Korra.

They kept some distance for the rest of the time. Korra noticed that they both had the same idea to analyze each other in the first round and then really go at it in the second.

It ended in a stalemate. When Korra walked back to her corner, there was a small chair already waiting for her, as well as Kuvira with a bottle of water. Korra happily took it after sitting down and having her mouthpiece removed.

“Your pace was sloppy at best, and you pretty much gave her that last hit. Get your ass in gear now.”

The mouthpiece was shoved back in before Korra even had a chance to argue.

*Ding! Ding!*

The second round started and she went back into the zone, determined to stay on the offense this time around. She threw a couple of punches at first to hopefully throw Yunko off, which worked, and then she performed a classic one-two-three combo that sent her into the ropes. Yunko tried to block out any other punches Korra sent flying her way, but Korra still managed to land two more. It was only when the referee broke them up and declared the end of round two that Korra went bouncing back to her corner, feeling more confident than ever, but also a little tired. This time when Kuvira was at her side, she gave Korra a long, hard look while wiping her face with a towel.

“Good. But don’t get too comfortable,” she said as Korra took a giant chug of her water. “You had her on the ropes for far too long and didn't capitalize on the moment. But the good news is she’s looking more tired than you. Finish this right now.”

The mouthpiece went back in, and she gave Korra a hard pat on the shoulder before jumping back
down from the ring, taking the chair, water, and face towel with her.

*Ding! Ding! Ding!*

Korra surged forward and attacked right away, trying to be sporadic with her punches, but Yunko was smart enough not to be bested twice and dodged them all. They circled each other again. Korra could feel herself growing more tired by the minute from all of the energy she let out just a second ago. She instantly felt stupid for not realizing that it must have been Yunko’s plan all along. Taken by surprise, her opponent suddenly rushed at her. Korra successfully dodged the first hits targeting her face, but she was unprepared for the cross double that was randomly thrown in: the first to the side of her head, and the second one to her chin and bottom lip. She ended up falling onto the ropes, just barely being able to hold herself up.

The referee came between them, telling Yunko to back off, then he ran over to check and see if Korra was still in good condition to fight. Her body was pivoted to the side as she tried to get over the overwhelming dizziness she felt from the blow to the head she just took. When her vision started to come back into focus, she looked out at the crowd and noticed that she was facing the direction Varrick’s table was. Her eyes lingered there for a moment, and then she did a double take.

It could have been the fact that her head was still spinning, or that the crowd in front of her was moving around in a frenzy and making everything seem all the more confusing with their loud cries of outrage. It was too dark to see anyone’s face from where she stood, but what Korra did see was a silhouette of a woman standing there at Varrick’s table, staring directly at her.

“If you don’t stand up in two seconds, I’m calling this match.”

Korra looked at the referee and immediately got off the ropes. Since her mouth guard was still in, all she could do was give a simple nod to let him know that she was okay. The referee gave her a skeptical look, but nevertheless moved out of the way to let the fight resume.

She kept her distance, still trying to shake off the dizziness from that stunned blow she received, but she also needed to get the image of that silhouette out of her head. She was so distracted that she almost didn’t see her opponent lunge at her. Acting quickly, she jumped back, just barely dodging the glove aiming for her abdomen. But her opponent continued her assault and Korra soon fell into defense mode, dodging and backing farther away until she didn’t have anywhere to go. She was now trapped between the turnbuckle and Yunko with no way out.

“It’s over! She’s gonna lose!” a member of the crowd shouted from behind her, along with a few others in agreement.

Hearing that was enough to get Korra’s mind back in the zone again.

Yunko was towering over her, about to deliver her final blow with her right fist raised high in the air. A small opening was made and Korra used that to duck out of the way. The other fighter fell forward, almost going into the post, but stopped herself and turned around, looking just as surprised as everyone else that Korra managed to escape that.

Korra didn’t give her time to process what just happened. She threw a double jab to the face, and then crunched low to deliver an uppercut that had Yunko’s head snapping back and making her fall to the floor. When she attempted to get back on her feet, she stumbled drunkenly before falling
back onto the canvas.

The referee immediately came between them and pushed Korra back before rushing over to the woman currently in a state of delirium to check on her. After a few seconds passed, he stood up and made a signal to ring the bell.

“KNOCKOUT!!! HERE IS YOUR WINNER AND STILL UNDEFEATED: THE LEGENDARY KOOOOOOORRA!!!!!”

The audience went nuts, roaring with excitement, surprise, and utter disbelief.

The referee eventually came over to Korra and grabbed her by the wrist, lifting her arm high in the air to officially declare her the winner. The ceiling could have caved in from all of the noise.

Korra was smiling as she removed her mouthpiece. She ignored the taste of blood flowing out of her busted lip in favor of doing her traditional victory lap and usual showboating after winning a match. Kuvira came sliding into the ring not too long after that and pulled Korra into a congratulatory hug.

Even though she was still feeling dizzy and most likely needed medical assistance, Korra wanted to hang onto the moment for as long as she could. The utter joy she felt could not be contained. It was another victory; another step toward proving that she wasn’t just some rookie. She was slowly but surely making her way up the ranks and, soon enough, everyone would remember her name. It was everything she could ever want.

For a brief moment, she looked over at Varrick’s table. The silhouette was gone.

“You’re lucky you had that mouth guard in. You would have had more than just a busted lip.”

Korra lifted the small ice pack and rolled her eyes. “You underestimate me.”

“Shh. Hold still.”

Kya, the medical examiner, took Korra’s face in her hands and moved it from side to side. “Well, aside from the lip and a little bruising right here.” She gave Korra’s cheek a firm poke. “I’d say you’ll be just fine.”

Korra glared and rubbed at the spot. “Gee, thanks.”

“Always a pleasure.” Kya said and started packing her stethoscope and other materials into her first aid bag. “Just make sure you don’t do anything strenuous for the next couple of days. You may not have a concussion, but you still took a couple of nasty hits. Kuvira, I’m trusting you to look after her.”

Kuvira was sitting on the couch with her feet propped up on the table and raised her hands in defense.

“Hey, that girl has a mind of her own. Not to mention she’s incredibly stubborn.”

“This girl can hear you,” Korra said. She threw the ice pack to the side and pulled on her jacket. Afterward, she got up from her chair and walked over to where Kuvira was sitting to grab her jeans and put them on. Her hair was still dripping after taking a shower. “And for the record, I’m not stubborn. I just know what I’m capable of.”
“What you’re capable of right now is another blow to the head if you don’t listen to me,” Kya threatened.

“Seriously? You’re starting to become more of a mother hen than anything.”

Kuvira stood up a second later and wrapped her arm around Korra’s shoulders while looking at Kya. “Don’t take it personally, doc. I believe that’s Korra’s code for, ‘thanks for taking care of me, Kya. You’re the best.’”

“Yeah, sure,” Kya said as she finished packing up her equipment. “You know, you girls are far too talented and intelligent to be involved with a place like this.”

“Says the woman in a family of political public figures,” Korra retorted.

“Yeah,” Kuvira chimed in on the teasing. “Haven’t you ever wondered what would happen if people found out about you helping a bunch of adrenaline junkie nutcases?”

Kya lifted an eyebrow, clearly not amused. “You guys do know that you’d be dead without me, right?”

“That’s pushing it,” Kuvira replied. “Maybe half dead.”

The doctor gave them a saucy look as she slugged her medical bag behind her shoulder. “Take it easy—the both of you. If I hear one word about you two being in some other shabby ring, or— heaven forbid—a street brawl, I won’t clear you for a month.”

“Yes, ma’am,” they said.

Kya walked over to the door but stopped and turned around.

“Oh, and congratulations, Korra,” she said, a tender smile on her face. "I was rooting for you." Feeling embarrassed, Korra blushed and rubbed at her neck. “Thanks,” she mumbled.

Kya nodded and was gone a moment later, leaving Korra and Kuvira alone in the small dressing room.

“So what are we doing tonight?” her coach asked. “The girls wanted to go bar hopping. I’m sure we’ll get free drinks the whole night.”

“I don’t care,” Korra answered. She reached for the brush sitting not too far from her and started stroking it through her damp hair. From the mirror, she saw Kuvira roll her eyes.
“You never care. It’s becoming a ritual.”

“Then I guess you should’ve already known the answer to the question.”

After brushing her hair back the way she wanted it, Korra tied it neatly back into a short ponytail. Noticing that her hair was getting a little longer than she liked it, she made a mental note to go and get it cut again soon.

“So…” Kuvira said. It was a tone that Korra knew all too well, and it instantly annoyed her.

“So?"

“Are you going to tell me what happened out there?”

“Well, from the looks of it, I won the match,” she said, feigning ignorance.

“Well, from my perspective, it looked like you were getting your ass handed to you until the last second.”

“Wow.” Korra looked at Kuvira from the mirror. “It’s only been an hour and you’re already trying to kill the mood.”

“No. I’m just trying to understand what happened. After you got back up, there was a look in your eyes. You seemed distracted before Yunko made another move.”

“It’s called being stunned from a blow. I would think you’d know something as simple as that.”

There was a long sigh. “You’re really going to play this game with me?”

“What game? And why do you care, anyway? I won, didn’t I?”

“That’s beside the point.”

“Really? Because right now it seems like the only thing you’re trying to do is discredit me.”

“You’re acting like such a brat right now.”

All of the lightheartedness they shared just minutes before disappeared, and replacing it was a lot of tension that Korra should have seen coming from a mile away but chose to ignore.

While she could say that Kuvira was the closest person she had since joining Varrick’s fight club, that didn’t mean that the two of them always had the best relationship. When Kuvira first became her coach, it was because no one else in the locker room wanted to train her. They argued and fought throughout those two years, but it also led to them building somewhat of a relationship, if you could call it that. They supported each other in the ring, but outside of it was where the complications arose.

It was only a week ago, when Varrick announced her as the main event, that things started getting heated. Kuvira thought she wasn’t ready while Korra thought the opposite. She figured her coach’s opinion would change after seeing her win the fight, but apparently it didn’t, and that infuriated Korra.

“When are you finally going to stop treating me like I’m still beneath you and accept the fact that we’re on the same level?” she finally asked.

Kuvira scoffed at that. “You main event one time and suddenly we’re equals? I don’t think so.”
Korra turned around and stood up again, taking a few steps toward her coach. “I’ve always been good, since before I even met you. And I know that’s secretly always intimidated you. It’s also probably why you’ve been so hesitant to fight me for real.”

“Is that really what you think?”

Korra shrugged. “You haven’t given me any other reason not to think that.”

“You are good,” Kuvira admitted, shaking her head, “but that’s never been enough to impress me, and you know it. Sometimes it’s about the heart.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Korra asked, growing angrier by the second.

“It means that the truth of the matter is you’re still as cocky, overbearing, and hot-headed as you were when you first came stomping into this place acting like you owned it.”

“And that suddenly offends you?” Korra asked. “Because for the longest time you were telling me that it was one of my strengths—”

“As well as one of your weaknesses,” Kuvira cut her off. “Why do you think it took so long for me to actually think you belonged here? A huge chunk of the time, it felt like your heart was never really in it.”

“I’ve worked my ass off to be here. You of all people should know that. And I could have easily gotten here, on my own, without your help.”

“Have I ever doubted that you could?”

“You just did!”

“No. I doubted if you actually belonged here.”

“It may as well mean the same thing.”

“I’m sure in that over-analytical brain of yours, it does.”

“Screw you.”

She tried to make her way passed, but Kuvira grabbed her by the arm.

“You see, this, right here...” she looked Korra up and down, “is exactly why I always told you we wouldn’t work out.”

Korra stopped struggling and stared back at her coach with a look of confusion, and then outrage. “You really want to talk about that now?” she asked, trying to keep her voice calm.

“Nope. I don’t need to because I’ve already made my point.”

“The only point you’ve made is one that I already figured out a long time ago: We’re too alike. And that’s why.”

“No, it isn’t.” Kuvira shook her head. “It’s because getting answers out of you is like pulling teeth. Look at what’s happening right now. You’ve managed to turn something so minimal into a full-blown argument.”
“I’m not the one bringing up the past,” Korra accused.

“Yeah, because that would actually require you to talk about the past,” Kuvira challenged. “Seriously, it’s always forward with you and never looking back. How is it that I’ve known you almost two years now, and yet I can’t recall a single moment where you talked about anything other than fighting?”

Korra looked away. “Now you’re just being dramatic.”

“Maybe. But at least I’m honest with you. Can you say the same thing about yourself?”

She opened her mouth to make a snarky reply, but then a sharp knock came on the door.

“We’re busy,” Kuvira called out, her eyes still locked on Korra.

“I hope you’re not too busy to talk to the guy who owns the place,” a voice called out through the door.

Korra yanked her arm out of Kuvira’s grip. “Come in,” she called out. Kuvira turned toward the door as well, but not before giving Korra one last glance.

Varrick walked in alone with two thick, white envelopes in his hands. He looked around the room for a moment before settling his eyes on them.

Korra thickly swallowed. It wasn’t the first time that she’d seen the man outside of bodyguards and his normal group of followers, but somehow, him being all by himself intimidated her more than anything. And the fact that he was visiting after her shakiest match yet set off major warning signs in her head.

“Hello, ladies. You both put on a good show tonight.”

“Thank you, sir,” both she and Kuvira said simultaneously.

The tactical businessman sat down on the couch beside the door and put the envelopes on the table.

“I thought that I’d hand-deliver these to you guys personally.”

Kuvira walked up first and grabbed the one with her name on it. After looking inside and making sure all of her compensation was in there, she put it into the pocket of her jacket.

“When will the next schedule be up?” she asked.

Varrick shrugged. “Dunno. We like to keep you guys waiting in suspense.” He looked over at Korra and his eyes lingered. “Kuvira, if you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to have a chat with Korra.”

Korra felt her heart drop into the pit of her stomach. This was not going to end well. She looked at Kuvira, who was looking between them, and saw her nod.

“Yeah. I was just heading out anyway.” She glanced over at Korra. “Will you call me later?”

“Sure,” Korra said, though she didn’t meet Kuvira's eyes.

Kuvira grabbed her gym bag off the floor and left, closing the door loudly behind her as she did.

“Ooooh,” Varrick said, shivering dramatically. “Did the temperature drop in the room or is it just
me?”

Korra sighed. “It was nothing.”

“Hmm.”

Silence came after that and Korra just stood there awkwardly. Clearly Varrick was having a fun
time watching her squirm, because he just sat and watched her like he had all the time in the world.

Wanting to break the ice, she figured she’d start off by apologizing.

“Uh, sorry about that sloppy performance. I know it was probably stressful to watch.”

“Oh, I don’t care about that!” Varrick waved her off and stood up. “That’s what makes this sport
so much fun! The suspense is what makes it so good! Besides, I know that you must have at least
enjoyed having such a strong opponent like that woman compared to all of the others you’ve
faced.”

“Well… yeah, actually,” Korra said, relieved that she wasn’t being fired. She even allowed herself
to smile for a brief second. It was true that, up until now, the women she faced were a bit more on
the weaker side.

“You think you deserve stronger opponents?”

Her eyes widened and she looked at Varrick, trying to determine whether or not this was some sort
of trick.

Varrick saw the conflicted look in her eyes and chuckled. “It’s okay. You can be honest with me.”

“Oh… okay. Then yes.”

That chuckle of his turned into full-blown laughter. Korra didn’t know what to do. She just
continued to stand there and look at him as if he’d gone off the deep end.

“You’ve got a lot of spunk, kid,” Varrick said, letting out one last laugh.

“Err… thanks?”

“That’s why I’m bumping you up to my main roster.”

Korra blinked, unsure if she heard him right. “W-what? Are you serious?”

“Yeah. I mean, why not, right?” Varrick shrugged. “You’ve proven yourself to be a pretty adequate
fighter, and the crowd obviously adores you. That was enough to pass my test.”

“Test?” Korra gave him a confused look.

“Oh, come on…” Varrick threw up his arms. “You didn’t think I’d put a rookie like you on as my
main event if it wasn’t some sort of test, did you?”

“Umm… Of course not,” she said.

The only thing she’d been thinking about since being announced as the main event was training
and beating her opponent. And besides that, Kuvira kept telling her not to think about why she was
chosen…
“Did she know?” she asked suddenly.

“Did who know?”

“Kuvira.”

Varrick rubbed his chin and looked up in thought. “I don’t see why she wouldn’t. I’ve done the same thing for everyone I ended up putting on my main roster.”

Korra came close to slapping herself in the forehead. This significantly changed a lot of the things she’d been thinking, and she immediately felt like one of the biggest assholes on the planet.

All Kuvira had been doing since Korra was announced as the main event was trying to get her prepared. She even sacrificed some of her own training in favor of helping her. And how did Korra repay her? By insinuating that she was jealous and never wanted her to succeed. Kuvira wasn’t without her own faults in that argument either, but now that Korra cooled down a lot, she realized that what she said wasn’t right either.

“I am such an idiot,” she groaned and put her face in her hands.

“Ah well. Everybody has their moments,” Varrick said. “Except for me.”

Korra lifted her face just in time to see him reach into his jacket and pull out another envelope. When he handed it to her, Korra took it and felt the weight of it beneath her hands.

“This…”?

“A little extra compensation,” Varrick told her.

Korra shook her head and immediately tried to hand it back. “Oh no. I couldn’t. You’ve already given me enough.”

Varrick grabbed her wrist and pushed the envelope back to her.

“If you think you’re worth it enough to be a main eventer, you’ll take it.”

The tone in his voice left no room to argue and, slowly, Korra lowered her hand and clutched the envelope at her side.

“Thank you,” she said. “Thank you for the opportunity. I promise I won’t let you down.”

“I have no doubt in my mind that you will.” Varrick turned and started heading for the door. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, there’s a late night scene I must be getting to that has my name on it. Literally.”

“Of course.”

Varrick winked just before opening the door and walked out. A second later, Korra saw two oversized men following behind him, along with Zhu Li, who gave Korra a wave as she passed by the door.

It took a few seconds, maybe even a minute, for Korra to actually process what just happened. She stared down at the envelope in her hand, and then at the other one sitting on the table. Feeling dizzy, she walked over to the chair in front of her mirror and sat down.

To say that she was stunned would have been an understatement. She was waiting for the moment
where someone would throw a bucket of ice on her head and yell at her to ‘wake up!’

That didn’t happen.

A genuine smile crept up her face until she was finally beaming with joy.

She spun around in her chair and looked at her reflection. Her eyes were wide and bright, and her cheeks flushed from smiling so much. How long had it been since that happened?

She was always confident that she would eventually be moved up to Varrick’s special group of elites, but she never could have imagined that it would happen so fast! People only recently began to take her seriously and respect her rookie status. And the fact that it didn’t take long to garner Varrick’s attention was even more remarkable. It normally took about two and half years for the man to even consider someone good enough to be a main evener. Yet there she was…

Getting over the initial shock, Korra stood up. She needed to get out of there and find Kuvira. First to talk and apologize profusely for everything she said, and then to spend the rest of the night celebrating. She wanted to get so fucking hammered that she wished Yunko actually gave her a concussion.

She grabbed her gym bag and started packing, taking random things off the dresser and stuffing them into her gym bag at a record pace. She couldn’t even think at the moment. Everything felt so surreal.

“That was an impressive fight you had out there.”

Instantly, she froze. The deodorant stick in her hand fell into her bag without her even meaning to drop it in there.

It was a voice she hadn’t heard in years, and yet it was so painfully recognizable. Just like that silhouette…

It was a voice that, even after all this time, she could never forget.

Korra turned around.

Standing there in the doorway was a young woman in a dress and a bag dangling off her shoulder. Her long, dark hair was pinned back so that it fell behind her, exposing her face so well that Korra couldn’t possibly mistake her for somebody else. But that was unnecessary, because all Korra had to do was lock eyes with her to know. There hadn’t been any other person in the world she’d met with such remarkably soft and revealing green eyes.

“Asami…” she breathed out.

And just like that, the bucket of ice came tumbling down on top of her like an avalanche.

TBC…
Asami used to hate parties.

Her parents had to physically drag her to them when she was a little girl. She hated having to listen to the older people talk amongst themselves while she stood in the background, bored to death and feeling ignored. That feeling didn’t change until she started high school. She moderately tolerated them now, but only the fun ones. She still hated attending social events with her father and having to smile for the cameras every five seconds like they were the perfect family. That was one thing she would never be able to stand.

But high school parties were a different kind of experience. For one, she got to be with her own age group, so that was a major plus; two, there was no added pressure to socialize with every single person in the room. The chilled environment made her comfortable and gave her the illusion of being a normal teenager.

Now that wasn’t to say that she was wilding out every weekend and getting so drunk that she couldn’t remember her own name. She couldn’t do that anyway at the risk of her father finding out about it.

An overwhelming feeling of guilt suddenly plagued her. She hated lying to him, but the reason she had to was because he would never in a million years let her go out to this kind of party. After all, he was an important public figure, and if the word got out that his daughter wasn’t as ‘good’ as she made herself out to be, that would mean very bad press. Not to mention her being grounded for life...

However, even with taking that into consideration, she couldn’t bring herself to spend the night in. If she did that, she would’ve been in bed crying the whole night. And the most pathetic part about that situation was it would've been all because of a boy.

Running her fingers through her hair, she looked around. She was sitting in the kitchen of a person’s house she didn’t even know. There were about thirty other people scattered around, as well. Some were outside, others in the kitchen with her, and then more in the dining room that led into the front room. From there she could hear the obnoxiously loud music playing from the speakers of a radio.

On second thought, maybe she should have just stayed home.

“A red cup appeared in front of her face suddenly, disrupting her from her thoughts. She looked over and saw Korra standing there with an expectant look on her face.

“How do you this for you,” she said as she took a sip from her own cup. “It’ll take the edge off.”

Asami took the cup and drank from it. Her face immediately scrunched up and she made a disgusted noise as she brought the alcoholic beverage away from her lips.

“No thanks,” she said, trying to hand the cup back to Korra.

Her best friend’s shoulders dropped in exasperation. “Seriously? I almost had to fight another girl for these.”

Asami gave her a reprimanding look. “Really? We’re at a party and yet you still manage to almost start a fight?”
“I didn’t start it!” Korra said, sounding offended at the accusation. “She was totally hogging it, and it’s not even her booze! She’s lucky I didn’t deck her right there for trying to put her lips all over the bottle!”

“You are impossible.” Asami rubbed at her temples.

Korra threw her head back and laughed. Her cheeks were flushed and she stumbled back a little, causing the other drink in her hand to slosh around in the cup.

“Yeah. I’m cutting you off.” Asami reached out and grabbed both of the drinks, placing them on the counter at the side of her so that Korra couldn’t get to them.

“Oh, come on. This is nothing.”

“Exactly. So let’s not get to the point where it does turn into something.”

Korra folded her arms and smirked, walking closer to Asami as she did. “Are you sure you don’t want to just get out of here and go someplace else? I know someone who—”

“I’ll pass,” Asami said, not even bothering to let Korra finish that sentence.

Korra rolled her eyes but kept the smile on her face. She was wearing a simple, black tank top and some jeans, with a flannel wrapped around her waist. Her hair was in its usual up-do, with her bangs covering her forehead. Asami thought she looked really good.

“Well, if you won’t drink with me and don’t want to leave, can you at least dance with me?”

“Ehh. I don’t really feel like it.”

“Ugh!” Korra threw her hands up in the air. “What is the matter with you? And please don’t tell me it’s about that stupid jerk.”

“And what if it is?” Asami asked, the tone in her voice warned the other girl not to cross the line.

Korra squinted her eyes and looked Asami up and down. After a second, she held out her hand for her to take. “Come with me.”

“Korra, really, I don’t feel like dancing,” she said, more firmly this time.

“Relax, princess. I’m not taking you to dance.”

Asami glared, but took her best friend’s hand anyway. “I thought I told you not to call me that,” she said after being pulled off the stool.

Korra gave her a sheepish grin and squeezed her hand. “Sorry. Old habits die hard.”

She let herself be led through the herd of people in the house. For a brief moment, she worried that the cops would get called. The house was big and spacious, probably enough to fit at least another fifty people in the living room alone.

“Whose house is this?” she yelled over the music.

Korra looked back at her and shrugged. “Who cares? Probably just another preppy, asshole, rich kid.”

As they walked by a couple of kids from their school, some of them said hello to Asami as she
passed them. Since she was the senior class president, it was easy to group her in with all of the popular kids; in fact, Korra was originally one of the people to do that. The reality of it though was that she kept to herself for the most part at school. Sure, she easily made friends, but it didn’t mean she actually liked being the center of attention. She already had enough of that outside of school.

Korra continued to pull her along, ignoring everyone else, but Asami couldn’t help but notice that the friendly looks she was given quickly turned into judgmental ones when they saw that she was with Korra.

She couldn’t give it much attention because when they reached the far end of the living room, Korra began to lead her up the staircase.

“Wait, what are you doing?” Asami pulled back and stopped Korra in her tracks. “We can’t go up there.”

Korra turned to her. “Who says we can’t?”

"Korra..." she chided.

“Come on, Sato. Live a little. Don’t chicken out on me.”

Asami stared up at her, feeling conflicted. For some reason it was always hard to say ‘no’ when Korra got that mischievous look in her eyes. There was something about it that brought tingles to her gut and made her feel just as daring and brave.

After taking one more glance over to where the actual party was, she looked back at Korra and hesitantly nodded.

Korra gave a triumphant ‘whoop!’ and then proceeded up the steps.

There were a few other kids up there just hanging out and probably wanting to get away from the noise. The house was only two stories tall, but with how wide and big it was—along with the expensive looking artifacts sitting around—there was no mistaking its richness. When they passed a couple of picture frames, Asami figured out exactly whose house they’d been in. Korra was right on the nose with her assumption.

They walked by a couple of rooms on the right and rounded a corner. Korra took her over to some french doors that led out to a small balcony on the side of the house. When they stepped out onto it, they were alone. Asami shivered as the cold air hit her face. It was late fall and winter was just around the corner.

“How’s this?” Korra asked. “Do you feel better now?”

Asami already knew it would be a lot quieter up there, but she didn’t know to how much of an extent. She could actually hear herself think, and the music from inside the house was muted and barely audible from where they were. It was peaceful and all she actually needed for the night.

“Much,” she replied.

Korra smiled back. She walked over to the ledge, leapt on top of it, and then tilted her head back to look up at the clear, night sky.

“I love parties.”

Asami ended up laughing, which caused Korra to look down at her in confusion.
“What’s so funny?”

“Oh, nothing.” Asami walked up to Korra and leaned over the ledge to look down below. From there she could see into the neighbor’s gated yard. “It’s just that before you came back, I was thinking about how much I used to hate them.”

Korra hummed and looked away. “Sorry. I thought coming here would help take your mind off things, but I guess not.”

Asami couldn’t help but smile at the sincerity in Korra’s voice. Even though her friend had a rough personality, under the surface was a heart of gold. It made her sad to think about all of the kids downstairs and how they never got to see this side of Korra. But it also made her question why she seemed to be the only one who did.

“Korra?” she asked suddenly.

“Yeah?”

“Why do you like me?”

Korra looked surprised at the random question. “Huh? What do you mean? Are you sure you don’t want a drink?”

Asami let out a small laugh. “No. It’s just... you and I are so different, you know? I guess sometimes it makes me wonder what it is about me that you like. I mean, am I really any different from all of those other ‘preppy, asshole, rich kids’ downstairs?”

After hearing the question reiterated, Korra’s eyes softened and she smiled.

“You’re a lot different from them than you realize. I can promise you that. Besides,” Korra leaned down, getting closer to her, “maybe you should be asking yourself what it is about me you like.”

Asami gave her an annoyed look.

“You know, you’re really not as bad as you have everyone else around here believing you are,” she told her.

Korra’s face became unreadable.

“You have too much faith in me, Asami,” she said, moving away. “Way too much.”

Asami rubbed at one of her shoulders as she stood with her back against the wall. She was in a long, narrow hallway, waiting just outside the dressing room that Varrick went inside of not too long ago. It was also the same room that Korra was in.

“You seem tense.”

She turned her head away from the door to look over at Zhu Li, who stood across from her with two of Varrick’s bodyguards.

Those were the only words she spoke to Asami the whole night, and yet they were the most perceptive.

She dropped her hand from her shoulder. “It’s just been a long night.”
Zhu Li gave her a sharp look but didn’t say anything else. When she turned away to whisper something to the two men standing beside her, Asami quietly let out a sigh.

Tonight had been one of the most nerve racking and emotionally exhausting nights she experienced in a long time.

Just waiting for Korra’s match to start gave her so much anxiety that she ended up asking for another drink—that one a bit more on the stronger side. She guessed that Varrick took the hint that she wasn’t into talking all that much after making their deal since he ignored the whole time after that. Not like she really cared. All she wanted was to see Korra in the flesh finally. And when she did...

Needless to say, she was absolutely speechless.

Asami was unsure if the Korra she was seeing was the same person she’d always known, or someone completely different. But one thing she was absolutely positive about was that the person was Korra… whatever version of her that might be.

The way she stood so unafraid of her opponent and confident in her own capabilities was something very much Korra-like. She was one of the most fearless people Asami had ever met, always going ahead and never bothering to think about the consequences or seeing any limits. It was something that Asami always admired about her old friend yet scared her at the same time.

So that was why when she saw Korra get punched so hard that it sent her flying into the ropes, facing in her direction, she stood up. Because no matter how angry she was at Korra, deep down there was still a part of her that could never stand to see her get hurt.

The door of the dressing room opened a second later, taking her out of her thoughts. Standing up straight, Asami mentally prepared herself. She didn't know why Varrick needed to have a conversation with Korra before letting Asami see her, but she was glad it didn't last long.

The person who came out, however, was a woman. She was dressed in dark clothing and her hair was in a thick, long braid that went down to her back. Closing the door loudly behind her, she started walking. Asami immediately recognized her as the woman in Korra’s corner during the match. It seemed pretty obvious that she was the coach.

She seemed distracted as she walked by, and at first Asami didn’t think she would notice that there were other people in the hallway, too. But then their eyes met. It was only for a brief moment, but the stranger gave Asami a curious look before facing forward again and continuing down the hall.

“She didn’t look very happy,” Zhu Li assessed.

Asami looked at her and saw the two bodyguards give short nods in agreement.

“Who is she?” she ended up asking.

“That’s Kuvira. She’s one of the best women on Varrick’s main roster,” Zhu Li told her.

Her eyebrows knit together in confusion. “So wait. She’s not the coach?”

“No, she is. But only Korra’s.”

“Oh…” she said lamely. Her head turned back in the direction the woman walked in. From what she’d seen in the ring, her and Korra seemed very close. The way they hugged… the way her face came intimately close to Korra’s whenever they talked in that small corner of the ring like nobody
Asami felt an odd pressure forming in her chest just then and took a deep breath. Zhu Li peered at her, but she didn’t offer an explanation. It would have been hard to do that anyway, seeing as she didn’t have one for herself.

She wouldn’t call it jealousy per se, but she couldn’t deny that seeing Korra be so comfortable with someone in the same capacity they once were made her wish that things were different. It made her wonder how many things would’ve changed if Korra hadn’t suddenly picked up and left after high school.

Thinking about that time still scorned her, especially when she was reminded of the things that happened after Korra left. Just a few of those things included: her father going to jail, their family almost going bankrupt, and after that, Asami trying to figure out how to get a multimillion-dollar company back on its feet all by herself. It was absolute hell, and at times she thought about just giving up and leaving it all to ruins. She never found someone to help fill the void or had anyone that she could honestly say she depended on like Korra apparently did. All she had was herself.

Her hands bunched together at her sides. It wasn’t jealousy she was feeling. It was envy.

A few minutes went by in silence, and finally the door opened again. Varrick came strutting out, straightening his jacket as he did. He was headed in the same direction Kuvira walked in a while ago and motioned for Zhu Li and the two bodyguards to follow behind.

“Good luck,” he said as he walked by her. “We’ll keep in touch.”

Asami watched him go, unsure of what to do. The hallway felt so utterly still with only her standing there. She looked at the open door and bit her lip.

All she had to do was take those few little steps, and then she would be in the same room as Korra after all these years.

Ever since she found out Korra was back in town, this confrontation had been the moment she couldn’t get out of her head. But, surprisingly, she wasn’t scared, nor was she anxious anymore. All of that melted away in an instant and was replaced with the burning need for answers, as well as the desperate need to release the anger she’d felt welling up inside of her for so long.

Before she knew it, her feet moved on their own accord and she was standing in the doorway, looking at the back of the person who took away so many pieces of her that at times she felt like an empty shell.

Korra was in front of a dresser, stuffing a bunch of her belongings into her duffle bag in a haste. For a second, Asami wondered what Varrick could have said to her that made her appear so excited. She almost felt bad that she was about to ruin the moment.

Almost.

“That was an impressive fight you had out there.”

She watched Korra freeze and saw something slip out of her hand and into her bag. Lifting her head, Korra turned around and their eyes met for the first time.

Asami had to force herself to breathe. Now that she was up close and under good lighting, she could actually get a good look at her former best friend.
Korra looked so different, yet the same. Her hair was a lot shorter than Asami remembered, but her facial features were more mature and intense as a result. There was a small bruise on her left cheek and she had a busted lip from those hits she took in the ring. But aside from that, she looked fine.

“Asami…”

It was only her name, but because it was the first word Korra said in that deep, rasped voice of hers, it made Asami feel so many conflicting emotions at once. She didn’t know whether to be happy, sad, relieved, or pissed.

Korra had that deer in headlights look in her eyes, but after getting over the initial shock, she masked it with one of indifference.

“How—What are you doing here?”

“You’re not even going to say ‘hello?’” Asami said in a bitter tone. “Then again, you were always the straightforward type of girl… For the most part.”

It hadn’t been her plan to come in showing all of the rage and hostility she felt. But now that they were face to face, it made it hard for her to not release some of that. Everything that she’d been thinking since she arrived came to the forefront of her mind, causing so many suppressed feelings to erupt from her all at once.

Korra stared back at her, confusion and anger in her eyes. She turned away from Asami after a minute and looked down at the dresser.

“You shouldn’t be here. Please leave.”

Asami walked fully into the room now and closed the door behind her. “I’m not leaving until we talk.”

“I have nothing to say to you,” Korra responded coldly and resumed putting things into her bag.

Asami swallowed thickly. She tried to ignore the small pang she felt in her chest at Korra’s initial rejection, but it was hard. How could she just ignore her? Why was she acting like she didn’t care?

“You have everything to say to me,” her voice shook. She saw Korra’s shoulders tense and how her hands clutched at the sides of her bag. Instead of backing down, Asami walked even closer.

Korra spun around again.

“No. Quite frankly, I don’t. And you don’t get to barge in here and suddenly start demanding things from me.”

“Well then what would have been a better time?” she sarcastically asked. “When you and that woman were trying to punch each other’s heads off? Oh, and while we’re on the subject, I guess it shouldn’t have surprised me to find out about this occupation of yours, but seriously, Korra? This is a new low, even for you. What the hell are you doing? And how long have you been back?”

“If you think insulting me is going to get you anywhere, you’re wrong. And do I even need to tell you that? Since apparently you’ve been keeping tabs on me this whole time,” Korra accused.

Asami gave a sharp laugh at that. “You’re so full of it.”

“What else do you expect me to believe? I haven’t seen or heard from you in years.”
“And whose fault do you think that is?” she bit back.

Korra glared. “Don’t turn this back on me. How did you find out?”

Asami didn’t say anything at first. She couldn’t answer that, because if she did, Korra more than likely would get more pissed and probably walk out on her. It wasn’t worth the risk.

“I don’t have to explain myself to you,” she finally said.

Korra snorted. “And I do?”

“You know you do.”

She watched as Korra turned and grabbed her bag, zipping it up before putting the strap over her shoulder.

“I’m not doing this with you. Not now or ever.” She faced Asami again. “Do yourself a favor and go back to your high-end, glamorous lifestyle, okay?”

“How would you know anything about the lifestyle I live, huh? Unless you’re really the one keeping tabs on me...”

“Trust me when I say that you’ve been the furthest thing from my mind since I left. Unlike you, I can easily let go of things.”

Korra tried to side-step her, but Asami blocked her path.

“That’s not going to work. I’m not going to let you slide your way out of this by saying a few nasty words. I know you too well.”

She looked down at Korra, burning her gaze into hers with a ferociousness she never thought she had. Though, secretly, it made her a bit smug to see that after all this time she was still taller.

“You don’t know me,” Korra said with a sardonic smile on her face. “Not anymore.”

“I know that you’re still someone who never backs down from a fight. I know that no matter how many times you put up that big, brick wall of yours, there’s still something in there that keeps you from being as cut throat as you want people to believe you are.”

Korra gave her a challenging look. Her blue eyes were sparkling with rage, but Asami was so immune to the look that it didn’t faze her. In fact, it gave her déjà vu thinking about all of the times Korra gave her that expression. She would continue to stand her ground until Korra finally gave in. Her old friend may have been intimidating, but Asami was too in her own way. And telling by how the look in Korra’s eyes became less impactful and her shoulders began to drop, she knew that Asami was determined to have her way.

“Why are you even here?” she finally asked, breaking eye contact as she did.

“I told you already. We need to talk.”

“You came all the way out here, to an illegal, underground boxing event, just to talk to someone you haven’t seen or heard from in years?” Korra’s voice deadpanned.

Asami shrugged. “I didn’t exactly know that you would be here tonight. I only asked Varrick—”

“You talked to Varrick about us?” Korra’s eyes widened in horror.
“No!” Asami said immediately. “I just... It’s a long story.”

Korra gave her a measured look. “How do you even know him?”

“He’s one of the richest businessmen in the world. Of course I know him. It’s one of the perks of having a ‘high-end, glamorous lifestyle.’”

Realizing she was being mocked, Korra crossed her arms.

“That still doesn’t mean you should be here. This is beyond your level of understanding.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Asami, her voice rising. “I didn’t realize I needed a special degree to understand something as simple as people beating the crap out of each other for money.”

Korra rolled her eyes. “I wasn’t talking about the fighting specifically. This is exactly why you don’t need to be here.”

“Well too bad, Korra. I’m here and there’s nothing you can do to change that.”

“If only,” Korra mumbled.

Asami glared. She knew that Korra was purposefully trying to rile her up just so she would leave. It stung a little that she was brushing her off so easily, but it was going to take more than that to push her away. They had too much history, and they’d been through much worse—a lot worse. Being reminded of that was enough to strengthen her resolve.

Just because they were different people now and she was still pissed off about Korra’s past actions, it didn’t mean she couldn’t be mature enough to reach some level of truce with her, even if only for the night.

“Look, I didn’t come here to fight with you if that’s what you think,” she sighed. "I just… I found out that you were back and I wanted to catch up. Maybe talk things out.”

Korra didn’t respond or look at her at first.

It wasn’t a complete lie. She did walk in expecting for there to be some arguing and possible yelling (which there already was), but deep down she hoped that the resolution between them wouldn’t be as dramatic or gut wrenching as she predicted it would be. A part of her still held Korra in high regards. A part of her wanted to believe that Korra never meant to hurt her—at least intentionally—and that there was some piece of the story she was missing. If Korra could just meet her halfway…

“What is with everyone suddenly wanting to bring up the past?” Korra threw her bag to the ground and sat down in her chair.

“Huh?” Asami said, confused at the outburst.

“Nothing. Fine. We can talk,” she said begrudgingly.

“Really?” Asami asked, looking amazed but cautious at the same time.

“It’s not like you’re giving me any other choice in the matter.”

She refrained from smiling at the fact that she won this battle and simply nodded.

“But just… not here, all right?” Korra said. “Everyone needs to be out by twelve. Let’s go
somewhere else."

"Fine by me."

Korra bent over and grabbed her shoes, putting them on. When she picked up her bag and stood up, her eyes lifted and met Asami's gaze.

"And after this ‘talk’ of ours, I don’t want to see you here again."

Asami felt another pang at the harsh but frank words. The way Korra spoke to her was so dismissive and unfamiliar. It felt like she was just something Korra needed to check off of her ‘to do’ list.

After a small pause, she nodded again. “If that’s what you really want.”

Korra eyes lingered on her for a moment longer, and then she looked away.

“Let’s go,” she said, making her way by Asami to grab an envelope off the table and then over to the door.

“Where are we going?” Asami asked, clutching her purse at her side as she tried to keep up with the shorter woman.

“I don’t know yet. But I’m assuming you came in one of the many cars you probably own?”

Asami rolled her eyes. “I brought my car, yes.”

“Good,” Korra said, ignoring how annoyed she sounded. “My ride probably ditched me by now, so you can just drive and I’ll tell you where to go.”

“Still as bossy as ever, I see,” Asami muttered under her breath.

“Yup. I guess you can say that’s one thing that will never change about me,” Korra told her as they turned down the hall.

They ended up driving back into Manhattan. Since it was a Friday night, things were lively, and more people were out and about looking for things to do. The only time Korra said anything to her was to give her directions, but other than that, the sound of the radio filled the silence.

Every once in a while Asami would glance over at Korra, but Korra would be looking out the window or elsewhere, seemingly in deep thought. Asami could imagine that there were a lot of things running through Korra’s mind at the moment, as well as a couple of old memories. But the latter could have been wishful thinking on her part, because up until now, Korra made it pretty clear that she hadn’t thought about her at all since she left.

The initial reaction to her showing up was what she expected it would be. Korra was shocked, confused, frustrated, and upset. And right now, telling from her body language, Asami could see that she was uncomfortable being in the car with her. But it wasn’t like this had been in her plan at all. She had no idea she’d be driving around in the middle of the night with Korra. It just happened that way.

But she couldn’t say that she minded it all that much. She had Korra all alone, with nowhere to run, so maybe it was possible that she would be able to get some answers out of her.

“Turn in here,” Korra told her.
Asami shook herself out of it and looked at the place where Korra said to pull into. It wasn’t somewhere she was familiar with, but that was probably because she had never really been over in this part of the city before. She parked the car in a half-empty lot at the front of the building and squinted up at the sign.

“A restaurant?” She looked over at Korra.

“Yeah. I’m hungry,” Korra said, grabbing her bag from the floor. She finally turned to Asami. “That a problem?”

Asami gritted her teeth. It was like Korra was purposefully doing this to piss her off. How were they supposed to have a genuine and real conversation while Korra was stuffing her face with food?

She counted to ten in her head before forcing a smile and saying, “Of course not.”

“Good.”

Korra got out of the car without another word, taking her bag with her. She stuffed her hands into the pockets of her jacket and started walking, not even bothering to stop and wait for Asami to catch up.

Asami just sat there and watched her from the car. After a moment, she leaned her head back into the seat and looked up at the ceiling. Korra was surely playing her like a fiddle because she knew she could. This was just a game to her and she wasn’t taking it seriously at all.

Angrily, she got out of the car and slammed the door. The heels of her boots clacked loudly against the ground as she stormed up to the restaurant in a huff.

When she walked in, she spotted Korra sitting in a booth near the back of the restaurant with a menu held up to her face. There weren’t a ton of people in there, but it was enough that Asami realized not to make a scene. She went by the restaurant host and headed right over to the booth. Korra didn’t look away from the menu as she sat down.

“I already ordered us some water,” she said audibly. “You still take yours with lemon, right?”

“Do you really think I don’t know what you’re doing right now?” Asami asked, cutting to the chase.

“No. What exactly is it that you think I’m doing?” Korra said, still reading.

“Stalling.”

“You are far too paranoid.”

“And why shouldn’t I be? How do I know you’re not just stringing me along for some sick, twisted game of yours?”

Finally, Korra lowered the menu and looked at her.

“I thought you said you didn’t want to fight?”

“I don’t,” Asami said in defense. “But it seems like all you want to do is provoke me.”

“And how am I provoking you?” Korra leaned forward and folded her arms on the table.
“Because you…” Asami started but stopped. She tried to come up with an explanation behind why she suddenly doubted Korra so much but ended up with nothing.

They were interrupted when the waiter came up to the table with two waters in his hands. He placed them out in front of them, giving her the one with lemon in it.

“Do you guys still need some time to decide?” he asked, bringing the tray up to his chest.

Asami’s eyes never left Korra, and Korra leered back with her head slightly tilted to the side, as if she were trying to unravel a puzzle.

“Just a few more minutes,” Korra ended up saying.

“Okay, no problem!” The guy said cheerfully, as if he hadn’t noticed all of the tension in the air. “And are you sure you don’t want an ice pack for that bruise, hun?”

“Nope. It’s fine.”

“Alrighty then,” he chirped. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

He left them alone again.

“You really should put some ice on that,” Asami said, letting her eyes run over Korra’s cheek and trace over her bottom lip.

Korra smirked. “You actually care?”

“Well despite what you think, I’m not some cold-hearted bitch.”

“I never thought that.”

“Sure.”

Korra actually looked angry at the insinuation. “Wow. You really had me going for a minute with all of that talk about how much you still know me. That’s clearly far from the truth.”

“So then tell me.” Asami leaned back into the booth. “Who are you now, Korra?”

She watched as Korra’s jaw visibly tightened. But instead of replying, Korra looked down at her menu again.

“I need to find something to order before he comes back,” she said, changing the subject.

Asami rolled her eyes and turned her head to the side. She didn’t know why she believed for one second that Korra wouldn’t be so… Korra. When they were younger, she always had to make things more complicated than they needed to be. She also had the tendency to derail from things she didn’t want to talk about. Clearly that hadn’t changed.

The waiter came back a few minutes later and Korra ended up ordering a burger with fries. Asami never even looked at the menu, but she didn’t want to be rude and not get anything, so she ordered whatever kind of soup they had. The waiter wrote everything down and told them it would be fifteen minutes before walking away again.

Asami heard the sound of a phone ringing. When she looked over, she saw Korra reaching into her pocket and pulling hers out. Her eyes scanned over it quickly and then she promptly put the phone back in her pocket, ignoring the call.
“No one important?”

“No one who can’t wait,” Korra said.

Asami let out a deep, long sigh. “So, are we actually going to talk? Or are we just going to keep tip toeing around each other?”

Korra shrugged. “This can be anything you want it to be. You’re the one who said you wanted to ‘catch up,’” she air quoted.

“Yeah. But if you aren’t going to tell me anything…”

“What do you want me to say, huh? Where should I start?” Korra placed her chin in her hand and addressed her lethargically.

Asami gave her a skeptical look. She wasn’t sure if Korra was actually going to give her some truthful answers or not, so instead of immediately asking the hard-hitting questions, she started with something simple.

“How long have you been back?”

“Two and a half years,” Korra answered neatly.

Asami’s mouth opened in shock. At most she guessed a year, but two and a half? It created a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach to know that Korra had been back for so long and never thought to come and see her at all.

“Well you definitely have a way of knowing how to keep yourself on the down low,” she said after recovering from that tidbit.

“Apparently not,” Korra said under her breath.

Letting that snide remark go, Asami thought about what to ask next. The obvious question would be why Korra didn’t even bother to contact her, but that would have been opening up a new can of worms and she really didn’t want to go through the headache.

“Where do you stay?” she eventually asked.

“Somewhere not too far from here.”

Her eyebrows rose in surprise. “Do you care to be more specific?”

“Don’t push your luck.”

She frowned. Why did Korra have to be so secretive? Did she really just not want her to know anything? Or were there other reasons? That prompted her to ask something she’d wanted to know for a long time.

“Where did you go when you left?”

Korra twirled the straw in her glass. “Next question.”

“That’s not fair,” Asami huffed in annoyance.

“I agreed to talk with you. I never said I’d give you all of the answers you want.”
“Then what was the point of you even agreeing to this?” She kept her voice as even as she possibly could, but she couldn’t keep the anger out of it.

Korra shrugged. “I guess it’s all just part of my so called ‘sick and twisted’ games.”

Asami gave her a revolting look at first, but then she stopped and shut her eyes in disbelief.

“You know what?” she said, her voice eerily calm. “Forget it. I should have known you couldn’t be honest with me.”

She got up to leave, uncaring of if she was making a scene anymore or not. And she definitely didn't care that she was about to leave Korra in a restaurant by herself with no ride home.

“Wait.”

Asami paused and then mistakenly glanced down at Korra, who was now giving her a tired looking expression.

“You’re really going to walk away so easily like that?” she asked.

“Yes. I am. I learned it from you,” Asami challenged.

A sad smile appeared on Korra's face. “I guess I deserved that.”

“Yeah. You did,” she agreed and slowly sat back down in her seat.

Korra nursed her drink. It was a telling sign of her becoming nervous. She looked down at it, as if contemplating something, and then she met Asami’s gaze once more.

“Look, I know that I’m being an asshole, and I’m sorry. But what you want to hear from me is not something that I’m all that willing to talk about.” She paused and glanced away for a moment. “Looking back on all of that isn’t easy for me. I’ve moved on with my life and I’m a different person now. What happened with us—with me—isn’t something I really like to dwell on. Can’t you at least try to understand that?”

Her voice got quieter and a bit gentler near the end, but Asami allowed it to have an affect on her. It was true that looking back at their past was not an easy thing. Asami still struggled to figure out where it all went wrong and how she could have changed the outcome. But she never shied away from it, or put it out of her mind like Korra seemed to do. Because even though they’d been through hard times, Asami still remembered the good times as well, and those mattered just as much.

“That was probably the most revealing thing you’ve said to me so far tonight,” she finally said.

Korra chuckled, which was also a first, and Asami briefly allowed a tiny smile to appear on her lips when she heard the familiar sound.

“But it’s still not enough,” she whispered, frowning again.

It went quiet between them after that. Korra’s lips pursed together and she looked like she wanted to say something else, but she couldn’t. Watching her struggle so much to find the words made her appear younger and more innocent. It reminded Asami of all the times Korra would have something on her mind but was afraid to admit whatever it was out loud. She didn’t press her on it, though. They were finally making progress and she didn’t want to scare Korra off by digging too
deep, too fast.

However, it was almost comedic how awkward they became after that. Asami wasn’t used to not knowing what to say, which made it all the more hilarious because it was her job to know what to do in these kinds of situations. People entrusted and relied on her to always know what to say. But because this was Korra, it made things significantly different. The last time they saw each other, they hadn’t been on the best of terms, and seeing each other now was something that they both needed time to process fully, without interruptions.

So when the waiter came back with their food, Asami let Korra eat in peace while she stirred at her soup. The waiter only stopped by once after that to ask them how they were enjoying their food, but they both gave dry, half-hearted responses.

When Korra finished her meal, she looked at Asami for the first time in a while.

“You never explained how you found me,” she said.

“Oh. Umm.” Asami scratched the back of her head.

It would have been hypocritical of her to say that Korra was being dishonest and then turn around and do the same thing. She had to at least tell her the gist of it.

“There’s this cop that I know,” she started, and when she saw Korra’s eyes widen, she was quick to try and appease the situation. “No, no! It’s not like that. Well… it kind of is, but—”

“'Kind of' is?” Korra interrupted her. “God, Asami…”

“He’s been interested in running an investigation on underground boxing clubs and I found out about it. That’s all! I promise,” she pleaded.

“Who is he? Have I seen him before?” Korra asked, sounding pissed.

Asami hesitated at the question, unsure of how to answer. It was becoming harder and harder to tell the truth.

“Most likely not, given your reaction,” she muttered.

Korra’s eyes squinted in suspicion. “Does he know who I am?”

Asami ran her fingers through her hair and sighed.

“He knows who you are, but he doesn’t know what you’ve been up to. At least, not that I’m aware of.”

Korra folded her arms and shook her head in irritation. When she looked at Asami again, she ended up staring, but Asami was unable to look back directly. She felt those intense, blue eyes staring at her and could tell that by struggling to meet them, she was only looking more and more guilty.

Suddenly, Korra leaned back in her chair and Asami lifted her eyes. She saw the wheels beginning to turn in Korra's head.

“Mako,” she said, spitting the name out like it was poison.

Asami didn’t say anything. She couldn’t say anything. But she could feel how much her face was giving it away. It was all Korra needed as confirmation.
“Well that’s just perfect now, isn’t it?” she said with a bitter laugh. “I should’ve known you were still with him. When’s the wedding?”

Asami let out a harsh sounding breath. And to think that things were actually starting to turn around for them…

“We’re just friends,” she said, bringing up her left hand to show that there was no ring on her finger.

“Yeah, sure. Well, whatever the case, I bet when he finds out about me, he’ll be itching to lock me up.”

“That’s not true. Mako’s not like that,” Asami tried to defend him.

“He’s hated me since the very beginning,” Korra said dryly.

“You’re wrong. You just never gave him a chance.”

“And why do you think?” Korra said, leaning forward. “He was a judgmental know-it-all, with a high almighty complex, and he very much disliked the fact that you were friends with me. I bet he couldn’t wait to throw a party once I left.”

Asami’s mouth drew into a thin line. She wanted to say something that would prove Korra wrong, but she couldn’t find the words. Probably because she knew what Korra was saying had some leverage to it.

Mako was her on-again, off-again boyfriend all throughout high school. And later on they became more and more off again. The thing with him was that he lived a similar lifestyle to Korra, but ended up turning it all around and becoming a better person in high school. So when he found out that Asami was hanging out with her, things became very complicated.

“I see you have no counter,” Korra remarked.

“You know, you talked about how much you’ve changed over the years. Maybe Mako has too.”

“Apparently not all that much since he turned out to be exactly who I thought he’d be. The guy is no different from—”

Korra cut herself off and didn’t say anything after. Asami leaned forward now, too, with a curious but anxious look on her face.

“Finish that sentence,” she pressed.

Korra turned away, and it took a lot for Asami not to just reach over and turn her face back toward her again.

“We’re getting off topic,” Korra said, moving away. “How did finding out about Mako’s little interest lead you to me?”

Asami felt like pulling her hair out. It was like they were taking one step forward and fifteen steps back. But instead of showing her frustration, she straightened her back and decided to answer the question.

“I didn’t find out about it until after I knew what you were doing. I was at a bar one night and I heard a few guys talking about the fight club in public. They were pretty drunk and it all sounded
like a bunch of nonsense at first, but then I heard them talking about you…”

Korra listened thoughtfully, waiting for her to continue.

“They talked about how you were the new girl with a lot of potential, and how you had a lot of attitude but were the real deal. I knew they couldn’t be talking about any other Korra, so then I went to Mako,” she held up her hand when she saw Korra open her mouth, “and I only asked him what he knew about illegal boxing clubs. That’s when he told me he’d been wanting to run an investigation. I didn’t want to ask too many questions to raise suspicion so I snooped around a little and found the names of all the leads he had and went from there.”

“You went to other fight clubs before this one?” Korra asked.

“No. I went back to the bar and found those guys again. I bought them a few drinks and they told me which one I could find you at.”

Asami took a few sips of water after finishing and watched as Korra took in what she had to say. She hoped that it was enough to answer her question, because if Korra made her go on and talk about Varrick, then she would probably have to lie, and that was the last thing she wanted to do.

After a while Korra hummed.

“Stupid drunks. Don’t they know that the first rule of fight club is to never talk about it?”

Asami blinked, and then her face broke out into a smile and she chuckled.

“Yeah. I guess they didn’t get the memo. Maybe you guys should think about shortening the invite list.”

Korra smiled back. “Yeah… maybe.”

Asami breathed out, suddenly feeling light. Seeing Korra smile was something she didn’t know she cared to ever see again. Back then it always filled her with so much joy to see her friend happy. Even though Korra was, at most times, known for her bad girl behavior, Asami always found it easy to see past that and find the carefree, fun-loving girl underneath it all. Of course she wasn’t so optimistic to believe this was the same instance, but nevertheless, it lifted her spirits the slightest bit.

When the waiter came back around, asking if they wanted desert, they both declined and instead asked for the check. They paid for their food separately, left a tip, and walked out of the restaurant. When they got to the car, they didn’t get inside, but instead stood in front of the hood. Korra shoved her hands into her pockets and looked at her.

“So, what now?” she asked.

Asami shrugged and sat down on the hood, crossing her legs as she did. “I guess I should get you home so you can put something on that.” Her head nodded to Korra’s bruised cheek and busted lip.

“Really?” Korra lifted an eyebrow. “That’s it?”

“I’m not your kidnapper, Korra.”

“Heh. True.” Korra looked down and kicked a rock, then she hesitantly came over and sat down, as well, leaving a gap between them.
“But I do want to see you again,” Asami spoke softly. “I know you said that after this you wanted me to leave you alone, but… I don’t think I can. At least not for right now.”

“So is this your way of saying you’ll be stalking me?”

“Ha. Ha. No.” Asami gave her a sarcastic glare. “I’m just saying that we’ve barely scratched the surface and I don’t think I can leave tonight without a proper resolution, or not knowing that I’ll ever get to see you again.”

Korra nodded and she looked down. Asami could tell that she was weighing the pros and cons in her head.

“You’re never going to let this go now, are you?”

Asami gave a sad smile. “Nope. I’m just as stubborn as you are.”

“I can see that.”

Korra opened and closed her mouth, remaining hesitant on whatever she had to say. Her skin was practically glowing under the yellow and orange hues coming from the restaurant lights. As her eyes searched Asami’s, they still had that guarded look in them, but also a look of curiosity; like she was wondering how far they could take this before it got messy.

“I guess another time wouldn’t be so bad.”

Asami managed to keep a neutral look on her face, but on the inside, she was screaming, ‘VICTORY!’

“Are you busy tomorrow?” she asked.

“No.” Korra shifted awkwardly.

“Can you meet me at 5 p.m. in Central Park? Near the statue of Alexander Hamilton?”

“…Sure.”

“There’s no real pressure or anything if you aren’t ready,” she added, though slightly disappointed. The reason she wanted to meet so soon again was because it gave Korra less of an opportunity to change her mind.

“No… It’s fine.” Korra got off the car and played with the strap of her gym bag around her shoulder. “I’ll meet you there at 5 on the dot.”

Asami got off the car in a panic as Korra started walking away.

“Wait! Where are you going? Don’t you need me to take you home?”

Korra turned around as she walked. “I said not to push your luck, didn’t I?” she shouted back over the wind that suddenly picked up.

Asami opened her mouth to reply, but she fell silent when she saw a brief and subtle smile appear on Korra’s face as she walked under the streetlamp.

The moment was gone a second later and Asami was left there in the parking lot, all alone, with mixed feelings.
On one hand, she was upset that Korra still didn’t trust her enough to drive her home. But on the other hand, she knew that it was probably for the best that they parted ways there, ending things on a good note. That did still beg the question on where Korra lived, though.

Oh well, she thought. That was another question for another day. And there would be another day.

Asami smiled to herself and made her way over to the driver’s side of the car.

Even if tonight didn’t go as she planned it; even if she didn’t get any of the answers she’d been desperately seeking… There was still hope. It wasn’t going to be easy, especially given Korra’s secrecy, but with how tonight ended, Asami knew it wasn’t impossible. It would just take some time.

She turned on the car and put on her seatbelt. When she looked at the clock, she saw that it was almost two in the morning.

What she really wanted to do was chase after Korra and make sure she got home safely, but she knew Korra wouldn’t appreciate it.

So instead, she wished for the night to end, and that she could sleep through the whole morning just to fast forward to the part where she got to see Korra again.

Korra unlocked the door to her apartment and opened it. Once she got inside, she leaned heavily against the door and closed her eyes.

The walk home did nothing to soothe the panic she was feeling. Her breathing was heavy and ragged, like she’d just got done running a marathon, and she could feel her hands shaking.

The minute Asami came into the room, old memories came flooding to the forefront of her brain like a dam breaking. She hit her head against the door a couple of times, hoping that it would somehow erase them all.

How could this happen? Why did Asami have to appear now when she was doing so well for herself? What spirits did she piss off so much that it warranted putting her through this?

She sighed. No. It wasn’t any spirits. More like really bad karma. It had to come back to bite her one of these days, and unfortunately it was tonight of all nights.

But there was no doubt it was what she deserved. After so many years of ignoring everything, it was now staring her right in the face like an immovable, brick wall. She couldn’t brush this off like one of those hard hits she took in the ring. Whether she wanted to or not, this was something she was going to have to face head on.

“Fuck,” she whispered into the darkness.

She was so screwed.

TBC...
When she was younger, Korra had a lot of behavioral issues. It wasn’t because her parents raised her wrong, or because she thought they weren’t giving her enough attention. In fact, it was quite the opposite. They gave her a lot of attention considering how hectic their schedules could be; with her mother being a veterinarian and her father the chief of police.

But sometimes—a lot of the times—the attention they gave was for restrictive means.

She was never allowed to sleep over at anyone else’s house, nor was she allowed to stay out past eight at night, including the weekends. And as far as she knew, she was the only teenager who still had a bedtime and needed to have the lights out by ten. They let her have a cellphone, but only after her father made sure to put a tracking device on it.

They had so many rules and expectations of her that at times it was almost suffocating, and that would make her want to shut them out even more. It got so bad that one time she stayed out all night and didn’t come home. The police found her sitting at the park by herself and immediately recognized her, then they ended up taking her to the station. When her father came to pick her up and she caught a glimpse of his face, all she could see was humiliation and disappointment in his eyes. That expression lasted for a while, until he spoke to her for the first time in what felt like weeks.

“You’re sending me away,” she said one night at dinner. “We think it’d be best if we let you go live with your uncle to finish out the rest of school.”

Korra stopped cutting into her meat and looked up. Her father had an unreadable expression on his face, while her mother looked a little more concerned.

“You’re sending me away,” she said, more as a statement than a question.

“Don’t say it like that, honey,” her mom spoke with that usual soft and gentle tone she always had. “We just think that you’d be better off having a fresh start somewhere else. Your uncle is a top donor for one of the most prestigious private schools in the U.S.—"

“Private school?” Korra interrupted, looking horrified. “You’ve got to be joking.”

“We wouldn’t be doing this if we didn’t think it was best for you.”

“So, forcing me to move away from my home, my family, and my friends is what you think is best for me?”

Her mother sighed. “When you’re a little older, I think you’ll understand.”

“Understand what? That you’d rather get rid of me than deal with me? Because I’m such a failure in both of your eyes, right?”

“Korra—"

“Don’t speak to your mother in that tone,” her father said, voice booming from across the table.

Korra shut her mouth and looked down. Her father raising his voice at her was not an uncommon thing as of late, but that didn’t make it hurt any less.
“Tonraq, it’s fine,” her mother said, trying to smooth things over.

“No, it isn’t, Senna,” he stopped her and then looked back at Korra once more. “Now you listen to me, young lady. This isn’t up for debate. You have gotten out of control lately with all of those fights you’ve started at school and that running away stunt you pulled—”

“I didn’t start any of those fights, and I wasn’t trying to run away!” she argued.

“Enough!” Tonraq’s large hands slammed against the table, causing the dishes and silverware to rattle and both her and her mother to jump. “I promise you, Korra, right now is not the time for you to be talking back. The original plan was to send you off to boot camp, but your mother—as loving as she is—had to beg me not to. It’s still not too late for me to change my mind.”

Korra clenched her fists at her sides and bit the inside of her lip to keep it from trembling. She wouldn’t dare think about crying, though. That would only make matters worse, and it was pretty clear that it would get her nowhere.

“Your uncle is a busy man,” her father continued, “but he assured me that he’d keep a close eye on you. You will go to school; you will come home from school; you will do your homework, and you will do anything your uncle asks you to do while you’re home, and then you’ll go to bed. If I hear one word about you misbehaving or acting out, you’re done. Do I make myself clear?”

Korra looked between her parents, trying to keep the feelings of betrayal written off her face. She briefly remembered back to when she was little and went on fishing trips with her dad; how he would hoist her on top of his shoulders to see all of the fishes in the clear, blue water. She remembered how her mother would always sing her songs in Inuktitut language before putting her down for bed, so as to soothe her fears of the dark. All of that was so far from where they were now.

“When do I leave?” she asked.

Settling into her uncle Unalaq’s place was an adjustment, but not as bad as she thought it’d be. He was actually pretty well off and lived in one of the biggest houses in the whole neighborhood, not to mention it was in New York of all places. Her cousins, Eska and Desna, weren’t there. Apparently they decided on their own that they wanted to go to boarding school, and her uncle didn’t object to it. Now they only visited on holidays and during the summer months. Korra was okay with that. She and her cousins didn’t exactly get along, plus they both had weird-like tendencies that freaked her out more times than not.

The day her parents dropped her off was underwhelming. They helped her unpack, but there were few words exchanged. Her mother had tears in her eyes as she pulled her in for a tight hug, while her father stood off to the side, arms folded and looking impassive. It was only when they were about to get into the cab that he turned back to her and leaned forward, kissing her on the forehead.

“Be good,” was the only thing he said.

Korra was unresponsive to both gestures her parents gave. She didn’t even bother to watch the car pull off from the curb or give a final wave goodbye.

Unalaq offered no words of comfort. He was a senior counselor member at a major law firm, so he had the stoic and bored expression down almost perfectly. It also meant that he really was a busy man like her father had suggested, but that didn’t stop him from sitting her down on the couch for
twenty minutes to scold her. He told her that he wouldn’t be putting up with any funny business and that he would be “watching her every move.” Korra just sat there, trying her hardest to tune him out.

Settling in at the school was another story. Coming from a place where everyone knew each other and it was easy to get around, to a school where everywhere you turned there was something new, was disconcerting to say the least. There were kids everywhere, too, and they weren’t exactly friendly. Most of them just stared when the teachers would introduce her, or they turned to their friends to whisper about her as if she were blind. That only solidified her fast but growing hatred of the place.

She knew that it was common for kids to whisper about the newer people—hell, her old classmates did it all the time—but the difference here was that they were whispering as if they already knew her. And that was something she couldn’t stand.

On her third day, she was sitting alone in the courtyard eating her lunch and reading Slaughterhouse-Five for her English class (her annoying teacher wouldn’t stop harping on her about needing to catch up). Internally, she thought about how much it sucked to come to a new school during the middle of the semester.

“Vonnegut certainly has a way of garnering your attention, doesn’t he?”

Korra looked up from the book and saw another girl standing in front of her. She had silky, long and dark hair, and the most entrancing green eyes. The grey sweater she wore was tucked into a black skirt, and along with it she was wearing high-knee socks.

After looking her up and down, Korra turned back to her book.

“He’s okay,” she mumbled.

The girl sat down on the bench across from her.

“You’re the new girl. Korra, right? I think we have calculus together.”

Korra glanced up from the book and looked at her again. Thinking back to the class, she tried to remember all of the faces she saw in there, and the girl was right. She sat in the very front, whereas Korra sat in the far back.

She opened her mouth to reply, but then something else caught her eye and she looked over. There was a group of students sitting a few tables away, staring at them with intent and judgement at the same time. They were all dressed in preppy school clothes and like they belonged in the latest issue of a teen magazine, similar to the girl in front of her. It was a no-brainer that they were her friends.

Finally, she looked at the girl again.

“Yes,” she answered curtly.

The other girl smiled. “Well, I just wanted to introduce myself. I know you’re new and everything. I’m Asami,” she held out her hand.

Korra stared down at it and looked back up at her. “This is a joke, right?” she asked bluntly.

“Huh?”

“Your friends over there, who can’t seem to stop staring, look like they’re very interested in this...
conversation. So did you lose a bet or something?"

The girl named Asami turned and looked at the group Korra was referring to, and then she laughed.

“I think you’ve got the wrong idea."

“Sure.” Korra got up from the table. She shoved a few things into her bag and threw it over her shoulder angrily. “Whatever the case, I’ll save you the trouble of having to force yourself to talk to me. Thanks for the chat, though.”

She walked away from the table, not bothering to let the other girl speak her case. It was pointless anyway. She looked like everybody else there, maybe even better, and her parents were probably loaded with cash.

What could they possibly have in common?

The birds chirping from outside the window prompted Korra to open her eyes. She turned on her side to look at the clock on the nightstand and saw that it was seven in the morning. Groaning, she tossed onto her back and blinked at the ceiling.

At most, she only got two hours of sleep. Her mind was still reeling from what happened last night.

First it was the news she’d been given about being on the main card, and then it was Asami showing up so unexpectedly. It was kind of poetic how the best day of her life arguably turned into one of the worst.

There was so much anger in Asami’s eyes, and the way she spoke at first was far from the normal, subdued tone she always had. It was probably the angriest Korra had ever seen her.

That’s not true, she thought to herself and sighed outwardly.

But even so, it was an unnerving sight to be met with when she hadn’t seen Asami in years.

However, Korra noticed that as the night went on, Asami became less hostile and more questioning. The way she kept trying to prompt her into answering so many things was baffling, but unsurprising. The real surprise was that Korra just let her do it.

She could have just told Asami to mind her own business and then briskly walked away, leaving no question on exactly where she stood with her. But for whatever reason something stopped her…

“I know that you’re still someone who never backs down from a fight. I know that no matter how many times you put up that big, brick wall of yours, there’s still something in there that keeps you from being as cutthroat as you want people to believe you are.”

Korra threw an arm over her face. She felt the telltale signs of a migraine coming on.

Of course, after everything, Asami still had some false sense of hope in her. Korra thought she squashed all of that the last time they saw each other, but apparently not. Asami was persistent and confident in how she spoke, which was something that had not changed. And the way she stared at Korra, as if she could see something in her that other people couldn’t, made her feel like a teenager all over again.

It was pathetic. Korra loathed herself for being so unrelenting. Where was the resolve she always
had? Why couldn’t she be as strong and intimidating with Asami like she was with all of her opponents in the ring?

“You know why,” she whispered to herself, then slowly sat up on the bed, wincing as she did.

Her abs were on fire, and she could feel one or two small bruises forming on her sides. It was the normal kind of pain she felt after having a match and was to be expected. Her opponent really made her work for it, and she did, which made her welcome the pain.

After getting up from the bed, she went to the bathroom, then washed her hands and splashed some cold water onto her face. Looking up in the mirror, she assessed the two markings she already had from last night. The one on her cheek got even darker over the past few hours, probably because she forgot to put something on it, and her lip didn’t look any better. She opened up her cabinet and her eyes immediately went to the ointment she normally used, but upon picking it up, she realized it was empty.

“Ugh!”

She threw the small tube into the sink and raked her fingers through her hair, forcing herself to calm down before she did something stupid, like punching the mirror. She didn’t want to have to explain that to the landlord. Again.

After gathering herself, she stripped out of her underwear and tank top to take a shower.

The water was cold as she stepped in, but she didn’t turn the faucet up any higher. She shivered and closed her eyes as it sprayed over every inch of her body.

All of her mistakes, all of her shortcomings, and all of the things she wasn’t ready to face instantly came into her mind, and she didn’t try to fight them off.

When she opened her eyes, she turned the water up as high as it would go and began to wash herself.

Asami wasn’t the root to all of her issues, but to say that she wasn’t one of the biggest branches stemming from the tree would be a lie. Their relationship had always been an odd one, and to this day, Korra still couldn’t understand it. Asami had been the rich and pretty daddy’s girl that everyone loved, while she was known as the girl with a chip on her shoulder and, every once in a while, made terrible life choices. They couldn’t have been any more different. And even now…

She turned off the faucet and got out of the shower.

There was no point in letting this go on any further past today. What happened was a long time ago, and she would put some emphasis on that when she saw Asami later. There would be no room for discussion or giving into the pressure of staying. She would leave and get back to living her life, and Asami would too.

It was better that way.

After getting dressed and ready for the day, Korra sat in the kitchen eating some cereal while on her laptop. She was checking her email for the schedule next week. The waiting game was the absolute worst, especially since she was the main eventer last night. It was still too good to be true that she was on the main roster, so when she saw the actual card for next week, that would make things official for her.
Until recently, she was only an upstarter and didn’t get as many or as good of matches that she would have liked, but now that was subject to change. She’d get to be on the card almost every week, whereas before she was only used sporadically. She would also be able to pick some of the people she wanted to fight. It couldn’t be any better than that.

Oh, and there was the fact that she could finally retire her “rookie” status. That was also a plus.

Unfortunately, her inbox was empty and she frowned. Varrick really wasn’t lying about liking to keep all of them on their toes.

Just as she got done closing her computer, there was a knock on her door. Instantly she got up and slowly made her way over to it. As far as she knew, she wasn’t expecting anyone this early.

“Who is it?” she called out.

At first there was no answer, and she felt her heart beginning to pound loud in her ears.

“It’s me,” a voice said. It was low, but clear enough for her to hear.

She instantly relaxed and walked over to the door to unlock it.

Kuvira stood there with two coffees in her hands.

“Hey.”

Korra’s eyes softened. “Hey.”

She moved to the side without a word and watched as Kuvira walked in, looking around as she did. Her visit was certainly a surprise given what happened. For one, they were both extremely stubborn after they fought, and it usually took a few days for one of them to work up the courage to seek the other out. And two, if Korra was to be completely honest, with all of the craziness going on, the fight they had got placed on the back-burner of her mind.

She knew that things should have been the other way around, with her showing up on Kuvira’s doorstep, but it made her grateful to see that her coach didn’t want to drag this out more than need be.

“I tried calling you last night,” Kuvira prompted.

“Yeah, sorry about that,” she said lamely.

“Here.” Kuvira offered her a coffee. “Caramel Latte; two shots. Just how you like it.”

Korra took it tentatively, letting their fingers brush against each other. She looked down at the coffee and played around with the Styrofoam cup before looking up again.

“About what happened…”

Kuvira waved her off. “It’s water under the bridge. Besides, I said some not so nice things, too.”

“No.” Korra shook her head in disagreement. “You were right about a lot of the stuff you said. And I shouldn’t have blown up on you like that over something stupid. So… I’m sorry.”

She normally sucked at apologies, but since she was clearly the one in the wrong, it made her swallow back her pride and own up to it.
Kuvira stared at her for a long moment and then gave her an amused look.

“Don’t go getting all soft on me now, rookie. Especially now that you’re on the main card.”

“So you did know!” Korra exclaimed, completely forgetting the seriousness of the moment they just had.

“Of course I did,” Kuvira said with a laugh. “I’m pretty sure the only one who didn’t know was you.”

A blush crept up on Korra’s cheeks. “Why didn’t you say anything before?”

“You were already a nervous wreck. Telling you that wouldn’t have done you any favors.”

Korra folded her arms. “I wasn’t nervous.”

“Yeah, and I like my coffee black,” Kuvira teased.

They smiled at each other, and that was enough for Korra to know that they were officially on good terms again. She never actually liked fighting with Kuvira. It only added more problems to her life. And besides that, Kuvira was one of the only people who actually understood her, more or less, and never really asked any questions. She accepted that there were some things about Korra that she would probably never get to know and was okay with that. They were teacher and student, partners and rivals, but most of all they were each other’s motivators to get through the women’s division at Blackstone. And despite all of the crap Korra was spewing the other night about not needing her; the reality of it was that she did.

They went and sat down on the couch, drinking their coffee in silence and looking out the window to watch the city become more alive as it got even brighter outside.

"I guess we have some things we need to talk about regarding me being your trainer.”

Korra tucked her feet underneath her and angled her body toward Kuvira.

“What do you mean? Is there some kind of rule that says you can’t be my coach if we’re both on the main roster?”

“Well, not really… But it is kind of frowned upon. For obvious reasons.”

Korra lifted an eyebrow, clearly lost.

Kuvira shook her head in amusement and sighed. “Right. I forgot how much of a newbie you are.”

“Would you just tell me?” She threw a pillow at her coach, who easily blocked it, laughing as she did.

“We’re each other’s competition now, Korra. Don’t think for one second that there aren’t already talks about us going toe to toe. Do you know how much money that would ring in for Varrick to have a former coach versus their trainee? Not to mention that you’re the rising star and I’m—”

“The star?” Korra finished, a smirk on her lips.

“You said it, I didn’t,” Kuvira cheekily replied.

Korra thought about it for a minute. It did make a lot of sense. Her and Kuvira were probably the most talked about in the women’s division, and a fight between them would be explosive. But it
wasn’t like she didn’t already know that. It was something she’d been anticipating since she realized how good they both were, and it got her excited just thinking about it.

“T’m looking forward to the day,” she said.

“Me, too,” Kuvira nodded in agreement.

“Oh really?” Korra asked, a playful look in her eyes. “Or do I still not have enough heart for you?”

This time, Kuvira threw a pillow at her. “Dumbass.”

“Sorry. It was too good to pass up,” Korra laughed.

This was exactly what she needed right now. After all of the self-contemplation and reflection she’d been doing since waking up, sitting on the couch and goofing around made her feel a thousand times better.

“I’d like to keep training under you for the time being,” she said after sobering up.

“Yeah?” Kuvira looked at her.

“Only if it’s okay with you. There are still a few things I want to learn that I don’t think anyone else could teach me.”

“Well, that’s true.” Kuvira smirked. “Okay. I’m in.”

“Are you sure?”

“Mhm.” Her coach nodded. “Besides… I don’t think I’m comfortable with letting you go just yet.”

They held each other’s gaze for a little longer than necessary, and then Korra cleared her throat.

“Right…”

Kuvira stood up and stretched. “Anyway, I have to get going. What are you doing later? I suppose I owe you a few drinks in order of celebration.”

And just like that the weights went perfectly back into place on top of Korra’s shoulders.

“Oh, umm,” she scratched the back of her head. “There’s something I have to do, but maybe when I’m finished with that we can.”

Kuvira arched an eyebrow. “That sounded a little ominous. Didn’t Kya say no street brawling?”

Korra rolled her eyes. “I’m just meeting up with someone.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah,” she said, unable to meet the Kuvira's gaze.

“Who’s the lucky person?”

“It’s not like that,” she said immediately.

Kuvira looked up in thought. “And now that I remember. I met up with some of the others last night at the Shaq. Rosa said she saw you leaving with some girl.”
Korra felt like smothering herself with a pillow. Why was it so impossible for people to mind their own business at that place? She was going to add Rosa to the list of people she wanted to fight.

“I just needed a ride home. That’s all.”

Kuvira eyed her, clearly not believing her. But instead of calling her out on it, she shrugged and said, “all right,” before walking by her.

Korra let out a deep breath and got up as well, following behind Kuvira. She knew it was crappy that she was hiding things once again, but talking about Asami to Kuvira was not a good idea at all.

“I’m sorry too, by the way.”

“Huh?” Korra said distractedly.

Kuvira turned just as she made it to the door and faced her. “For ditching you last night… and all of the other things I said. I’m sorry, too.”

“Oh…” Korra glanced down. “It’s fine. You didn’t say anything that wasn’t true.”

A warm hand came to the side of her face and she looked up. Kuvira tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and smiled at her.

“I think your hair’s getting longer.”

Korra swallowed. “Yeah…”

“Hm. I like it.”

Kuvira gave her one last look before pulling away and opening the door.

“Text me if you want to meet up tonight. If not, I’ll see you tomorrow, bright and early for some light training in the gym. Be there at 7:30.”

Korra frowned. “You really know how to kill the mood, don’t you?” she called out.

The only reply she got was the sound of Kuvira’s laugh echoing from down the hall.

After closing the door, she sighed and walked back into the kitchen. When she looked over at the clock on the stove, she saw that it was only half past eight. On one hand, it felt like she had plenty of time to kill before meeting up with Asami later, but on the other hand it felt like it was no time at all.

There was no telling what would happen, or how far she would let the conversation go before ultimately deciding that it was time to end it. Asami would more than likely end up disappointed, but that was how it needed to be. Things were already getting far too complicated and they didn’t need to be made any worse.

Either way, she really didn’t want to think about it anymore, and at this point it was probably better not to. She already made up her mind about what needed to happen by the end of their conversation, so it was best to just let things flow naturally to that conclusion.

For now, she was going to ice her stomach and take some Aspirin. Because if the throbbing in her head was any indication, it was definitely going to be a long day.
Asami sat at the large desk in her office, lightly tapping her pen against her notebook. She was supposed to be writing notes on the new designs her team came up with for next year's models of Sato mobiles, but so far the sheet of paper in front of her was blank. Not to mention that the “designs” weren’t exactly impressive.

Technically, it was her day off. She didn’t like coming into the office on the weekends unless she had to, but this time it was different. She knew that if she didn’t busy herself with work, the only thing she’d be doing was sitting at home, staring at the clock every five minutes in impatience.

It wasn’t excitement she was feeling, nor was it nervousness. If she really had to describe it, then maybe ‘keen’ would be the right word.

The whole interaction she had with Korra was replaying in her head on a constant loop ever since she got home last night. She thought about all of the things she should have said, or how she could have reacted better to Korra’s indifference, but eventually she realized it was pointless to go through the ‘what-ifs’ and drive herself even crazier. It was almost laughable at this point how ridiculous she was being. She wondered if Korra was internally laughing at her attempt of reconciliation. Or could it even be called that? It was really hard to tell.

She dropped the pen and spun around in the chair to face the large window behind her.

Future Industries was one of the tallest buildings in the whole city. From where she sat was the perfect view of everything going on around her. It was a new and interesting perspective to look at things from, and it was privy to only her.

There was a river that was a couple miles away, tucked underneath a bridge, and across from that bridge was an outline of the next city over.

Asami dreamed about moving away when she was younger to start her own business. For a while she entertained the thought about going to school for fashion design, but engineering became her calling, as well as business. The only thing that sucked was that she was one of the only girls in the engineering program. But that wasn’t enough to scare her off. It only made her work even harder to get to where she was now, although people still liked to discredit her.

She was very much aware that people thought the only reason she made it this far was because she had a company “handed to her” on a silver platter. If only they knew…

Sometimes she wished she could have started off fresh, in a completely different place and doing her own thing. That was the original plan, after all. Then again, she was sure that Korra had some influence over that former dream of hers with how much she went on about wanting to leave.

“It’s so boring here,” she would say, and then look over at Asami with a glint in her eye. “What do you say? After we graduate let’s ditch this place.”

Asami knew that Korra was being dead serious when she said it, but she never believed her friend would go through with it; let alone without her. If things turned out differently between them, then maybe she would have actually left with Korra, especially with how everything went down the sinkhole a few years after that.

But that was easy to say now after all this time. She really couldn’t imagine a life outside of the city. She had people who depended on her here and a huge corporation to run. That former dream of hers was all it was. Reality may have set in far too soon for her at a young age, but she didn’t run away from it, nor did she delude herself into thinking that things would magically work itself out on its own. She put on her best suit and high heels, then she faced the world with as much integrity
and determination she could muster within herself.

Though it did make her question why someone like Korra, who was so adamant about leaving, would want to come back after burning so many bridges. For as long as she’d known her, Korra hated this place. And so for her to end up back here was very odd.

She was taken out of her stupor when a knock came to the door.

“Come in,” she said, turning around in her chair.

Her assistant walked through the door with a few envelopes and documents in her hands. She was an older woman, with a few wrinkles under her eyes, and her hair was always in a bun. As she approached the desk, she pushed up her glasses.

“Sorry to disturb you, but here’s your mail and a few things that need to be read over and signed before Monday.” She set everything out on the desk.

“Oh yay. More reading to do,” Asami cheered unenthusiastically and then sunk lower into her chair.

“Don’t worry. I’ve got you covered.” The blonde woman handed her a sheet of paper. “I read over everything already and highlighted the most important bits, then I typed up an overview.”

Asami breathed a sigh of relief and took the sheet of paper. “This is why I keep you around, Rita.”

Her assistant smiled at her. “It’s always a pleasure to help you.”

Asami watched as she started to walk out of the room and then had a thought.

“Hey,” she called out to her. The older woman turned and gave her a curious look.

“Is there something you need?”

“No.” Asami shook her head. “But why don’t you go home? I don’t think I’ll be staying here much longer myself.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. Besides it’s not like I’m getting any work done.” She held up her blank notepad for emphasis.

Her assistant chuckled. “Fair enough. I’ll just check on a few things before I leave. Thank you, Miss Sato. I’ll see you on Monday.”

Asami smiled as the woman left the room, then grabbed the stack of mail to look through it. One thing she could say she loved about this job was making her employees happy.

She continued to flip through the mail, but when she got to one particular envelope, her smile quickly turned into a scowl.

It was a letter from the Queensboro Correctional Facility.

She let her fingers bunch the sides of the letter as she looked down at it. Her eyes went over the curve of every letter written so neatly on the front of the envelope.

Normally, if she saw these kinds of letters, there would be no hesitation to immediately throw it
into the garbage and spill every condiment she could on top of it so that she wouldn’t trick herself into reading it.

But this time her fingers had a mind of their own and ended up opening it. When she pulled out the small-sized piece of paper, she unfolded it and let her eyes scan over some of the content.

*My dearest Asami,*

*It’s been a long time. I haven’t seen you since the trial. You’ll probably ignore this letter like the other ones, but if you are by chance reading this, I need you to know how sorry I am. I miss you, and you don’t know how much I’ve been hoping and praying for the day you show up and see me. I know that you hate me for what I’ve done and what I put you through, but if you would give me the chance to explain myself—*

Asami tore up the small piece of paper and threw it into the small wastebasket beside her desk, along with the envelope. She put her face into her hands and had to force down a scream of frustration that was ready to release from her lungs.

Why couldn’t her father take the hint that she didn’t want anything to do with him? The more he wrote her, the sure she was that ignoring him was the right thing to do. Besides, there was nothing for him to explain. He was willing to bring the whole company down with him when he started making firearms and selling them to terrorists. There was nothing he could say that would ever make her forgive him for such a despicable and treacherous act.

She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to compose herself. This was the last thing she needed to be thinking about today.

When she opened her eyes, she looked down at the blank piece of paper on her notebook. Picking up her pen, she started to draw her own models for the new Sato Mobiles. There wasn’t anything in particular she had in mind for what she wanted them to look like, but if it was one thing she wanted them to be, it was better than anything her rotten, piece of crap father ever created.

She didn’t end up going home like she told Rita she would. Instead, she sketched for a good chunk of the day, and then she distracted herself even more by checking on the small group of mechanics working on the bottom level of the building. It was the best thing she could have done for herself, because once she stepped foot down there and the smell of grease and oil hit her nose, she exchanged her outfit for a jumper and started working on the closest car she could get her hands on.

It was one of her favorite things to do when she had a lot on her mind. However brief the moment was, it allowed her enough time to escape from her troubled thoughts. But it may have worked a little too well in this instance, because when she looked over at the clock for the first time in a while, it was already 3:30.

She was only just able to make it back to her apartment at a record time to take a shower and then get ready in a chaotic manner. The park was only fifteen minutes away from where she lived, and she normally walked there for the exercise, but since she was short on time, she decided to take her bike and speed through the oncoming traffic.

By the time she got there, it was exactly five o’clock, but Korra still wasn’t there, so she stood in front of the large statue that was their meeting place and waited.

It was a nice day out, so the park was full of people outside enjoying the warm weather. Not too far
from her was an ice cream stand, and there were kids lined up with their parents, tugging on their sleeves as they eagerly waited for their turn to order. A sad smile appeared on her face when she thought about all of the times she would drag her parents over to wherever she wanted and beg them to buy her something.

A few minutes passed and she looked around, trying to spot where Korra would be coming from, but she didn’t see her anywhere. Her brows knit together as she looked down at her watch.

5:08

Immediate doubt began to wash over her.

Korra never promised to meet her there, just like she said she never promised to give her answers.

She sat down on the edge of the statue and bounced her leg up and down, feeling very close to having some sort of mental breakdown.

It wouldn’t be the end of the world if Korra didn’t show up. She could just find out when and where they were holding the next fight club event. But would that really be something she wanted to do? She already had to make a deal with a shady businessman just for the chance to see Korra again, and if she was going to keep getting blown off, then that just meant it was all for nothing…

She rubbed at her temples as a few more minutes went by.

“Funny. I had a headache this morning.”

Her head shot up and she looked over to her right. Korra was walking up to her, hands stuffed into the pockets of the same jacket she wore yesterday. Her hair was down now, and it was the first time Asami noticed it was cut into a bob style.

“Was it from keeping yourself waiting in suspense?” she mumbled under her breath.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she said and stood up. “You actually showed up.”

Korra folded her arms. “Of course I did. I said I would, didn’t I?”

Asami nodded. “You did.”

Her former friend eyed her. “Are you still on about this whole me playing mind games with you thing?”

“Can you really blame me? It’s not like you’ve made it easy for me to understand what’s going on in your head.”

“Look, I have better things to do with my time than mess around. But the fact that you keep thinking I would do something like that is annoying and downright insulting.”

Asami looked down, feeling ashamed. Korra used to always stick by her word, for as long as Asami had known her. She hadn’t meant to be so discounting, but being face to face with Korra now was making her feel a major dose of insecurity, and she couldn’t understand why.

“Sorry,” she quietly apologized. “I shouldn’t have been so quick to jump to conclusions.”

Korra shifted on her feet, looking uncomfortable all of a sudden.
“You don’t need to apologize,” she said, refusing to meet Asami’s eyes as she did. “But it wouldn’t kill you to give me the benefit of the doubt.”

The way she spoke was in a much softer tone than the one from yesterday. She looked more relaxed, too, in her posture. But the look in her eyes remained guarded; like at any moment she would be ready to run off and leave Asami in the dust.

“Shall we start over then?” she suggested.

Korra glanced her way again and nodded.

“Hey, Korra,” she said.

Her former friend seemed lost at what to do and just stared at her. She snapped out of it a second later.

“Hi…”

A family of four walked by them, chitchatting excitedly with ice creams in their hands and unbeknownst to the moment her and Korra just shared. Asami couldn’t tell what Korra was feeling, but if it were anything similar to her, it would be alleviated.

They quietly made their way over to an empty bench that was in front of a small forest. From the corner of her eye, Asami noticed that Korra sat down much slower than she did and, similar to last night, she left a large amount of distance between them. It was hard not to take offense, but Asami knew better than to say anything.

“How are you feeling?” she asked instead, once the silence between them became awkward. “I see the swelling on your cheek has gone down a bit.”

“I’ve had worse,” Korra replied, leaving it at that.

She had to keep from wincing at the image of Korra sustaining even greater injuries than the ones she got from last night. She wasn’t completely ignorant to fighting since she took one or two electives in college on self-defense, but it was still a striking difference compared to what she saw last night. In all of the matches she got to see once she got there, all of the fighters had a feel to them that gave her some troubling vibes. The energy was more intense, and there was a thirst for blood that she never could have imagined seeing right in front of her eyes.

But then there was Korra…

It may have been the bias talking, or Asami putting on her best pair of rose-colored glasses, but she didn’t get the same vibe in Korra’s match. Sure she was clearly excited and ready to open up a can of ‘whoop ass’ on the other fighter, but her posture was less menacing and more thrill seeking. There was no other person who had that type of demeanor, including her opponent.

“Is it true that you’ve never lost a fight?” she questioned. “That’s pretty impressive if so.”

When she looked over at Korra, she was met with a disapproving gaze.

“Oh right,” she said after determining exactly what the look was for. “I’m not supposed to talk about that. Got it.”

Korra leaned back on the bench and propped one of her elbows up behind her.
“Why don’t we just cut to the chase and you tell me what you want to hear?”

Asami weighed that response for a minute.

“This isn’t about what I want to hear, Korra,” she eventually told her.

“Then what do I need to do so we can get this over with?” Korra restated.

“Geez. Try not to sound over-eager.”

“It’s not about being over-eager. But the reality of the situation is that it’s better for you to not know too much. Especially with that cop boyfriend of yours running around trying to abide the law.”

Asami rolled her eyes at the ‘boyfriend’ statement but didn’t bother to correct Korra this time around. She could believe whatever she wanted.

“Mako won’t find out about this. You have my word.”

“Sure,” Korra said. The doubt was evident in her voice. “But that doesn’t change my decision on this needing to be our last interaction.”

“So,” Asami tried to keep the hurt out of her voice, “you’re really that insistent about not wanting to see me anymore?”

“I…” Korra paused, then sighed. “I don’t know how to answer that without coming off as offensive.”

Asami couldn’t stop the bitter laugh that escaped from her mouth. She looked over at Korra. “Like that’s stopped you any other time so far?”

Korra glared but had no reply to that, most likely because she knew it was the truth.

Asami sobered up and sat back against the bench, looking up at the sky for a second.

“I’d rather you tell me what’s on your mind than keep it all to yourself,” she spoke quietly.

“That’s something I never thought I would hear you say.”

Her eyebrows knit together. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, you were never really a fan of me speaking my mind back then.”

“That is far from the truth,” Asami disagreed full-heartedly. “I think all of that time you spent trying to leave the past in the past has affected your memory.”

“It’s possible,” Korra mumbled, looking away in thought.

Asami watched her for a minute and then turned fully in her direction.

“Is it really that hard for you?”

“What?”

“To look back on all of that.”

Korra shrugged. “It was a long time ago. Why should I have to?”
“You don’t have to,” Asami exasperated. “But to pretend like it never happened…”

“Who’s pretending?” Korra asked, sounding angry all of a sudden. “Just because I don’t want to talk about it, that doesn’t mean I refuse to acknowledge it. I may not be hard pressed on finding answers like you are, but that doesn’t make me a terrible person.”

“I never said you were,” Asami urged. She hadn’t expected Korra to get so defensive about what she said, and it was shocking how passionate she sounded in her heated reply. “I guess that came out wrong.”

Korra sighed and rubbed her face. “It’s fine.”

They sat there in silence for a while. The sun was slowly making its way to the north, indicating that it would be setting in about another hour or so. Some people were making themselves comfortable in the circular field nearby, enjoying every bit of the warmth.

Asami wanted to cut the tension between them, but she didn’t know how. There was no way of telling where Korra’s head was, and she hated having to play the whole guessing game with her.

Oh, to hell with it, she thought.

“What are you thinking right now?” she asked.

Korra had no response at first. She only folded her hands and leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees.

“That this was a really bad idea,” she answered truthfully.

“Oh…” Asami said, not bothering to hide the disappointment in her tone. “Well, at least you’re being honest.”

Korra scoffed.

“What’s so funny?”

The brown-haired woman shook her head. “Nothing. But you’ve definitely lowered your expectations of me, if that’s even more possible.”

“It’s not that,” Asami argued. “You have your reasons for not wanting to be around me, and I can understand that.”

“So then why are you pushing this so hard?” Korra finally looked at her.

“Because I…” Asami paused and looked down. She wrapped her hands around the bench on either side of her as she tried to figure out the best way to admit what she was about to say.

“Do you remember that fight we had a few weeks before graduation?” she asked slowly. “Right after… what happened?”

From the corner of her eye she saw Korra stiffen.

“What about it?” her former friend asked, clearly trying to keep her voice leveled.

“Well. You said some things… and at the time I was so pissed at you that I didn’t take it to heart all that much. But when you left…” she paused, but pressed on, even though it was difficult. “When you left, all I could think was that it was my fault—"
“Asami,” Korra tried to stop her.

“No. Let me finish,” she said and ran her fingers through her hair, forcing a breath before speaking again.

“It’s not that I wanted to see you again to ease my own guilt, because despite what you think, I did move on. I had no other choice to, given the circumstances. But when I heard you were back here, all of those looming questions resurfaced, and as hard as I tried, I couldn’t let it go.”

Korra stared at her, an indiscernible look in her eyes.

“I still want answers,” Asami continued, "but I realize now that demanding things from you and acting like you owe me something was the wrong way to go about it. You did your share of bad things back then, but I was no saint either. So, if that’s what caused you to leave, then I’m sorry.”

She went quiet after that, biting her lip and staring down at her lap, unable to meet Korra’s gaze. She didn’t mean to let all of that come out in one sitting, but it was hard not to. There were plenty of words she imagined saying to Korra if she ever saw her again, and a majority of them were angry. But there were other things that had been buried underneath all of the anger, and that was one of them.

“I told you not to apologize,” Korra spoke quietly. When Asami glanced up, she saw that Korra’s hair was shielding her eyes.

“Why shouldn’t I?” she asked, tentatively scooting closer to her.

Korra shook her head. “Forget it.”

“No. Don’t do that. Korra, just talk to me.”

“I can’t!” Korra said and stood up from the bench. “Why is that so hard for you to understand? I can’t talk to you about this and I don’t want to.”

Seeing that she was about to walk away, Asami quickly got up and stopped her.

“Please stay,” she pleaded.

Korra folded her arms and looked off to the side. “Why? This is all starting to get pretty pointless.”

“I don’t think you really believe that.”

The shorter woman was silent and Asami watched her, trying to gauge what her reaction was. The thing about Korra was that it was anyone’s guess what her true thoughts were.

“You really picked the wrong place to have this conversation.”

Asami blinked and then looked around. The sun was slowly beginning to fall, but it seemed like more and more people were gathering around.

She looked back at Korra. “Would you prefer to go somewhere more private?”

Korra shook her head vehemently. “Let’s just leave things as they are here. I already knew this would be a mista—"

“One night,” Asami interrupted her.
Korra gave her a confused look. “What?”

“Give me one night to talk to you. I will try my best not to pry, and I definitely won’t try to trick you into answering questions you don’t want to answer. We can just… talk. About anything you want. It can be about soccer for all I care. But just… give me a chance to prove that this isn’t all for nothing and that it’s possible for us to get along and actually have a regular conversation.”

She sucked in a large breath and let the air fill her lungs. All of those words came out before she even had a chance to think about them. The only thing she knew was that she wasn’t ready for things to end yet. It was just like what she told Korra last night: Now that they were finally getting somewhere, albeit slowly, it would be hard for her to turn around and leave things so improperly finished between them.

Korra initially looked surprised at the offer, but that quickly turned into uneasiness and doubt. It was the same type of conflict Asami saw in her eyes when she asked her to meet up at the park.

“Asami, I don’t think this can wo—”

“Please, Korra,” she said. It was embarrassing how desperate she sounded.

Korra opened her mouth and then shut it, only to gaze at Asami. Asami gazed back, trying, but failing once again to figure out what Korra was thinking. Her heart was racing and she felt a million knots forming in her stomach. She knew that if Korra said ‘no’ right then, it would all be over, and then she would really need to move on. She was a lot stronger than the last time Korra walked out of her life, so it wouldn’t feel impossible like before, but it would be a lie to say that it wouldn’t leave her with another open scar.

“…Fine,” Korra said quietly after a minute of contemplation.

It should have been impossible for one word to spread so much relief and hope into someone, but Asami felt it. Her muscles instantly relaxed and she felt a thousand times lighter.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

Korra didn’t reply. She only stood there awkwardly, like she was waiting for something. Asami was still reveling from the high she was feeling that she couldn’t understand what the look was about.

“Where are we going to go?” Korra asked, sounding irritated.

“Oh! Umm…” Asami thought for a minute. “We can go back to my place? It’s only a few minutes away. But only if you’re comfortable with that.”

Korra looked skeptical at first, then impassive.

“I guess,” she said.

“Okay.”

They slowly fell into a side-by-side walk, filled with heavy silence. Asami tried to keep from glancing over at Korra too much, but it felt like if she looked away for more than a second, the other woman would vanish.

Then she remembered something.
“Oh, and I kind of drove here on a motorcycle, so unless you have a car, or want to hold onto me while I—"

“We can walk,” Korra said, not even bothering to let her finish that sentence.

TBC...
Asami lived on the Upper East Side, in a nice duplex apartment that she couldn’t complain all too much about. She rented out two rooms on the top floor as a safety precaution, and it ended up being the best thing she could’ve done for herself, because aside from one other person who rented out the rest of the floor (some rich guy who had too much money to spend), it was quiet and she didn’t have to worry about an invasion of privacy. The first room was obviously used as her living quarters, whereas she used the second room as an office space for when she worked from home.

“I’m surprised you’re not still living in Queens.”

She fumbled with the key in her hand when Korra spoke. The fifteen minute walk back from the park had been quiet, but it was the first time Asami didn’t feel uneasy, or that she somehow needed to fill the silence. Although, now with Korra’s observation, that tension reemerged.

Asami hadn’t been thinking all that much when she first moved out of her old house, but that didn’t stop the press from writing non-stop about it for a solid month when she finally had the guts to put it up for sale online.

“Um, yeah,” she said while putting the key into the slot. There was a small ‘beep’ and then the light turned green. She opened the door and walked in first, with Korra following behind. “Sorry if it’s a little messy.”

They both removed their shoes and Asami offered to put them in the closet beside the door. After that, she went over to the nearby wall and switched on the lights.

“I think you and I have different definitions of what the word ‘messy’ means,” Korra said as she looked around. Asami did as well and decided that Korra was right. Aside from a couple of books and papers being out of place in the living room, it was clean. But that was probably thanks to the housekeeper named Glenda who came by once every week. There was no telling how chaotic the place would really be if Asami didn’t have her.

Focusing her eyes back on Korra again, she watched her look around the room, adjusting to this new kind of scenery.

The place wasn’t too big, but it definitely wasn’t small either. The front room was an open space, with a kitchen connected to a dining area and the living room on the other side of the apartment. The living room was a tad bit darker because another set of lights needed to be turned on, but there were a couple of couches put closely together in front of a fireplace that had a flat-screen television above it and a bookshelf nearby, as well.

But Korra looked at none of that. Her eyes were glued to what was in front of her, and that was the landscape window that gave the most amazing view of the city. It was Asami’s favorite spot outside of the office to watch the sun set. If she thought about it beforehand, though, she definitely would have been able to guess that Korra would like it, too, seeing as they both shared a common liking of views from high places.

She was honestly still getting used to the idea of Korra being in her apartment. If someone would have told her a few years ago that this would happen, she’d laugh hysterically. But this was real, and yet somehow it didn’t feel like it. It certainly wasn’t an unpleasant feeling having Korra be there, but it definitely was odd.
Korra’s eyes finally met hers again, noticing that she’d been staring, and then raised an eyebrow.

Asami immediately looked away, feeling the heat rising in her cheeks at being caught.

“So, are you thirsty?” she asked, not even waiting for an answer and going over to the kitchen anyway.

“Some water would be nice,” Korra responded.

Asami walked over to the steel fridge and pulled out two bottles of Fiji water, then handed one over to Korra, who was slow to take it at first.

“Thanks,” she mumbled.

“Sure.”

Asami didn’t know what to do or how to start off a “normal” conversation like she’d been so eager to have Korra agree to. In the spur of the moment it sounded like a good idea, but that was because she would have said anything to get her to stay. However, at the same time, she was also serious. She wanted this to somehow work between them, even if she was unsure of what exactly ‘this’ was.

Korra drank some of the water, and when she finished, placed it down on the nearby countertop. After, she looked at Asami expectantly.

“Well? What now?”

“I don’t know,” Asami tilted her head. “You tell me.”

“You came up with this idea.”

“Yeah, but I’m also the one who’s done a lot of the talking. Maybe we should switch it up this time so that we don’t start off on the wrong foot again.”

Korra shifted and suddenly looked very uncomfortable.

“Well, if I were to be honest…” she started, and then looked at Asami with a questioning gaze, as if asking for permission.

Asami gave her an encouraging nod.

Korra regarded her for another moment before looking down and letting out a deep breath.

“T don’t know how to talk to you,” she admitted

Asami’s eyebrows shot up. That was… not what she’d been expecting. If anything, she would have thought it was the other way around, given how every time she said something to Korra, it seemed like she was treading on thin ice.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

Korra shrugged. “I guess, to put it bluntly, this isn’t high school anymore. You’re you, and I’m… me.”

Asami looked at her oddly, not really understanding what she was trying to imply.
“Unless we’ve done some sort of *Freaky Friday* switch-a-roo that I’m unaware of, I’m pretty sure I’ve always been me, and you’ve always been you.”

Korra rolled her eyes. “Since when did you become the sarcastic one?”

“I picked up on a few things after you left,” she said, then immediately cringing afterward. “Sorry.”

“That’s the third time you’ve apologized today,” Korra said, brushing off that remark.

Asami faltered. Had she really been apologizing that often? And why did Korra constantly feel the need to point it out? If she were allowed to ask that question, she definitely would have, but instead she just let it go.

“What I mean is that just because we’re not who we used to be, that doesn’t mean we’re completely different people. It doesn’t mean that things have changed that much to warrant us not being able to talk to each other.”

“You’re wrong…” Korra said with the shake of her head.

Asami folded her arms. “How so?”

“For starters, look at the kind of life you live compared to mine,” Korra waved her hand around the room. “Can you honestly look me in the eyes and say that you can relate to someone who, in your own words, ‘beats the crap out of people for money?’”

“We don’t need to relate to each other to understand each other. And even if we don’t relate to each other now, it doesn’t mean that it’s some kind of impossible thing. Are you forgetting how we even became friends in the first place?”

Korra opened her mouth with a ready reply and then closed it. Her eyes drifted to the side and she looked reminiscent, if only for a second.

Things between them hadn’t been easy from the start. Korra had her opinions of the other kids around her, just like they had their opinions about her. And the people she did make friends with…weren’t exactly the best people you’d want to associate yourself with. After their first interaction, Asami steered clear of Korra, figuring that she was just a high-tempered girl with a lot of issues. But a few months later, things significantly changed between them, and all it took was one night. It was the first time Asami realized that there was more to Korra than she let on, and how different she really was from everyone else in her social bubble. And for her, that was a good thing. It was also why it hurt even worse when Korra left. Because Asami knew that she would never have another person quite like Korra in her life.

Her phone rang suddenly, startling them both. When she pulled it out of her jacket and looked at it, her eyes rolled. Of course she couldn’t be given a few hours on her own without having something work-related come up.

“I have to take this really fast,” she said apologetically before walking out of the kitchen and answering the phone. “Hello?”

“Hello Miss Sato, sorry to call you on a Saturday evening. This is Roy from AeroVironment. I was hoping you were able to look over our contract agreement before we start on building the prototype for our collaboration on these new drones.”

Asami gritted her teeth. “No, I can’t say that I have considering that I just got the contract today.”
Asami glanced over to the kitchen and saw that Korra was still standing there looking in deep thought. The voice in her ear drowned out as she fretted over how the hell she was going to pull this off.

There had to be something she could do to minimize the number of lulls in their conversations. Because she knew that the less time they spent talking, the more Korra would become uncomfortable and want to leave. And that was the last thing she wanted to happen.

It was so frustrating that they could barely keep a conversation going for more than five minutes when it used to be the exact opposite. There was never a thing she felt like she couldn’t say to Korra, and vice versa. Now it just seemed like there were secrets between them both, with no way of uncovering them. And despite how much she tried to ignore it, the tension between them was beyond suffocating. She knew that if she couldn’t find a way to get rid of that feeling between them and fast, then she would never be able to talk to Korra in the way she wanted to.

“Miss Sato? Hello?”

“Yes, I’m here,” she said and went to rub her face out of pure frustration, only to realize she was still wearing makeup and settled for placing her hand on her hip instead.

“So what do you think?” the man named Roy asked.

“I think you should let me read the contract agreement first before talking to me about making changes.”

“But—”

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m in the middle of something. You can contact my assistant on Monday if you want to go over this again. Like you said, it’s a Saturday evening, after all.”

She quickly hit the ‘end’ button and then turned her phone off, not wanting to deal with any more calls or texts for the night. This conversation with Korra would be enough for one day.

Walking over to the kitchen again, she placed her phone on the counter by the sink and went over to Korra, who was now checking her own phone.

“That should be the last interruption for the night,” she said.

Korra looked up.

“Do you get a lot of important phone calls like that on the weekend?”

Asami looked at her, surprised at the sudden interest. “I wouldn’t classify that as important, but I usually like to keep my weekends as free as possible, unless I have to travel or attend a social event.”

Korra looked her up and down for a second and then met her eyes once more. “You’re probably really successful now.”

Asami didn’t know how to respond to that at the risk of sounding either conceited, or too modest. On top of that, it seriously made her question whether Korra really meant what she said the other night about never checking up on her. Asami had an excuse because Korra left no trace of where to find her at all. She didn’t even have a Facebook for crying out loud. So then what was her excuse?
And if what she said had been true, did that also mean she had no clue about what happened with her father? The bankruptcy? Her taking over Future Industries? Any of it?

“Korra, do you…really have no idea about what’s gone on with me in these past few years?” she asked.

“Do you want me to?”

Her brows furrowed. She didn’t know why Korra couldn’t just answer the question outright and make things easy for once. But then she actually thought about it for a second…

If Korra really didn’t know anything that went on since she left, was there even a point in letting her know? Would Korra even care? And aside from all that, was getting into that discussion with someone who’s been out of her life for so long really a good idea?

“I… don’t know,” she decided, her voice soft and almost questioning herself.

Korra’s gaze remained on her for a few long seconds. “It wouldn’t be a surprise if I said no, would it?” she said.

Asami tried not to stiffen. “No, it wouldn’t.”

“And I would be the last person to go digging around in other people’s personal lives when I don’t want to talk about my own, right?”

“So it that a yes or no?” Asami asked, suddenly annoyed, with herself for anticipating the answer so much, and with Korra for beating around the bush.

Korra’s lips parted, and her eyes were searching for a moment. She inhaled, and when the air escaped her lungs, she let out a breathy sounding, “No.”

Asami had no reaction at first, she simply stared, but once that finalized answer sunk in she looked away. “Okay.”

“Are you disappointed by that?” Korra asked.

Asami shifted uncomfortably and raised her eyes to meet Korra’s once more.

“No… Why should I be?”

Korra stuffed her hands into her pockets and shrugged. “I don’t know. It just looked like you were.”

It was bothersome how Korra could read her mind so easily, and yet she couldn’t do the same for her. She was normally so good at keeping her emotions in check, and yet somehow Korra managed to see right through her.

“I need to sit down,” she mumbled and walked away after that, deciding to go into the living room. As she approached the couch, she removed her puffy jacket and threw it wherever, not really caring where it ended up.

Why did Korra’s answer trouble her so much? Was she really expecting her to answer any differently? Was she hoping for it? But that didn’t make any sense, because then she’d probably end up being more pissed at the revelation that Korra knew all these things about her and chose not to reach out. Her feelings were jumbled all over the place right now…
The sound of shuffling and cabinets opening made her turn around.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

Korra ignored her at first. Her back was still turned as she took out two glasses from one of the upper cabinets. When she turned around finally, she placed them on top of the island in the center of the kitchen and looked at Asami.

“Where do you keep the alcohol?”

Asami gave her an incredulous look. “You can’t be serious right now.”

“Why not?”

Asami slowly walked back over to her, glaring. “Is it really so bad being in the same room with me that you have to resort to drinking?”

Korra chuckled while shaking her head and placing her hands up on top of the island. “You’re overthinking it.”

Asami raised an eyebrow. “Am I? I had to beg you to come back here with me, and now all of a sudden you want to have a drink with me like we’re all buddy, buddy?”

“Well do you have any better ideas of trying to make this any less awkward? If not, then I can just leave right now and we can forget this ever happened in the first place.”

Asami’s mouth opened, but when nothing came out she closed it. She already silently admitted to her herself that she had no idea what she was doing. So far, everything she came up with had been in the heat of moment, and they’d only gotten as far as they had right now because Korra was willing to let it happen.

But this was different. Because Korra was now trying to call the shots (pun-intended), and it actually looked like she was putting in somewhat of an effort to make this last, even if it wasn’t exactly the best way. But then again, this was Korra. Since when did she conform to anything? Or ever act like her ways were the morally correct ones?

With that in mind, she walked back into the kitchen and over to the pantry door. After opening it, she reached up to the highest shelf and pulled down a full bottle of vodka that was given to her as a present.

“This is all I have,” she said after coming back over.

Korra watched as she set the bottle down, then looked up at her.

“You don’t have any orange juice?”

“Umm. There could be some in the fridge, maybe?”

“Mind if I take a look?” she pointed back with her thumb.

Asami only answered with a shrug.

Korra walked over to the fridge and opened it. She dug around for a few seconds and moved a few things around before pulling her head out and letting the door shut on its own. When she came back over to Asami, she had the orange juice in her hand.
“I can whip us up a couple of screwdrivers with this.”

“…That’s fine,” Asami said with a delayed response.

Korra went to work. She grabbed an orange out of the fruit bowl in the middle of the island and found a knife and board to cut it on. She was silent as she did this until she finally asked Asami to fill the two glasses with ice, probably because she felt Asami’s eyes on her like a hawk the whole time.

After doing what she was told, Asami set the two glasses down beside Korra, and Korra immediately took one to pour a measured amount of vodka into it.

“You’re a pro at this,” she commented.

“Anyone can make something this simple,” Korra said as she poured the orange juice in. “But I guess two years of being a bartender makes this child’s play for me.”

Asami’s ears perked up at hearing this new information. “You were a bartender?”

“Mhm,” Korra hummed.

Asami took a second to imagine her in a pub somewhere serving drinks to motorcyclists with too many tattoos and piercings to count.

“I can see that,” she murmured.

Korra finished the first drink off by placing a sliced orange on the edge of the glass, then going on to make the other.

“Did you like it?” Asami asked tentatively, not knowing if she was teetering over the line or not.

“It was just a job that helped me get by and pay off my student loans.”

“Oh, so you went to school, after all,” Asami said. She had to keep herself in check and not ask the million and one questions sounding off in her head. “That’s cool.”

Korra didn’t reply. She finished the other drink in under a minute and slid it over to Asami.

“Thanks,” Asami said as she took the drink into her hands and looked down at it. Korra immediately went to sipping at hers and turned away, walking out of the kitchen. When she noticed Asami wasn’t following behind she looked over her shoulder.

“Well? Are we doing this or not?”

Asami was hesitant, but followed behind her nonetheless.

“You’re not planning on getting me drunk, recording me, then sending it to some kind of tabloid, are you?”

“You seriously did not just ask that.” Korra set her glass down on the table. “But thanks for reminding me how much of a lightweight you are.”

Instead of sitting down on the couch, she plopped down on the wooden floor. Asami turned the lights on before walking over and then slowly sinking to the ground as well. She sat cross-legged and watched Korra closely.
“I’m no lightweight, but let’s say I was for a minute: Would it be a good idea to get me drunk? I’d lose my filter and probably end up breaking my promise on not to pry.”

Korra pulled one of her knees up and locked her hands around it. “Let’s be real here, you didn’t mean that.”

“O-of course I did,” Asami stammered.

“Maybe in the moment,” Korra said matter-of-factly. “I know it’s probably killing you right now not to ask me something.”

“That sounds a little over-confident, don’t you think?”

“Am I wrong?”

Asami locked her jaw. Korra sounded so sure of herself, and the fact that she was right on all accounts was beginning to frustrate her.

“You were my best friend once…” she blurted out.

Korra tensed.

“What’s your point?” she asked, and then distracted herself by picking up her glass and taking another sip.

“Do you really think it’s out of the ordinary that I want to know things about you?”

“You’re not asking me something as innocent as what my favorite color is, Asami. What you want is for me to talk about certain things that I don’t want to discuss. There’s a major difference.”

“So you’re really fine with the way things are then?” Asami asked. “You mean to tell me that ever since the day you left you’ve had no regrets about not telling me anything?”

There was a pregnant pause, and for a second Asami was sure she saw something in Korra’s face twitch.

“See what I mean? You just can’t help yourself with all of these questions.”

Asami looked into her lap, but after giving it some thought, she raised her head and met Korra’s gaze.

“No, I can’t. And that’s probably the one thing I won’t apologize for.”

A small smile played on Korra’s lips, but it went as quickly as it came.

“If I told you what you wanted to know, what would you do after having the information?”

“You can’t ask me that,” Asami said with the shake of her head. “I can’t predict how I’ll react, and neither can you.”

Korra grimly looked away before raising the almost empty glass to her lips again.

Asami sighed and finally drank from hers, letting the bitter taste of alcohol mixed with fruitiness touch her tongue and reach her throat. She didn’t drink all that often, in fact that bottle of vodka had been in her pantry for almost two months now and she kept forgetting about it. But still, every once in a while, she would have one of those days where a drink was heavily needed.
“So much for talking about soccer, huh?” Korra said.

Asami snorted. “Yeah. That would have been a one-sided conversation anyway since I haven’t watched a game in years.”

There was another brief pause.

“Asami?” Korra said, her voice sounding less sure this time.

“Hm?” Asami looked at her, and she froze, almost forgetting to breathe momentarily when she saw the way Korra was staring at her.

Her face was taut, but her mouth was open, as if she wanted to say something.

“N-nothing. It’s nothing.” She looked away.

Asami’s brows knit together confusion. “…Okay.”

Korra was holding back again, and it was aggravating to no living end. But what else could she do? How many times could she tell her that the only thing she wanted was the truth before sounding like a broken record?

At the most inappropriate time, her stomach growled. She gave a sheepish grin when Korra glanced over at her.

“I haven’t eaten all day. I guess I should probably have something before I drink anymore.”

Korra nodded, though she seemed distant. “That would be for the best.”

Asami stood up and smoothed out her jeans. “There’s a Thai restaurant up the street. We can order in and have it delivered. If you want anything, that is.”

Korra looked up at her and then tilted her head. “This day just keeps getting weirder and weirder, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, well, I’ve quickly learned to just roll with it,” Asami replied, putting her glass down on the table and standing up. “I’ll go get the menu.”

She left Korra on the floor and treaded back to kitchen to find the piece of paper in a drawer where she haphazardly kept all of the takeout menus in.

Yes, it really had been a weird 48 hours between them, but at least it wasn’t turning out to be a complete disaster, proven by the fact that Korra was still there. So maybe, just maybe, this really could work. But in order for it to continue, there would need to be something to really break the ice between them. All she needed was a minute to think.

Korra was staring out the window, watching as the last bit of sun started to fall behind the dark clouds that were coming in. There was no doubt that a storm was on its way.

When she turned her head to look inside the room again, she found Asami in the kitchen talking on the phone rather quietly and looking slightly irritated. She ordered the food fifteen minutes ago after Korra finally decided to get something.

She hadn’t realized that she’d forgotten her wallet at home until Asami was about to call, and then they ended up arguing back and forth about whether Asami should pay for her meal or not. In the
end, Asami’s persistence and stubbornness managed to outweigh Korra’s once more, much to her annoyance.

After Asami placed the order and hung up, her phone rang almost immediately after, and that was when she got pulled into another long conversation with someone from work. It didn’t really bother Korra all that much, but Asami still gave her an apologetic look after a while and even put the phone on mute to tell her that she could make herself comfortable and have a look around the place if she wanted.

That was a surprise to say the least. Did Asami really trust her that much?

No, she was quick to reprimand herself. If she allowed herself to think along those lines, it would possibly lead to her thinking about other things, and maybe even slip up on a few details she wasn’t all that eager to share. It was already enough that Asami managed to persuade her into coming here, but if she actually coerced her into that conversation? It would be a catastrophe waiting to happen…

However, once again, Korra found herself in this predicament. She ended up doing the exact opposite of what she was supposed to. Instead of just walking away when she had the chance, she let Asami stop her. It was funny how much the tables had turned. A lot of the times it had been the other way around, with Korra always trying to convince Asami into doing something. Sometimes she would automatically agree to it, while there were a few times she would need a little more persuasion.

Folding her arms, she looked over at Asami again. She was pacing back and forth with her hand on her hip and a frown on her face. Korra figured it was the same person she’d been on the phone with earlier because she was sporting the same expression she had upon answering the phone the first time.

She continued to walk back and forth through the kitchen, but briefly she looked over and their eyes met again. Korra drew in a deep breath before releasing it and breaking the contact. The screwdriver did very little to calm the major case of nerves she had. She’d probably need to have another one soon.

Removing herself from the large window space, her eyes searched the room for anything interesting to kill the time. She wasn’t comfortable with just walking around Asami’s apartment, so she wanted to focus on something that was close by.

Her eyes settled on the wall adjacent to her. On the mantle of the fireplace were a couple of photo frames on top of it. When she glanced over at Asami again and saw that she now had her back turned, it made her feel more at ease with doing this, so she quietly made her way over there.

She looked over each photo slowly and carefully, analyzing these important moments of Asami’s life. In the first photo, it was of Asami standing in the middle of a crowd of people, clapping as she used a large pair of scissors to cut a red ribbon on the steps in front of the building behind her. It was a grand opening of sorts. In the next photo, it was of her and two other girls laughing in their caps and gowns. Apparently she ended up going to an ivy league college after all. Her father surely must’ve been proud of that.

The last two photos were the most interesting, but also made her glare.

One was of Asami standing next to a bride and groom, with none other than Mako. The groom, however, she ended up recognizing as his brother, Bolin. She remembered the younger of the two being the more exuberant, and also incredibly down to earth whenever Korra crossed paths with
him, which wasn’t all that often. The girl he married was unfamiliar, but she looked like a good fit for him. She had gentle, loving eyes and looked very wise for her age. It was the perfect counterbalance for someone like Bolin. Then again, she had no idea what he was like now, so maybe he calmed down over the years?

The other photo—the one that made her glare the most—was of just Asami and Mako. He was in his complete officer get-up, smiling widely as he wrapped an arm around Asami, who had a hand on his chest and was mimicking that same expression. She could easily guess that this was after he graduated from the police academy, and that it was probably from a few years ago. But just as she suspected, everything about him looked exactly the same.

When she heard footsteps approaching from behind, she looked over her shoulder and saw Asami walking up, apparently done with her phone call.

“Okay, this time I promise that will be the last interruption,” she said, still looking down at her phone. “This guy couldn’t seem to take the hint the first time that I didn’t want to read a stupid contract agreement right now.”

When she finally looked up, she saw where Korra was standing, and then her eyes went to the photos on the mantle. It was quiet for a minute, and then Korra noticed something flicker in Asami’s eyes.

“That’s Opal,” she pointed at the wedding photo and stepped closer to Korra. “Bolin met her in college one day at a poetry reading and he claimed it was love at first sight. They got married after only two years of dating.”

Korra snorted. “I can’t see Mako agreeing with that.” It was a known fact in high school that Mako was overprotective of his younger brother, who was two grades lower than the rest of them. It was one of the reasons why Bolin only talked to her on very rare occasions. Well… that and because it was awkward given that she couldn’t stand his brother just as much as he couldn’t stand her.

“Oh, he didn’t,” said Asami with a low chuckle. “He thought they were rushing into things way too fast, and I agreed at first, but then…”

“Then what?” Korra asked, actually showing interest in the story.

“I don’t know. Call me a romantic or whatever, but you could just tell they were meant for each other.”

Korra glanced back at the photo again, and then over at all the others. She couldn’t deny that it was interesting to see this part of Asami’s life. It was clear by the genuine happiness she emitted in the photos how much she really did move on from her after high school.

“What’s Bolin up to now?” she asked.

“They moved out into the country. Opal’s family owns a farm there. They built a house and everything.”

Despite herself, Korra cracked a smile. “Nice.”

“Yeah…”

She felt Asami’s eyes on her, but she couldn’t bring herself to look back. Instead, she stepped away from the mantle.
“So how long until the food gets here?”

“They said about forty-five minutes to an hour.”

Korra nodded. “What should we do to kill the time?”

“Hmm,” Asami tapped her chin and thought for a second. “I suppose I could give you a tour.”

Korra gave her an amused look. “Should I go grab a camera and follow you around with it?”

Asami smiled. “Well I can’t say that I haven’t ever dreamed of having my own MTV edition of Welcome to my Crib.”

“You were obsessed with that show,” she recalled, smiling herself.

“And heartbroken when they took it off the air.”

“You know the houses didn’t even belong to any of the celebrity’s, right?”

“I like to remain in denial, thank you very much.”

A small laugh escaped Korra’s lips. It was for the first time that she felt some sense of normalcy between them, even if it was only for a moment. All of the tension she’d been feeling since agreeing to come back to Asami’s apartment was slowly beginning to fade.

“So how about that tour?” she asked.

“Right,” Asami said, still smiling. “But first… can you make me another drink?”

This time, Korra let out a breathier laugh. “Just don’t blame me if you really do end up getting drunk.”

“I’m really not as much of a lightweight anymore as you think.”

“I’ll have to see that to believe it,” Korra said, walking passed her and grabbing their glasses off the table before going into the kitchen to make them both another drink.

Giving a tour of the apartment was pretty lame in retrospect, but Asami figured that it would at least give them something to talk about. At first she thought Korra would make a snarky remark about her trying to show off, but thankfully she was wrong, and it made her feel bad for even thinking Korra would. For the time she’d known Korra, she had never been all that interested in the “luxury” of Asami’s life. There were times where she would be impressed, but other than that she never really treated Asami any differently or acted envious because of who her father was. It was refreshing and made Asami feel like she didn’t have to keep up an impression in front of Korra like the rest of the people at their school.

After Korra made them both another drink, Asami led her around the apartment. She first directed her over to one of the bathrooms just in case she needed to go, and then proceeded to explain the building’s origins. It dated back to as early as the Great Depression and was prone to a lot of vandalism, so it had to go under constant renovation after that.

Korra only listened and didn’t comment much on what Asami talked about, but she wasn’t tuning out or acting like she was bored, so Asami just kept on with it.

After covering all of the downstairs, she led Korra up the spiral staircase that was near one end of
the room. There were only three rooms on the second floor: her bedroom, another restroom, and a
guest room that had been changed into her own, private movie theatre. Asami took her into the
latter.

There was a large, flat screen television attached to one wall, and in front of it was a long, plush
couch that was big enough to fit twelve people on it, along with a glass table that had a few unlit
candles placed on top. There were two tall, oak shelves against the wall on the other side of the
room from them that had Asami’s entire movie collection. Korra flocked over to it just as the lights
were turned on.

“You’ve become even more of an addict,” Korra said.

“I actually had to put a few in storage because there were too many.” Asami walked over to her.

With the shake of her head, a small smile appeared on Korra’s face. “That sounds about right. You
still have some here that I remember.”

It was true that Asami was a certified movie addict. If fixing cars couldn’t take her mind off things,
the next best thing was an old, classical film, or something of the horror genre. She didn’t know
who used to tease her about it more: Korra, or Mako. But the both of them would still sit down and
watch them with her anyway whenever she was in the mood.

“I guess some things never change, huh?” she said.

Korra, who had been looking at the back of a dvd box, glanced up at her.

“I suppose so,” she said back.

Asami smiled softly. Things became significantly calmer between them. After she caught Korra
looking at those photos, she decided to switch gears and make the conversation more lighthearted,
and much to her relief, Korra actually went along with it.

That, of course, didn’t mean that there wasn’t a huge elephant in the room that still needed to be
addressed, but for now it could be ignored. After all, wasn’t she trying to prove that her and Korra
could be in the same room without it being all awkward and tense between them? With how they
were interacting now, Asami could confidently say that she was successfully managing to pull
something off, even if at first she had been talking out of her ass.

But still, these were only a few minutes. Could it even last for another twenty? She hoped so.
While Korra seemed more responsive than earlier and last night, she was still closed off and being
careful about whatever she said. It was subtle, and the only reason Asami could tell was because
she was good at understanding body language. Too bad that knowledge did nothing to help her
figure out Korra’s true thoughts.

They left the room after a few minutes of Korra sifting through her collection, and Asami led her to
the last door at the end of the hall.

“And this is my room,” she said, opening the door and switching on the lights.

It was a pretty decent size. The freshly polished floors gleamed underneath the chandelier hanging
from the ceiling in the middle of the room. On the right side was her king-sized bed that sat on top
of a circular rug. Across from that were two doors that, when open, led to the bathroom that
connected to her walk-in closet. It was the second-best thing in the whole apartment, the first being
her own personal balcony just outside of her room.
Asami walked farther into the room and turned to Korra.

“I know. It’s pretty plain compared to everything else I showed you, right?” she said once she caught the look of indifference on Korra’s face.

“Well that and…” she paused, and two lines forming a ‘V’ appeared on her forehead as she thought about how to say what she wanted to.

“Hm?” Asami encouraged her to continue.

“You must not sleep here very often.”

Her eyebrows rose in surprise. “What gave you that impression?”

Korra shrugged. “The bed hardly looks slept in, and I don’t think there’s anything in here that really represents you as a person. So it’s either that, or you just really lost your skills in terms of interior design, and I don’t believe the latter is the case.”

Asami’s lips parted. She didn’t think that Korra would be so… attentive, or even notice the lack of effort she put into decorating the room. But when she thought about it, it made sense. The last time Korra stepped foot into her room was when she was living at the old estate. Now that room was brimming with tons personality as any teenagers would.

“I’m always traveling or at my office,” she explained. “I planned on decorating it, but it just kept slipping down the list of priorities and then it fell off completely.”

Makes sense,” Korra said, playing with the sleeve of her jacket.

“ Aren’t you hot in that?” she asked.

“I’m okay.”

“Because if you’re worried that I’ll comment on your injuries…”

“I’m fine, Asami,” Korra insisted, but didn’t sound angry.

She closed her mouth. Her eyes assessed the bruise on Korra’s cheek, as well as her busted lip, and then she remembered something.

“Hold on a sec.”

She turned away and went over to her bathroom, opening the doors, switching on the light and walking in. She headed to the medicine cabinet and opened it.

“What are you doing?” she heard Korra’s voice from behind her. Without even turning around, Asami knew that she was looking around from outside the doors, too hesitant to fully step into the bathroom.

She didn’t respond though because she was too busy rummaging through the cabinet. She knew there was a cream or some kind of ointment in there…

“Aha!” she exclaimed when she found what she was looking for. She closed the cabinet and turned to Korra finally.

“Here,” she handed over the tube.
Korra looked down at it. “What is it?”

“Just some ointment. If you use it regularly for the next three days, those bruises should heal a lot faster.”

“You really don’t have to do this.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “It’s only medicine, Korra. I’m not giving you my kidney or anything.”

Korra glared but took the tube anyway.

“…Thanks,” she heard her mumble.

“No problem,” Asami said rather smugly. “Now hurry and put some on before your lip gets all scaly and gross.”

She walked passed, and her arm brushed against Korra’s covered one as she did.

After going back into the bedroom, she noticed that it was really stuffy in there. She went over to the AC monitor and turned it on. It sucked that it automatically turned off when she left the room after thirty minutes, but if it saved energy she couldn’t complain.

Looking over, she saw that Korra was fully in the bathroom now, applying the ointment to her lip and cheek.

Asami had to keep herself from smirking. If she were keeping tally, it would be three to zero in terms of whose stubbornness outweighed the others.

When Korra was done, she turned off the light in the bathroom and walked out, stuffing the tube of ointment in her jacket.

“So I’m guessing the tour is over?” she asked.

“Afraid so. I’d show you my office space next door but that would probably bore you to death.”

“Most likely.” Korra nodded.

“So how did you like it?”

“It was fine, I guess.”

Asami lifted her eyebrow in curiosity. “Were you expecting something more?” she asked.

“I didn’t have any real expectations, aside from you still living at that old castle of yours.”

Asami rolled her eyes at the exaggeration. “That place never really suited me to begin with,” she said, unable to hide the slight bitterness in her tone.

Korra looked back at her. “You used to love it there.”

“Yeah, well not anymore.”

“So then can you honestly say that you feel more at home here than you did there?”

“That’s a heavy-handed question for someone who doesn’t make an effort in getting involved with other people’s personal lives, don’t you think?”
Her tone was snappish and dismissive, and she noticed how Korra’s brows raised in surprise at her abrupt change in mood. It was only when she felt how tense she actually was that she released a sigh and looked down.

“Sorr—” she began to apologize but stopped herself, remembering how Korra, for some reason, didn’t want her to apologize.

“You just,” she started again, but trailed off when she couldn’t find the words.

“Hit a nerve?” Korra offered.

Asami nodded slowly, crossing an arm over her body to hold onto her other elbow. “Yeah, I guess.”

The truth was that Asami hated discussing the matter of her moving out. It hadn’t even entirely been her choice considering the bankruptcy. Yes, she did want to get away from the reminder of her father’s sins, but that didn’t mean she was ready to let go so fast. That house was where she grew up. It was where all of her memories were. It was also the place she associated her mom with the most, so of course it tore her up inside to give it up without a fight.

“So even you have things you don’t want to talk about then,” Korra assessed, but spoke in a softer tone.

Asami didn’t respond and ran her fingers through her hair. It now felt like the roles were reversed. This only gave Korra more fuel to blow her off and say that she was being a hypocrite. And just when things were finally starting to look up between them…

But surprisingly, that never came.

“Come on. I’ll fix you another drink.”

Without looking back, Korra walked out of the room, leaving Asami there in shock.

The tables just kept on turning when it came to Korra, didn’t they? Just when Asami thought she understood her ways, she went on and did something else that made things even more complex. Was she just feeling sorry for saying something that clearly upset her? Or was it something else? If it was the former, then she’d rather die than see another person take pity on her. She had just about enough of that over the years.

Eventually, she followed after Korra and found her in the kitchen. She took a seat at one of the stools around the island and watched her.

Korra’s face was concentrated as she sliced an orange. Her steady hands used the knife with such ease and gentleness that it would have been hard to tell that just the other night she was using her fists in brutal combat. How could only one woman have so many different layers to her?

“You’re an anomaly, aren’t you?” she whispered.

Korra was pouring the vodka into the glass at the time and looked up. “Huh?”

Asami shook her head. “Nothing.”

There was a knock on the door just then.

“That’s probably the food,” Asami said, spinning around on her stool and getting up to walk over to
the door. When she opened it, one of the people who worked down in the lobby stood there with a bag in his hands.

“Here you go, Miss Sato. The receipt’s in there.”

“Thank you, Darius,” she said, taking the food gratefully. Whenever she actually was home and didn’t feel like cooking, she ordered food by card. The delivery person on the phone had to leave it at the desk and then someone (usually Darius) would take it up to her. It felt like it was too much at first, but Darius reassured her that it was a part of the policy. That didn’t stop her from giving him a tip, though.

He took the money with a chuckle and shake of his head. “Have a good night. And make sure you keep your windows locked. We’re supposed to get a nasty storm soon.”

Her eyes widened. “Seriously?”

“Yeah, I know. It’s gonna suck to drive home in this.”

“Well… be safe,” she told him.

He tipped his head to her. “Always am. Have a good night.”

Asami shut the door and walked into the kitchen and placed the bag on the island absentmindedly. Korra finished making the drink and slid it over to her before meeting her eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh.” Asami didn’t realize the face she was making “I guess we’re supposed to be getting a storm tonight.”

Korra looked over to the window and Asami followed her gaze. The sky was becoming darker as more clouds were rolling in.

“I thought so,” Korra said.

“Ah, that’s right… I forgot you had that sixth sense of knowing when it’s going to rain. If your whole boxing career doesn’t work out, you should consider becoming a meteorologist.”

Korra’s face scrunched up. “How boring did that sound coming out of your mouth?”

Asami pretended to think about it for a moment. “Hm. Pretty boring.”

“Exactly.” Korra pulled out the two boxes from the bag and took a second to figure out which one was hers before handing over Asami’s.

Together they sat at the island with their food and freshly made drinks, then they started digging in. Asami didn’t know how much she’d been starving until she took the first bite of her noodles and practically moaned out loud.

They didn’t talk as they ate, but she was fine with that, because she did feel a slight bit of a buzz coming on, much to her annoyance. She could only imagine the smirk on Korra’s face to know that she’d been right about her still being a lightweight. She’d definitely take her time finishing that last drink and then stick to water for the rest of the night.

They continued to eat, but then Korra put down her chopsticks for a moment to unzip her jacket and slowly shrug out of it. Asami lazily looked up as she did this and almost choked.
“Wow! I didn’t even notice those last night.”

Korra looked up at her after she hung the jacket up on the back of the chair. Her eyes looked more vibrant in the loose, blue shirt she was wearing.

What Asami was referring to were the tattoos on Korra’s right arm.

The only one she recognized was the one she got when they were still in high school. It was partially hidden by her sleeve on her upper shoulder—a small tribal image of the sun. The other two were lower down on the forearm. One of them was an armband with different, intricate patterns going around it, while underneath that was an image of the woods, with a wolf in the middle of them howling up at the full moon.

“How long have you had them?” she couldn’t help but ask.

Korra looked down at them as well.

“About three years.”

“The person who did them is really talented,” she complimented.

“Yeah. She owns a parlor. I got them for dirt cheap, though.”

At that, Asami frowned. “I think someone like that probably deserves a lot more.”

“She didn’t seem to mind,” Korra said, a smile playing on her lips. There was a clear, hidden meaning behind it.

“…Okay,” Asami said. A part of her wanted to know what that meant, but there was a nagging feeling at the back of her head that told her it was probably better if she didn’t.

“Do you have any?” Korra asked.

“Nah…” she shook her head. “I’ve always chickened out.”

“What would you get?”

“My mother’s name.”

Korra nodded. “That would be nice.”

“Yeah, maybe…”

Korra continued to eat, but Asami looked off toward the window again. Thoughts of her mother usually came and went in passing, but this time they lingered a little longer.

“Your food’s going to get cold.”

Asami looked over at Korra, then down at her own food. She picked up her chopsticks and started eating again, although taking slower bites this time, not having that much of an appetite anymore.

Another ten minutes passed by before they both announced themselves full. They cleaned off the island together and Asami put her leftovers in the fridge while Korra tied hers in the bag. Afterward, they stood in the kitchen facing each other; Asami leaning back against the countertop and Korra with her arms folded.
“Thanks for dinner,” Korra told her.

“Thanks for making the drinks,” Asami replied back.

The awkward silence returned after being gone for a while and Asami cursed it. She hated that it was always going to be there between them until they actually talked about things.

“I should probably get going before it starts to storm,” Korra announced.

As if on cue, they both looked over at the window when a flash of lightning appeared in the sky, followed by the sound of thunder.

“Too late,” Asami said. It wasn’t raining just yet, but there was no doubt that it would come pouring down any minute. “Ugh, my bike is going to get soaked!” she whined and walked over to the window. Her heart silently cried for her uncovered bike left at the park. She just finished doing repairs on it, too.

“I guess that’s my fault.”

She turned back around and looked at Korra. “No, it isn’t. I was the stupid one and didn’t check the weather report. Besides, I could have easily just walked there.”

Korra came over to the window and stared outside. Just then a few droplets of rain began to fall from the sky, lightly hitting the window.

“Well this is just perfect,” Korra grumbled sarcastically and pulled out her phone from her jeans. “It’s going to take an hour to get home now.”

When Asami saw her open an app to a cab service, an idea came to mind.

“You could… stay here for the night.”

Korra laughed, but when she finally looked at Asami and saw the expression on her face, the humor in her eyes faded.

“You’re not being serious, are you?”

“The couch in the living room pulls out into a bed, so you could sleep there. I wouldn’t feel right letting you go home when I know it’s about to storm.”

“You don’t need to worry about me,” Korra said plainly.

She shrugged. “It was only a suggestion.”

Korra looked down at her phone and started tapping at things again. “I appreciate the concern, but it’s fine.”

Asami sighed. “Are you really still that uncomfortable being in the same room as me?” she asked.

“That’s not it,” Korra said, then she corrected herself. “Well, that’s mostly not it.”

“Then what is it exactly?”

This time Korra was the one to sigh and she looked up from her phone again. “Asami…” she started, but her mouth didn’t form any other words. Asami was still feeling put off by Korra’s rejection that she didn’t even want to wait for the explanation.
“Haven’t I already proven that it’s possible for us to have a normal conversation?”

“Yeah, and it only took a little bit of alcohol to get us there,” Korra pointed out, albeit sarcastically.

“My point still stands. We should be able to move past this whole awkward phase and act like grown adults and talk about things.”

“We’ve spent all of three hours together. Do you really think that’s enough to change my mind so easily?”

“Then what will?”

“Nothing!”

And just like that, the tension was back again, and even more intense this time.

“You’re being unreasonable,” Asami said.

“I don’t see it that way.”

“Yeah, and that’s the problem. You can’t see any other way but your own.”

“Oh, that’s rich. So we’re just going to forget that you’ve been ignoring my feelings about this whole thing and that I haven’t had a say in anything?”

“You did have a say!” Asami argued. “You didn’t have to come with me last night and you didn’t have to meet with me today, and you certainly didn’t have to accept my offer to come here. But you did! So don’t put this all on me. That’s not fair.”

Korra grew quiet, and just then the sound of the rain hitting the window became heavier.

“Why are you doing this?” she finally asked, quietly this time. “Why do you even care about this anymore?”

Asami looked at her in disbelief.

“Why do I care? How can you ask me that? You just left! You didn’t answer my calls, you changed your phone number, and I never saw you again. Do you even know how that made me feel? I’ll give you a hint: not good! So tell me, how could someone who was supposed to be my best friend do something like that to me? What happened that made you hate me so much?”

“I never hated you!” Korra exclaimed, seemingly outraged at the assumption.

“Then what is it? Just tell me,” she pleaded in a raspy tone.

Korra’s eyes searched hers for a moment, with her lips pulled together in a tight, straight line, and then she finally turned away.

“It’s complicated.”

“Then un-complicate it, Korra,” she said, voice firm and full of resentment. She was tired of holding back her feelings and trying to be the reasonable one. Were they not just as valid? And how Korra couldn’t see that this was affecting her in such a way made her want to unleash everything even more.

“…I can’t,” Korra whispered, so low that Asami almost missed it.
That was the second time she said it today, but this time it sounded of regret. It wasn’t enough, though. It would never be enough.

“Why not?” she asked. Korra didn’t respond, choosing to keep her back turned. A pool of dread and desperation formed in the pit of her stomach. “Please, Korra,” she tried again, and this time there was a slight tremble in her voice that she couldn’t cover up even if she tried. But when all she got was more silence and Korra’s stiffened back, she let the anger subside, then it was replaced with a never-ending trend of disappointment, and finally defeat.

In a last-ditch effort, she reached forward to touch Korra’s shoulder, but then closed her hand into a fist and let it drop to her side.

There was another clap of thunder, and the rain smacked against the windows like it would shatter the glass at any minute.

“The offer still stands,” she said after gathering herself for a moment. “You can sleep here for the night, and when you wake up in the morning you can go, and I’ll just leave you alone… for good this time.” When Korra still didn’t respond, she shook her head, completely at a loss, and stepped away from her. “Goodbye, Korra.”

She walked away at first after that, but when she got to the stairs, she ran up them. She didn’t want to see the moment Korra put on her jacket and walked out the door, making things even more permanent. When she got to her bedroom, she slammed the door shut and then practically threw herself on top of the bed. Her face was buried in the pillows and she had to stuff in the loud scream she wanted to let out.

In the end, all of her efforts were put to waste. Everything she did to get to this point had all been for nothing. She wished she never walked into that bar and heard those drunken bastards utter Korra’s name; she wished she never went searching for her; she wished she never sought out Varrick’s help, but most all, she wished she didn’t care.

The pain she felt was identical to when Korra left the first time, but not worse. Definitely not worse. Because this time she knew what she was getting herself into. She knew, and yet she still let herself dare to hope for something.

It was her fault and hers alone. Korra made it abundantly clear how she felt, but she chose to ignore it. She realized now that it was denial that kept egging her on. She only wanted to believe that Korra felt the same as her.

And now, there she was, on the bed with tears burning in her eyes, and feeling more stupid than ever. She angrily wiped at them, not caring if she was smearing her makeup all over the place. It was dark in her room, and the sound of the rain hitting the window made perfect background noise for the sound of her sobbing. She didn’t understand anything. She didn’t understand her. Why couldn’t she? There was a time where she comfortably felt like she knew Korra like the back of her hand. Could six years of being apart really change a person so much that they turned into a complete stranger?

The answer was yes, of course. It was naïve to believe that people didn’t change over time, and she would have been a fool to think otherwise. But even so… Even if Korra changed this much, she wouldn’t have cared. Just as long as she got to know who this Korra was, it would have been okay.

But now she would never get the chance to.

After not really knowing what she wanted to happen between them, she realized exactly what she
wanted all along in this confrontation, and that realization happened only after she couldn’t have it anymore. She squeezed her eyes shut as more tears fell and she cried even harder.

*Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.*

All of it was stupid: her tears, her feelings, *everything*. She shouldn’t have cared this much, and it was impossible to tell which part was worse: that chapter of her life remaining unfinished, or never knowing how Korra felt.

After tonight it would be pointless to ever think about again.

She ended up falling asleep and woke with messy, tangled hair and the desperate need to pee. On her nightstand, the alarm read that it was five in the morning—her normal wake up time. It was dark in her room and outside, though she could still hear the soft pitter-patter of the rain. It hadn’t stopped all night.

Slowly, she sat up and rubbed at her face. She felt uncomfortable in the jeans she accidentally slept in and kicked them off before getting out of bed and heading to the bathroom.

After relieving herself and washing her hands, she looked up in the mirror and, for the first time, saw how much of a mess she looked. There was makeup running down her face and her eyes were red and puffy. She stared at herself, feeling disoriented and like she wasn’t even in her own body. When her senses came back to her, she turned on the water faucet and splashed cold water in her face. It wasn’t her typical morning routine, but it would do for now.

She left her room, deciding to go put a pot of coffee on. It would rid her of the small headache and all-around grossness she was feeling, then hopefully get her gears going. Today was going to be just like any other day, she decided. There would be no reminiscing over her failure or feeling sorry for herself over what happened. She would take by example and leave everything in the past, where it probably should have stayed, and move on like it never happened.

She walked downstairs and, unsurprisingly, saw that Korra was gone. She ignored the pang she felt in her chest and walked over to the kitchen, noticing that there was no trace of evidence about what happened last night at all. Even the glasses that were used had been cleaned and placed back into the respective cabinet. It was for the best, anyway. After all, it was a normal day. She would have her cup of coffee, then maybe go for a run, and then possibly head into the office to catch up on some work. Maybe she’d even read over that stupid contract she was being harassed about.

She turned on the coffee maker and filled the kettle with water. While that was on, she decided to get the creamer out of the fridge. She was still half asleep, so she was doing things mechanically. After closing the fridge, she turned and set the creamer on top of the island.

It took her a minute to realize that something wasn’t right.

She blinked several times and turned back to the fridge….

And immediately froze.

On the door, stuck under a metallic magnet where she normally put her reminders, was a torn piece of paper that hadn’t been there before. When her brain was finally able to function, she slowly walked up to the fridge and gently slid the paper out of the magnet, her hands shaking. On the piece of paper were six simple words:

*I just need some time.*
--Korra

Her eyes went over the note about ten times. It didn’t fully sink in for her until she saw the phone number also written at the bottom of the note. Her lip trembled and she clutched onto the paper like a lifeline, feeling like she was still in bed dreaming and that it would disappear from her hands at any second.

With this it confirmed two things for her: One, that there was a part of Korra that actually wanted to explain herself, and two… that last night hadn’t been their final goodbye.

This wasn’t over. In fact, it was far from over.

Her heart was so heavy that she thought it would fall out of her chest. She felt the wetness in her eyes forming and tried to blink them away, but to no avail a few tears managed to shed. A noise escaped from her throat, and it was a cross between a cry and a pathetic attempt at laughter.

It was stupid of her (God she knew it was stupid), but she allowed that small flicker of hope to come alive once again for something that was so desperately out of reach.

She didn’t know how much more she could take with this rollercoaster of emotions that kept on happening with Korra, but for now she would endure it because of her borderline desperate search for the truth.

All Korra needed was time, and Asami would give that to her for as long as she could.

PART 1 (END)
Interlude I: Two Worlds Collide

Korra sighed for what felt like the billionth time as she watched her uncle mingle with three other men in flashy suits and wine glasses in their hands. They were in a hotel ballroom area at some business banquet dinner that her uncle was invited to by a co-worker. All around her were people dressed in sophisticated outfits, trying their best to give off the impression that they were important.

She had no business being there.

It was boring, and there was not a single person there who was her age that she could at least share casual looks of being miserable with. All she got was odd looks and side-eyes, which was quickly becoming her new normal. But still, her uncle seemed to love torturing her for his own amusement. She sent him an evil glare from behind.

He saw right through her plans of going out to a ‘study group’ meeting tonight while he was away, and then he promptly told her to march upstairs and come back down in something ‘more presentable’ before forcing her to come with him.

He was good. Way too good. And it slightly irked her that after a month of living with him and doing everything that was expected of her, he was still watching her like a hawk and making good on his promise to her father. She couldn’t feel all that insulted though since she really didn’t come up with that good of a lie in the first place. Now she was stuck at this lame social event, in a dress that was tight around the arms and waist (she had to borrow it from her cousin’s closet), and feeling like the outcast she already was.

But Unalaq already made it clear in the taxi ride over that any groaning, complaining, whining, or muttered insults under her breath would earn her a plane ride back to Quebec and her angrily awaiting parents. Although, at this point, being sent off to boot camp sounded like a spa retreat right about now.

Her eyes rolled when the group shifted to make room for another person coming over to join them.

“If it isn’t the host himself,” she heard one of them say.

Korra paid enough attention to notice how everyone’s backs straightened and even became stiff as this person came up to them, including her uncle. If she cared enough to look over her uncle’s shoulder and see what had these guys so nervous, she would have, but instead she kept herself in place and continued to look off in boredom.

“I’m glad you all could make it tonight,” she heard a man say. His voice was low and modulated, but it also sounded as honeyed as everyone else’s in the room—possibly even worse.

Everyone made their introductions, but this time talking themselves up even more (if that were even possible). She tried to tune them all out and keep herself from muttering something sarcastic out loud.

This was the worst.

“It’s nice to meet you all. And I’d like to introduce you to my daughter… If she ever gets out of the conversation she’s currently in.”

All of the men laughed.
This was the absolute fucking worst…

“Asami, can you come over here, please?”

Korra’s eyes widened and she immediately shrunk behind her uncle. She heard footsteps walking up to them.

“Hello,” a polite sounding voice said. Just the sound of it made Korra want to fall into the nearest ditch she could find.

She couldn’t believe this was happening. As if the embarrassment couldn’t get any worse, she had to suffer from seeing someone from her school here, and of course it had to be the girl she practically told to fuck off in their first and only conversation.

It didn’t take long for her to find out exactly who Asami Sato was. She had a very popular name in their school because her father owned one of the biggest multi-industry companies in the world. It should have been obvious whose party this was, and there were probably signs everywhere eluding to it, but Korra didn’t even bother to look around because she’d been busy glowering at her uncle’s back the whole time they’d been there. If she had known, though, she definitely would have put her foot down and told him she wasn’t going.

For weeks she’d been plagued with guilt from their first initial meeting. When she let her anger die down after their conversation, she realized that she may have jumped to conclusions too fast, and that she might have owed Asami an apology. It was her own stubborn pride that kept her from doing that, as well as her lingering skepticism after finding out Asami’s status. There were one or two times where she would glance Korra's way in class, but Korra would just look in the opposite direction. They moved on to ignoring each other following that.

Now, after a whole month went by, Korra successfully managed to place it all in the back of her head.

Until now.

She watched Unalaq's back rise up and down from laughing at something that was said. Absently she thought that he would’ve made an excellent politician, putting up such a façade in front of all these people.

“Unalaq, are you having someone shadow you today?” Asami’s father said.

Oh no, she thought.

“Huh?” Unalaq looked back at her, suddenly remembering she existed. “Oh.”

Please no. No, no, no. She begged him with her eyes and with the slight shake of her head.

He completely missed the signal and ended up wrapping an arm around her shoulder, bringing her forward and into the small group.

“This is my niece Korra.”

Forget this being the absolute worst. It was absolute hell.

She was able to get a full look at Asami’s father now. His broad shoulders and overall physique showed in the suit he wore that looked more expensive than anything anyone else was wearing in the room. But it was his overall presence that made Korra see exactly why everyone had been
straightening up earlier. He looked like the kind of guy you wouldn’t want to be on opposite sides with.

A tight smile tugged on his thin lips. “Korra. What a lovely name.” He stuck out his hand. “My name is Hiroshi Sato.”

“Uh, thanks. Nice to meet you.” She awkwardly shook hands with him and looked anywhere else except for the girl beside him whose eyes she could feel on her.

“You guys must have very strong genes in the family,” he said to Unalaq. “I would have thought you were her father if you hadn’t said anything.”

“I have two kids, but they’re both studying at a boarding school in London right now,” Unalaq explained. "Korra’s staying with me right now. She’s attending the private school up here.”

“Well then you two must’ve seen each other around then, right Asami?” Hiroshi looked over at his daughter questioningly.

“We actually have a class together,” Korra heard Asami say. After finally working up the courage, she looked at her.

She was wearing a sleeveless, red dress that went just below her knees, and her hair was in a half-up, half-down style with a couple of pieces pulled out to the front of her face. It didn’t come as a surprise that she looked even more like a model outside of school as she did in school. Meanwhile, Korra felt like her too-tight-dress was riding up.

“That’s very fortunate,” Hiroshi said. “Now you have a friend to hang out with. I guess you were freaking out about not having anyone to walk around with for nothing.”

“Dad!” Asami said, clearly embarrassed. Everyone else except Korra laughed.

“Why don’t you guys go talk to some more guests for a little while? Appetizers won’t be served for another thirty minutes.”

Korra started. “Oh, I don’t think that’s neces—"

“Korra would love to,” Unalaq intruded and gave Korra’s shoulder a tight squeeze, indicating that she really didn’t have a say in the matter. A minute later, she was walking away with Asami, hands clenching at the sides of her dress and trying to conceal the anger and betrayal she felt. Her uncle was worse than her father, and it just now dawned on her that it was the main reason she was sent to live with him in the first place.

They ended up being stopped numerous times by adults before they could even get a word out to each other. All of them wanted to talk to Asami, who was nothing but courteous and gracious in their presence. Korra managed to calm herself down a significant amount, but she still wasn’t up for chitchat, so she was glad everyone was ignoring her. But during all of those conversations, she did find out a lot more about Asami.

Like how she’d won the national science fair four times in a row when she was younger, and how she loved talking about cars or the latest technology being built. But the biggest thing Korra noticed was how her eyes shined the most when someone complimented her on her dress and she proudly proclaimed to designing it herself.

She wanted to tune her out, just like she’d been doing everybody else so far, but she couldn’t because she was so intrigued by Asami’s answers and how she handled herself so well in front of
“So have you decided on what schools you want to start looking at?” an older gentleman asked. He was the seventh person who stopped them, and currently the most talkative because they’d been standing there for ten long, agonizing minutes.

“My dad says I would do great at Cornell,” Asami said.

“Ah. That is an excellent choice. Didn’t he get his master’s and doctoral there?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well then I don’t see you having much of an issue. You are an extremely bright and well-mannered girl for your age. Just remember to make the most out of these next two years and be very active in whatever extracurricular activities you’re in. Schools definitely look at that.”

“I will. Thank you for the advice.”

“And what about you, young ma’am?” The guy finally turned to Korra.

“W-what?” she stammered. Clearly she was stunned that someone was actually giving her the time of day.

“Do you have any schools you’re looking at?” the man reiterated.

“Um.” Korra glanced at Asami, who was patiently waiting for her to answer as well. “Not really,” she said, looking back at him.

“Oh. I see,” the man said with a frown and then turned to Asami, smiling again. “I guess it’s harder for some than it is for others, right?”

“Oh, sure…” Asami replied, looking slightly uncomfortable now.

Korra felt a knot in her stomach as she watched the two of them fall into another conversation, ignoring her once more.

She learned to accept being the outsider in a place full of self-important people, but she never felt more isolated than she did at that very moment. It was like she was wasting other people’s oxygen by just being there.

She didn’t bother to excuse herself and just walked away. It was suddenly extremely hot in the room, and that only made her more flustered. She at first thought about just going back to her uncle and being in his “shadow” once again, but as she maneuvered her way through the groups of people talking, she decided to just leave the room altogether.

To her relief, it was a lot cooler and quieter out in the large hallway. She walked over to a bench near a wall and sat down, then brought her hands to her face and started rocking back and forth. She was frustrated, angry, and needed a major stress reliever at the moment.

It shouldn’t have bothered her so much what that old geezer said, but for some reason it did. She didn’t know if it was because he sounded so patronizing about the whole thing, or because he compared her to Asami Sato of all people. Either way, it didn’t sit well with her, and she couldn’t shake off the inferiority she felt.

All around her were people who thought of this event as a typical Saturday evening for them. They
sat around and talked about their achievements and future goals for themselves… and Korra just couldn’t relate.

She was only sixteen. How the hell was she supposed to have her life figured out already? She wasn’t even sure if she wanted to go to college, let alone where. It felt like everyone else around her had their shit together except for her. At least back home, while she and her parents had their arguments and disagreements, there was never any pressure on her to know exactly what she wanted to do with her life. And now it felt like she was being thrust into a new world where that was all you were supposed to know.

“Fuck this,” she murmured to herself. She didn’t want to be here anymore, and at this point she’d willingly take her uncle being pissed at her for ruining his evening over having to suffer in this place a minute longer.

She pulled her hands away from her face and was about to get up when the sound of heels clacking against the marble floor caught her attention. She looked over and saw Asami making her way toward her.

“I’m guessing you’re not enjoying yourself,” she said just upon reaching her.

Korra folded her arms and looked off to the side. “I wonder what gave you that idea.”

“Mind if I sit?”

“I can’t see why I would.”

“Well, I just wanted to make sure. I didn’t want you snapping at me and walking away again.”

Korra grimaced and looked at Asami just as she sat down. “So you remember that…”

“It’s kind of a hard thing to forget,” Asami said.

Korra tried to keep the blush from starting up her cheeks. “I was just having a bad day.”

Asami chuckled softly. “If that was your attempt at an apology, it kind of sucked.”

There was humor in her eyes, and she didn’t look offended, but for all Korra knew, it could have just been a ruse.

She looked away again. “Why’d you come out here?”

From the corner of her eye, she saw Asami shrug. “I guess I just wanted to check and see if you were okay. From a first-hand experience, I know that being around these kind of people can be really overwhelming.”

“Try annoying,” Korra corrected her. “And you seemed to be doing a pretty good job at it from where I was standing.”

“Yeah. And it took me about ten years to finally be comfortable with it. I guess the trick is to let them do all of the talking and respond with as little words as possible.”

“I don’t need any tips,” Korra told her. “The only reason I’m here right now is because I was forced to come.”

“Ah. I guess that makes sense,” Asami nodded. “I’d give anything for my father not to drag me out to these things.”
“I find that hard to believe.”

“Why’s that?”

Korra lifted a shoulder. “I guess you just seem like the kind of person who doesn’t mind all of the attention.”

Asami’s eyes narrowed. “Do you make a habit out of judging people you don’t know, or is it just with me?” she asked in an offended tone.

“My bad. I thought that was just the normal thing around here,” Korra said.

“Yeah, well I’m not that kind of person, but thanks for letting me know that’s who you are.”

She watched Asami get up angrily and start to leave. And just like after their first meeting, Korra felt the guilt creep up on her, only this time it was instant.

“Wait,” she called out to her.

Asami stopped. “What?” she said coldly. It oddly sent chills down Korra’s spine to hear her speak in that tone.

She unfolded her arms. “I’m sorry, okay? I shouldn’t have said that. I just get like this when I feel...,” she paused. “Being here is just...” she tried again, but none of the words she wanted to say came out right.

Asami turned around and addressed her for a long minute. Korra was reluctant to meet her gaze but still did anyway. She at least wanted Asami to see that she was being sincere in her apology, no matter how shitty it sounded.

“You’re not used to this type of environment and feel like you don’t belong here,” Asami assessed a minute later.

“Yeah. I guess you could say that’s part of it,” Korra said and leaned back, then she let out a bitter laugh. “You know, I’ve done just fine ignoring all of the comments people make about me, but at least I never had to deal with it outside of school. Until now...”

The anger she saw in those bright, green eyes lessened, and slowly Asami became more understanding. She came over and sat down beside her again.

“I don’t think he was trying to be malicious with what he said.”

Korra shook her head and ended up waving the whole thing off. “It doesn’t matter. I’m used to it.”

“Clearly not if it's made you this upset,” Asami said, this time sounding concerned.

Korra didn’t have a proper response to that, so she shrugged again.

“Anyway, you don’t have to sit here and listen to me. I’m sure you have better things to do. But... I really am sorry about before... and for that one time.”

It felt good to finally apologize for their first encounter at least. Her conscious was finally cleared and she wouldn’t have to feel that embarrassment whenever she saw Asami walk into the classroom. As for why she chose to let out a lot of her frustrations to someone she only had two whole interactions with... she had no clue. Maybe she was finally reaching her breaking point? It was anyone’s guess.
“I want to apologize, too,” Asami said.

Korra looked over at her in surprise. “For what?”

She watched as Asami sighed and placed her hand at the side of her neck. “After you blew me off that day, I kind of just wrote you off as a girl with a major attitude problem,” she confessed. “I didn’t even think to take into consideration how you might have been feeling at the time. And how could I? I’ve lived in the same place my whole life, so I don’t know what it’s like to have to just pick up and move to a new place all by myself. That’s really brave.”

Korra blinked at her confession. It fell so easily from her lips, and the way she spoke so carefully, yet candidly at the same time, left no room for doubt in her words.

“It’s fine,” she ended up saying, and then she shook her head at how little those words conveyed how she felt. “No, it’s more than fine. I was the rude one. You didn’t have to say all of that.”

Asami gave a simple shrug and offered her a wholehearted smile. “It doesn’t matter. I wanted to.”

Korra was officially out of words to give. All she could do was stare at the girl next to her in awe.

How could someone who should have been one of the worst people here be so… understanding? So nice? It made no sense to her because of how much she’d seen from everyone else. It could be that she was getting way ahead of herself, but with all that was just said between them, she had a hard time believing Asami was deceiving her. Asami seemed like the most honest person in the room, and Korra found herself hoping that she wasn’t wrong about that.

For the minute she spent thinking, they didn’t speak, or even look at each other. It was a comfortable silence, and Korra had a feeling Asami didn’t mind it so much either.

That was broken when they both heard Asami’s name being called. It was another old man who was slowly walking by them, toward the ballroom.

“Oh, hi, Mr. Jameson.” Asami offered him a small wave.

“Will you be coming back in any time soon?” he asked.

“Yes. Very shortly.”

“Oh good. I hope you’ll save me a dance later.”

Asami laughed in good nature. “Of course, of course! I’ll see you in there.”

He winked at her and walked into the ballroom. The door audibly shut behind him.

Korra looked over at Asami finally with a bemused look.

“Are you really going to dance with that old pervert?”

Asami’s face turned utterly serious the minute she looked at her.

“Hell no.”

It was silent for a whole second, and then they both burst into fits of laughter. The few people who were around looked at them, but Korra didn’t care and apparently neither did Asami. It died down after a while, with a few giggles in between. Korra finally caught her breath.
“Wow,” she said, smiling all the while.

“That’s probably the hardest I’ve laughed all night.” Asami wiped at one of her eyes and then checked to make sure she didn’t accidentally smear her makeup.

Korra leaned back against the bench once more and looked at her. “Same. I’m assuming you get asked by old guys to dance all the time?”

“Yes,” Asami said with an exaggerated roll of her eyes. “I manage to get out of it most of the times, but the few times I can’t I usually get through half of the dance before excusing myself to go to the restroom.”

Korra made a disgruntled noise. “What a bunch of creeps.”

“Eh. They’re not so bad. Besides, if they ever did do anything I’d kick their butts.”

Korra looked at her in amusement. “I’d love to see that.”

Asami mimicked her expression. “Me being groped by old men?”

“Of course not,” Korra said with the roll of her eyes. “The other part.”

Asami pulled the loose part of her hair over to one side of her shoulder. “What? You don’t think I’m capable of kicking someone’s butt?”

“You probably are… but that would be your very last resort since you strike me as the kind of person who would rather talk it out first.”

Asami contemplated that answer for a second. “That’s true. You already know me so well,” she joked.

“You’ve actually surprised me quite a lot tonight.”

“Have I?”

“Yes.” Korra nodded.

“In a bad way or a good way?”

“…Good.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” Asami smiled at her fully, and Korra noticed how white her teeth were. She felt embarrassed by the way she was looking at her but managed to keep the eye contact.

“Can’t judge a book by its cover, right?” she ended up saying.

“Right,” Asami said. She stared for another second and then looked down at her watch. “Ah. I can’t believe it’s been fifteen minutes.”

“Has it?” Korra asked, although she didn’t really care. The longer she stayed out there, the better.

“Mhm. Although, I kind of don’t want to go back in there now.”

“So don’t.”

Asami looked up from her watch and gave her a confused look.
“What do you mean? I don’t have a choice. My dad would kill me.”

“Sure you have a choice. Besides, he’s probably wrapped up talking about some new car he’s building. He won’t even notice you’re gone.”

She meant nothing by it, but she noticed the way Asami’s eyes went downcast and how a small frown appeared on her face. It lasted for a second before she tried to play it off with a smile.

“Yeah, maybe, but…” she trailed off.

Korra watched her, trying to gauge what that look was about, but figuring it was none of her business anyway, she simply shrugged.

“Well, whatever. I know I’m not going back in there.”

“You aren’t?” Asami asked, sounding disappointed.

“At least not right now. I’ll come back when dinner is served, but I’ve kind of reached my limit of hearing a bunch of pretentious assholes talk just to hear themselves.”

“Right…” Asami stood up. “Well, I guess I’ll head back in then.”

“Okay.”

There was a long pause, but Asami didn’t move from her spot. Instead, she looked at the door to the ballroom, and then to Korra again. After a moment of indecision, she sat back down and folded her hands over her lap.

“Maybe I’ll stay out here, too,” she said. “Just for a little while longer.”

Korra smirked. “You sure? I bet the old man is waiting for his dance with the princess.”

“Hey now…” Asami warned, but the tone in her voice didn’t match the humor in her face.

“I’m only kidding,” Korra laughed. Asami stared at her, seemingly perplexed with something, but she didn’t speak. Korra stopped laughing and then nervously tucked a piece of hair behind her ear, wondering if there was something on her face. “What?” she asked.

“I don’t know.” Asami tilted her head. “It’s just… You have a nice laugh.”

“Um, thanks?”

Asami shook her head and looked down in embarrassment. “I guess that probably sounded weird.”

Korra nodded in good humor. “It did come out of the left field.”

“Maybe it’s because I’m not used to seeing this side of you. You’re so quiet and disengaged in class, but I guess that’s for a reason.”

“Oh… yeah.” She rubbed the back of her neck.

“We only have one class together, though,” Asami said quickly after. “It’s impossible to grasp a person’s personality when you’ve never really talked to them before. I’m sure your friends know you a lot better than I do.”

“Friends?” Korra questioned.
“Yeah. Haven’t you been hanging out with Tahno and those other seniors?”

At that, she laughed. “They hardly know me. And I wouldn’t exactly call them my friends.”

“Really? I was just under that impression since you’re always with them.”

“Or is that what you’ve heard?” she asked knowingly. Asami went quiet and didn’t answer the question, which was all Korra needed as an answer. She played with one of the sleeves on her dress and sighed. “I occasionally sit with them at lunch and I’ve hung out with them once outside of school. Being a part of cliques and social groups isn’t exactly my thing if you couldn’t tell already.”

Asami nodded. “I have.”

Korra folded her arms. “Besides, I can’t really make friends when my uncle barely lets me leave the house.”

“Oh yeah. What’s the story with that anyway?”

“With what?” she asked, though she already knew where Asami was getting at.

“You know. Moving here and living with your uncle.”

“I’m sure you’ve already heard things.”

“Yeah, but I’m quickly learning that it doesn’t matter what I’ve heard. Only the truth.”

Korra chewed the inside of her lip. The rumors she heard about herself were far off from who she was, and for the most part she didn’t care what was said, but every once in a while, there would be the occasional one that stirred her up inside. Sure, there were a couple of things she would admit to if she was blatantly asked, but she definitely wasn’t some juvenile delinquent like people were making her out to be.

She raised her eyes and met Asami’s patient ones.

But maybe… just this once she could finally open up and clear the air on a few things. If her mind would let her, that is…

“If I tell you, this stays between us.”

Asami turned to her and gave her an encouraging look. “You can trust me. I won’t tell a soul.”

Korra felt like both sides of her brain were yelling at her. One side was saying ‘shut up, shut up, shut up!!!!’ while the other side urged her to continue on.

“It’s really not that big of a deal. I got into some trouble back home and my parents sent me to live here.”

That was an answer that seemed to satisfy both sides.

Asami let out a deep breath. “Well that’s a relief. I thought you were going to say they died or something.”


Asami looked around after her outburst, checking to see if anyone was looking at them now, then
she faced Korra again. “That’s what I thought when I heard you were living with your uncle,” she said in a low whisper.

“No.” Korra shook her head. “It’s nothing like that.”

“Good.”

They were quiet for a moment before Asami spoke again.

“So they sent you away? Just like that?”

“Yup. Just like that.”

“What did you do that was so bad to make them think sending you away was a good idea?” When Asami saw her squirm, she quickly added, “if you don’t mind me asking.”

Korra blew out a puff of air. “It’s got nothing to do with what I did, but more with the fact that they don’t understand me. It was like they couldn’t imagine that I wanted to do things on my own or just be on my own. For most of my life they’ve treated me with kid gloves, and I was sick of it. My dad is the chief of police, so naturally he’s a very strict kind of guy. But it also means that he’s always thought my mistakes were a reflection on himself.”

“You think your parents were embarrassed of you?” Asami asked in disbelief.

Korra shrugged. “Embarrassed… disappointed, or a combination of both.” Her eyes became unfocused as she thought about her parents and all of the times she brought them shame. “They thought I started all of those fights with the other kids, and that I ran away because I wanted their attention. But in reality, I was just tired of feeling like I had no place to breathe…” She stopped abruptly, realizing that she’d been musing and saying way too much with very little context. When she looked over at Asami, she saw that the other girl was watching her closely. “I guess I ended up saying more than I should have,” she said nervously and tucked a piece of hair behind her ear.

“No.” Asami shook her head. “I understand,” she said. Her voice was, again, full of sincerity and acknowledgement. But it didn’t sound like it was out of pity.

“You do?” Korra asked.

“I mean, I can’t say that I know the exact situation you’re going through, but I know a thing or two about having a parent not understand who you are.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah. My dad… isn’t the best listener,” Asami admitted. “I always try to tell him that I’m not entirely positive if I want to do all of this,” she stretched her hand out, as if she were showcasing the place. “Sometimes it feels like everything I want takes a backseat to what he wants. It’s like he doesn’t really see me.”

Korra flashed back to the look in Asami’s eyes when she made that comment a few minutes ago about her dad not noticing she would be gone. It made sense now, and she immediately felt bad for being so unintentionally insensitive.

“Don’t worry,” Asami told her once she saw the look of realization on Korra’s face. “There’s no way you could’ve known what I was feeling. Besides… You’re one of the only people I’ve ever told about this.”
“Really?”

Asami nodded and smiled. “It’s kind of hard to be out with your feelings when your dad’s a famous innovator.”

Korra took a brief pause. It wasn’t as much of a shock what Asami revealed, but something clicked inside her head in that moment. Asami was so different from her, and yet they shared the same inner conflict. Hers stemmed from not really knowing how or who to talk to about these kinds of things, and Asami’s was from feeling like she never could.

She laughed.

“What are you laughing at?” Asami asked, giving her an odd look.

“Ah, nothing. It’s just that… I never would have expected to let out all of my pent-up frustrations and anger to you of all people. Let alone feel understood.”

After hearing the explanation, Asami chuckled as well. “Likewise. I guess we share a lot more in common than we may think.”

“Hm. Maybe.”

“But just so you know, if you tell anyone about what I said, I may have to kill you.”

Korra laughed again. “Likewise.”

The sound of wheels rolling against the floor made them turn their heads. There were three servers pushing carts of food toward the ballroom, about to enter it.

“I guess that’s our cue to head back in and face the crowd, huh?” Asami stood up and smoothed the wrinkles out of her dress.

Korra made a face. “You can. I’m fine out here for another twenty minutes.”

Asami frowned. “But then I’ll have to talk to all of those people by myself.”

“It’s you who they wanna see,” Korra said, amused by Asami’s pouting. “Besides, I recall you doing all of the talking while I just stood behind you.”

“Yeah, but I kind of freak out still when I’m left alone by myself. And my dad’s probably busy trying to impress everyone that I’ll end up getting pulled into other conversations.”

“Oh. So you need a stand-in,” Korra figured.

“Well, yeah,” Asami admitted and lowered her eyes before meeting Korra’s again. “But also because when we were in there, I actually felt comfortable knowing you were beside me.”

Korra was genuinely stunned by that confession.

“Even after I was rude to you the first time we met?” she asked and looked at her skeptically.

Asami nodded.

“Why?”

The standing girl looked up in thought, and her dangling earrings shimmered under the lights from
above them. “Well, if I had to come up with an explanation for it, I guess it would be because you’re not someone who feeds into all of this crap,” she said. “For instance, how honest you were about not having any colleges you were looking at. You don’t put on a show for anyone and you stay true to yourself. That’s something that I’ve felt like I could never do because of who my dad is, but I guess seeing someone else who can do that for themselves is inspiring. And being around someone like that is really eye-opening.”

A weird flutter started in Korra’s stomach at those words. No one had ever said anything like that to her before. She was used to people calling her all sorts of names and ridiculing her off-putting behavior as a desperate cry for attention or help, but never before had she been praised for that behavior. It was strange to feel validated, and at the same time it was overwhelming.

Instead of voicing what she felt, she stood up, forcing Asami to step back.

“You really must be desperate to have me go back in there with you,” she said jokingly.

Asami did an exaggerated shrug and played along.

“What can I say? Adults scare the life out of me.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be beside you and protect you from groping, old men. You’re on your own once dinner is served, though.”

“Fair enough.”

They smiled at each other and slowly started to make their way back to the ballroom.

“So, what happens after this?” Asami asked.

“Well, I plan to go home, get out of this ridiculous dress, and go to sleep.”

“No,” Asami said with a soft laugh and roll of her eyes. “I mean with us. Are we going to talk in school? Or will we do that thing where we pretend we don’t know each other and none of this ever happened?”

“What happened?” Korra replied cheekily.

Asami gave her a playful glare. “You really don’t make things easy for a person, do you?”

“So I’ve been told… But in all honesty, who knows? You have your own group of friends, and I hang out with…”

“Your not friend-friends?”

“Exactly.”

Asami looked up in thought for a moment. “Well, I don’t see why we can’t give it a shot.”

“What? Being not friend-friends?”

“Yeah. Or maybe even just… friends?”

“Why?” Korra couldn’t help but ask as she looked at Asami in bewilderment.

“Why not? We’ve already told each other our deepest, darkest secrets,” Asami said, trying to sound overly dramatic. “I say we give it a shot.”
“I don’t think your actual friends will like it all too much.”

They reached the door and Asami stopped just as she placed her hand on the doorknob and looked at her.

“Like I care what they think about who I choose to be friends with. I’m my own person.”

“Those are some wise words.”

Asami smiled widely. “So does that mean you’ll think about it?”

Korra rolled her eyes but smiled, too, nonetheless. “Let’s just see if we can make it through the rest of the night without getting on each other’s nerves first.”

“Deal.”

Asami stuck out her hand and they shook on it.

After walking back into the ballroom, Korra felt a thousand times lighter, even a bit more relaxed. It was odd how one conversation could change her perspective on another person. She felt a new level of respect for Asami, and even if they didn’t talk again after this, she’d probably still feel that way.

She kept her promise and stayed with her until dinner was served, and then they met back up again, picking up the conversation where it left off. They talked whenever Asami wasn’t being chatted up by a bunch of random strangers. And every time they walked away from them, Asami would discreetly pull a face and intentionally make Korra burst into laughter.

Korra also did right by whisking Asami away whenever an older man asked to dance with her and Asami would give her an appreciative look. They made the most out of what would have been a boring night, and to Korra’s surprise, she wasn’t having the worst time ever.

And sometime during the night, when she was standing off to the side, watching Asami pretend to be engaged in a conversation and laugh at all the unfunny jokes that were told, she found herself thinking that a future with the two of them being friends didn’t sound so bad.

INTERLUDE I (END)
The punching bag swung violently as Korra threw a solid combo into it. Sweat rolled down her face as she circled the bag and continued her assault, hitting it harder and faster with each and every move. Her entire body was practically humming as she let out all of the excess energy she had; there was plenty, given the circumstances.

“This. Is. Bullshit,” she said in between punches.

Three weeks. It had been three painfully long weeks since she stepped foot inside the octagon for her last fight as an undercard. And right now, she was wishing she could go back to that, because at least then she’d still be getting to fight every other week. Now, all she got was radio silence from Varrick and his precious assistant Zhu Li.

Kuvira, who was standing off to the side silently watching, folded her arms and sighed.

“Why don’t we take a break?” she offered.

Korra reached out and caught the bag just as it was swinging toward her again. She encircled her arms around it, hugging it close to her body as she tried to catch her breath. A few pieces of hair that fell out of her messy bun stuck to her face from all of the sweat. She closed her eyes and tried to calm her heart rate.

“You good?” she heard Kuvira ask.

After a minute, she opened her eyes and looked over at her coach. “That depends on what you’re asking about.”

“We’ve talked about this already, Korra. You’re not the first, nor will you be the last to be benched. Almost everyone has been through what you’re going through.”

“Not you,” Korra challenged.

“Yeah, well, that’s because I’m me,” Kuvira said, trying to lighten the mood.

Korra rolled her eyes and pushed off the bag, letting it swing back and forth as she walked around it. “Whatever. It’s still crap. Someone who’s been undefeated up until now deserves a chance.”

They were in a not so crowded area at the gym where there were a few others training on separate mats nearby. Korra walked over to her gym bag and sat down as she pulled off her gloves and threw them to the side. She grabbed her water bottle and angrily pushed the top open to drink from it. Her eyes went over to Kuvira when she came over to sit down as well. She had an amused expression on her face.

“That may be true, but at least now you can train and get even stronger by the time you step back in that ring again,” she said. “I honestly think it’s for the best.”

Korra glared. “Well thanks, traitor.”

Kuvira rolled her eyes and finally regarded her seriously. “I’m speaking as your coach here when I
“You’re not ready.”

When Korra opened her mouth with a ready reply, Kuvira raised her hand and halted her. Korra hesitated for a second, but then she let her shoulders drop. It was a signal for her coach to continue.

“First and foremost, you definitely are showing improvement in strength and stamina; I can give you that,” Kuvira complimented. “But these past few weeks you’ve been sloppy in your form, and not as zoned in as you should be when we’re sparring.”

“I’m assuming you’ve already formed your own theory?” Korra asked.

Kuvira shrugged. “The only time you’re ever like this is when something is on your mind. So whatever it is, it must be really getting to you.”

Korra looked away at that, suddenly more interested in her water bottle.

“Have you ever thought it might be because I’m frustrated about not fighting?” she asked.

“Yes. But I know you. It’s something more than that.”

She gritted her teeth together and raised her eyes to meet Kuvira’s once again. “I don’t know what you expect for me to say.”

“Korra, you know I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what’s going on. Personal shit aside, I’m your coach, remember?”

“It’s nothing,” Korra said, rubbing at her face and suddenly feeling irritated. “Can we drop this now, please?”

After saying that, it went quiet between them, but Korra could still feel her coach’s eyes on her.

“Fine,” Kuvira said and got to her feet. “You don’t have to tell me then. I know how this story goes anyway.”

“Kuvira…”

“No really, it’s cool. I’ll give you twenty minutes alone to get it out of your system. I’m gonna go train. Just come and get me when you’re ready to start back up again.”

Korra watched her go with a gaping mouth. She could tell by Kuvira’s hunched shoulders that she was upset, but unfortunately she couldn’t think of anything that would rectify the situation.

At first, she noticed the usual understanding look in Kuvira’s eyes whenever she couldn’t tell her something, but underneath that, Korra saw clear frustration, too. And it wasn’t the first time her coach had that look before either.

Korra knew that all of her secrecy and reclusiveness always bothered Kuvira on the inside, but rarely did she ever voice it. Those few weeks ago after her last match had been one of those rare occasions, and the other few times before that, it had been taken a lot more personal. There was no denying that it hurt their partnership a little bit at times, but it was never something they couldn’t bounce back from. However, it certainly put an end to another aspect of their relationship that they never really addressed.

She took a long sip of her water and threw it to the side. After giving her gloves a long, hard look, she decided to put them on again. Once they were securely strapped on, she got up and walked over
to the punching bag. She rolled her shoulders and cracked her neck. After raising her gloved fists parallel to her face, she gave the bag a light punch. It only moved an inch, but Korra tried focusing only on that.

Slowly, she started hitting it again with both fists until the rhythm was finally set. She punched harder and faster and kept light on her feet. The sound of the impact was loud in her ears. It reminded her of heavy rain splattering against a hard surface.

And underneath that was the sound of muffled crying.

Korra threw her hardest punch into the bag before stopping it. Her heart was racing again, and more sweat accumulated, but she couldn't pay attention to any of that.

Kuvira was right. She was distracted; way more than she was willing to admit.

Varrick benching her was one of her biggest frustrations at the moment, but she’d be lying to herself if she said it was the main thing on her mind these past few weeks.

No. That title went to Asami. And the harder Korra tried not to think about her, the more she did.

She remembered standing in that living room for a long time after Asami said goodbye. Everything inside her told her to leave and free herself from the madness forever, and yet her feet remained rooted in place.

It should have satisfied her that she was getting what she wanted, which was Asami finally taking the hint and leaving all of that stuff in the past. It meant that she’d be able to get on with her life and pretend their little reunion never happened.

But…

The pain in Asami’s voice echoed in Korra’s mind and tore at her heart. It reminded her of all those years ago when they had their very last fight. The anger and sadness in Asami’s voice… the way her voice wavered…

It took a long time for Korra to forget. And as it turned out, she never forgot in the first place.

Out of curiosity, and something else she wasn’t quite sure she felt, she quietly made her way up the stairs and walked down the dark hallway of Asami’s apartment. When she reached the bedroom, she put her hand on the doorknob and leaned her ear against it. At first, she didn’t hear anything, but as she listened more closely, she could make out the quiet sound of Asami’s sobs.

She walked away after that, and it was only when she got down the steps that she let out a noise of irritation, anger, and of course regret.

Her decision to write that note didn’t come easy. She sat and stewed in the kitchen, weighing the pros and cons for about thirty minutes. There were certainly a lot more cons than there were pros, but deep down she knew what she had to do—what was the right thing to do. Walking away again was not an option at this point, and she knew that once she stuck that note on the fridge there was no turning back.

But just like her little message said, she needed time. And so far, Asami seemed to understand that since she hadn’t called or texted her once these past three weeks.

Or maybe she was just through with Korra for good and tore up that piece of paper the moment she saw it. That would be well deserved.
It wasn’t like she was waiting in anticipation for Asami to text her or anything. It was just the anxiety of knowing that at any moment it could happen. She wasn’t prepared for it in the slightest, even with all this time she spent thinking about it.

Eventually she was going to have to tell her former best friend the truth, and when that day came, things would significantly change between them. A few words already came to mind about how Asami would take it: shock, anger, and disgust were at the top of that list.

“I can’t predict how I’ll react, and neither can you.”

Oh, but she could, Korra thought. And when Asami finally heard the truth, she’d most likely want to put it back where she found it.

Korra zoned in on the bag and started punching it again, this time a little more controlled than before.

As for her, she knew that a lot of things were better left unsaid. It was one of the reasons why she left in the first place.

A bell chimed as Asami made her way into a small, run-of-the-mill restaurant.

She removed her large sunglasses and placed them in her purse before looking around, trying to see if she could spot who she was looking for.

“Hello,” a greeter came up to her, smiling. “Table for one?”

“Oh no. I’m actually looking for—”

“Asami!” she heard from the left of her. When she turned her head in that direction, she saw a familiar tall figure standing by a table near the window, waving at her. An immediate smile broke out on her face and she forgot about the greeter in favor of briskly making her way over to Mako. He held his arms out just as she got there and swept her up into a long embrace, even spinning her around.

“I feel like it’s been forever,” he said, giving her a firm squeeze.

“You’re gonna break my ribs,” she said with a breathy laugh.

He took the hint and let her to her feet, although he was still grinning.

“What can I say? I missed you that much,” he said.

“You should! You’re so busy these days,” she playfully shoved him.

“Like you’re the one to talk.”

He helped her out of her long coat and placed it on her chair before pulling it out for her. She couldn’t help but smile at how that gentleman side of his never went away, even after they split up.

“I already ordered for you, so don’t worry about it,” he said after sitting down himself.

“And what if I wanted something different?” Asami folded her arms and lifted a brow.

“Then that would be a miracle since you order the same thing every time we come here.”
Asami tried not to smile, but utterly failed.

Over a month passed since she last saw Mako. They would talk on the phone on occasions, but since both of their jobs were so demanding, it was really hard for them to sync up their schedules. She missed him dearly, though. He looked especially handsome in the button up shirt he was wearing, and his hair naturally stood up in that messy way she always teased him about. It gave him that boyish charm he always had since they were thirteen years old.

“So what’s been happening on your side lately?” he asked.

She just got done taking a sip from the glass of wine that he ordered for her.

“You know. Same old, same old. I just got back from Japan a few days ago, so I’m still pretty jet-lagged.”

“Really?” he looked surprised. “How long were you there for?”

“Eh. Two weeks.”

“You left the country for two weeks and didn’t even tell me?”

Asami shrugged. “It was sudden. I just had some things to take care of at the other headquarters.”

“Like?”

She shifted in her chair. “The usual. Seeing what ideas they’ve come up with, who they’ve hired on, how the stock is doing. Pretty boring stuff, really.”

“Mmhmm.” Mako looked at her skeptically. “And how am I supposed to believe you didn’t just take a personal trip to the Bahamas and leave me here all alone?”

Asami laughed and brushed a piece of hair behind her ear. “I would have definitely invited you if that were the case.”

“I guess I’ll take your word for that, Sato. But it still would have been nice to know where you were. Imagine if I would’ve called or stopped by your place during that time. I could have come to the conclusion that you were missing or something.”

She rolled her eyes at his overreaction. “Come on, give me some credit here. I can handle myself.”

“Yeah. With those one or two defense classes you took, I’m sure,” he said sarcastically.

She kicked him under the table.

“Ow!”

Smirking, she sat back in her chair. “That’s what you get.”

Their food came a few minutes later, and they immediately started eating all while catching up. It put Asami’s mind at ease when they got off the topic of her trip to Japan.

What she told Mako wasn’t the whole truth, but it was still the truth. She really did have business to take care of, but if she were being honest, it was nothing that her assistant (or anyone over in Japan for that matter) couldn’t take care of. But after the whole ordeal with Korra, she needed to get away and busy herself as best as she could.
She wanted to keep up her end of the bargain about giving Korra as much time as she needed. It also gave her time to herself to think about things and get her head on straight again. That night with Korra physically and emotionally drained her, and going to Japan put her back in reset mode.

“I have some news,” Mako said, after wiping his mouth with a napkin.

“Hm?” Asami’s eyes focused on him again.

He pulled out his phone and showed her a picture.

“Oh my god!” she squealed and snatched the phone out of his hands. She was smiling from ear to ear as she looked at the picture of Opal and Bolin. They both had hands on her belly, which was only beginning to show signs of a small life growing inside it.

“Crazy, right?” Mako asked.

“I’m in shock! How long have you known?”

“A few days. I wanted to tell you in person.”

She handed back the phone and did a celebratory clap. “I’m so happy for them. I know how hard they were really trying. Opal was getting so depressed over it.”

“I know, so was Bolin. I can’t believe my little brother’s going to have a baby.”

“Uncle Mako’ has a nice ring to it, don’t you think?” she teased.

“That’ll take some getting used to,” he smiled. “But yeah, it doesn’t sound so bad at all.”

“Can you just imagine a little Bolin running around causing a ruckus?”

“Maybe he’ll get a taste of his own medicine and finally get to see all of the hell he put me through when we were younger.”

“Oh come on, he wasn’t that bad.” When Asami saw the look Mako gave her, she chuckled. “Okay, so maybe he did have his less than finer moments.”

“Remember that time he broke his leg trying to skateboard off our grandma’s roof and into the neighbor’s pool?” Mako deadpanned.

At that Asami laughed harder. “I still remember you calling me in hysterics, and I actually had to be the one to tell you to call an ambulance.”

“Yeah well, you do stupid things when you’re in shock,” he said, trying not to look embarrassed.

“What even made him think that was a good idea anyway?” She looked up in thought, trying to recall the situation.

It took her a minute to realize that her question made Mako go quiet. When she looked at him, she saw that the humor in his eyes became more subdued.

“I don’t think I remember,” he eventually said.

“Really?” Asami asked. She tried to think on it for another moment.

“It’s just a moment we can look back on now and laugh about,” Mako said. “We don’t need to
remember every little detail, do we?”

Asami looked at him again, in confusion about how dismissive he sounded. He wasn’t even making eye contact with her anymore and went back to eating his food.

“Mako,” she said, trying to get his attention.

He raised his head finally and had a slightly annoyed look on his face. But that one look instantly made Asami remember.

Bolin had a few crushes in high school, but none of them ever compared to the one he had on Korra. And while Korra was completely oblivious to his crush, Asami and Mako weren’t. Especially Mako.

Bolin would do anything just to get her attention, which included a crazy attempt to make a viral video of him skateboarding off a roof to impress her.

Asami watched Mako take a few more measured bites of his meal. He looked incredibly awkward and tense. Probably because it was the first time they got this close to discussing the topic of Korra in years.

It was a silent, mutual agreement to never bring her up. Not only because it was touchy, but also because Asami was afraid to.

It was fair to say that her former best friend had some involvement in her and Mako’s break up; however, Mako always seemed to like placing the blame fully on Korra, often saying that she started the rift between them. Asami didn’t agree to that, though. Their relationship was already on and off before she even met Korra. Things just happened to get a lot worse between them when her and Korra became friends. Mako couldn’t understand why Asami liked her, and that resulted in them getting into yelling matches with each other. Some of their nastiest fights happened around the time Korra left, and well after. Asami recalled them not speaking to each other the whole summer after graduation, and only right before it was time for her to leave for Cornell did Mako reach out. Even then, it still took time for them to be on good terms again like they were now.

So yeah, they didn’t talk about Korra for obvious reasons, but the coincidence of her being brought up after so long was not lost on her.

“Well, I’m just glad Bolin finally found someone who would kick his ass if he tried anything like that,” she said, trying to smoothly transition out of that awkward interaction between them.

Mako looked up at her, and after a second, smiled.

“Yeah.”

“Maybe we should go and visit them sometime. A nice weekend at the farm doesn’t sound so horrible.”

This time Mako grinned. “I’d love that. Work’s been kicking my ass lately,” he said, raking a hand through his hair.

“Oh yeah? How’s the crime rate, officer?” she asked.

“As bad as ever,” he said, unenthusiastically. “And that’s detective to you, remember?”

“Ah, sorry,” Asami said, raising her hands up in defense. “I’m still not used to saying that.”
Not only was she not used to it, but she also remembered that she told Korra wrong. She could only imagine her reaction when she told her that Mako’s cop duties were a little more top notch.

And now that she was thinking about that whole situation…

She bit the inside of her cheek and watched Mako take another bite of his food as she thought about how to approach her next question.

“So have you gotten any leads on any cases?”

That wasn’t blunt at all.

“We’ve cracked a few," Mako sighed. “But my partner is a total control freak. Every time I bring up a case I want to work on, he ignores me and puts us on the ‘more pressing matters.’” He used his fingers as air quotes.

“Oh,” Asami said, keeping a neutral face. “You haven’t tried talking to the chief about it?”

“I can’t. The guy has been there for almost thirty years and is well respected. It would be wrong of me to try and go over his head.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“Nothing. Just wait for the day he actually hands over the reins. But until that time comes, all my cases are at the bottom of the pile.”

An enormous feeling of relief overtook Asami. If what Mako was saying was true, then that meant Korra was safe for now from being busted. And technically, so was she since she was somewhat involved now with the mastermind behind it all.

“I’m still going to continue researching and looking into things, though,” Mako said.

Her heart dropped.

“Really?” she asked, trying not to sound overtly suspicious.

“Yeah,” Mako nodded. “There are a couple of cases I know I can crack. And once I get all of that information, maybe I can just slide a few files onto my partner’s desk without him knowing and make him think it was his idea.”

When he laughed, Asami just sat there with a fake grin. “That… That’s really great.”

“Yeah. I just hope all of this hard work doesn’t end up going to waste.”

Asami stared at him. She could feel the knots in her belly forming, twisting, and turning.

If Mako found out that she knew all of this information about Varrick and the club, he’d probably never look at her the same way again. In fact, that would probably put an end to their friendship for good. And losing someone else she cared so much about was not something she thought she could handle in the midst of everything else right now.

She forced an encouraging smile on her face and reached over to rest her hand on top of his on the table.

“Your day will come eventually. I’m sure of it.”
Mako smiled back. “Thanks. I love you.”

She felt a sharp pain in her chest. The way he said it made her feel even more horrible about lying to him.

“Yeah… You, too.”

After finishing dinner, they sat there and talked for an additional thirty minutes, but eventually they left the restaurant and went to the ice cream parlor across the street. It was a special tradition of theirs.

They had a good rest of the evening and were both equally sad when they had to part ways. Mako needed to get back to the station, and Asami had to be up at five in the morning the next day for work.

When she got back to her apartment, she kicked off her shoes by the door, then she went into her living room and practically collapsed onto the couch, looking up at the ceiling.

Now that she was alone, the guilt was starting to eat at her more and more.

Mako was one of the only people in her life who stuck by her after all that she’d been through, even at times when she did her best to push him away. And now, to repay him, she was keeping secrets and lying.

But even though she knew it was wrong, she just couldn’t bring herself to tell him the truth right now. It was too dangerous for her and Korra if Mako did in fact start pushing for an investigation.

And there was also one more thing.

That unwavering sense of loyalty she felt to Korra was still as strong as ever. She wanted to regain at least a little bit of the trust they had back then. And if that meant keeping her mouth shut about things, then so be it. However, she did notice how unfair it was. Right now, she was practically throwing herself in a pit of fire just to get a few answers out of Korra, only to get so little in return.

That would need to change. She did not want a repeat of that night to happen again, because if it did, then no matter how much those answers meant to her, she would have to walk away. There were only so many times one could put themselves and their pride on the line before it became downright pathetic.

Sighing, she pulled out her phone from her pocket. After unlocking it and going to her messaging app, she pressed on the empty draft at the very top. Her eyes went over Korra’s number several times. She could’ve had it memorized by now from how many times she tried to do this.

Nervously, she moved her fingers over the keyboard and started typing a message.

Hey Korra, it’s me: Asami. How are you? If you aren’t busy, we should…

“Too formal,” she murmured to herself and deleted the message.

Hey. It’s Asami. I was hoping that maybe we could…

“Too desperate,” she said while hitting the backspace.

Hey

She groaned in frustration and dropped her phone to the floor, then she threw an arm over her face.
This was going to be a lot harder than she thought it would be.

Korra sneezed just as she was about to enter her apartment.

“Don’t tell me you’re catching a cold,” Kuvira said from behind her.

“It’s just allergies,” she mumbled and opened the door. They walked inside and the cold air greeted them.

“Geez. Or maybe it’s because it feels like the South Pole in here.” Kuvira shivered and zipped her jacket up the whole way.

Korra took off her shoes and dropped her gym bag to the floor. She walked over to the heater and turned it on. A few seconds later, a soft hum was heard throughout the apartment.

“Happy?” she asked.

Kuvira shrugged and dropped her own bag, as well.

Korra went over to the kitchen and turned the stove on. After taking out a pot, she filled it up halfway with water.

“You were quiet the whole walk here,” Kuvira commented from behind.

“Was I?” Korra asked without looking back. She placed the pot on the stove and a little bit of water sloshed out of the side, causing the burner to make a long ‘hiss.’

“Mhm.”

“Sorry,” she offered half-heartedly, then she walked passed Kuvira to go sit at the small, round kitchen table.

“Don’t be,” Kuvira walked up to her and sat down in the other chair across from her. “Just tell me what’s up.”

Korra did a one-shoulder shrug. “I’m not in a good mood.”

“Yeah. That’s pretty obvious. But why? If it’s about what happened earlier—”

“It isn’t,” Korra quickly denied.

“Okay,” Kuvira said slowly, waiting for Korra to continue, but Korra just sat there, unable to voice what she was feeling.

As she so bitterly learned at the gym, there was no amount of punching or kicking she could do that would successfully clear her mind, and she did a lot of it. She was ready to call it quits for the day by the time Kuvira came back to resume their training. Much to her surprise, Kuvira didn’t even attempt to argue with her about it.

It was too hard for her to focus when all she heard in the back of her mind was Asami, Asami, Asami.

She sighed and looked at Kuvira, who at the same time, looked at her.

“I’m gonna ask you something, and you have to answer honestly, okay?” she said.
Kuvira regarded her curiously and then nodded.

Korra took a deep breath and sharply exhaled.

“In all the time that you’ve known me, what’s one of the worst things about me?”

It was a completely random thing to ask, and she could tell by the look on Kuvira’s face that she was confused. She probably thought Korra was going to ask something silly like if she was a good fighter or not.

But Korra needed to know the answer to this from one of the only people whose opinions mattered to her. And also because it would help her with the internal issues she was dealing with. If she was going to continue her meetings with Asami, it was a good idea to have a little self-evaluation, as well as the perspective from someone who actually knew the kind of person she was now rather than in the past.

Kuvira’s expression turned into a sarcastic one.

“I can only say one thing?”

“You can say more if that’s how you feel,” Korra said, giving a nonchalant shrug.

“Nah, I’m kidding.” Kuvira lightly kicked her foot under the table. She looked off, seemingly contemplating how to answer the question.

“You can be really cold,” she eventually said. “And not in the conventional way, but just… You internalize a lot of shit, and that makes you distant. You don’t like people knowing your business, which is fine, but it gets to the point where you think that you have to deal with everything all by yourself.”

Korra hummed. That response wasn’t surprising to her in the least. It was similar to what Kuvira already told her before, though more nicely put.

“But also,” Kuvira started again, making Korra look back at her. “I think the reason you choose to be that way is because you’re afraid of getting hurt or being the one to do the hurting.”

There was a long, pregnant pause, and Korra noticeably tensed. Her eyes diverted away from Kuvira’s analyzing ones.

“Right,” she offered.

Kuvira chuckled. “Are you regretting asking me now?”

“No.” Korra shook her head. “I wouldn’t have asked if I was going to regret it.”

“Can I ask you something, then?”

With uncertainty, she nodded.

“What’s all of this really about?”

“Oh… Um…”

“I’m not asking you to go into every little detail,” Kuvira told her. “I’m just… worried about you. That’s all.”
Korra chewed on her bottom lip and then deeply sighed. It was only right to give Kuvira some form of an answer, even if it was as vague as possible.

“Some things that I thought I left behind a long time ago have started to come up again,” she revealed. “And I’ve been trying to figure out how to deal with those things, but it’s been hard.”

She looked up finally and noticed that her coach was nodding.

“So, in a way, it’s a ‘your past is coming back to haunt you’ sort of thing?”

“Yeah,” Korra folded her arms and leaned back against the chair, “that’s definitely one way to put it.”

“But you aren’t in any kind of trouble, though, are you?”

Underneath Kuvira’s questioning gaze, there was also concern.

“No,” Korra shook her head, knowing exactly what her coach was alluding to. “It’s nothing like that. It’s just… complicated.”

She couldn’t bring herself to go any more into detail and left it at that. To her relief, Kuvira simply nodded again, this time in understanding.

“Well, I hope you can figure it out.”

“Me, too.”

“Just try not to let it affect you so much in training from now on, okay?”

“Yeah. I won’t.”

Kuvira paused before looking at her. “Thanks for telling me.”

Korra gave her a smile. “You’re welcome.”

“And just so we’re clear,” Kuvira added, “I don’t really find anything ‘the worst’ about you.”

“No?” Korra raised an eyebrow.

“No.” Kuvira shook her head. “I think you’re difficult, hard-headed, and a pain in the ass sometimes, but you wouldn’t be you without those qualities.”

Korra chuckled. “Gee, thanks.”

“And you’re definitely a lot more put together than the first time we met, so I’d like to keep it that way.”

She looked up at that comment, meeting Kuvira’s eyes and seeing the serious expression she had. It made her realize for the first time how much Kuvira really knew her. She witnessed the tail end of the darkest period of her life; yet she still managed to see something in her. It was a miracle, because at that time Korra had been one of the biggest walking disasters on the planet. And now, here she was, standing on her own two feet and more independent than ever. Kuvira deserved a lot more credit for that.

“Thank you,” she said, this time sounding a lot more genuine and sincere.
Kuvira tilted her head and looked at her playfully. “For?”

Korra smiled and shook head. “Don’t ruin the moment by asking more questions.”

Kuvira laughed.

“Anytime, rookie.”

It was almost midnight by the time Korra finally got herself situated and ready for bed. Kuvira left a few hours ago after they had dinner together, which was a rarity since they mostly hung out at her place or elsewhere. But still, it was nice. As much as Korra hated to admit it, sometimes it really did feel empty in her apartment. She couldn’t exactly call it ‘home’ anyway when she barely had any of her boxes unpacked.

She was on her back, staring up at the dark ceiling and listening to the sounds of car alarms and police sirens going off beside her window. It grew to be the thing that lulled her to sleep more than a TV or music could. It was just too bad that even all that noise couldn’t block out the jumbled mess of thoughts in her head.

How was she going to figure this all out? Especially when every time she thought about going near all of that touchy stuff again, it made her feel like she was stepping right into quicksand?

She rubbed at her eyes, frustrated and tired at the same time. This was all becoming far too much to think about while she was sober.

Her phone started ringing from somewhere on the bed.

With a sigh, she felt around for it lazily, barely even trying to find it. When she felt it underneath her leg, she grabbed it and answered, not even bothering to check the I.D. Most likely, it was Kuvira calling about something she accidentally left. The woman was notorious for doing that everywhere she went.

“What did you forget?” she drawled into the phone. When there was a lack of response, her brows knit together. “Hello?”

“Uhh… hey.”

Korra sat up immediately at the sound of Asami’s voice.

“Oh, um, hi,” she said.

“Is this a bad time?” Asami asked, and Korra could hear the sound of her shuffling around.

“N-no. I was just sitting here.” She grimaced at how socially inept she sounded.

“Oh…”

“Yeah…”

Awkward couldn’t even begin to describe how she was feeling. Though it was a little funny how after all these weeks she spent thinking about Asami and imagining the conversations they would have, her mind was now drawing blanks. This was another unexpected greeting from her, and Korra was beginning to wonder if that was going to be their new normal.

“You answered,” Asami said after the long silence. She sounded surprised.
“You called,” Korra replied and then pulled the phone away from her face for a second to look at the clock. “And not at the regular business hours either.”

“Yeah well, I didn’t think you’d actually pick up. I was going to leave a voicemail.”

“What were you going to say?” Korra asked out of curiosity.

There was a small pause.

“I didn’t really get that far into my plan,” Asami confessed.

Korra smiled to herself. “You usually always have a plan.”

“Well, with you, I’ve kind of realized that the best laid plans are better off left in the storage unit.”

“I can’t say that you’ve come to the wrong conclusion.”

It was quiet for another minute.

“How are you?” Asami asked, though her voice sounded much softer.

“I’m fine,” Korra said, scratching at her cheek. “You?”

“Good. Busy.”

“Oh… that’s good. “

“Yeah…”

Korra chewed on her bottom lip. This conversation was so far looking to be one of their most uncomfortable exchanges yet, but it couldn’t last forever, so it was best to just cut to the chase.

“I was beginning to think you’d never call after… you now,” she said.

“That makes two of us,” she heard Asami say under her breath.

“So what made you?”

Because of how silent it was, she could easily make out the sound of Asami’s breathing.

“I don’t like the way things ended between us that night,” Asami said.

Korra was tempted to make a sarcastic remark about which night she was referring to but refrained from doing so.

“Me neither,” she agreed.

“Really?”

“I left you that note, didn’t I?”

“Yeah, you did,” Asami said. “But I didn’t know if you left it out of pity or because…”

“Because what?” Korra prodded after Asami trailed off. She imagined her running her fingers through her hair as she tried to figure out what to say next.

“Or because you actually want to fix things between us?” Asami finally said, her voice sounding
hesitant and unsure.

Korra’s lips pursed together. Out of all the weeks she spent thinking about their situation, she never even thought about the possibility of repairing their long-lost friendship. And seeing as how incredulous she was finding the idea now, it was no wonder why it hadn’t come to mind. Asami would end up realizing that for herself when Korra eventually told her everything.

“It’s okay,” Asami spoke when Korra remained silent. “You don’t have to answer that. I guess I’m just curious about what your true intentions are.”

Korra swallowed and then closed her eyes. Right now, talking on the phone with Asami was just as hard as talking with her in person.

“I can’t tell you what my intentions are because I don’t even know myself,” she admitted.

“Okay,” she heard Asami say, with a trace of disappointment in her voice.

“But what I can say,” Korra started again, “is that I do want to see you again.”

“You do?”

Korra heard the sound of rain and muffled crying in the distance again.

“Yes,” she said.

“Good,” Asami said with a sigh. “I would really like that.”

“Although, I do think we should establish some rules first,” Korra said.

“Rules? What kind?”

“Like, things we aren’t allowed to ask each other. At least for right now.”

“Okay,” Asami said, though she sounded uncertain. “What can’t I ask you?”

Korra licked at her drying lips. “Nothing about my profession...”

“Gee, I thought that was a given,” Asami said.

Korra ignored her sarcasm and continued. “Nothing about where I’ve been or what I’ve been doing these past few years.”

“All right.”

“And... You can’t ask me why I left.”

“Korra—” Asami started, apparently drawing the line at that.

“At least for right now,” Korra said over her.

“But—”

“Please, Asami.”

It was quiet for a long time, and Korra found herself holding her breath. She knew that it was unfair, but there were still a few doors that she needed to leave closed for the time being.
She heard a long, irritated sigh.

“You know those are pretty much all the questions I have, right?” Asami said.

Korra exhaled. “I know…”

“And that you’re giving me nothing to work with, right?”

“Yes.”

“You really think that’s fair?”

“No, I don’t.” Korra rubbed at her face. “I just... I can’t talk about it all at once like you expect me to.”

“I’m not expecting anything like that,” Asami said. “All I want is honesty, Korra. We can do it in baby steps if that’s what you need. But this can’t go on if it’s going to continue to be the way it’s already been. You have to be willing to give me something.”

Korra chewed on her bottom lip again. She heard the determination and strength in Asami’s voice. It sounded a lot different than last time. Almost dominating.

“I’ll try,” she said.

“That’s all I want,” Asami eased off. “So are you done with all of your rules now?”

“Yes...”

“All right.”

“You don’t have any rules you want to add in for me?” Korra asked.

There was a brief lull in the conversation.

“Just one,” she heard Asami say.

“What?”

“Don’t walk away again.”

It was a simple request, and an easy rule to follow, but it still managed to knock the air right out of Korra's lungs.

All it did was remind her of how badly she hurt Asami by doing that. Not just once, but two times now. That tightness she felt in her throat almost prevented her from answering.

“I won’t,” she rasped.

“You mean it?”

“Yeah... Do you believe me?”

“I want to believe you mean it...”

It wasn’t a ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ but Korra couldn’t really blame Asami for not trusting her. At the moment, she wasn’t even sure if she trusted herself.
“Are you free this Saturday?” Asami asked.

Korra started to play with the string on her night shorts as she thought about it. The only thing she had scheduled for that day was training and a party someone from the fight club invited her to.

“Yes, I am,” she decided.

“Okay. Let’s meet around four. I’ll let text you the location when I think of one.”

“That’s fine.”

“All right. So, I guess I’ll see you soon, then?”

“Yeah,” Korra agreed, still twirling at the string on her shorts.

“And, Korra,” Asami said.

“Hm?”

“I really want things to be different this time around.”

Korra could tell just by the sound of her voice that it was a warning. This was the last chance Asami was giving her, and then that would be it. Surprisingly, she was unsure how that made her feel.

“Okay,” she said.


“Yeah... Bye, Asami.”

“Bye.”

Korra hung up and slid the phone away from her ear. She fell back on her pillows and stared at the ceiling once more.

That definitely went a lot better than she expected, but she still felt uneasiness about the whole thing.

At this point, she was wasting her time trying to figure it all out, because no matter how much time she had, nothing could ever prepare her for this.

But she only had one more chance. One more chance to make this right, and one more chance to finally face everything she’d been ignoring for the past six years.

The pressure was definitely on.

TBC...
A bitter, cold wind blew by, making a few people visibly shudder and withdraw even further into their large coats. Now that it was the middle of November, the east coast was officially getting a taste of the winter that was upon them, much to Asami’s distaste.

She was standing on Third Avenue, across the street from a Starbuck’s where she told Korra to meet her. The traffic light tortured her by being on green for what felt like longer than a minute. She exhaled and watched the visible puff of air escape from her mouth.

For once, she didn’t overthink the situation, nor did she try to analyze the conversation they had on the phone the other night. She simply waited for Saturday to come along while going about her usual business.

There was no telling what she was about to get herself into. The way Korra sounded when they talked felt different from the other times, but a lot of people sounded different on the phone. And after taking all of their past confrontations since meeting again into account, Asami didn’t want to get ahead of herself.

She didn’t want to be hopeful or have high expectations. Instead, she remained cautious, and even doubtful. It would have been stupid of her not to be either of those things.

The light changed red and the signal was given to cross the street. With a deep breath—and a last minute pep talk to herself—she stepped off the sidewalk. The heels of her boots clacked against concrete, giving her the appearance of being confident, yet she couldn’t control how fast her heart was beating.

When she made it across the street, she had to pass a group of tourists standing in the middle of the sidewalk. None of them moved for her, so she had to rudely shove her way through while saying ‘excuse me.’ God, she hated New York sometimes.

After getting passed them, she walked up to the Starbuck’s and opened the door. When she entered, she was immediately met with warmth and the smell of brewing coffee, which immediately washed away all of the sudden irritation she felt. From that alone, she was sure that she ended up choosing the right meeting place.

As usual, there were people standing in a line that extended close to the door. Thankfully enough, this was one of the least busy Starbuck’s on Third Street. It was less noisy, too. She sometimes came there on her lunch break just to get away from the chaos that was her office, so naturally it was one of the first places she thought of to meet with Korra.

And speaking of Korra...

Asami looked ahead of the line, trying to see if she was there. When no one looked familiar, she gave the room a quick glance before frowning and looking down at her watch. It was three minutes past four.

So help her, if Korra was going to be super late again...

There was a shift in the line, causing everyone to move forward. Asami glanced up for a second, but then a flash of short, brown hair caught her eye and made her look up again.

She immediately made her way to the other side of the line and then stopped in her tracks.
Korra sat at the opposite side of the room beside the window, staring out of it. She had her hands wrapped around a cup of coffee and she looked deep in thought, but also calm.

Feelings of hope began to emerge, but Asami quickly shoved them back down. The only thing that should make her hopeful is the aftermath of their conversation. Anything she felt until then wouldn’t mean anything. It was a test of self-control. If she failed, then that would mean she didn’t have as much of her act together like she thought she did.

After gathering herself—and realizing that she probably looked like a crazy person just standing there staring—she walked over to Korra, keeping a steady pace. When she was only a few feet away, Korra seemed to snap out of the daze she was in. Asami noticed her stiffen for a second, but then she took a breath and her shoulders eased.

“I hope I didn’t keep you waiting long,” Asami spoke first. She hung her purse on the chair and took off her coat, then promptly sat down.

Korra shook her head. “You didn’t. I just got here really early.”

“How early?”

“Two hours.”

Asami’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Really?” When Korra nodded, it made her lean forward, mimicking the other woman’s posture by folding her arms on the table. “Why?”

Korra shrugged. “Mostly for traffic purposes, but also,” she paused and glanced away for a second before meeting Asami’s gaze. “It gave me a chance to think about what I needed to say.”

Asami shifted in her chair, trying to keep any kind of reaction or emotion from appearing on her face at that comment.

“And here I thought you’d say it was because you were afraid there’d be no place to sit,” she joked, though it sounded like a weak statement more than anything.

Korra smiled and brushed a strand of hair behind her ear. “I can’t say I didn’t think about that as well. It’s nice, though,” she looked around for a second. “It’s busy, but not so much that it’s a distraction.”

“I’m glad you feel that way. It’s all part of the plan.”

She quickly closed her mouth after saying the latter sentence.

“Oh, so you came up with a plan after all,” Korra asked, appearing amused now.

“No,” Asami quickly denied then let out a sigh. “Well, not really. I just knew how I wanted this to go.”

“So let’s hear it,” Korra said.

“What?”

“What did you want? I’m curious.”

Asami nervously played with the long sleeves of her sweater dress. “It’s nothing all that substantial,” she started. “But as weird as it sounds, this kind of environment really keeps me focused and alert. The reason I chose to come here is because I knew I’d have the upper hand on
things and maybe control the conversation better.”

“Hm. That was smart of you,” Korra complimented, sipping at her coffee. “Did you also think you could persuade me into talking more?”

Asami gave a slight shrug. “I certainly wouldn’t stop you if you wanted to talk more, if that’s what you mean.”

Korra hummed after placing her coffee to the side and then looked down at her hands. Asami watched her, trying to gauge her reaction, but then she remembered that it was pointless.

“Did I leave you enough time?” she ended up asking.

“What?” Korra’s head lifted. She looked so young with the facial expression she was making.

“Did I leave you enough time to think about what you needed to say?” Asami rephrased.

Korra’s expression turned contemplative.

“I think so.”

“And?”

There was a pause, and Asami felt herself slowly slipping to the edge of her seat. She was almost too eager to hear what Korra had to say, mostly because of how intense she looked. Asami felt entranced as she stared into her vibrant, blue eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Korra said.

Asami’s eyebrows raised and then she blinked.

“For what?” she asked.

“I shouldn’t have acted the way I did that night,” Korra admitted. “I could’ve handled it a lot better. I could’ve handled most of the stuff that’s happened since we met again a lot better.”

“Oh,” Asami looked down. “Is that all you’re sorry for?” she asked, fumbling with her sweater some more. It distracted her from the disappointment she felt.

She definitely wasn’t unhappy that Korra was apologizing for something that obviously upset her. However, there were other things that she selfishly wished her former friend regretted. When she didn’t hear Korra offer any kind of response, she took that as her answer.

“Right,” she mumbled to herself, feeling like an idiot.

“I know that it’s not enough for you,” Korra said.

Asami shook her head, trying to play it off. “If that’s all you can give then I can’t fault you for it.”

“It’s not that it’s all I can give. I just… I don’t want to say anything that I don’t mean.”

“Yeah. Fine. That’s fine,” Asami stumbled over her words and looked away. She wanted to get off this subject completely now before it got even more awkward.

“Asami,” she heard Korra say, and then there was a long sigh that made her turn her head back. Korra was rubbing at her eyes and appeared flustered. “This isn’t coming out the way that I
imagined it would.”

“What are you talking about?”

Korra sighed again and placed a hand behind her neck. Asami remembered how she used to always do that when they were younger whenever she was nervous or embarrassed over something.

“Just listen,” she said.

Asami slowly nodded, confused but still compliant. “Okay.”

Korra’s lips pressed together. She was thinking, but also seemed conflicted about what to say and how to say it. Asami was about to open her mouth, despite being told to do the opposite of that, just to reassure Korra that it was all right and she could say whatever she needed to say. But suddenly Korra’s eyes met hers again, and it looked like she was ready.

“All I’ve been able to do these past few weeks is think about you and everything I thought I left behind a long time ago. You have to know that when you suddenly showed up out of the blue, it surprised me. I think I’m still getting over the shock of it all.”

There was another small pause, but Asami waited patiently for her to continue.

“I didn’t think I’d ever revisit that part of my life ever again, and that’s why I’ve been so reluctant up until now. But I know I can’t do that anymore. And I also know that I don’t want to keep stringing you along like this.”

Asami felt her heart slowly beginning to sink at the way that sounded. “So what are you saying then?” she said, forcing the words out of her mouth.

Korra let out a breathy laugh and shook her head.

“What I’m saying is that I want to be honest with you. Or, at least, I want to be as honest with you as I can be. Even if it turns out to be a total mistake for the both of us.”

Instantly, Asami relaxed. She let out a long breath, feeling relieved but also annoyed at the same time.

“Why didn’t you just say it that way?” she said a bit hotly. “You made it sound like you were going to say something horrible.”

“I thought I made it clear the first time. Then you made me re-explain it.”

“Well make it clearer next time.”

They regarded each other seriously, and then for whatever reason Korra started laughing.

Asami looked at her, then around the Starbuck’s to see if anyone was looking at them.

“What’s so funny?” she asked, finally turning back.

Korra shook her head. “Just… you.”

“Cute. Well I didn’t find it funny. At all.”

Korra tried to keep herself from smiling. “Sure, of course not. I’m sorry.”
Asami rolled her eyes and looked away. When she could still feel Korra’s eyes on her she accidentally glanced in her direction and looked away again. Despite herself, she could feel a small smile beginning to form at the corners of her mouth.

“Whatsoever,” she said.

Korra laughed again.

“Can I make it up to you by getting you something to drink?”

Asami fully faced her again, arms still folded, and did a one shoulder shrug.

“A grande caramel macchiato with whipped cream wouldn’t displease me.”

Korra nodded, still smiling. “I’ll be back.” She got up from her chair and started making her way over to the line.

Asami smiled to herself fully now, surprisingly happy with this sudden turn of events.

“Oh!” she turned when she forgot to mention something. “And make sure it’s with—”


Asami’s mouth fell open in surprise and she stared after Korra’s back. She felt a tiny flutter in her stomach and weirdly felt a thousand times happier. Why she felt so overly joyed about Korra remembering that small detail, she had no idea.

So much for her not being hopeful.

Korra drummed her fingers against the counter as she waited for Asami’s order. It didn’t take too long for her to get to the front of the line because of how fast everyone was moving. She watched the cashiers and baristas shuffle around expertly, calling out orders left and right. They worked mechanically. Strangely, it reminded Korra of herself.

For so long she’d been doing the same routine daily. It felt like the only thing she knew how to do was train and fight, then eat and sleep. If she really thought about it, her life played in a constant loop for the past three years. It wasn’t a bad thing in her book, though. It gave her stability and something she could go back to every day. But now she was starting to realize how much she relied on that routine, and just how much that affected her verbal communication skills.

She looked across the room. Asami’s back was to her, but Korra could tell by her posture that she was at ease. It made her want to pat herself on the back for doing better than the previous times so far at least. After taking a few mental notes from those past interactions and analyzing her own behavior, she came up with the best conclusion she could think of on how to move forward in their talks. One of the most important things she learned was that she needed to talk to Asami in the opposite way she talked with the people who she normally surrounded herself with. And that was by being less… abrasive.

It was certainly an adjustment, and she didn’t exactly have all that time to practice on anyone, but she wasn’t doing as bad as she thought she would. She just needed to always think carefully about what to say before saying it. So long as she did that, nothing could go wrong.

But that just made her nervous about the conversation they would get to anytime now. That was still something she had no idea how to address. Because once she did, that would be it and she
couldn’t take it back.

She tried not to think about all of the scenarios that would possibly happen afterward, because that only freaked her out and made her want to run in the opposite direction. Instead, she just focused on actually getting the words out of her mouth.

She exhaled and leaned against the counter, putting a hand under her chin.

How interesting was it that one woman could manage to interrupt the entire flow of her lifestyle? 

No, she thought. Maybe it wasn’t interesting. Maybe it was just familiar.

“Grande caramel macchiato!” a barista called out.

Korra snapped out of it when she heard her order and grabbed the hot beverage off the counter.

Before walking back over to Asami she took a relaxed, deep breath and then rolled her shoulders back.

Who knew that putting in effort could be so taxing?

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Asami was just finishing up a reply to an email on her phone when a coffee was placed in front of her.

“Enjoy,” Korra said and sat down across from her again.

“Thank you,” Asami said appreciatively. She put her phone away and picked up the warm beverage. After taking a few sips, she hummed in delight.

“Good?” Korra asked, giving her an amused expression.

“You have no idea. I get this almost every time when I come here, but it somehow manages to taste even better than before.”

“Or maybe it just tastes better because you swindled me into buying it for you.”

“I don’t recall it happening that way.”

“Mhm. Sure you don’t.”

Asami gave her a knowing smile and raised the cup to her mouth one more time before putting it down to the side.

She was happy with the way things were going. Korra seemed so much more open and unbent. It was like, for the first time, Asami could actually breathe around her without feeling like she was taking up all of the oxygen. And despite the initial awkwardness that always came during the first few minutes of their interactions, it didn’t seem to take as long to get past that this time. It made Asami wonder if she should talk to Korra the way she did on the phone all the time. Maybe that could have saved her from all of the confusion and angst.

“What?” Korra asked after taking a drink from her coffee. “Is there something on my face?”

“Oh, no,” Asami said, shaking herself from her trance. “Nothing.”

Korra looked at her oddly, then she nodded and brushed her hair behind her ear, revealing her clear
Asami finally noticed.

“Your bruises healed,” she said.

Korra paused before setting down her drink. “They did.”

“Whoops,” Asami said sheepishly. “I guess that falls under the category of things not to discuss.”

“It’s fine.” Korra shrugged it off. “I should be thanking you actually.”

“What for?”

“The ointment.”

“Oh!” Asami tapped her forehead when she remembered. “I completely forgot about that.”

“I’ll have to buy you another bottle since I used all that was left of it,” Korra told her.

Asami waved her off. “That stuff was just a waste of space in my cabinet. Don’t worry about it.”

They were quiet for a moment and Asami started to wonder how long all of the small talk could last. All that was left underneath were burning questions and inquiries. But she didn’t want to ruin the mood after all of the progress.

“Oh yeah,” she said. “You won’t believe this: Bolin and Opal are having a baby.”

Korra leaned her head against her palm and stared at her with raised eyebrows. “Really?”

“Yeah. I just found out the other day,” she said, though she was smart enough not to mention who she found out from. “It’s really amazing because—”

“Asami,” Korra interrupted.

“Uh, yeah?”

“You really didn’t ask me here to talk about Bolin and Opal, did you?”

It wasn’t really a question, and Asami knew. She folded her hands together on top of the table and looked down.

“You already know the answer to that,” she said and looked up again. “And here I thought I was going to be the one to kill the mood.”

Korra didn’t reply, but she removed her hand from her chin. Asami sat there under her unreadable expression.

“Can I ask you something?” Korra said after a minute.

Completely taken off guard, Asami sat up. “S-Sure. Go ahead.”

“All right. But I don’t want you to take this the wrong way when I ask.”

“Oookay,” she said cautiously. “I’ll try not to.”

Korra nodded and then took a deep breath.
“How do you think me telling you everything will help you move on?”

Asami paused. She didn’t know what kind of question she was expecting Korra to ask, but that certainly wasn’t it. And it was even more surprising that Korra was being the one to initiate this entire conversation. Things really were shaping out to be different.

“It’s good to have closure, don’t you think?” she responded, although it was with a question of her own.

“It doesn’t matter what I think,” Korra said. “You’re the one who wants answers.”

Asami chewed on one side of her cheek. That was true. Korra had her there.

“I’m still interested in what you have to say,” she said eventually.

Korra folded her arms neatly on the table and held Asami’s gaze.

“I don’t believe anyone truly gets closure,” she said. “I think that a lot of people hope that their perceptions on things will be validated in some way. And when that actually does happen, it may satisfy them for a while, but then they realize that maybe there was never really a point to it at all.”

“And when it doesn’t happen?” Asami prodded.

Korra fiddled with her cup. “When it doesn’t… It just leads to more questions, more pain, and wishing they never sought the truth out to begin with.”

“So, in this situation, you think I’m the latter.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to.”

Korra looked away, and by that, Asami knew she was right. With a sigh, she ran her fingers through her hair and turned her head to the window. From the outside, a few people walked by the long glass, looking in. She wondered how the two of them looked from their perspective.

Did she really seem that weak in Korra’s eyes? Or that she couldn’t handle the truth? If so, then that was just flat out insulting. Sure, she got a little emotional in their last encounter, but that didn’t mean she was some kind of fragile doll…

She froze at that thought and then slowly turned her head back to Korra, who still had her head turned to the side.

“I am so stupid,” she murmured.

Korra finally looked at her, giving her a confused expression. “What?”

Since she was still puzzled by her own realization, Asami didn’t answer her. Instead, she got up and grabbed her coat and bag. “I gotta go.”

“What? Already?”

Asami gave Korra one final glance, although it probably looked more like a glare.

“Yes.”
She walked away, leaving her unfinished coffee, and didn’t turn back even when Korra called out to her.

It was sad how long it took for her to realize that all of the smiles, all of the kind gestures, and all of the “honesty” weren’t real.

She made it out of the Starbuck’s and was about to go stand on the street to hail a taxi, but then her arm was grabbed. With momentum, she whirled around, causing Korra to almost crash into her.

“Whoa,” Korra said, stumbling back. “You’re mad?”

Asami rolled her eyes. “Gee, what gave you that idea?”

“Am I missing something? What the hell has gotten into you all of a sudden?”

“Oh, you actually care? Or is this just another one of your ways to make you feel better about yourself?”

“What are you even talking about right now?”

It was so loud with all of the cars zooming by. There were people on the sidewalk staring at the two of them as they walked by, but Asami didn’t care. At the moment she was so done with everything.

She finally shrugged out of Korra’s hold.

“I don’t need this,” she said, her voice shaking with anger. “I don’t want your damn pity, all right?”

Korra’s confused expression turned into one of understanding and then guilt.

“Let me explain,” she said calmly.

“No need to,” Asami said, ready to walk away again. “I already know what I need to know.”

Korra reached for her arm again. “No, you don’t.”

“Ugh!” Asami groaned in frustration. “Just let me go. This is what you wanted all along, right? For me to leave you alone?”

“We are not doing this here,” Korra said.

Before Asami could argue more, Korra pulled her down the sidewalk until they turned into the entryway beside the Starbuck’s that led to a parking garage. Korra released her and continued walking farther into the alley, before stopping and turning to her.

“You really are something else. You know that, right?”

“You think you’re in any position to tell me that?” Asami said.

“Very true. But just look at how you’re acting right now.” Korra folded her arms. “You don’t even know what I’m thinking, and yet you’re always so quick to jump to conclusions.”

“I don’t see you denying what I said,” Asami accused.

“No, I’m not. And that’s because, yes: I did feel guilty about how I handled things the last time, and maybe it is partially why I wanted to meet with you.”
“Good. That’s all I needed to hear.”

Asami ignored the twinge of hurt she felt at that confirmation and was prepared to turn on her heel and walk away.

“But it wasn’t the whole reason why,” Korra said earnestly and stopped her again. “I meant everything I told you in there. I want to be honest with you.”

“Yeah, but why?” Asami asked. “Because you actually want to be or because you feel guilt tripped into doing it?”

“Just because!” Korra said and brushed back her hair in a frustrated manner. “Do I really need to explain myself? If this is what you wanted, then why should it matter what the reason is for why I’m telling you things?”

“It just should! And if you’re going to treat this like it’s something to check off your ‘to do’ list, then I don’t want it.”

“Oh, come on,” Korra said with a disbelieving laugh. “That’s not what this is about and you know it.”

Asami regarded her with a doubtful look. “Do I?”

Korra finally stopped, and the look of annoyance on her face slowly melted away when she heard the meaning behind Asami’s words.

“I can’t make you believe me, Asami,” she said in a softer tone.

“I know that,” Asami said, looking down. “But I’m telling you right now that I’m not going to be the only one who cares in this situation. I’m not going to…”

She stopped and took a deep breath.

I’m not going to hurt anymore because of you, she finished in her head.

It was an oath. She refused to be put through the same scenario three times with Korra. Before it even turned anywhere near that direction, she would make her exit, which was exactly what she was trying to do now. Korra wasn’t going to hurt her anymore so long as she had the upper hand. She would keep whatever remaining dignity she had and walk away with her head held high.

And to think this all had to happen just when she was starting to believe things were going to be different.

“Why is it that when I finally think that things are going good between us, something always happens and we’re right back where we started?” she asked, unable to keep it in her thoughts.

“We’re not,” Korra said, stepping forward.

“Oh yeah? What do you call this?” Asami waved her arm between them and their surroundings.

“Honestly? An overreaction.”

With a sigh, Asami deflated against the brick building behind her. Was she overreacting? Probably. But with all of the times Korra did, it was only fair that she got one time of her own to do so.

“Look,” Korra said, and took another step forward. “I know that I haven’t exactly been the most
compliant or trustful in all of this, but I wanna be now. That’s the one thing I’m sure about. If you can’t believe anything else I say, at least believe that.”

“And how do I know you’re not just going to blow me off again like before?” Asami asked. The jaded feeling that she’d been suppressing was finally beginning to rise to the surface, and yet she also found herself becoming exhausted. She was so tired of this constant push and pull between them. It was like they could only be stable for a minute before things got unbalanced again.

“I promised you I wouldn’t,” Korra said. “So I won’t.”

There was a pleading look in her eyes, which was something that Asami had never seen before. And slowly she found herself falling for it.

Even though she was growing more tired, she pushed herself off the wall and looked Korra dead in the eyes.

“I’m going back to my place,” she said. “Are you coming?”

Korra watched her, looking as if she were trying to determine what the mood between them was.

“Yeah.”

With that confirmation, Asami turned and walked out of the alleyway. She went on to the curb and put her hand out for the first cab she saw. When she got in, she slid into the backseat, and a second later Korra did, too.

After rattling off her address, she fell back into the seat and looked out window. Neither of them spoke the whole ride.

They got back to the apartment twenty minutes later. Asami shrugged off her coat and placed it on the kitchen island, along with her bag and keys. After that, she unzipped her boots and kicked them off. Behind her, she heard Korra removing her shoes as well.

She turned after a minute and faced her. Korra’s eyes were on her the whole time.

“So do you need anything,” she asked, still wanting to be courteous at least.

Korra shook her head as she walked more into the room. “No, I’m good. Thanks.”

Asami nodded and drummed her fingers on the counter top.

When the lingering silence continued, Korra asked, “what now?”

Asami shrugged. For the first time, she had no words to offer. The quiet car ride gave her enough time to calm down and think with a level head. She didn’t know what to say to Korra now after her little outburst. A part of her felt embarrassed, but she couldn’t say she truly regretted it either. Korra needed to know exactly how she felt and what she wasn’t going to put up with anymore.

“Well, what do you want to happen now?” Korra rephrased, looking at her with patient eyes.

Asami leaned back against the island and folded her arms. That was the million-dollar question.

“I want us to talk,” she spoke finally. “I want us to talk and not fight.”

“Okay. Then let’s talk,” Korra said and started making her way over toward the living room.
“But I also want to say what’s on my mind and not feel like I’m at risk of stepping on landmines when I ask you something.”

At that, Korra stopped in her tracks but didn’t turn around at first. When she finally did, it was only to look over her shoulder.

“That’s fair,” she said, and then started walking again.

Asami waited a second before following behind Korra. When they got to the couch, they sat down a few inches apart from each other. Korra looked around with a thoughtful expression and Asami found it weird how, all of a sudden, she seemed like the calmer one out of the both of them.

“You said you wanted to be honest with me,” she said, turning Korra’s attention back to her.

“I did.”

“But what does that mean? How far does that go exactly?”

Korra folded her hands together and glanced away.

“I’ll tell you as much as you need to know,” she said after a minute.

“And what if I don’t think you’re giving me ‘as much as I need to know?’” Asami questioned.

“Trust me. This will make you understand a few things a lot more clearly,” Korra said, an aloof smile gracing her lips. It gave Asami the impression that there was some joke she was missing.

“If you’re so sure, then just tell me right now.”

Korra looked at her again. Their eyes locked and held, and slowly that smile faded. Asami was holding her breath.

“I’m surprised you never figured it out after all this time.”

“For Christ’s sake, Korra,” she let out a frustrated sigh. “Could you just be straight with me for once?”

At that Korra burst into laughter and put her hand over her face. “Sorry, sorry,” she said.

Asami looked at her incredulously and felt her temper about ready to rise again.

“You’ve officially lost it,” she said.

“No.” Korra shook her head, still laughing. “For once, I haven’t.”

Asami sat back, unable to form any words about what was transpiring between them. She waited until Korra finally sobered up and watched her expression grow more serious.

“It’s weird thinking back to that long ago,” she said. “It’s almost like I was a completely different person, but even that’s a bit of a stretch considering…” she trailed off and cleared her throat.

Asami’s brows knit together in confusion, but she kept quiet.

“I was only a kid back then,” Korra started again and ran her hand lightly over the couch cushion. “I thought I was more mature than I actually was just because I didn’t have my parents around to nag me all the time. And once my uncle finally got so busy that he stopped caring about what I did,
things really got to my head. You remember, don’t you?”

Korra looked up at Asami, acknowledging her for the first time since she started talking. Asami slowly nodded in confirmation.

“Of course I do.”

It was hard not to recall those nights where Korra would be out and about, doing god knows what with her other “friends.” But instead of ever speaking up about it, Asami would turn a blind eye to it. That was one thing she always regretted.

Korra turned away from her and leaned forward a bit, placing her elbows on her knees.

“Having all that freedom was really dangerous for someone like me,” she said. “I partied and stayed out longer, and eventually I didn’t give a shit about any of the rules. It actually became a game to me: seeing how far I could teeter off the edge without falling into the pit.”

There was a pause and Asami watched all of the emotions flickering across Korra’s face as she stared ahead of her.

“Somehow I never thought of myself as a wild child or troublemaker like everyone else saw me as,” Korra continued. “The only thing I really thought about at the time was escaping from my own reality for a while.”

“Because of your parents?” Asami asked tentatively. She knew how much of a touchy subject that was back then for Korra, so she didn’t want to start being insensitive now.

Korra shrugged. “Because of them, and because I knew no matter how hard I tried, I would still be an outsider. I just stopped caring about all of it.”

Asami bit her lip and looked down at her lap. Hearing Korra speak about her past issues brought back a familiar ache she used to feel whenever Korra actually opened up about it. And those times were rare.

“But contrary to that,” Korra spoke again, though her voice was much softer. “I also realized that just because I didn’t really have any kind of authority figure, it didn’t mean there wasn’t anyone around to keep me at least somewhat grounded.”

Her head turned and they shared a knowing look. With that, Asami didn’t even need her to say out loud whom she was referring to.

“I guess that’s the irony in all of it,” Korra said with a weak laugh. “In the end, that’s how I finally fell into the pit.”

Asami blinked. She was totally lost at where Korra was getting at.

“I don’t understand,” she said. “How was it such a bad thing? And what happened to make you think of it that way?”

“What do you think happened?” Korra asked.

Asami rolled her eyes. “I don’t know! That’s why I’m asking you.”

Korra let out another small laugh. “I’m really not trying to be difficult here. I just want to get your perspective on things.”
“Okay, fine.” Asami ran a hand through her hair. “I remember you being moodier than ever before senior year started. I think it was after you stayed with your parents for a few weeks during the summer?”

“Mhm,” Korra turned to her. “Go on.”

“There were times where things would be good between us, and then there would be times where you’d blow me off or act like you wanted nothing to do with me.” She swallowed, trying hard not to show her bitterness or hurt at that fact.

“Did you come up with any reasons why I acted that way,” Korra questioned.

“At first, I just labeled it down to homesickness, but then it got worse. You just became even more distant, and then we had that big fight before graduation. Then…”

“Then what?” Korra asked.

Asami looked away. She found it hard to reflect on everything out loud. Was this how Korra had been feeling all along?

“That night happened,” she said, and she subconsciously gripped at the ends of the couch.

“You mean the party,” Korra said simply.

“Was that not obvious?” Asami deadpanned.

Korra looked up thoughtfully. “I wonder if Mako would add that night to my criminal record when he arrests me. I mean I did get detained in a way.”

“That’s not funny,” Asami said sternly.

“Who’s joking?”

She had to look away again. It stung the way Korra brought that moment up so casually when it was one of the only moments in their history that Asami couldn’t bring herself to fully face, because right after that was when Korra left and she never saw her again.

“Anyway, is this refresher course going to end soon?” she eventually said. “I think we’re both on the same page about our issues.”

“Are we?” Korra tilted her head. “I think you’re missing one glaringly large detail.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “Yes, Korra. I know you and Mako didn’t like each other.”

“Do you even know why?”

“No. And I really don’t care,” she said, finally fed up. “The only thing I want to know is if I’m the reason why you left.”

Her mouth shut immediately after. She hadn’t meant for it to come out that way. In fact, it was far from the way she wanted to phrase it. But she couldn’t deny the instant relief she felt after finally asking the burning question she wanted answered after so long. Though, she almost wanted to take it back after seeing the different string of emotions appear on Korra’s face within a short amount of time. It was the most conflicted she ever looked.

“You’re part of it.”
It took a moment for Asami to react, but when she did her shoulders dropped.

For as long as she imagined hearing Korra confirm her suspicions, she never thought it would crush her as much as it did.

She swallowed and looked away, not wanting to make eye contact with Korra until she could bottle down her emotions. She refused to let Korra be right about her not being able to handle this.

“Okay,” she said when she could finally form words, and then she got to her feet. She needed to physically put some distance between them because of how much her mind was reeling.

She thought back to some of their moments, trying to pick out where exactly it all went wrong between them. They had plenty of arguments: both big and small, and most of them she barely even remembered what for. When and how did it all change between them to get to where they ended?

“Asami…” she heard Korra call out her name but ignored her. She started pacing around, biting her thumbnail.

Admittedly, there were a couple of times where she felt like she tried too hard in front of Korra; to be as down to earth as she was. Maybe that was it. Maybe she just wasn’t real enough.

“Asami.”

Or, as much as it pained her to think about, maybe she just failed Korra as a friend? How many times did she place all of Korra’s issues aside just because she thought it would be easier?

“Hey,” Korra was next to her now, halting her by the elbow and keeping her rooted in place. “Sit down. You’re going to put a hole in the floor.”

Asami stopped and looked at her finally. It almost felt like she was looking at a different person now. Then again, she probably never really knew Korra to begin with.

She ended up back on the couch again, and Korra stood in front of her, hands in the pockets of her puffy jacket.

“What did I do?” Asami whispered to herself, although it wasn’t really a question.

Korra shook her head and sighed. “You didn’t do anything.”

“Don’t lie.”

“I’m not.”

Asami glared. “You can’t say that I was the reason why you skipped town and left and then claim I didn’t do anything. That doesn’t make sense.”

“I said you were part of it, that doesn’t mean you were the whole reason.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

“It shouldn’t make you feel anything. It was a long tim—”

“Can you just stop it with that?” Asami cut Korra off. “I don’t care that it was a long time ago. Haven’t you figured that out by now?”

Korra went quiet, only watching her. Asami was the one to break their little stare down when she
raked her fingers through her hair and looked to the ground. She was angry: at Korra, but mostly at herself. God, why was she taking this so damn hard?

From the right of her, she felt the couch dip as Korra sat back down. She didn’t acknowledge her, though. It was out of fear that if she did, she’d be reduced to tears or something even more embarrassing. But then she felt a hand on her shoulder and that immediately caused her to look up. She did a sharp intake of breath when she saw how intensely Korra was staring at her.

“You didn’t do anything,” she repeated, this time more gently. There was sadness in her eyes despite the tiny smile she offered. “The only thing you were guilty of was being in love with somebody else.”

Everything in the room stilled, including Asami’s lungs.

Her eyes had been on Korra’s mouth the entire time she spoke, and yet she was certain that she didn’t hear those words correctly. The weight of the hand on her shoulder was suddenly the heaviest thing in the world. She thought she’d crumble underneath it.

It felt like an eternity went by in those few seconds that passed without either of them talking, moving, or even breathing.

“What?” Asami finally spoke, though her voice was barely audible.

“Do I really have to repeat myself?” Korra said, pulling away to rub at the back of her neck. “It was already hard enough saying it the first time.”

Asami just stared at Korra, unable to do anything else. A part of her was still in denial.

“If this is a joke, it’s not funny,” she said, sounding breathless.

“Believe me, I wish it was,” Korra told her. “Maybe it would’ve made my teenage years less excruciating.”

Asami gaped, still not believing what she was hearing. She entertained the idea that this was all just a dream, but that was quickly squashed when she could feel how hard her heart was racing in her chest.

Her eyes were still wide and mouth partially open when Korra finally faced her again.

“I don’t know what to make out of this reaction you’re giving me right now,” Korra said, her eyes roaming over Asami’s face. “Can you say something?”

Asami’s mouth was dry, and she could feel her palms sweating. What could she say about something that was so far off the mark from what she’d originally thought?

“I never knew you liked girls.”

Apparently all of the shock was too much for her to come up with anything better to say, but even then it would have probably ended up being more stupid.

There was a look of, what she thought to be, relief in Korra’s eyes, and then a small smile appeared.

“Yes, I do. But guys aren’t so bad either.”

“And you liked…” Asami took a shaky breath and then she tried again. “You liked me?”
Korra rubbed the back of her neck again. “I’m actually surprised by how stunned you are. You aren’t just screwing with me, right?”

“What?” Asami said, taken out of the moment briefly by that incredulous accusation. “Of course not!”

“Relax. I’m only kidding.”

“Oh.”

Korra looked away, but Asami just kept staring at her, practically gawking, although her eyes were becoming less focused as she thought about it more and more. How could she have missed something like this? She always thought Korra was the oblivious one, but now that apparently applied to her as well.

Suddenly Korra’s random burst of laughter earlier made a lot more sense, and now it just made Asami think about how many other signs she missed.

“The only thing you were guilty of was being in love with somebody else.”

It didn’t even sound real in her head.


Her words were jumbled and she was at a complete loss.

“What was I supposed say?” Korra spoke evenly. “You were head over heels for Mako and it’s not like that school was the right one to have the proper girl on girl experience at.”

Asami’s cheeks flushed at the wording. “I...” she started but stopped when she couldn’t come up with anything. “I don’t know.”

“I was close to telling you a few times, though.”

“What?” Asami responded out of astonishment. She thought all of this new information would make her pass out.

“It’s all in the past now, anyway,” Korra said. “We’ve both clearly moved on with our lives. So now that I’ve given you that answer, maybe we should just leave it at that before diving even further into the rabbit hole.”

Asami saw that she was about to get up again, but on reflex she reached out and grabbed Korra’s hand. When Korra looked down in surprise, Asami immediately pulled away and started stammering.

“I—I’m sorry,” she apologized. “I didn’t mean to, um... sorry.” The last part came out as a weak mumble.

Korra stared at her for a few seconds, and then she put a hand to her head, shielding her eyes.

“I knew this was a bad idea,” she said. “Now you’re being super awkward about it.”

“No! No, I’m not,” Asami tried to argue, though her voice betrayed her by sounding an octave higher than normal. “I’m just surprised! That’s all! I mean, you can’t expect for me not to be, right?”
Korra removed her hand from her eyes.

“So you never noticed it then?”

“Noticed what?”

“The tension.”

Asami could feel the heat rising to her face again. She felt like she was in middle school all over again.

“N-no. I mean… I don’t know. I always thought we had a complicated friendship, but not—”

“That complicated?” Korra finished for her.

“Right,” Asami nodded slowly.

Korra looked anywhere else but in Asami’s direction. Asami, however, couldn’t keep her eyes off Korra. She saw the stiffness in her posture and how it looked like at any minute she’d bolt out the door. That absolutely could not happen.

She took a deep breath and exhaled, trying to quiet her mind from all of the endless questions she had and focus on just one.

“When did you know?” she asked.

Korra shook her head. “It doesn’t matter.”

“It matters to me.”

“You really don’t have to do this.”

“Do what?”

“Pretend that none of this doesn’t make you uncomfortable,” Korra said.

“It’s not like that at all,” Asami insisted. Her voice still sounded odd, but it was a lot calmer than before. “I wanna know everything.”

“Asami—”

“You said you’d tell me everything I needed to know,” she argued when she saw Korra’s hesitation. “This is something I need to know everything about.”

Finally, Korra turned to her again. There was a sympathetic look on her face, but she was also tense.

“It’s not going to make a difference now, you know?” she said carefully. “All of this was years ago.”

“I told you I don’t care about that,” Asami reminded her. “You might not believe in closure, but I do. Besides, I’d look like an idiot now for walking away without hearing the whole story.”

“I’m not judging you if you do,” Korra said. “I’m giving you an out here.”

“I don’t want an out,” Asami said quietly with the of shake her head. “I just want the truth.”
Korra watched her for another moment and then sighed.

“You’re not going to like some of this,” she said matter-of-factly.

“That’s fine,” Asami told her.

“And it might change the way you feel about certain things.”

Asami paused briefly, but she took another audible breath, although she could still hear how loud her heart was pounding. “That’s fine, too.”

Korra gave her one last warning look, but Asami didn’t even blink and instead turned toward her even more. That seemed to give Korra the final acceptance she needed. After breathing out another heavy sigh, she turned and faced Asami, mimicking her posture.

“Do you remember your 18th birthday?” she asked.

Asami paused and tried to think about it. When a few mental images came to her mind, she slowly nodded. “A little.”

“Do you remember that I left to visit my parents right after?”

“Is that when you knew?”

“Not exactly,” Korra shook her head. “I don’t know when I knew, largely because I spent a long time being in denial about it.” Her eyebrows knit together and Asami watched her struggle. She felt a twinge of guilt.

“Can you at least tell me why you felt that way about me?” she asked. That question probably wasn’t any easier than the first.

Surprisingly, Korra laughed and then looked Asami in the eyes.

“You’re still as modest as ever,” she said.

Asami raised a curious brow, not really understanding.

“I was the girl with the bad reputation, and you were the popular girl who everyone adored,” Korra said like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “In any other typical situation, we should have disliked each other, but for some reason you were the one who showed me kindness and understood me more than anyone else did.”

Asami swallowed thickly and felt knots forming in her belly. But even then, her gaze never wavered from Korra, who remained placid.

“I think the real question is: Why wouldn’t I have felt that way about you?”

TBC...
Editor's Note: In the original chapter, I wrote that these scenes took place seven years ago. That's actually false. My ass can't count backward and this chapter actually takes place eight years ago. It's the next chapter that takes place seven years ago. My bad.

Eight years ago

A cool summer breeze blew in from the left, making Korra stir. She heard the birds chirping from outside, becoming louder as she came to. Slowly, she opened her eyes and blinked at the ceiling. The brightness in the room made her groan out loud.

“It’s about time you woke up.”

She slowly turned her head and squinted at the light that shined in her eyes. Asami was staring back at her from the desk near the window. She looked thoughtful while holding a pencil in her hand and an open book in her lap.

“What time is it?” Korra rasped. Her voice sounded hoarse and felt sore. She tried to run her fingers through her hair, only to find that it was a tangled, curly mess. She didn’t need a mirror to know that she looked like an absolute train wreck.

“Almost the afternoon,” Asami answered coolly as she turned her attention back to her book and wrote something down.

“Shit!” Korra sat up, and immediately regretted it because of the disorientation she felt. “Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“Because you sleep like a log.”

Korra put her face in her hands. “Unalaq is going to kill me.”

“Relax,” Asami said. “I called him earlier and told him I was going to take you home later. You’re in the clear.”

Korra brought her hands down and let out a relieved sigh. “I owe you one,” she said, giving Asami an appreciative look.

“You owe me a thousand,” Asami said. She reached behind her, grabbing an unopened bottle of water from her desk, then she tossed it over to the bed. Korra caught it easily.

“Thanks.”

She took a moment to get herself hydrated and her mind clear.

They only started doing this for a few weeks. Korra would tell Unalaq that she was sleeping over Asami’s for the weekend—which she really did—but at night she would go out and meet up with
some other people for a couple of hours. Sometimes it would be a party, but more often than not it was just hanging out in someone’s apartment. She normally never stayed that long, but this time she didn’t manage to get back to Asami’s place until close to five in the morning.

“I didn’t wake you when I came in earlier, did I?” she asked.

Asami was still focused on whatever she was working on. “Nope. I was still up.”

“Oh.” Korra worried her bottom lip with her teeth.

“I’m guessing you didn’t see any of my texts?” Asami asked.

“Uh, no?” Korra reached down to feel at her pants pockets, only to remember that she wasn’t in her jeans from last night and changed into a pair of shorts. At least she was somewhat coherent enough last night to do that. “I don’t think I looked at my phone the whole night.”

“Mm,” was the only response she got.

When she looked over at Asami, she noticed the slightest bit of irritation on her face. She couldn’t tell if it was because of the book or her.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

Asami held up the book she was looking at, showing Korra the cover. It was an SAT prep book.

“I thought you were taking a break from that? Plus, didn't you already take it last year and get a high score?”

“Not high enough.”

“The test isn’t for a few months anyway,” Korra said, brushing her hair out of her face. ”Don't you think you're overdoing it just a bit?”

Asami shrugged. “I can’t afford to slack off now. You, too.”

“Yeah, but I’m not as obsessed with getting a perfect score as you are,” Korra pointed out.

“Well, we all can’t be as laid back and cool as you are, can we?” Asami said snappishly.

Korra frowned and put her water to the side after securing the top.

“Hey,” she said. When Asami looked up at her, she motioned her over with her finger. “Come ‘ere for a sec.”

Asami raised a brow but put her book to the side and got up. She was already dressed for the day; wearing a pair of jean shorts and a flowy, yellow top. Her hair was tied up in a messy bun, though a few pieces of hair fell out of it. Korra noted that it must've been really hot outside since Asami only ever wore her hair up like that when that was the case. Everything about her, down to the shoes she wore, always needed to be flawless.

When she sat down on the bed, Korra stared momentarily. She watched Asami’s face and noticed how tense she was.

“I’m sorry I didn’t answer your texts,” she said, figuring that was the real issue. “I didn’t mean to make you upset if I did.”
Asami seemed surprised that Korra caught onto her mood so fast, but it shouldn’t have since, over time, Korra learned how to read her like a book.

“I’m not mad at you or anything,” Asami clarified. “I was just worried.”

“You don’t have to be. I’m not doing anything crazy and I know my limit.”

“Yeah, but…” Asami trailed off and looked away.

Korra smiled. She couldn’t help but feel endeared by Asami’s concern.

“Besides,” she started, “you said you already had plans and I didn’t wanna bother you or anything.”

Asami gave her an earnest look. “You wouldn’t have bothered me at all.”

Korra had to hold her tongue to prevent herself from saying something she shouldn’t. In all honesty, she would have stayed in with Asami last night if she hadn’t found out that Mako was coming over. She didn’t want to have to deal with the constant side-eyeing she’d get from him the whole night. It was uncomfortable, awkward, and only gave her a headache.

“My night kind of ended early anyway,” Asami said, interrupting Korra’s train of thought. There was a twinge of bitterness in her voice that Korra knew all too well.

“What did you guys fight about this time?” she said with a sigh.

Asami waved her hand, dismissing the question. “Nothing.”

Korra opened her mouth to pester Asami even more about it, but then there was a knock at the door.

“Asami, are you decent in there?”

Korra heard Asami’s quiet noise of irritation. “Yeah, Dad, you can come in.”

Hiroshi entered, and stopped abruptly when he set his eyes on Korra.

“I didn’t know we had a visitor,” he said.

“I told you Korra was coming over before you left yesterday,” Asami said flatly.

“Right.” Hiroshi cleared his throat. “It must have slipped my mind.”

Korra gave him an awkward wave. “Hello, Mr. Sato.”

Hiroshi gave her a once over and then a curt nod. “Good morning.”

He didn’t say it in a warm, welcoming tone, but it wasn’t cold either. Korra still cringed nonetheless. She had a feeling that Asami’s father did not like her ever since the first time Asami invited her over to their house. In fact, it wasn’t even so much of a feeling anymore. She just knew it. The sudden switch-up from the first time they interacted where he was polite and friendly in front of her uncle and those other people, made her feel like it was all a front. He didn’t expect for her and Asami to become as close as they did and was taken off guard by her suddenly being around all the time. And it didn’t help that right now she looked like she just got done sleeping in a dumpster, either. At least she was smart enough to wear a t-shirt with sleeves long enough to cover up the tattoo on her shoulder. She imagined that Hiroshi would react in the same way her parents
would if they found out about it.

“I didn’t think you’d be home at all this weekend,” Asami said, cutting the pleasantries.

“Yes, well, I’m only here to shower and change clothes. I’ll be heading back to the office afterward.”

“Of course,” Asami said. The sarcasm was clear in her tone.

“You’re not going anywhere for the rest of the day, are you?” Hiroshi asked, ignoring her attitude.

“I’m taking Korra home, but other than that, no.”

“Okay then. I’ll see you later.”

“Sure.”

Hiroshi left, closing the door behind him quietly.

Korra spoke first. “That was a little tense.”

Asami shrugged but didn’t say anything. Instead, she fell back onto the bed, landing on the pillows in a huff.

“He’s not mad that I’m here, right?” Korra self-consciously asked.

“He’s never here, so why should it bother him who I have over?”

The anger in Asami’s voice alerted Korra. There were very few times where she ever heard Asami sound that way, and every time it never failed to spark worry in her.

She turned to her side, then leaned against the pillows and rested her hand to the side of her face. She looked down at Asami. “What’s up?”

“Nothing,” Asami said, shaking her head. “It’s stupid.”

“I bet it isn’t.”

Asami turned her head and looked up at Korra with a solemn expression, which was something Korra wasn’t used to seeing on Asami’s face. She wanted to wipe it away, or hurt the person who caused it.

“I finally told him about wanting to go to fashion school.”

“Ohh.” Korra immediately understood and gave her a sympathetic look. “I’m guessing that didn’t go well?”

“It didn’t go at all.” Asami glared up at the ceiling. “In his opinion, I’d be wasting my potential. He’s also saying he won’t pay for my tuition.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Korra said angrily. “He can’t do that.”

“Oh, but he will,” Asami said. “It doesn’t matter anyway. I should’ve never told him, or even thought of that stupid idea to begin with.”

“It is not stupid,” Korra urged. “You shouldn’t listen to him. I’ve seen what you can do and you’re
amazing.”

She wasn’t lying. Asami never gave herself enough credit and it drove her crazy sometimes. To think that someone as gifted and talented as Asami was would even think about wasting that away to go work for some corporate bullshit was maddening. If Korra had it her way, she’d drag Asami by the hand to the nearest fashion school and force her to apply.

Asami smiled at Korra, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “Thanks. At this point, I’m pretty sure you’re the only one who believes in me.”

“I know you don’t mean that,” Korra said. “What about Mako?”

Asami paused and then did a half-shrug. “Who knows what he’s thinking these days?”

“Is this what you guys fought about last night?”

“No.” Asami shook her head. “It was about something else.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Korra asked hesitantly.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Asami said after a moment and looked away from her.

Korra furrowed her brows. She always tried her best not to meddle or get involved in Asami’s relationship problems. Unless Asami brought it up, Korra didn’t ask. Though, more recently it felt like those two were more off than on. It had been that way ever since the summer began.

It made her curious to what they fought about, but also not. She knew that if Asami told her, it would cause problems. She would probably act irrational and end up saying something that would make Asami sadder, or possibly even mad. That was a mistake she already made one time before, and it hadn’t gone so well.

“Well, how does he feel about you doing the whole fashion thing?” she ended up asking and sat up.

Asami rolled her eyes, getting up as well. “He was sort of on my dad’s side about it and told me I was overreacting. I don’t even want to talk about it with him anymore.”

“You shouldn’t have to put up with that,” Korra couldn’t help but say.

“I know,” Asami said with a sigh.

There was a small pause and Korra worked up the courage to ask. “So then, why do you?”

It was something she’d been wondering for a long time; ever since Asami introduced her to Mako. The guy was as stiff as a board and the complete opposite of someone as sweet and kind as Asami was. Then again, it wasn’t fair of her to say that given how different she was from Asami as well.

“He has his days and I have mine,” Asami said with a shrug.

That answer wasn’t good enough for Korra.

“That doesn’t seem worth it to me.”

Asami didn’t respond or even look at her at first. She seemed lost in thought.

“He’s a complicated guy, but he cares,” she said. “A lot. And even if we fight, I know that he’s always going to be there for me no matter what. I told you before about why he acts the way he
“And I’m sure things will end up being fine between you two like always.”

There were obviously layers to Asami and Mako’s relationship that she would never be able to understand. They both shared the loss of a parent, and that wasn’t something you could just share with anyone. It took Asami close to four months to finally open up to Korra about it, and Korra understood why. As much as she prided herself on knowing so much about her best friend, there were just some things they couldn’t relate with each other about.

“You don’t like him, do you?” Asami asked quietly. It was a casual assumption. She didn’t sound angry or sad when she said it, but the disappointment was clearly there.

Korra looked back at her.

“As long as you like him, why does it matter what I think?” she asked, sidestepping the question.

“Because you’re my best friend.”

Korra sighed and dropped her head. She ignored the way her stomach flipped and dropped simultaneously at hearing Asami say that with little to no thought.

“You’re going to pull that card, huh?”

“You really gave me no choice,” Asami told her, smiling.

Korra mimicked her expression. They rarely acknowledged how much their friendship had grown and progressed since the first time they met, but the moments they did were always significant. And as much as it irritated her that Mako was now incorporated into those moments, she still couldn’t bring herself to ignore Asami’s honest words.

“I’ll try,” she said. “But he has to meet me halfway here.”

Asami’s eyes brightened up and she smiled even fuller.

“He will. I promise.”

Korra bit the inside of her cheek and refrained from telling Asami to not make such a promise. She
knew there was no chance in hell that things between her and Mako would change. They were better off continuing to ignore each other’s existence. But she wasn’t going to destroy Asami’s hope like that. And the chances were that she’d end up figuring it out for herself eventually. Plus, it seemed like Asami had enough on her plate as it was.

Korra realized something just then.

“Wait, so if that wasn’t what you guys fought about last night, how long ago did you tell your dad about fashion school?”

Asami paused and then looked at her with a guilty expression. “About a week ago.”

Korra’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “A week?” she repeated. Asami nodded. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t know.” Asami sighed. “I guess I just didn’t want to bother you about my stupid problems.”

“Okay, one, they’re not stupid,” Korra reassured her with a smile. “And two, do you forget who you’re talking to? A controlling parent with little regard for their child’s needs sounds right about down my alley.”

Asami responded with a smile of her own, although Korra could tell it was forced. She felt bad for not realizing how much Asami was going through at the moment. It also felt weird because, at most times, Asami was an open book. The fact that she managed to hide away her feelings so easily worried Korra. Why hadn’t she noticed? Or was she that wrapped up in her own problems that she couldn’t tell her best friend was hurting?

“I just don’t want to make you feel uncomfortable or anything,” Asami admitted. “I know how much you hate talking about that stuff. Besides, like I said earlier, I’ve been worried about you lately. I know you love a good party, but you’ve been going out a lot more than usual.”

Korra sighed. “I told you already. You don’t have to worry—”

“I know,” Asami said before she could finish. “I know that you can take care of yourself and that this is just your way of wanting to deal with things on your own. But I’m just saying that you don’t have to do it that way. I mean, you have me…”

Korra looked down at her lap. She hated that the topic was now being shifted onto her, but at the same time she realized how much of a hypocrite she was being. Here she was, expecting Asami to tell her everything, when there were a couple of things she hadn’t been willing to talk about or admit to. Maybe this was an opportunity for her to let out some of the things she had been hiding. Maybe it was important for the both of them.

“I haven’t spoken to my dad all summer,” she said.

Asami, who had been playing with the bedsheets absentmindedly, looked up at her in surprise. “Really? Why not?”

“I don’t know.” Korra shrugged. “My mom calls every week, but never him. She told me I shouldn’t take it personally, but it’s kinda hard not to.”

“I’m so sorry, Korra,” Asami said, reaching out and placing her hand on Korra’s knee. “You don’t deserve that.”

“Maybe I do,” Korra mused.
“You don’t.” Asami squeezed her knee. “You deserve a father who will be there for you, even when they don’t understand.”

Korra reached for Asami’s hand and looked her in the eyes. “So do you.”

They stared at one another, and for each second that passed, Korra felt herself submerging deeper into something she swore to herself she never would. She felt those familiar, growing feelings twisting inside of her. Recently, with every little conversation or interaction they shared, it only made things harder. The longer she went on ignoring it, the more intense those feelings got.

“Asami…” she started, struggling to keep eye contact and feeling a sudden weight on her whole body, crushing her.

“Hm?” Asami asked, looking at her intently.

Abruptly, Korra resurfaced, remembering herself.

She pursed her lips and pulled her hand away. “Please tell me you have food downstairs for the slightly hungover?” she said instead.

Asami blinked at the change of conversation and gave Korra an odd look, but she thankfully said nothing about it.

“Well, I made pancakes earlier, but not enough for you.”

Korra shook her head in fake-disapproval. “You disappoint me, Sato.”

“Again, it’s not my fault you sleep like a log. If you had come home sooner and woken up earlier, maybe I could have made you some.”

“You make a terrible host.”

Asami rolled her eyes and got up from the bed. “I’ll go make some more. Meanwhile, you should clean yourself up a bit.”

“Ouch.” Korra put a hand over her chest. “I hope you know that I worked hard to achieve this look.”

“We oughta do something about your sense of style, then.”

Korra stuck her tongue out. “Princess.”

“Halitosis.”

The pillow barely missed Asami as she ran out of the room and shut the door behind her, laughing along the way.

Korra sat there for a long minute afterward. She came to the conclusion that there were just one or two things that Asami was better off not knowing.

It was one of the hottest days in July so far that it was almost agonizing.

Korra came home, feeling sweaty and gross after being packed in the subway with a bunch of strangers. When she walked into the kitchen, she found her uncle talking on the phone. The minute he saw her, his face was caught between looking surprised and also like he’d just been seen with
his hand inside of a cookie jar.

“I’ll call you back,” he said into the phone and hung up. When he looked at Korra again, his face changed to the normal, passive look she was used to seeing by now. “I didn’t think you’d be home so soon.”

Korra gave him a suspicious look and shifted her bookbag to one shoulder. “Asami had a dinner party to go to with her dad,” she said.

It was as much of a disappointment to her as it was to Asami. They’d pretty much been attached at the hip all week.

“You know, it still surprises me how the two of you have gotten so close,” Unalaq said, rubbing at his chin.

Korra rolled her eyes. She heard him say that many times before, ever since the first day she told him about her and Asami hanging out. It was also code for, ‘I can’t believe someone like her is friends with you.’ She wouldn’t put it past him to think something like that, anyway.

“Who were you talking to just now?” she asked, choosing to ignore his comment.

“A client. Not that it’s any of your business.”

“You never take business calls at home,” she pointed out.

“Well, now I do.”

“Oh really?” Korra folded her arms. “So, let me guess: This client of yours is looking for a legal way to emancipate himself from his daughter?”

Unalaq shifted uncomfortably but didn’t look away. “Tonraq is hardly that kind of guy.”

“Why won’t he talk to me then?”

“He just… doesn’t know what to say to you,” Unalaq said and rubbed at his tired eyes.

Korra glared. So her dad was ignoring her after all?

“And that just makes it okay for him to pretend like I don’t exist?” she said.

“That’s—no,” Unalaq struggled. “He may not be the best with words, but Tonraq does care. And he loves you. You’re just too blinded by your own anger to see that.”

Korra looked away. She knew that what Unalaq was saying was right, but there was this nagging voice in her head telling her that he was wrong.

“I’ll be in my room.”

Unalaq didn’t say anything as she walked out of the kitchen and went upstairs. When she got to her (well, really Eska’s) room, she dropped her bag to the floor. After sitting down on the bed, she put a knee up to her chest.

The bitterness inside of her made it hard to see the situation as any other way than how she perceived it. After all, she was the one sent away, while both her parents went on about their lives. What kind of ‘love’ was that? Right now, she was an outsider to her own family, and it looked like that wasn’t going to change any time soon.
She didn’t know how much time passed with her in her own thoughts, but she was taken out of them when she heard her phone making a dinging sound from her backpack. Sighing, she reached over and unzipped the front pocket to pull out her phone. When she woke it, she saw that there were five new messages from Asami. With a raised brow, she unlocked her phone and read through each one:

**OMG you’ve only been gone for 30 minutes and I’m already dying,** the first one read, causing one side of Korra’s mouth to twitch.

**OK, so we just got here and this old guy is already asking me to dance with him later. Remember when you called me an old man magnet? I’m starting to believe it.**

**Crisis averted. Now I’m listening to them talk about a bunch of business stuff that is above my level of comprehension. I’m sure that if I just close my eyes and tune them out, my soul will eventually leave my body.**

**My dad just saw me on my phone and now he’s giving me dirty looks. Gotta go. Missssss you!**

Korra was smiling so hard that it hurt by the time she got to the last message. She held her bottom lip between her teeth and read through them ten more times.

It felt like every single time she was slipping into that dark place in her mind, Asami came from out of nowhere to pull her out of it. Even if only by coincidence. She didn’t believe in fate, but it was moments like these that made her think about their relationship and that unspoken connection they had. It was as exciting as it was confusing. Exciting because it was something Korra had never felt with anyone else before, but confusing because she didn’t know what to do with those feelings. She *couldn’t* do anything with them.

She felt an ache in heart that wouldn’t go away. Having to keep everything she was feeling bottled up inside was starting to get to her. It frightened her to think that one day she could eventually lose control and everything would come bursting at the seams.

Hours went by, and before she knew it, it was night time and she officially missed dinner. Then again, she wasn’t all that hungry anyway. Instead, she just got ready for bed.

After turning out the lights and getting under the sheets, she tried to drift off, but all that happened was a bunch of stirring. Finally, after an hour, she gave up and reached over to grab her phone. Without thinking, she dialed the all too familiar number.

“You are not going to believe the night I had,” Asami said once she answered.

Korra closed her eyes at the sound of her best friend’s voice. Even though it had only been a few hours since they last saw each other, it felt like forever.

“Yeah, well it was probably better than mine.”

“Oh?”

“Mhm.”

“Are you okay? Did something happen?” Asami asked, sounding the slightest bit worried.

Korra didn’t know what to say to that. Everything and nothing happened. She just felt so confused, tired, and *alone.*
“Wanna trade stories?”

There was a brief pause. And she could picture the concerned look in Asami’s eyes.

“Sure. I’m game.”

They talked. For hours. Saying a lot, but not too much at the same time until it was about four in the morning and they were practically slurring as they spoke.

It left Korra feeling comforted and unsatisfied at the same time. But nonetheless, she let Asami’s voice soak through her like a wave on sand. She allowed herself to think for a moment that nothing else mattered. She even let those dangerous thoughts into her mind, like a soft whisper. She imagined Asami sleepily resting beside her, talking to her in that gentle voice and reaching over to brush Korra’s hair behind her ear. And in return, Korra would do the same.

*Just for one night,* she thought to herself. For one night only, she’d entertain herself with those thoughts. Then, when she woke up in the morning, they’d be gone like a forgotten dream.

The only computer in the house was the one that Unalaq used in his home office. The only time Korra was allowed to use it was when she needed it for homework, or to Skype with her parents. In this case, it was the latter.

“Two weeks?” she said in disbelief.

“Korra,” her mother started, and she could be seen sighing through the computer screen. “We really want to see you.”

“Why? I already came home for Christmas and spring break. And it’s not like either of those visits did anything to benefit any of us.”

In fact, with both of those visits, all she remembered was long, awkward silences at the dinner table, and sometimes her father wouldn’t even be there for those. Most of the time, Korra just sat in her room, counting down the days until she could be back in New York where she at least had some semblance of a life. She all of a sudden found herself missing the endless noise of the city and the self-absorbed people. There was also maybe one particular person she missed in general, and it definitely wasn’t her uncle.

“You guys are doing just fine without me,” she said.

Her mother frowned. “You know that’s not true.”

“Do I? It’s not like I’ve heard much from Dad lately,” she spat out angrily. “Does he even know that I exist anymore?”

“I’ve already told you that he’s been busy at the station. If you knew how much he had on his plate you wouldn’t be saying any of this.”

There it was. The guilt tripping.

“He’s so busy that he can’t even take five minutes out of his day to talk to his own daughter?” Korra scoffed. “Right.”

“He agreed with me that it would be good for all of us if you came home for a few weeks. We need to figure out what you want to do after you graduate. Have you looked at some of the schools I told
you about?”

Korra massaged her temple, feeling a headache coming on. “No.”

“Well, maybe when you come up here, we can all go and visit some together.”

She laughed ironically and looked at her mother in the screen. “It’s funny how you guys sent me away to go to a different high school, and now you expect me to come back home and go to college there. Do I even have a choice?”

“Of course you have a choice,” her mother said carefully. “But don’t you think it would be better for all of us if you finally came home and we all just started over?”

Korra could feel herself begin to tremble and shake. Even with the hundreds of miles of distance between them, the reins her parents had on her neck were as tight as ever.

“Start over?” she repeated slowly. “You really think that’s possible now after everything?”

Her mother sighed. “All we’ve ever wanted was to try and do what’s best for you, Korra.”

“Yeah? Well look at what good that’s done for me.”

The silence between them after that was long and doing more damage to their already strained relationship. Looking into those eyes that were so similar to hers made Korra feel longing and resentment at the same time.

“This isn’t up for debate,” her mother said. Her voice changed into an authoritative and out of patience tone. “We’ve already bought the ticket and we expect to see you in a few weeks.”

Korra opened her mouth to say something, but then bit her tongue. She knew it was futile to argue. Besides, she would never win.

“Whatever you want.”

The conversation ended shortly after that and she flattened her palms over her eyes. After a minute of hearing her own thoughts screaming at her in the quiet room she sat in, she let out a shuddered breath before reaching for her phone.

She went to her contacts. For a split second her thumb lingered over Asami’s name, but she scrolled past it. After finding the number she was looking for, she quickly dialed it before she could change her mind.

“Hey,” she said when the person answered. “What’s the move for tonight?”

The blazing fire kept her warm on a summer night, even though it was far from chilly out. A guy was strumming his guitar, singing a song in a somber, quiet tone that had her swaying.

She ignored the voices of the people around her and let everything else drown out. She could only feel her feet as they moved, along with the occasional dizziness.

It felt so fucking good.

Even if she had no control and thought that things were out of her hands, it was amazing how little she cared. All she wanted was to be in that state forever, where everything just went away.
The fire grew hotter, and her movements more languid.

Absently, she wondered if this was what it was like to feel nothing at all.

“So, from what I heard, there’s this epic car chase scene that lasts about ten minutes.”

“Oh, really?” Korra said, trying not to sound as disinterested as she felt.

The smell of popcorn and candy filled her nose as she sat at a small, round table, waiting. Idly, she listened to the boy beside her rattle on about the movie they were about to see.

“I know that sounds over dramatic, which it is, but I’m kind of excited for it. Oh! And I also heard…”

Korra tuned him out and looked elsewhere. Her eyes rested on the concession stand where she saw Asami and Mako standing next to each other. They were holding hands as they waited in the long line. She felt a twitch of irritation coming on.

Whatever fight the couple had a few weeks ago was either swept under the carpet or completely forgotten about. It was something Korra already knew would happen, but when Asami invited her out to the movies, she somehow forgot to mention that it would be with Mako and his little brother. Talk about a mood killer.

And on top of that, she was going back to Quebec soon. Was it really asking too much if she wanted to spend some time with her best friend alone before she was subjected to that hell?

It took a week of avoiding and flat out ignoring the subject, but Korra finally told Asami about her sudden trip back home. Asami tried to be supportive and reassuring that it wouldn’t be “that bad.” Korra knew the opposite, though.

“How about you?”

Korra glanced over at Bolin finally.

“I’m sorry?”

“Oh, I just said that I’m not a big movie goer like Asami is, but I love a good action film. Do you?”

“Um, yeah. They’re awesome.” She gave him two thumbs up and plastered a smile on her face. “I can’t wait for it.”

Bolin smiled at her brightly. “I had to beg Asami for us to see it, but I’ll make it up to her with the birthday present I got her.”

Korra did a double take. “What? Her birthday’s coming up?”

“Yup,” Bolin said, unaware of the look of surprise on Korra’s face. “I can’t wait to see how her party tops last year. Her dad actually got Coldplay to perform. It was so awesome.”

“What’s awesome?”

Korra looked over and saw Mako and Asami walking up to them with food and drinks in their hands. Carefully, they sat them down on the table. It was Asami who asked the question.

“Korra and I were just talking about—"
“This amazing scene he heard about in the movie,” Korra finished for him. She looked over at Bolin and gave him a smile, but underneath was a plea for him to just play along. There was a flicker of confusion on his face, but it was gone before he looked back over at Asami and Mako.

“Yup. Super cool indeed.”

“Ugh, Bolin,” Asami groaned. “Why do you always have to spoil things?”

“It’s not spoiling! I told her it was something I heard. It doesn’t mean I know for sure if that scene will actually happen or not.”

“That’s true,” Korra backed him up. When he looked over at her, he winked and Korra smiled back genuinely this time around. She felt guilty for not paying him much attention before.

Asami looked between them both and smiled. “Whatever you say.”

“We forgot to butter the popcorn,” Mako said, cutting in and turning everyone’s attention to him. “Come help me, bro.”

“What? You can’t do that by yourself?” Bolin said jokingly.

Mako didn’t respond. Instead, he took one of the buckets of popcorn and started walking back to the concession stand. Korra realized he wasn’t even the slightest bit amused by the conversation. In fact, he almost looked annoyed. But seeing as how he always wore that expression whenever Korra was around, it wasn’t anything out of the normal for him.

With the drop of his shoulders, Bolin sighed and grabbed the other bucket of popcorn before following behind his brother, mumbling something under his breath along the way.

“You two seem to be hitting it off,” Asami said after the boys were out of earshot. She sat down across from her, stealing Bolin’s seat.

Korra shrugged. “He talks a lot.”

“Ah, well, at least there’s never a dull moment with him.”

After a moment of contemplation and wondering if it was wise enough to bring it up, Korra made her decision.

“Why didn’t you tell me your birthday was coming up?”

Asami froze and her eyes widened. “How did you—” She looked in Bolin's direction to send him a glare.

“Don’t be mad at him,” Korra said, gaining her attention again. “Were you even going to tell me?”

Asami shrugged. “I was getting around to it.”

“You didn’t want me to come to your party?” Korra asked, hating how insecure she sounded.

“No, no! That’s not it.” Asami reached out and touched Korra by the arm lightly. “It’s just that… I don’t really like celebrating it. If it were up to me, I wouldn’t even be having a party.”

“Why not? From how Bolin described them, they seem cool.”

“Bolin thinks everything is cool,” Asami said. “Meanwhile, I’m always told these parties are an
‘opportunity,’” she used air quotes.

“Ah. Your dad forces you to have them,” Korra concluded.

Asami nodded. “It’s his way of helping me build connections. Sometimes he invites a couple of corporate shitheads to meet with me and discuss my future,” she said with the roll of her eyes. “I’m pretty sure he’s already made the calls and I’ll be expected to talk to ten different people. No fun for me.”

“Sounds rough,” Korra said. And she didn’t mean it in a sarcastic way, either. From the way Asami described the life of being a famous CEO’s daughter, she wouldn’t wish that life on her worst enemy.

“Anyway, you’re definitely invited,” Asami said. “I just know that this stuff isn’t really your scene.”

“If it’s for you, I wouldn’t miss it,” Korra said truthfully.

“You’d willingly go through that torture with me?”

“Yup. I’ll just stand beside you and do absolutely nothing while you get your head talked off.”

Asami smiled knowingly. “That sounds like an oddly familiar situation.”

“I would hope so,” Korra laughed. “It wasn’t that long ago.”

“Yeah… but it kind of feels that way, though, doesn’t it?”

“Mm.” Korra nodded in agreement. They had only known each other for a little under a year, and yet it felt like they’d known each other forever. Korra always thought it but never found the courage to say it out loud. However, hearing that Asami shared those same thoughts as well gave her validation. It was easy to not imagine Asami’s life as anything other than perfect, but Korra knew better. She learned the very first night when they had a full-blown conversation that Asami had her own issues, but it was the way she brushed them off her shoulder so easily that Korra could sometimes forget. It was incredibly admirable, yet sad at the same time.

But it was through that where they found a connection, and it was something Korra wanted to hang on to for as long as she could. There was no other person in the world who she could trust and share so much of her life with.

“I’m gonna go to the restroom,” Asami said, getting up. “Watch my stuff, please?”

“Sure.”

Asami walked off and Korra sat there alone.

Looking over at the butter station, she saw Mako and Bolin talking, though it appeared that Mako had been doing most of it. She had a gut feeling that their conversation was about her, but she didn’t care in the slightest. However, it wasn’t making it any less easy for her to not find Mako extremely manipulative and condescending.

“Well, well, look who it is.”

Korra turned her head and saw a familiar group of people walking over: three guys and two girls.

“What are you guys doing here?” she asked.
Tahno, the boy in the middle, strolled up to her and placed his hand on the table. He leaned forward, into Korra’s personal space. “Just admiring the view,” he said with a smirk.

Korra pushed him away with the roll of her eyes. “Try again.”

“We’ve been here for a few hours, hopping movies,” said Dinah, one of the girls. The other girl, May, was eating a twizzler and appeared bored.

“Seriously? That’s how you guys like to spend your time?” Korra looked between them all. “And here I thought that once you graduate, you become more mature.”

“You could join us,” Tahno said and pointed his thumb behind him. “We’re all going over to Ming’s house later. His brother’s coming home for the weekend so I’m sure he’s going to hook us up.”

The boy mentioned was standing off to the side, looking so far gone from the rest of the world, and given how red his eyes were, that seemed to be the case.

To this day, Korra still had no idea what to think of this group. On one hand, they definitely knew when to show her a good time when she needed it. But on the other hand, they were people with no goals or aspirations in life, and they were just fine with that. Korra wasn’t. Even though she was lost about what she wanted to do with her life, at least she knew that she wanted to go somewhere. It was her way of affirming to herself that she was different from them, even in the slightest way possible.

“No thanks,” she ended up saying. “I’m with people.”

“Oh, you mean with your girlfriend and her boyfriend?” Tahno questioned. “Yeah, we saw that.”

The whole group erupted into hysterics, as if what Tahno said was the funniest thing in the world. Korra, however, did not. Her back immediately stiffened and she clenched her jaw.

Tahno had this way of knowing things he wasn’t supposed to know, so the fact that he was joking about something like this sent Korra into a slight panic mode. If he was saying things like that about her, then that could also mean other people were, too. And if it somehow managed to get back to Asami…

“Why don’t you guys go find something better to do?” she said coldly.

“Aw, come on. Don’t be like that,” Tahno wrapped an arm over her shoulder. “You know how much we love picking on you.”

“Look, she’s blushing,” Dinah said with a laugh.

Korra removed Tahno’s arm from off her. “Go. Now. And take your posse with you.”

Tahno laughed it off. “All right, all right. I can tell when I’m not wanted.” He backed away but paused and then leaned back to whisper in Korra’s ear. “Just let me know when you’re ready for some real fun again.”

He pulled away and gave her a sly look before walking off with the rest of the group. Korra watched them go, breathing easier now that they were gone.

“What was that about?”
Korra turned her head. Mako was walking up to her, appearing visibly angry. At a glance, she noticed that Bolin was still over by the butter station, though he was looking over at the two of them nervously.

Korra looked back at Mako. “What was what about?”

“Don’t play dumb,” Mako said. “I saw you talking to those idiots.”

“Wow. Idiots? That’s a little harsh, even for you, Mako,” Korra said, sarcasm dripping in her tone. “Do you call everyone who doesn’t look or act like your group of preppy douchebags idiots?”

Mako glared. “A bunch of people whose idea of a good time is drinking and getting high off of God knows what makes them idiots. If you knew what was good for you, you wouldn’t associate yourself with them.”

“Aww.” Korra slid off her chair and stepped toward him. “I didn’t know you cared so much about me.”

“I don’t,” Mako said flatly.

The sarcasm melted away from Korra’s face in an instant, and she replaced it with a scowl. “Then mind. Your own. Fucking. Business,” she said. Her voice was low, but the emphasis in her words was clear.

“If you’re going to be hanging around Asami and bringing your bullshit along with you, it is my business,” Mako said, stepping closer.

“Says the guy who’s constantly making her put up with his bullshit,” Korra countered. “And I hate to break it to you, but Asami’s a big girl. She’s perfectly capable of choosing her own friends.”

“Apparently not,” Mako said, giving her a once over. His gaze was mocking and showed how superior he thought he was. Korra wasn’t intimidated at all.

“If you’ve got something to say, say it,” she challenged.

“Oh, I will,” Mako said, inching forward even more.

Out of nowhere, Bolin suddenly stepped between them both, pushing Mako backward.

“That’s enough, bro,” he said, sounding a lot more mature than he did just a few minutes before to Korra’s surprise. “Knock it off.”

“Stay out of it, Bolin,” Mako said, still glaring at Korra.

“No. You’re the one causing a scene in a public place. Let it go.”

It took a few nudges, but finally Mako backed down. Korra was still fuming, though. She was about ready to grab one of the drinks off the table and throw it in Mako’s face. Who the hell did he think he was? They rarely ever exchanged words, and when they did it was only a sentence or two laced with bitterness and disdain. Yet there he was, insulting and berating her.

She hated him. She absolutely hated him and there was no way of hiding it now.

“Guys?”

It was almost comical how all three of them turned at the sound of Asami’s voice. She stood there
with a look of confusion on her face.

“What’s going on?”

There were streamers and balloons everywhere outside. It was eighty degrees, though it felt like it was in the nineties from how much Korra was sweating in the taxi ride over.

She walked up the driveway of the Sato house, nervously fiddling with the gift in her hand. For a split second, she thought about just chucking it in the bushes before reaching the door, but she decided against it.

She was too thrilled when Unalaq told her he had to go into the office and couldn’t “escort” her to the party. Any chance the man got, he would make up an excuse to drop her off or pick her up from Asami’s house just so he could have a chance to speak with Mr. Sato. It was so obvious what he was doing; however, when Mr. Sato actually was home (on very rare occasions), he would indulge in a five-minute conversation with the man.

She heard a lot of noise coming from the backyard but thought best to try and find Asami in the house first instead. She wasn’t in much of a rush since she wouldn’t be staying long anyway.

Only two weeks passed since the whole movie theatre incident. Somehow, both her and Mako managed to cover up their ill feelings for each other and endure the two-hour film, but the awkward tension was there throughout. And when Asami finally got Korra alone to ask her about it, Korra blew it off and told her she was just imagining things.

It wasn’t brought up again after that, but Korra knew Asami wouldn’t let it go, which was why she decided it was best to keep herself at a distance for a while. With Asami being so busy and studying away for the ACTs and SATs, it was easy to go under the radar. But now that Korra was leaving in a couple of days, there was no way to avoid being in the same room with Mako. It was inevitable, but she could get over her distaste of him for a few minutes to give Asami her gift, and then she would leave.

With that reinforced into her brain, she entered the house… and almost groaned out loud.

There were people everywhere. She noticed a couple of kids right away from her school and passed them quickly. She really hated that Asami was so popular.

It could have been worse, though. Asami managed to talk her dad into throwing a house party and tone it down on the theatrics. Korra didn’t want to know what he originally had planned.

She walked through the house, making her way through the heaps of people until she reached the kitchen. Asami wasn’t anywhere to be found. She looked out of the window that led to the backyard. There were people outside in their bathing suits, taking turns going down the long slip and slide, while others just bathed under the sun while eating some food. A huge projector was set up on one side of the yard. Korra remembered Asami saying something about how she wanted an outdoor movie night.

She noticed Hiroshi was outside by the grill talking to several men around him. They must have been the “connections” he wanted Asami to make.

“Hey, Korra!”

She turned around and saw Bolin walking up to her, smiling. He was in a white t-shirt and a pair of swim trunks.
“Hey,” she said and let out a surprised noise when he hugged her. It was her first time seeing him since that night. She actually appreciated how even after being put in a tough situation, Bolin still included her and tried to soothe things over. How he could be related to one of the biggest assholes on the plant was anyone’s guess. Either way, she hugged him back.

“Did you just get here?” he asked after pulling away.

“Yeah,” she said, scratching the side of her head. “I was looking for Asami.”

“Oh, she’s upstairs… with Mako,” he said and gave her a guilty look.

Korra rolled her eyes. “Perfect.”

It was no use holding back her disliking of him. Bolin already caught a glimpse of it, and she already knew that Mako wasn’t holding back with anything he said about her.

“I can go get her if you want?” Bolin offered.

Korra shook her head. “No. That’s okay.”

“You sure?”

“Youp. Thank you, though.”

She waved at him and walked off. It was a real shame, because if Bolin wasn’t Mako’s brother, she imagined that they would have been great friends. But she wasn’t going to put him in that kind of position, so it was best to just keep it as acquaintances.

She passed back through the kitchen and living room and then headed up the steps, going over the single white streamer that marked them off limits.

It was quiet and cooler up there. As she walked down the familiar hallway and got closer to Asami’s room, she heard the distinguishable voices coming from it. The door was wide open, so she at least didn’t have to worry that she was walking in on something she really didn’t want to see.

There was a small laugh from Asami, and then Mako said something else, which made her laugh even harder.

Korra finally reached the door and looked in. Mako and Asami were sitting on her bed. Neither of them were dressed in bathing suits like the rest of the people downstairs. Asami was in a floral, knee-length dress, while Mako wore jeans and a button up shirt. They looked like the perfect, sophisticated couple that everyone at school praised them as.

When they still hadn’t noticed her, she knocked on the door.

“Hey,” she said, looking at Asami, and only Asami.

Asami looked over and her eyes lit up. “Hey!”

“Hope I’m not interrupting,” Korra said, though she didn’t mean it in the slightest.

“Nope! We were just getting away from the noise for a while.”

“Asami, I’m going to head downstairs,” Mako said.

“Okay. We’ll be right behind you.”
To Korra’s annoyance, Mako leaned over and kissed her for a brief, but far too long, moment.

He got off the bed and headed toward the door. They locked eyes for a second as he passed, but neither of them said anything. He left quietly.

“I was beginning to think you weren’t going to show up,” Asami said once they were alone.

“The best kind of guests arrive late, haven’t you heard?” Korra joked and stepped more inside the room.

“Oh? Where’d you learn that?”

“Sorry, princess. That’s top-secret information.”

“Uhuh,” Asami said with a laugh. “Sure it is.”

Korra sat on the bed. “Although, you could have gotten me here earlier if you got Paramore to come do a mini-concert in your backyard.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “I didn’t know you were that easy to bribe.”

“Eh. Only with certain things.”

They smiled at each other, and instantly Korra felt everything else melt away. Mako? Who the hell was that?

“Either way, I’m really glad you’re here,” Asami said. “Now this party can be a little more bearable.”

Korra’s smile faltered and she looked down in regret. “I can’t stay.”

Asami frowned. “You’re kidding.”

“I just have a lot of stuff I need to take care of before I leave,” Korra tried to explain. “I put it off until last minute, so now I’m paying the price.”

It was such a shit excuse and she knew it. She couldn’t even look Asami directly in the eyes as she made it.

“But you’re my person for this kind of stuff!” Asami said. “How am I supposed to get through today?”

“I’m sure you’ll manage,” Korra said with a small chuckle.

Asami shook her head, smiling. “Nope. Impossible.”

Korra loved and hated the way her chest swelled. That assurance she felt that Asami needed her there meant so much. Almost too much.

She looked down at the gift in her hands.

“Is that for me?” Asami asked.

“No. I brought it for the other birthday girl.”

With the roll of her eyes, Asami leaned over and flicked Korra on the forehead. “Smartass.”
Korra rubbed at the nonexistent bruised spot. “Thank you for the compliment.”

Asami laughed and flipped her hair behind her shoulder. “You are unbelievable.”

Korra dropped her hand and smiled. Once the laughter died down, she held out the gift. Asami took it into her hands, holding both sides of the square box like it was the most delicate thing in the world. She looked up at Korra curiously.

“Can I open it?” she asked.

Korra nodded. “Of course.”

Asami looked down at the box again. She untied the bow and then lifted the lid.

“Oh, my goodness,” she gasped and pulled out the bracelet. “Korra…” she looked up at her with an expression of being genuinely touched and surprised.

Korra felt herself blushing and tried to wave it off. “It’s nothing,”

“It’s everything.” Asami looked at the jewelry in awe. Six pieces of circular scrimshaw were bound together on a beaded chain, each of them having different drawn images on them. “Where did you get this?” Asami asked quietly.

“A family friend of my parents owns a craft store up in Quebec,” Korra said. “I used to help him out on weekends and in return he would teach me how to craft jewelry. I haven’t gotten a chance to make anything new until now.”

“You made this?” Asami looked at her with wide eyes.

“Well, I put it together,” Korra corrected and rubbed at the back of her neck. “It was sort of a rush job, though. If I’d known it was your birthday sooner…”

Asami shook her head. “This is incredible.”

Seeing how amazed Asami was by the gift put Korra’s mind at ease about it.

“Here,” she reached for the bracelet. She pointed to one image with an antelope on it.

“Gentleness,” she said, and then moved on to the next one: a horse. “Nobility.” Asami’s look changed from confusion to wonderment, and when Korra saw this, she continued naming off all the symbols she learned about since grade school.

“Generosity. Wisdom. Strength… Friendship.”

Her thumb lingered on the image of the two arrows crossing.

“This is…”

When Korra looked up at Asami, she saw the tears in her eyes.

“Yeah,” she confirmed. All those symbols represented the person she saw right in front of her.

“Can you help me put it on,” Asami said, her voice cracking and layered with emotion.

Korra nodded. A second later, she was clasping the bracelet around one of Asami’s wrists. She was about to pull away, but Asami practically tackled her into a hug. After gaining back her balance, Korra returned the gesture and wrapped her arms around Asami’s back. The smell of strawberry
scented shampoo filled her nose.

“You’re such a crybaby, Sato,” she said in a fake, exasperated tone.

Asami sniffled into her shoulder. “Shut up.”

“Happy birthday.”

Asami pulled away after a minute and wiped at her eyes. “Thank you,” she said, smiling. “Best gift ever.”

Korra tried but failed to not show how overly smug she felt at hearing that. “I know,” she ended up saying.

Asami just laughed and then finally got off the bed. She went over to her dresser and grabbed a tissue to wipe at her eyes. After a few minutes of collecting herself, she turned back to Korra. “Okay. I guess it’s time to go face the cavalry now.”

Korra got up as well. “I should probably get going.”

“What?” Asami gave her a frown. “Come on. You absolutely have to stay now! At least for a little while?”

Korra bit her lip. She knew that she didn’t have a valid excuse. It was pure selfishness that made her so reluctant to come. But now that she was standing there face to face with Asami, it was like her back was against a wall, in a narrow space of a corner. And seeing disappointment in those bright, green eyes only made Korra disappointed in herself.

“Just for a little while,” she agreed.

The way Asami’s face lit up made her less apprehensive about her decision.

They made their way back down to the party. Korra stayed behind as Asami made her rounds and talked to her other friends from their school. She barely contributed much to any of the conversations, and she was just fine with being ignored.

At one point, she ventured off to the kitchen to find something to drink, but when she came back, Mako was there and ended up taking her spot. He had his arm around Asami’s waist and they were both listening to the conversation in the small group they were in. Asami looked so happy and relaxed with everyone around her. It was picturesque, and Korra couldn’t have wanted anything more for a person like her. She deserved it.

And yet, at the same time, there was a pool of emotion forming inside of her.

Fear.

It felt familiar; like it had been hidden underneath the surface of her other feelings for a while, and she was only just now noticing it.

She felt inexplicably small; insignificant. It was similar to how she felt with her parents after seeing how easily they could get on without her. Seeing Asami surrounded by so many other people who were similar to her in all the ways Korra wasn’t brought that fear to life again. She realized that one day soon, maybe Asami would grow bored of her, too.

After the initial moment passed, she walked back over to the group. When Asami saw her, she
offered a smile. Korra smiled back, but it was only with half the effort. Asami didn’t notice.

For the first time ever, Korra felt the distance between them.

TBC...
All the nights spent off our faces, trying to find these perfect places.

What the fuck are perfect places, anyway?

Everything was blurry.

Korra blinked a couple of times, trying to shake herself from the feeling, but that only made it worse. She jumped around instead, belting out the lyrics to a song she knew and laughed whenever she stumbled over her own feet.

The club was dark, with only a glimpse of light whenever they flashed from overhead. It made everyone look mechanical in their movements, and Korra felt nauseous from how trippy it was. A few times, she almost fell to the floor from how dizzy she felt, but luckily someone kept pushing her right back up. She was lost in the crowd and away from the people she knew, but that only made her feel more adventurous and daring. Sure she was barely 18 and it was illegal for her to be there, but that was no one else’s secret but her own. She mixed well into the crowd of anonymous faces, danced with people she didn’t know, and felt multiple hands on her body. It felt good.

The constant feeling of her phone buzzing in her back pocket tickled, but she grew to ignore it as the night went on.

Pretty soon, she lost track of where she was, but that didn’t matter because for the first time in a long time, her mind went utterly quiet.

There was no sound of her parents constant berating and nagging, or thinking about their disappointment in her. There was no thinking about her future, or the fact that in three months she would graduate and have no clue what to do with her life.

It all became so pointless to her. It was useless to dwindle on things she couldn’t foresee. Her life was her own life, and what she chose to do with it was really no one else’s business.

It all just faded away into an abyss. She was so far gone from where she was that she could barely even remember what she was thinking about in the first place. And maybe she wanted that. Maybe it was better that way.

For a split second she thought of Asami, who had no doubt been calling her the whole night. The distance just kept growing between them to the point that Korra could physically feel it. It made it easier for her to suppress her own feelings, though she realized that as much as she tried to forget about them and lodge them away in the back of her mind, it was impossible.

It was only when she was like this that those thoughts went as soon as they came.

So she danced longer, laughed a little louder, drank a little harder, and eventually the whole world was quiet around her.
Spring was just around the corner as March rolled through, though there was an occasional snowfall every now and then—like now for instance—that never stuck to the ground. The winter there for Korra wasn’t nearly as rough as in Quebec. There were nights where the heater would be on full blast, but it still wasn’t enough to keep her from freezing. When she was still a little girl, the snow would pile up so high that it would reach up to her waist. During those times, her father would lift her up high on his shoulders and carry her around that way. She always liked to pretend that she was flying.

She wondered if her father ever thought about those times or missed them. Did he even remember them? Or were all the years of constantly working and the year and a half she spent away enough to make him easily forget?

“Hey, stranger.”

She was taken out of her thoughts and hadn’t realized how long she’d been staring out the window, but it must have been for a while. She was sitting in the school library, trying to catch up on some of the missing homework she had. When she looked away from the window, she saw Asami standing there looking timid, but friendly nonetheless.

“Hi,” Korra muttered and then looked back down at her work.

“I haven’t heard from you in a while,” Asami said.

Korra picked up her pencil and tried to at least pretend like she was doing something.

“We see each other every day,” she said.

“You know what I mean,” Asami responded and sat down in the chair adjacent from Korra’s. Her voice was hushed, even though they were the only ones around. They didn’t have any classes together this year, but they both had a free period at the same time. Normally they would meet up in the library and do homework together. Although, for the past few weeks, Korra stopped coming.

“No, I really don’t,” she insisted.

It was quiet for a second, but then Asami breathed out.

“Liar,” she uttered.

Korra abruptly shut her book and looked up, meeting Asami’s gaze. The brightness from outside came through the window, and she could see every detail in Asami’s face. From the expressive look in her eyes that caused her brows to knit together, to the slight frown on her lips.

“What do you want me to say? I’ve just been busy.”

“Yeah,” Asami said with a scoff. “So I’ve heard.”

Korra narrowed her eyes. “What have you heard?” she asked, but on second thought she shook her head. “You know what? Never mind. I don’t even care. This school is full of a bunch of nosy asses who run their mouths but can’t say shit to anyone’s face.”

Asami looked taken aback by how candid Korra was being. “What is wrong with you?” she asked.

Korra shrugged. “Nothing. Like I said, I don’t care.”

“Well I do.”
“Well don’t,” she snapped. “It’s got nothing to do with you.”

Their eyes locked again for a solid moment and then she looked away.

“You’re doing it again, Korra,” she heard Asami say.

“What?”

“Shutting me out.”

Korra refrained from flinching. “You’re psychoanalyzing me now?”

“Don’t change the subject.”

“You really wanna hang out? Fine. We’ll go somewhere this weekend. Okay?”

“Wow,” Asami said, folding her arms. “I’m sorry for being such an inconvenience for you these days. I didn’t know I was carrying the plague.”

Korra sighed and closed her eyes. “Can we not do this right now?”

“When will we then, huh?” Asami asked, her voice raising. “How long are you going to keep playing this hot and cold game you’ve been doing for months now?”

Korra wanted to get up and walk away. It seemed like this was the only thing they talked—or rather fought—about these days, and it was quickly becoming a broken record. It was also a conversation she never felt like having because, quite frankly, Asami was pushing for answers that she didn’t even have. A lot changed with her, and it didn’t look like that would be stopping any time soon.

She still looked back on all of the moments she spent with Asami and reminisced about the closeness and bond they shared over time. In fact, it never left her mind. But she was right in thinking that it wouldn’t last forever. She went home for two weeks, dealt with feeling like the biggest disappointment in her parents lives on her own, and then she came back. She felt lost and with no direction like always, but while she always thought she’d just stumble on something eventually, she didn’t feel that way now. All she felt was emptiness and reaching for things she couldn’t have.

Asami was one of those things.

“I have to study,” she said and opened her book once more.

“Look, did I do something wrong?” Asami asked after a few seconds of silence passed between them.

“What makes you think that you did?”

“Well seeing as you’ve barely been returning my calls or texts and have been blatantly ignoring me, it kind of feels like I did.”

Korra sighed again. The never-ending feeling of guilt settled in the pit of her stomach. Even if she could find a way to articulate everything she was feeling, was there even a point? She was tired. So tired of everything and everyone. The last thing she wanted was to have to explain herself.

Finally, she looked up.
“It’s not always about you, Asami.”

There was a look of surprise on Asami’s face at the coldness in her tone, but then it quickly changed into one of upset. Korra forced herself to avert her gaze. She flipped a page in her book and started reading, though all of the words went over her head as she still felt those mesmerizing green eyes on her. Still, she didn’t look up.

After the seconds of lapsed silence, there was the sound of a chair sliding against the floor and Asami got up and left.

Korra waited two whole minutes before putting her book to the side. She folded her arms and put her head down, then she turned to stare out the window again. The snow fell lightly from the grey sky, and for a moment she wished that things were back to the way they used to be, with her on her father’s shoulders, catching snowflakes with her tongue, and feeling like she was flying.

It was close to three in the morning by the time she walked—or well, stumbled—into the house. She quietly shut the door behind her and locked it. Her boots were loud against the wooden floor boards, so she kicked them off, although one seemed stubborn to go. Just as she got it to release from her foot, the living room light turned on, almost blinding her in the process.

“Where the hell have you been?” Unalaq’s voice came from behind her.

Korra blinked a few times, trying to get her eyes adjusted to the brightness in the room. When she finally turned around, she saw her uncle in the doorway connecting the living room and the kitchen. He had bags under his eyes from the lack of sleep, but he still managed to look intimidating with his thin lips pulled into a frown and his steely eyes regarding her.

She managed to stand straighter, but in doing so she swayed back and forth.

“Out,” she said. If she spoke anymore, she’d run the risk of slurring her words.

“‘Out?’” Unalaq repeated, as if he hadn’t heard her correctly. “And what do you think you were doing ‘out’ this late?”

“It’s the weekend. What does it matter?”

Unalaq stepped closer to her. “It matters because a teenage girl like you doesn’t need to be out and about at this hour.”

“Would you say that if I was Desna?” Korra bit back.

“Don’t talk back to me,” Unalaq said, raising his voice. “If I tell you your curfew is eleven, then your curfew is at eleven and no later than. Do you understand me?”

Korra glared. She felt a sudden rage bubbling inside her like she was a volcano about to erupt. It was like she was at home again, listening to all of the lecturers, berating, and underlying disappointment.

“You’re not my father,” she hissed out loud at the man through her clenched teeth.

Unalaq looked startled at first by her outburst, but then that stern look was on his face again in a heartbeat. He grabbed Korra by the arm and wrenched her close.

“Breathe on me,” he said. His tone was calm, even if he looked like he was about to go off.
“What?” Korra said, as she struggled in his grip.

“Breathe. On. Me,” Unalaq said again, and with every word he tightened his hold.

Korra looked up at him with wide eyes. For a minute, she was actually frightened by him. And then, reluctantly, she blew a puff of air into his face. The pungent smell of alcohol mixed with a bit of vomit lingered in the air between them.

Unalaq didn’t speak immediately. He only released Korra’s arm and took a step back. He inhaled and exhaled sharply before looking at her again.

“This is the kind of person you really want to be, huh?” he said.

Korra felt her stomach drop, but she didn’t say anything. She didn’t know what to say. Instead she turned her head to the side.

“I’m not going to tell your father about this because, unlike you, I know that he has a lot on his plate right now.”

The anger instantly returned again at the mentioning of her dad.

“When doesn’t he?” she said. She knew that she was treading on thin ice, but she didn’t care. At this point she almost wanted the ice to break from underneath her.

“Do not test me right now, Korra. You’re already grounded,” Unalaq said. “If you try this again, I won’t hesitate to give you a real taste of the actual world. Now go to your room. We’ll talk about this in the morning.”

Korra walked out of the living room and went upstairs. When she made it to her bedroom, she slammed the door shut. She shrugged out of her jacket and threw it down in frustration before letting herself slide to the floor. Everything was loud now, including the sound of her rapidly beating heart.

She put her head between her knees and forced herself to calm down; to breathe. It took about twenty minutes, and during that time she somehow ended up spread out on the floor, turned on her side. She stared blankly into the darkness of the room as the numbness returned, and then she closed her eyes. It was easy to succumb to the pool of blackness surrounding her after that.

Being grounded by Unalaq wasn’t so bad. In fact, it wasn’t any different than what he normally expected of her. Aside from the double chores she had to do, she carried on as usual. Since he was working on a big case for work, he spent most of his days and nights at the office. All Korra had to do was make sure she got home before he did. It didn’t even seem like he was putting in any real effort.

She had music playing in the background as she mopped the kitchen floor when the doorbell rang. After putting the mop back into the bucket, she turned the music off and walked to the door. Guessing from her luck, it was one of the neighbors coming over to complain about how loud it was.

When she opened the door, she was shocked to see Asami standing there.

“Hey,” Asami said, giving her a small wave.

Korra felt dumbstruck. There were only a handful of times when Asami came over to her house
instead of the other way around, but even those were expected. For her to show up out of the blue like this was uncanny. Oh, and there was the fact that they weren’t even on speaking terms at the moment.

“Hey,” she replied with skepticism.

“Is it all right if I come in?”

Korra hesitated at first, but it was the cold wind that blew into the house that knocked some sense into her. She stepped to the side, allowing Asami to come through the door.

“It’s nippy out there,” Asami muttered while unzipping her jacket. Her cheeks were red and hair slightly damp under the purple knitted hat she wore. It must have been sprinkling outside.

“What are you doing here?” Korra asked. She didn’t try to hide the surprise in her voice.

“Oh, you know. I was just in the neighborhood,” Asami joked as she took off her shoes. When she looked over at Korra and noticed her serious expression, she rolled her eyes. “Obviously I’m here to see you.”

“Why?” Korra asked.

“I just wanted to talk,” Asami said in a softer tone. “Can we?”

Korra fidgeted. In the few weeks that went by that they hadn’t spoken, she already felt like so much had changed. She felt different in all of the bad ways, and just being in the same room as Asami had her reflecting on everything.

“Sure,” she said.

They walked into the living room and sat down. Asami put her coat to the side and then turned to Korra.

“How are you?” she asked.

Korra wanted to laugh. It was such a basic question, and yet it weighed such a heavy answer.

“Just peachy.”

Asami glanced away before looking at Korra again.

“Look, I know that things have been kind of shaky between us,” Asami admitted. "And I don't know why exactly that is, but I'm willing to bury the hatchet because... I miss you."

Korra inhaled sharply at the tender confession and soft expression in Asami's eyes. It was those last three words she uttered that made all of the coldness inside of Korra melt. She’d been building this wall up around herself for a while and all she was beginning to feel was hollow. But now Asami was there with a hammer to break it down. It instantly gave her hope; that even with all of the bullshit she was surrounded by, it didn’t mean that was all there was.

“I miss you, too,” she admitted, both to Asami and herself.

Asami smiled and reached up to tuck a piece of hair behind her ear. The charms from her bracelet dangled back and forth. Korra looked at it and couldn’t keep from smiling.

“Do you wanna help me with some chores?” she asked.
Asami looked contemplative for a moment, but then she shrugged. “I suppose,” she said in a fake exasperated tone.

Korra rolled her eyes. “Princess,” she said with a smile.

“Troublemaker,” Asami replied.

The rest of the day they spent working around the house, dusting and spraying. They talked about what they’d both been up to (with some omission on Korra’s part). Asami was eagerly waiting to hear back from all of the schools she applied to and also recently took up a part-time job at Forever 21 that she was excited about. Korra had no problem with listening. Hearing Asami’s voice was a pleasant distraction, and one that she’d been missing for a while. But it also made her realize that within a blink of an eye she could miss so much going on in her best friend’s life. It just proved how versatile Asami was and how she kept moving no matter what.

And just like that, the both of them forgot about their little fight, which was fine by Korra. It wasn’t worth mentioning anymore anyway. However, it felt like a lot of their fights ended that way; with the both of them just forgetting about it and sweeping it under the rug.

But when it was time for Asami to leave, she pulled Korra into a tight, warm hug.

“You can’t get rid of me that easily,” she spoke softly into Korra’s ear.

Korra swallowed thickly and blinked a few times.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” she whispered back.

There was a long, drawn out pause between her and her mother after Korra dropped the bombshell.

“What do you mean you never applied?” Senna said slowly over the phone, as if it could keep her from sounding angrier.

“I never wanted to go to that school in the first place, Mom,” Korra said.

“So where are you going to go then, Korra?” her mother asked, sounding frustrated and out of any patience to give.

“Why do I have to choose right now? I told you when I came home last time that I was thinking about taking a year off.”

“Yes, and we talked about why that wouldn’t be a good idea.”

“I don’t recall being able to talk,” Korra argued. “All I heard was you making decisions for me. I wish you’d be more like Dad and not give a crap about what I do.”

“Okay, first off, watch your language,” Senna warned.

“I was just being honest,” Korra mumbled.

She heard a deep sigh through the phone.

“How long are you going to keep up with this act of treating us like we’re the bad guys?”

“It’s not about you being the bad guy,” Korra said in clear frustration. “It’s about how I’m 18 now and I’ve been doing things on my own for a while.”
“You may be 18, but you’re far from being an adult,” her mother said.

Korra felt her hands practically trembling at her sides. “Yeah, well apparently I’m adult enough for you to abandon.”

Her mother didn’t say anything for a long moment and it made Korra think she wasn’t on the other line anymore.

“Is that really what you think of us?”

Her voice sounded hoarser than usual and like she was on the verge of tears.

Korra faltered, feeling instant regret at speaking those words out loud.

“No,” she lied.

With the house keys in hand, along with her phone and subway pass, she gave herself one final look in the mirror.

She wore a white midriff shirt under her dark jean jacket and a matching pair of jeans with two zippers on the front pockets. It was a borrowed outfit, but one she considered keeping just because of how good it made her look. She wore her hair up normal as usual, but it gave more edge to her appearance. The slightest bit of makeup she wore also made her appear slightly older.

Going to a college party required a different type of get-up. When Tahno first asked her to come out earlier, her initial response was “hell no,” but after sitting on it for a few hours, she eventually changed her mind. The idea of hanging out with a bunch of older people intrigued her. Aside from a random night at a club where she couldn’t really see anyone’s face, this was an experience she had not yet tried. The idea of it brought out that side of her that was just aching to do something new, fun, adventurous, and wild.

She gave her bangs a tease and then flipped off the light in the room. Her footsteps were loud as she went down the steps, but since Unalaq wasn’t there, it really didn’t matter how much noise she made.

She was grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge when her phone rang. Figuring it was Tahno just calling to rush her, she ignored it. The subway wasn’t a far walk from where she lived so she really wasn’t in any rush.

When the phone rang for the second time, she raised an eyebrow. Reaching into her jacket, she pulled it out. To her confusion, it was Asami.

For a brief second, she hesitated to answer. Things were still fragile between the two of them even after making up, and the last thing she wanted was to have another argument. But at the same time, she knew that ignoring Asami would do more harm than good.

“Hello?” she answered.

It was silent, but then she heard a soft sounding, “Korra?”

“Asami?” Korra looked at her phone just to make sure she saw the name right. “What’s up?”

“Are you busy?”

“Uh, why?” she questioned. She knew it would be better not to divulge her plans. But when Asami
didn’t respond immediately, she felt a surge of panic. “Asami?”

“Can you come outside?”

“What? You’re outside?” Korra’s brows knit together. She walked out of the kitchen and into the front room. When she looked out of the window, she saw a familiar, red convertible parked on the curb.

Quickly, she went over to the door and opened it. Asami was right there, sitting on the front porch with her back facing her.

It took Korra a few seconds to get over the initial surprise visit (two in one week), but when she did, she ended the phone call and walked out onto the porch, closing the door behind her.

“Hey,” she said carefully and went to sit down beside Asami. “How long have you been out here?”

“A few minutes,” Asami said with a sniff. Most of her hair fell to the side that Korra was on, making it unable to see her face. But telling from the sound of her voice and how she was sniffling every so often, this wasn’t a happy visit.

“Do you wanna come inside?” Korra asked, her voice soft.

Asami shook her head. “No. I don’t even…” she paused, apparently struggling with what she wanted to say. “I don’t even know why I came here.”

Korra worried her lip.

“I’d like to think it’s because you’re drawn to my natural, warming presence,” she joked and gave Asami a slight nudge.

To her relief, that got a small chuckle out of her.

“Oh, is that it?” Asami said, brushing her hair off her shoulder and finally looking over at Korra. She wasn’t wearing any makeup and there was some puffiness around the rims of her watery eyes, but that only enhanced how green they looked.

“What can I do?” Korra asked, getting serious again.

She knew that Asami wasn’t ready to talk about what was going on. They were alike in that aspect. So instead of focusing on the things they’d eventually get to, she wanted to focus on what she could do now.

Asami sniffed again. She rested a hand on her cheek and looked up in thought. Even when she cried, she still looked more beautiful than any other girl at their school. Korra just stared and waited.

“Come take a drive with me?” Asami decided and looked over at Korra questioningly.

“Where?”

“I don’t know.”

It wasn’t what Korra had been expecting. With Asami, it was usually something simple like staying in and watching a movie. But this was different and spontaneous; two things that were very much unlike Asami. It was concerning, but Korra wasn’t going to question it. The only thing that mattered was that Asami needed her, and no matter her own personal issues, or the confusing
feelings she had for her best friend, she could put all of that aside.

“Let’s go,” she said.

Even though there was no destination in mind, and the traffic was god-awful, Korra was content as she sat in the car, staring out the window and watching the city go by. The only noise coming from the car was the sound of the radio; the Killers ‘When You Were Young’ playing on repeat. It was one of Asami’s favorite songs to listen to whenever she was feeling sad over something, or a certain someone.

She looked lost in thought as she drove, but occasionally she would glance over at Korra and they’d share a look, but then she would turn away.

After about an hour of driving around aimlessly, they ended up in Brooklyn. Asami finally spoke, but it was only to ask if Korra was hungry. When Korra said yes, they ended up going to a place called Blue Collar. Asami wasn’t so keen on eating inside, so they ended up back in the car, parked on the curb of some random street. It was twilight and they sat there with the radio now playing quietly in the background.

Korra was nibbling on a fry when she glanced over at Asami. Her meal was still in her lap, untouched.

“Aren’t you gonna eat?” she asked.

“Huh?” Asami blinked and looked down at her lap. “Oh…”

Korra put her meal to the side. “Do you want to talk now?”

Asami didn’t say anything immediately and simply stared ahead at the moving cars and people passing by. And then she finally spoke.

“Do you still want to leave here after graduating?” she asked.

Korra blinked. She didn’t quite understand what that had to do with anything.

“Yeah, I think so,” she eventually said with a nod.

“Where do you want to go?” Asami asked.

Korra thought about it. “I don’t really know.”

“Doesn’t that scare you?”

Korra turned her head to Asami, who was looking at her now. She seemed so utterly lost.

“Not really. Moving to new, unfamiliar places is kind of my thing now,” she said jokingly, trying to lighten the mood.

Asami leaned her head back against the seat, still watching Korra with contemplative eyes. “I wish I could be more like you, Korra.”

Korra laughed humorlessly. “No, you don’t.”

“I do. You’re just so… fearless and brave, and you don’t care what people think about you.”

“Asami,” Korra sighed. Aside from the latter, there was a lot of untruthfulness in that sentence, but
she didn’t even want to deconstruct it. “What’s this really about?”

There was a pause, and Asami looked away for a moment before meeting her eyes once more. Silently, she reached into her purse, pulled out a piece of paper, and then handed it over.

With a confused look, Korra took it and held it up to her face to read.

“Dear Ms. Sato,” she read out loud. “It is with great pleasure that I offer you admission to the Fashion Institute of Technology—” she stopped reading and the huge smile that appeared on her face was uncontrollable. “Asami, this is great! I didn’t even know you applied!”

“I didn’t tell anyone,” Asami said quietly.

Korra looked over at her excitedly, but her smile disappeared when she saw Asami still leaned back against her seat, not looking even the slightest bit enthusiastic.

“What happened?”

Asami chewed on the side of her lip and looked away. “My dad opened it before I did.”

A long silence stretched between them.

“Oh…” Korra said. “Well, what did he say?”

Asami laughed bitterly. “What didn’t he say? It’s a waste of my time. I’m never going to succeed. I’m letting him down. That if my mom were here—”

Her voice broke and she looked away from Korra, wiping at her eyes.

Korra put the letter down between them and placed a firm hand on Asami’s shoulder, squeezing it. Asami still didn’t look her way, but she reached up and grabbed Korra’s hand, holding onto it with a deathly grip.

“You have to know that none of that’s true,” Korra spoke in a soft tone.

“I don’t know what to believe anymore,” Asami sniffed. “I don’t know what to do anymore.”

Korra released Asami’s hand in favor of tucking a piece of silky, dark brown hair behind her ear.

“You deserve to be happy.”

"But I'm scared," Asami admitted, her voice sounding incredibly small. "I don't want to disappoint him. He's all I have."

"Asami..." Korra said, feeling so much sadness and heartbreak for her best friend. "It's not about what he wants. It's about what you want. You're one of the most selfless people I know. It's about time you think about yourself for once."

Asami looked at her. Tears were in her eyes, but they also flickered with a different kind of emotion that Korra couldn’t put her finger on. She didn’t even think Asami realized she was making it.

“Korra...” Asami said but added nothing to it and trailed off.

Korra slid her hand to Asami’s shoulder. “Hm? What is it?” she asked.

Asami shook her head. A small, tired smile appeared on her face.
“Nothing,” she said, wiping at her eyes again. “I’m sorry I had to drag you out here to listen to my stupid problems.”

“They are far from stupid,” Korra disagreed.

“I just felt so alone,” Asami admitted quietly.

“You’re not.” Korra turned toward her more. “I know we’ve been a little… weird lately, but I’m sorry if I made you feel that way.”

“I think ‘weird’ is the perfect definition for all of my relationships at the moment.”

Korra halted at that.

“You and Mako?” she asked.

Asami shrugged. “I haven’t talked to him for the past few days.”

“Not even about this?”

Asami shook her head again.

“Why not?” Korra couldn’t help but ask.

“I don’t know. I just had a feeling that he would take my dad’s side? And then we would have fought, and it would have made me more upset.” There was a small pause, and she hesitated. “We’re not on the same page anymore with a lot of things these days.”

“So, what? You guys are on another break?” Korra said with an eye roll. “I’ve heard that one before.”

“No.” Asami turned to her seriously. “I think we’re just… done.”

Her eyes widened in surprise. That was definitely a first. She was used to the drama surrounding Asami and Mako’s relationship. It usually started with tears, then contemplation, and after that Asami would remember their “history.” It was the same step by step, wash and repeat process.

But something was different with this. The way Asami claimed that they were “done” was said with so much conviction and finalization that Korra actually believed her.

She chose not to say anything and just faced forward again in her seat. They both went quiet, watching the rest of the sunlight disappear in the sky. It would rain soon, she thought.

The ride home was uneventful. Once again, the radio filled the silence and the city passed by in a blur, this time with more lights all around. When they got back to Korra’s place, Asami parked near the front entrance and let the engine run.

“I hope I didn’t totally ruin your plans tonight.”

Korra blinked. For the entire time, ever since Asami showed up on her porch, she hadn’t even remembered her plans with Tahno and the others. It was disorienting how that part of her life suddenly reappeared into her thoughts. What had she been planning on doing anyway?

“Nah,” she eventually said. “You saved me a trip.”

Asami smiled and regarded her fully for the first time that night. “That’s a wasted outfit, though.
You look hot.”

Korra forced down the blush that threatened to show and tried to calm her heart, which practically leapt out of her chest at Asami’s words. “Thanks,” she said smoothly.

Asami’s look turned into a more serious one. “I’m glad you were home,” she said.

“Me, too,” Korra said honestly.

“And Korra?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for, you know, being there.”

She smiled. “Any time.”

And she meant it. It made her happy that still, in their weakest moments, they always had each other’s back. Despite there being so much air between them, Korra still felt that gravitational pull toward Asami. It was a constant, never ending rush to know that it was still there. As much as she tried to deny it, she knew how much that pull meant to her. Maybe it was just the evidence of the word ‘forever’ between them.

God, she hoped so.

April was a good month. Despite all of the school work piling up and the graduation stuff being shoved down her throat, Korra didn’t complain. In fact, she was just as eager to get the hell out of there like most of her classmates, but for different reasons.

She had no idea where she was headed, but she figured it had to be better than being in a bubble of gossip, drama, and entitlement.

“Okay, how do I look?”

She was digging through her locker, trying to find the latest book they were reading for her literature class when she turned and saw Asami walking up to her. She was all smiles with a red graduation cap on her head. When she stopped in front of Korra, she did a series of modeling poses.

Korra laughed. “You, Miss Valedictorian, belong in a catalog.”

Asami grinned. “Thank you.”

“Have you even written your speech yet?”

“No. I’m waiting to be inspired.”

“You better get inspired quick. We only have three more weeks,” Korra reminded her.

“I know,” Asami said, looking down in shame.

Things between the two of them had been good, as well. They’d been hanging out a lot more lately, and it felt like their friendship was getting even stronger as a result of that. It wasn’t lost on Korra that without Mako in the equation, it made things easier between them. Asami kept by what she said in the car that day and hadn’t spoken to or about Mako at all. It made things feel fresher for them, at least in Korra’s mind, but she still couldn’t put the blame on Mako for being the whole
reason behind her and Asami’s issues.

“Where’s yours?” Asami asked, referring to Korra’s cap and gown.

“Oh, um.” Korra was still searching through her locker. “I haven’t picked it up yet.”

“Do you want to go now?”

“Nah. I’ll just get it next week.”

From beside her, she saw from the corner of her eye Asami lean up against the locker next to hers.

“Would it kill you to show some enthusiasm?”

“I think you’ve got enough for the both of us,” Korra said distractedly.

“It’s already in your bag.”

Korra paused and tore her eyes away from her locker. Asami was giving her an all-knowing look and simply pointed to the bag looped around Korra’s shoulder. Without a word, Korra reached into it and, long- Behold, there was her book.

“Thanks,” she said.

Asami gave her a half shrug. “Sure.”

Rolling her eyes, Korra pulled her by the arm. “Come on. Let’s go get it.”

Asami’s face immediately brightened again.

“Yay,” she cheered, doing a celebratory clap.

They walked down the crowded hall together as their other classmates hastily made their way out of the school. It was a Friday, so there was a lot more energy to get home and start the weekend.

“What do you want to do tonight?” Korra asked as they entered the room where the caps and gowns were being handed out. There were five other seniors waiting in line.

Asami hummed as they got in line. “I don’t know. I was hoping you’d come up with something.”

“Me?”

“Yeah. You’re always up to something.”

Korra gave her an odd look. Something was up. Usually it was her always jokingly making suggestions for the two of them to go out and Asami would just give her a disapproving look. For her to just randomly suggest it was weird to say the least.

“I don’t know…” she said, albeit awkwardly.

“Oh, come on. Please, Korra?”

Asami clasped her hands together and looked at her pleadingly.

“You’re actually serious about this?”

“Of course!”
Korra thought about it. A small part of her was saying that this had ‘bad idea’ written all over it, but a larger part of her wanted this. There were only a handful of times where they actually went out together. And it would be a shame not to do it since they were so close to graduating. When was the next time they would have this opportunity?

“Okay, let’s do it,” she said.

Asami rewarded her with a wide grin.

The line moved quickly, and once Korra was up to the front, she told the teacher her name and, after a minute of searching, received her cap and gown. She looked down at it, trying to will the excitement to come to her, but instead she just stared at it thoughtfully.

“Kind of surreal, right?” Asami said, assuming that was what Korra was thinking.

“Yeah... Something like that.”

“Are they going to be there?”

By “they,” Asami meant her parents.

“That’s what they told me.”

It made her nauseous to think about walking across a stage in a silly gown that was supposed to symbolize her achievement. She felt like a fraud. But it was probably the one thing that her parents were proud of her for, so she wouldn't complain.

Asami’s hand fell onto her shoulder and she looked over.

“We did it,” she said with an encouraging smile. From that look, she must’ve been reading Korra’s mind.

Korra smiled back. “Yeah. We did.”

It didn’t take long for her to figure out what party was going on where. All it took was using Asami’s social media and impersonating her. She instantly received five replies inviting her (Asami) over. It reeked of desperation and she scoffed at it. She couldn’t believe how Asami hung out with some of these people who were only using her for her name alone, but that was another issue for another day. So instead of dwelling on it, she just accepted one invite from someone she wasn’t familiar with, but someone who Asami knew. They lived in a big house in Jamaica Estates, the same area where Asami lived. Asami, of course, was thrilled about it and jumped at the chance to go.

So, after a few hours of getting ready (Asami’s fault), they walked over to the house and got there just as things were kicking off.

It wasn’t even a party. More like a “get together” after school special with alcohol involved. It was loud, even though there weren't that many people there, and Korra was instantly annoyed once she walked through the door. Asami seemed to fit in just fine, though.

Currently, she was chatting up a storm with several people by the staircase while Korra discretely watched her closely from a wall on the other side of the room.

The minute they arrived, Asami immediately asked for a drink, which was Korra’s first warning sign. Asami wasn’t much of a drinker. She usually treated it as more of a casual, social thing and
only took a few sips throughout the night from the same drink. Another thing she didn’t do was get
drunk, but it looked like a few things were changing tonight.

“Hey, Asami,” some kid yelled out from across the room, garnering everyone’s attention. “Where’s
Mako?”

“Fuck Mako!” Asami shouted back.

Yup. Things were definitely changing.

Briefly, Korra wondered if she was letting things get a little too out of hand, but she ended up
deciding that, no, she wasn’t. Asami needed this. With everything going on in her life and all of the
stress being put on her, she deserved a night to let loose and get crazy. And if she got carried away,
Korra would take care of it. She’d take care of her.

She took a long drink from her cup, feeling satisfied. The sound of loud footsteps coming from the
stairs caused her to look up, and she almost choked.

Tahno was walking down the steps with the host of the party. Once they got to the bottom step,
they did a simple handshake and parted ways. For a second, Korra thought that he wouldn’t notice
her, but he must have felt her eyes on him because he looked over at her and grinned wolfishly.

“Fancy meeting you here,” he said once he made his way over.

Korra nervously looked over at Asami but saw that she wasn’t paying any attention. In fact, she
was deeply engaged in what seemed to be a very interesting conversation that involved a lot of
animated movements with her hands. Maybe she would have to cut her off sooner than she thought.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, looking at Tahno once more. “I didn’t think this was your
kind of scene.”

“I could say the same for you, sweetheart.” He picked up a piece of her hair and let it run through
his fingers before letting it fall. “But if you must know, I’m your guys supplier for the night.”

“Dealing to a bunch of high schoolers is your thing now?”

“Only when it suits me.” He straightened his leather jacket. “It would shock you how many people
in this room aren’t as clean as they make themselves out to be. I’ve been giving them the hook up
for years now on the down low.”

“That doesn’t shock me in the slightest,” Korra said, drinking from her cup and looking back to
where Asami was.

“You never wear your hair down,” Tahno spoke again after a minute. “Are you trying to impress a
certain someone?”

Korra ignored him. She didn’t want to play games with him tonight. Besides, she had more
pressing matters: like making sure Asami didn’t tip over at some point.

“It’s kind of cute the way you watch her.”

She growled and, despite herself, shot him a dirty look. “Don’t you have someplace to be? Or are
you so bored that the only thing you have to do is annoy me?”

“Definitely the latter.”
She rolled her eyes and looked away. “Well, congratulations. You’ve achieved that.”

Surprisingly, Tahno didn’t do his obnoxious, mocking laugh. When Korra turned to him again, he was still staring. “What?”

He didn’t say anything at first and instead looked between her and Asami. Finally, he settled for giving her a pat on the head.

“Don’t get your feelings hurt. I’ve been in that kind of situation before and, spoiler alert: It didn’t turn out so well.”

Korra’s jaw dropped in surprise. It was so out of the blue and unexpected that she didn’t know how to react at first. After a few seconds passed, she regained her composure, although stiffening a bit, and looked away.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said.

Tahno laughed. “Sure thing. I’ll see you around.”

Korra didn’t respond or look at him as he left, exiting the party like a silent wolf.

She turned her attention back to Asami, who was still chatting lively and looking genuinely happy.

She wasn’t stupid. From the very beginning, she knew not to let herself fall into a trap of false ideas and fantasies. Asami was her best friend, and that was all she needed. It was enough.

Wasn’t it?

A few minutes went by before she decidedly made her way back over. Asami was laughing along with the group about something. When she saw Korra coming over, her eyes brightened, and she held out her hand.

“Hey, you!” she said, wrapping her arm around Korra’s shoulders. “Where have you been? It feels like you’ve been gone forever.”

Korra laughed at her obliviousness. “Around. How many of those have you had,” she pointed at the drink in Asami’s hand.

Asami looked up in thought. “Three maybe?”

“Right,” Korra nodded. “Maybe that should be your last one for the night.”

“What? No! I’m fine. Really!”

“From the amount of times you just nodded your head, I’d say otherwise. Besides, we both know you’re a total lightweight.”

Asami just laughed and tightened her hold. Even though they were in a group of people, it still felt like they were in their own bubble, having their own conversation. Across from them, a blonde-haired girl gave Korra a dirty look, but she couldn’t bring herself to care. She was too happy and content with the arm around her shoulders to be anything else.

The music from the stereo changed and some loud pop song started playing from the radio.

“Oh, I love this song!” Asami said excitedly.
“Oh yeah?” A guy in the group said, looking at her with a twinkle in his eye. “Do you want to dance?”

“I do, actually,” she said matter-of-factly, then she looked over at Korra. “Shall we?”

Korra’s mouth parted and she sputtered. “Really?”

“Yeah! Come on…”

Asami pulled her from the group and farther into the room where people were playing a video game. She turned to her and started to sway, then she cocked her head to the side, causing her hair to flip from one shoulder to the other, and smiled.

“Asami, no one else is dancing,” Korra pointed out in an amusing tone.

“Who cares! Let’s be the pioneers of our generation, Korra.”

Asami gave her a light nudge and, without her, started dancing.

With a sigh and shake of her head, Korra slowly started moving as well, because who the fuck cared if no one else was dancing?

They moved around each other, sometimes along with the rhythm, but mainly it was just them hopping around from one side to the other. Korra felt eyes on them, or well, Asami. And who wouldn’t be staring at her? She looked absolutely gorgeous with her sensual movements, bright green eyes, and hair cascading down her shoulders.

There were times Korra could only watch as Asami circled around her. At one point, she was twirling so much that she almost fell onto the guys playing video games, but Korra easily caught her. Asami only laughed in good nature and held onto Korra's shoulders to steady herself, but quickly went back to dancing and singing her heart out to the song.

It ended far too soon for Korra’s liking, but by the time it was done they were both panting and trying to catch their breath.

“That was so fun,” Asami said between sucking in air.

Korra laughed and grabbed her hand. “Come on. You should probably sit down.” They walked over to the couch and sat beside a couple that occupied one side of it.

“Are you having fun?” Asami asked. Her eyes were hazy, but she still looked alert.

“A blast,” Korra smiled.

“We should go out more often.”

“I’m sure that once you sleep this off, you’ll think otherwise.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “You think you know me so well.”

“Because I do.” Korra reached over and tapped the bracelet around Asami’s wrist.

Asami looked down and her eyes lingered on the jewelry momentarily. When she looked up, the laughter in her eyes was still there, but she looked a lot more thoughtful and appreciative.

“Yeah, you really do.”
Korra’s breath caught in her lungs and she felt her heart speeding up in the process. And it could’ve just been her eyes playing tricks on her, but she swore she saw a flicker of something else in Asami’s eyes.

“I’m going to get you some water,” she muttered and got up.

“Don’t leave,” Asami whined, grabbing at one of the strings on Korra’s hoodie.

“I’m not. I’ll be right back. Promise.”

She left and headed into the kitchen to hopefully clear her head. There were several people in the kitchen playing an intense game of cards which involved screaming, yelling and, every other minute, calling each other cheaters.

Her heart was still racing as she replayed that look in Asami’s eyes. It must have been the alcohol getting to her. There was no other explanation for it. But even still, she found herself not ready to let go of the idea of something else just yet.

She went to the fridge and opened it. Luckily enough, there were water bottles stocked up at the bottom of the fridge. She took one from it and closed it, then she maneuvered her way back into the front room. It was so loud with everyone talking over each other that it began to give her a headache.

When she got back to the couch, she noticed that Asami was missing. She looked around the room, trying to see if she went off to talk to other people, but she was still nowhere to be found.

“Hey,” someone tapped her. She turned and saw that it was one of the boys who was with Asami earlier. “She’s in the bathroom. I think she said she was going to be sick.”

Korra instantly panicked. “Where?” she asked urgently.

The boy pointed over to the hallway between the kitchen and the living room. “Second door on the left.”

Korra went there immediately, shoving by a few people in her way. She came to the darkened hallway and, sure enough, saw the light under the door she was directed to.

She knocked twice, but there was no answer.

“Asami, it’s me,” she called through the door. When there was still no answer, she jiggled the door handle, only to find that it was locked. “Can you open the door?” she said with a nervous laugh.

There was a long pause before she heard a muffled, “Give me a second.”

With a sigh of relief, she rested her hand against the frame of the door.

“Oh. Okay. Well, I have some water. Do you want that at least?”

There was another pause, and then the door opened slightly. Asami’s hand became visible as it reached out in every direction for the bottle.

Korra giggled and handed it to her. When the door was closed and locked again, she leaned up against it, sighing. With the way things were looking, both her and Asami would be going home early, which didn’t at all sound so bad. As much as it had been a good night, she just wanted to go back to Asami’s place and wind down. She didn’t even mind the idea of holding her best
friend's hair back as she puked.

“All right,” she heard Asami say from behind the door. “I haven’t thrown up so I don’t think I’m going to be sick.”

“I’m surprised, given all of that jumping around you did,” Korra said. “Can you come out now?”

“Another minute.”

With the shake of her head, she smiled.

“You’re gonna be the death of me, I swear.”

“Did you say something?” Asami asked, sounding tired.

“Nope. Now hurry up so I can get you home.”

It was quiet again, and the only way Korra could tell Asami wasn’t passed out on the toilet was because she could hear her shuffling around.

She almost didn’t catch the loud commotion coming from the living room. It sounded a lot like yelling, and she could hear someone cursing. With a raised eyebrow, she walked away from the bathroom to check it out. More than likely it was just some drunk idiot who couldn’t hold his liquor.

She stopped in her tracks.

In the center of the room, Mako stood there nose to nose with the boy whose house this belonged to. He looked angry, but at the same time there was also an incredible amount of concern in his eyes. A few other guys were trying to push him away and calm him down, but that only seemed to make things worse.

“Where is she?” he said loudly, looking over the small crowd that had formed.

“She’s in the bathroom, Mako,” a girl said.

“Where?”

Someone pointed over to the hallway.

Korra sucked in a deep breath when Mako’s eyes met hers on cue. Once he saw her, it seemed like everything suddenly clicked into place for him, and it caused him to look even more pissed.

Korra straightened her back. She felt the slightest bit rigid but didn’t show it. Instead of lowering her eyes or cowering behind something, she just stared back.

“Of course this has something to do with you,” Mako said as he walked over and stopped just in front of her. “This has you written all over it.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean?” Korra asked.

“I think you know.”

“No, I don’t.” She folded her arms and stood right in the entrance way, completely blocking his path.
“Then I’ll spell it out for you: This toxic environment is almost as bad as you are.”

An awkward tension filled the air, replacing the electrifying energy from before.

One of Korra’s eyes twitched.

“Asami wanted to come,” she said, as calmly as she could. “And why do you even care? Are you really going to be one of those insecure ex’s who stalks their ex-girlfriend?”

“I’m not stalking her, I’m looking out for her,” Mako said in defense. “But you wouldn’t know anything about that since you’re so self-absorbed. And do you really think I’m going to believe that Asami had the idea to come here?”

Korra was about to open her mouth and prove him wrong, but she stopped herself and looked around at the few people who were not even being discreet as they listened. And then she thought about it. There wasn’t much to gain for her by telling the truth, but there was a lot to lose for Asami. She was the level-headed one; the one who people expected good things from and admired.

She heard the bathroom door open behind her.

“What can I say? Someone’s gotta let her have some fun.”

At that, Mako turned red in the face.

“If you want to make a mess out of your own shitty life, go ahead, but keep Asami out of it.”

Korra’s eyes narrowed. She felt an instant rage bubbling up inside of her.

“You don’t know a thing about me,” she said steadily.

“Oh, trust me. I know enough.”

Korra stepped forward, ready to hit him, but then she felt a hand on her shoulder, pulling her back.

“Korra, don’t,” Asami said calmly.

Korra gave her an incredulous look, but she ignored it in favor of walking toward Mako.

“Come outside with me, please?” she told him quietly, only loud enough for Korra to hear.

Mako shot Korra another disgusted look and then nodded at Asami. They both walked out of the living room and out the door.

Korra stood there, letting what just happened sink in. She heard everyone around her buzzing about the scene that played out. Every once in a while, someone glanced her way, but they smartly chose not to come up to her.

Instead, she ignored them all and went to the kitchen to pour herself a drink. She lifted the cup to her lips and let the alcohol fill her body and mind. And when ten minutes passed by and Asami still hadn’t come back inside yet, she poured herself another drink and downed it as well.

Finally, when she couldn’t take it anymore, she decided to go and check on the situation. She opened the door and stepped outside. It was dark but lit up enough for her to see Asami and Mako a couple of feet away, talking quietly. They turned when they saw Korra coming down the steps. Asami came forward but paused and told Mako to wait there before coming over to her.
“Hey,” she said, sounding a lot more like herself, as if she hadn’t just been jumping around and singing at the top of her lungs in a room full of people.

“What’s going on?” Korra asked, cutting straight to the point.

Asami bit her lip and looked back at Mako for a minute before turning back to Korra.

“I think I’m gonna go,” she said.

“With him?” Korra said, sounding as shocked and dumbfounded as she felt.

Asami hesitated but nodded. “Yeah.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Look.” Asami reached out and grabbed her by the arm, “I know things are crazy right now, but I’ll explain everything tomorrow, okay?”

Korra shrugged out of her hold. There was a flash of hurt in Asami’s eyes as she did so.

“Sure,” she said despondently. It was the only thing she could say.

“Do you need me to wait for you to get a ride home?” she asked, completely forgetting that Korra was supposed to sleep over.

“No. I’ll get home by myself.”

Asami bit her lip again, looking conflicted about what to do. It probably didn’t help that she was intoxicated.

“Okay.”

Korra turned on her heel and went back up the steps of the house. She thought she heard Asami call her name, but she didn’t bother to check. Instead, she entered the house again. Everyone looked at her as she walked in, but she ignored them, too. Instead, she made her way back into the kitchen and settled down beside her drink again. She looked around at all of the people she didn’t know who had all quickly moved on from the recent drama and were back to chattering loudly.

There was no reason for her to be there anymore, but she couldn’t will herself to get up and leave. She sat there in her own thoughts, replaying the night over and over again, trying to figure out how it all went from being so perfect to the worst night ever.

“Don’t get your feelings hurt.”

Right. So much for that.

She got up and slipped by everyone once more, exiting the house quietly and letting the night air hit her face.

Asami and Mako were long gone, of course, but she forced herself not to think about it. She walked down the street for a while before she saw a taxi driving by. She had enough money to at least get her somewhere close to a bus stop.

When she got inside and told the driver where, she leaned her head against the window and let her mind wander.
She remembered Asami’s face, smiling and laughing as she danced around. Her words from earlier, which lit up everything inside Korra for an instant and put her mind at ease, echoed in her mind as a faint whisper. She tried to remember that feeling she had from before, as well as for the past few weeks, where everything felt like it was slowly starting to fall in place for her...

What a fucking joke.

She knew it was no one else’s fault but her own. She allowed herself to think dangerously and get caught up in her own little fantasy world. In this world, there was no Korra and Asami. It was just Korra and her wishful thinking. Because even if she knew the outcome of this situation and had already gone through it in her mind how much it wouldn’t work, there was still a small part of her that always held onto the idea that it could. And that part of her was the one she went with.

When she finally got home that night, she was met with an empty, quiet house that welcomed her with open arms. Instead of going to her room, she sat down on the couch in the living room and stared into the darkness at the wall across from her. It was silent everywhere except in her head, where a voice told her that she was alone and had no one.

She believed it.

TBC…
"Hard Feelings" and "Liability" are the real MVPs. Or just listen to the entirety of the Melodrama album because it's basically a character study of Korra in the form of music.

A whole day passed before Asami finally texted Korra on Sunday morning asking her to come over. At first, Korra chose to ignore it. She didn’t feel ready to talk to Asami just yet because she was still getting over her anger at the unexpected turn of events from the other night. And the way she figured it, with her own thoughts not even fully processed at the moment, going over there to talk about what happened seemed pointless.

It was only when Asami sent another text, practically begging her, that she relented. There was still some kind of tether preventing her from actually saying ‘no’ to Asami. It only made her feel that much more pathetic.

She stood outside of Asami’s house, staring up at it with intimidation. She spent the whole train ride and partial walk over contemplating what to say and trying to imagine how the whole conversation would go, but it only made her more anxious. While her and Asami had their share of conflicts in the past, this felt a lot different, though she couldn’t put her finger on it.

Eventually, she worked up the courage to knock on the door. A couple of beats passed before Asami came and answered it. She wore a simple tank top and a pair of jeans. Her hair was tied up, showing off her bare face. If Korra had to guess from looking at her, she was still feeling the after effects from that party.

At first, neither of them said anything and just stared, measuring one another. But then a tiny smile hinted at the corner of Asami’s mouth.

“Hey,” she spoke softly.

Korra stuffed her hands inside of her jacket and looked elsewhere. “Hey.”

“Do you wanna come in?” Asami asked, stepping to the side.

Korra shook her head. “Out here is fine.”


When Asami disappeared from the doorway, Korra let out a long breath and ran her fingers through her bangs. She turned away from the door and sat on the steps of the porch. That familiar ache in her chest returned and she absentmindedly rubbed at it. It was as she already expected that this interaction was something she wasn’t prepared for.

Asami returned after a few minutes, wearing shoes now, but also with a bag in her hands. Korra didn’t immediately recognize it was hers until she remembered that she left it over there the other night under the impression that she would be coming back.
“Here you go,” Asami said, handing it over as she sat down beside her.

Korra took it and hung it over her shoulder. “Thanks,” she said stiffly.

There was a lull for a few seconds and she could feel how thick the air was around them.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call you yesterday,” Asami said, breaking the silence. “I just… had a lot on my mind and I was kind of embarrassed about the whole thing.”

Korra shrugged. “Don’t sweat it,” she said dismissively.

From the corner of her eye, she saw Asami turn toward her more, but she wisely chose not to look her way and kept facing ahead. It was too hard to look at Asami right now without getting upset all over again.

“Look, I know you’re mad,” Asami said.

Korra laughed humorlessly. “Well, you ditched me the other night to run off with your ex-boyfriend who went out of his way to embarrass me. So yeah, I might be a little bit mad.”

“I’m really sorry about that,” Asami said sincerely. “I was drunk and I think I just got so caught up in what was happening that I forgot…”

Korra tried to ignore the sting she felt at those words.

“So, you’re saying I became an afterthought?” she said.

“What? No, of course not!”

Korra didn’t believe her. Because if that weren’t the case, then why was she left high and dry that night? Why did Mako’s sudden intrusion cause Asami to drop everything—including her supposed best friend—and run off with him?

It was simple, Asami just forgot about her.

“Whatever,” she said, ignoring the slow-burning ache that made its way through her chest. “But if you think I’m just going to let what he said go, or sweep it under the carpet, you’re dead wrong.”

“I don’t think he meant any of what he said to you the other night.”

“You don’t think?” Korra said and then scoffed. “I’m quite positive that he meant everything he said. You weren’t even there to hear most of it.”

“He was just worried about me,” Asami insisted. “One of our mutual friends who was there texted him about what I was up to and he assumed the worst.”

Again, Korra scoffed. “Oh, so you’re defending him now? That’s rich since you were just saying ‘fuck him’ minutes before he showed up to save you from my evil clutches.”

Asami didn’t reply at first, and then Korra heard her let out a heavy sigh.

“I don’t wanna do this,” she said. “I don’t wanna fight with you about him.”

“Why? Because you know I’m right?”

“No, because it’s stupid,” Asami said, sounding frustrated. “And I’m so tired of feeling like I have
“I don’t recall ever making you feel like you had to choose between us,” Korra said defensively. “Unless he has?”

There was another long pause. The tension between them was palpable. And when Asami didn’t answer the question, Korra balled her hands into fists.

“I’m just saying that the two of you are stubborn,” Asami said calmly.

“Don’t compare me to him,” Korra said hotly. “We’re nothing alike and it’s kind of insulting that you’re even suggesting that.”

“No,” Asami sighed. “I don’t even think you’re trying to understand.”

“God, this is so like you,” Korra said, as if she hadn’t heard her. “That asshole must’ve done a real number on you this time since you’re trying so hard to convince me that he’s not a piece of shit. And I guess I shouldn’t even bother asking about whether you two are back together or not.”

“Are you really going to act like this the whole time you’re here?”

Korra finally turned to her. She could feel the anger and hurt showing on her face and did nothing to hide it. At the same time, all of the memories came rushing back to her of that night, and so much more. She remembered the first time they met, all of the talks they had late into the night and into the morning. She remembered how complete she would feel sometimes just by one simple conversation. And then there was the feeling of knowing that there was someone out there who knew her so well, better than anyone…

She suddenly remembered Mako’s words from the other night.

“Oh, trust me. I know enough.”

The realization hit her instantly.

“What does he know about me?” she asked.

“What?”

“You told him about me, didn’t you?”

Asami’s mouth opened in surprise, but then her expression quickly turned to guilt.

“I didn’t tell him everything…”

Korra felt like she’d been struck in the face. For a moment, she didn’t breathe at all. All she did was stare at Asami in disbelief and outrage. She’d never felt more betrayed in her entire life.

“You had no right to tell him anything about me,” she said aloud. “And what happened to you not telling anyone? Seriously, what the fuck, Asami?”

She saw Asami flinch at her chilled words.

“I just thought that if he knew a little bit more about you—”

“That what?” Korra interrupted, absolutely furious. “That we’d magically become the best of friends because of completely unrelated situations? Well that’s never going to happen, so you
should just deal with it already.”

Her shoulders rose and fell heavily as she breathed. She was seriously about to lose it.

“And that’s exactly what the problem is with you,” Asami concluded quietly after a minute. “You
don’t even try to make an effort with people.”

“I did make an effort,” Korra said and then gave her a once over. “Or at least I thought I did.”

Asami didn’t miss that look and squared her jaw.

“And yet, even with me, you’re still a closed book some of the times,” she said pointedly.

“My business is my business,” Korra inflected. “Are you really going to act like I have no reason to
be mad?”

“I’m not saying you don’t,” Asami replied. “But the way you're acting right now isn’t helping you
prove your point.”

Korra breathed through her nose a couple of times to try and calm herself, but it didn’t work. She
had enough of the psychoanalyzing and people placing the blame on her. And it hurt. God it
fucking hurt to see how much Asami didn’t get it. She was supposed to be the one person in her
life who knew her inside and out. So why did it feel like they were complete and total strangers in
that moment?

“Don’t patronize me right now,” she said. Her voice shook with as much anger as she felt.

“I’m not,” Asami said, sounding annoyed now. “I’m just trying to get you to understand—”

“What?” Korra interrupted and got to her feet. “That I’m apparently the unreasonable one in this
situation?”

“Korra—”

“Or the fact that I’m going to have to sit through your waterworks the next time the two of you
break up while you're having daddy issues and you use me again for a quick fix.”

It went utterly quiet between them, but the weight of Korra’s words filled the air. She didn’t know
where it came from, or why she said it, but her anger clouded her judgement right now.

Asami looked at her as if she was the betrayed one now. After a second, she got to her feet as well
and looked down at Korra from the higher step she was on.

“Well, the next time it happens, I’ll be sure to keep you out of it,” she said.

“Exactly. The next time,” Korra emphasized.

There was disbelief, hurt, and rage in Asami’s eyes as she stared back.

“You have no right to talk.”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re the last one to talk about someone using another person when the only time you can be
bothered with anyone is when it’s convenient enough for you,” Asami said.
Despite herself, Korra laughed bitterly. “Okay, so we’re going to have that fight again?”

“Yeah, we are, because it’s finally time that you admit how much of a hypocrite you are. Don’t talk about other people’s faults when you can’t even admit to your own.”

“Nice deflecting you did there,” Korra pointed out. “You must be really desperate to ignore the facts.”

While the anger on Asami’s face never left, it turned into something angrier and more threatening than Korra had ever seen from her before.

“I’m not ignoring anything,” Asami said, her voice deepening. “I’m just pointing out that it seems like the only time you want me around is when you’re starving and desperate for the attention you don’t get.”

It came out of her mouth so easily; like it had been something on her mind for a while that she was waiting for the right time to get off her chest. Korra didn’t speak. She was without words, and even if she could, there was a pressure in her chest that made it feel like her heart was slowly being crushed by a weight.

She swallowed the knot in her throat and straightened up as best as she could.

“Yeah, well, I guess you don’t have to worry about that anymore now, huh?”

Asami’s face changed. It finally looked like the reality of her words hit her, as well as Korra’s. Her mouth was open, but her jaw locked in place. The reflection of the sun in her eyes clearly showed the tears beginning to form.

“I guess so,” she said in a hoarse whisper.

The confirmation hurt Korra more than any of Asami’s other words did.

She nodded, but didn’t say anything else. There was nothing else to say between them. Asami didn’t stop her as she walked away either.

For a second, she doubted what just happened was actually real. She told herself that it was just another stupid fight they were having. It would all turn out okay, just like it always did.

She kept walking, making the distance between her and Asami greater.

Asami couldn’t have meant it, right? There was no way she could have thought Korra was that kind of person. She couldn’t have. And Korra didn’t mean her words either.

She was down the street now, far from the house, and then she broke out into a run, letting her feet take her wherever they wanted. The sound of her stomping against the concrete was loud in her ears.

She ran for what felt like half an hour and eventually ended up in Cunningham Park.

Her breathing was labored and heavy, and she clutched at her aching chest as if she were trying to hold it together. Soon enough, all her thoughts caught up to her and she felt sick to her stomach.

Of course Asami meant what she said. And why wouldn’t she? Korra spent so much time avoiding all of their issues and her own feelings that she ended up losing the one person, the only person, who really saw her.
She covered her eyes with her hand, thinking she was just blocking the sun from her face, but then she felt the moisture in her eyes.

A friendship like theirs was too good to be true, anyway. Asami was always going to be the girl with so much to gain in life. She was going to be the person that everyone needed, but wouldn’t need anyone. Korra was just too blinded by her own feelings to see it. Her own selfish feelings.

Asami didn’t need her, and that was reality.

A woman passing by with her two children stopped and asked if she was all right. Korra just waved her off, saying she was fine.

But she wasn’t. How could she be fine when her heart was being ripped out of her chest?

The thought of being a temporary person in Asami’s life was soul-crushing. It was the realization that all of her fears were true after all. There was no room for her in anyone’s life: not Asami’s and not even her parents. She was replaceable; indistinguishable.

All she had was herself from now on, and the more she thought about it, the scarier it got.

The lights were much too bright around her, making it difficult for her to keep her eyes wide. There were people around her mingling, laughing, and joking, but she tuned them out. Instead, she chose to focus more on letting herself go and reaching the point where none of those voices made sense.

“You still with us?”

She lazily looked up at Tahno who popped up from out of nowhere and sat beside her on a stool. He wore a smirk on his lips and sipped idly at the drink in his hand.

“Sadly,” Korra replied.

Tahno chuckled. “You haven’t been this fucked up in a while.”

“I’ve always been fucked up,” she stated and chose that moment to reach over and snatch the cup out of his hand to drink from it.

“You’re quite the feisty one tonight, aren’t you?”

“Quit letting her drink, Tahno,” someone said from behind. It was either Dinah or May, but Korra couldn’t tell the difference.

Tahno waved them off nonetheless and scooted himself even closer toward her. “Care to share any of your woes with us?”

“Fuck off.”

“That bad, huh?” Tahno concluded. “You know, you never told me how the rest of that party went last weekend. But I heard it was pretty explosive. Why don’t you listen to anything I tell you?”

Korra was happy that she was so heavily intoxicated, or else she would have reacted to that comment.

“You’re shit at giving advice,” she said instead.

“I guess that’s what friends are for, right?”
“You’re not my friend,” she said almost automatically. The alcohol was finally beginning to take effect, turning her already diminishing filter into dust.

“Ouch.” Tahno dramatically leaned back and clutched his chest. “Is that all the thanks I get for inviting you over here?”

“The only reason you wanted me over here was to try and get in my pants for the billionth time, which will never happen.”

The people around them laughed at Tahno’s expense, causing him to show an uncharacteristic amount of embarrassment. It took a second for him to bounce back from it, but when he did, he gave a bitter smirk.

“Well, maybe you should rethink that since apparently no one else wants you.”

The laughter and humor of the situation quickly died out, creating an awkward silence in the room.

Korra didn’t respond at first and chose to drink from the rest of Tahno’s cup. After letting the alcohol burn her tongue and the back of her throat, she promptly slammed the cup into Tahno’s chest so hard that he almost fell off the stool. She offered no words and got up after that, walking away from the scene and ignoring Tahno’s angrily muttered “bitch” as she left.

She walked out of the apartment and took the elevator all the way down in silence. When she finally made it out of the building, she stopped and leaned against the heavy concrete underneath a lamp. Her jacket, she realized, was still inside, but the cold air felt good. She closed her eyes and listened to all of the cars driving by and the overall loudness of the city.

Briefly, she thought about what happened a week ago where she walked home to an empty apartment and sat on her couch with that empty feeling in her chest. Somehow, that feeling stayed with her. Even now.

The ghost of Tahno’s words crept into her mind.

She was high and drunk enough. Maybe she could call Asami and dish out a tearful apology. Or who knows? Maybe when she heard Asami’s voice again, the anger would come back. It could go either way.

But no, she thought. The bridges were so burnt that they were turning into ash at this point. Asami hadn’t called or texted her since then, and Korra hadn’t bumped into her at school either. That gave her all of the confirmation she needed to know that they were as good as done.

The looming night air continued to whirl around her, becoming a muse to her thoughts.

No one else wanted her, huh? Maybe he was right.

There was only a week of school left and she spent a good majority of it skipping. There was no point in going anymore if all the exams were done. Plus, she wanted to spend as little time there as possible. All it did was give her bad memories.

The past few days were spent walking around aimlessly through the city or sitting in a coffee shop. There was nothing else she had to do, and she was still too pissed at Tahno to even think about asking him if she could chill at his place.
And, of course, at night she would sneak out once Unalaq was in bed. Similar to during the day, she’d go wherever her mind took her, or where she figured some of the excitement was happening. That was the only time she regretted not having Tahno with her. He could get her in anywhere. But it really didn’t matter where she went. So long as it kept her thoughts from eating at her, anywhere was fine.

She made it home by five o’clock, which was the normal time Unalaq came home. She never knew if he wouldn’t be coming home for the night, so she’d go back home just in case he actually did show up. Then again, it wouldn’t have mattered if he came home and saw that she was gone. As hardass as the man tried to be, everything he said felt like empty threats at this point; like he was forcefully reading them from a script.

Just as she sat down on her bed, she heard her phone ring. For a split second, she thought it was the school calling about her absence (she wrote down her contact info on the emergency form rather than Unalaq’s), but they never called this late.

Her heart skipped a beat as she dared to hope that it was Asami.

She pulled out her phone and looked down at it. Disappointment came when she saw that it wasn’t Asami, but then a new hope emerged at the same time.

Hesitantly, her thumb hit the “talk” button and she answered.

“Hello… Dad?”

There was a small pause.

“Korra,” Tonraq spoke into the receiver clearly.

It felt like an eternity passed since she last heard her father’s voice. How long had it been this time? Since her birthday in December, maybe? She couldn’t be too sure. But he was definitely—aside from Asami—the very last person she expected to hear from, which really painted a picture of their estranged relationship.

“Hi,” she spoke quietly.

“How are you?” he asked.

There were so many ways to respond to that question that it couldn’t be answered.

“I’m fine,” she lied.

“I’ve been hearing good things about you from Unalaq.”

At that, she rolled her eyes. The only thing her uncle concerned himself with about her these days was if she ate dinner. More than likely he was saving his own ass from being grilled by her father.

“What’s up?” she asked. “Are you and Mom all packed?”

It was the plan for her parents to come and stay for a few days leading up to her graduation. After that was where it got complicated, because they were definitely expecting her to come back with them to Quebec. She didn’t know how to approach the discussion about staying. She just knew that all of the independence she had for a while now would go down the drain if she moved back under their roof. And she already knew that a suggestion about moving out would be shot down immediately.
“Actually,” her father spoke, clearing his throat. “I’m calling because I need to talk to you about something, and I wanted you to hear it from me.”

“What is it?” she asked slowly, sounding suspicious. There was a feeling of dread looming in the air, as well.

“It’s about your graduation,” he said. “I don’t think I’ll be able to make it.”

The phone almost slid from Korra’s hand, but she caught it in a tight grip.

“What?” she said in a calm tone, though she quickly began to lose composure.

“We’re going through a lot of changes over at the department,” he tried to explain. “They need me here.”

She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. It was like everything was coming around full circle for her. Like the world was really laughing at her, telling her how much of a joke she was.

And how couldn’t she start laughing at herself, as well?

“Wow,” she said, catching her breath and holding a hand to her head. “So, once again, you’re choosing your job over me? Fantastic.”

Tonraq didn’t respond at first. Maybe he was just as baffled by her reaction as she was.

“Look,” he said calmly, though his tone was edging on sounding like the authoritative one Korra grew up with all her life. “I know that you’re disappointed, but it’s not the end of the world. Your mother will still be there and I already asked if she could record it for me.”

“You really think that’s what I’m mad about right now?” Korra asked, disbelievingly.

“Aren’t you?”

“No!” she shouted, feeling even more hysterical. "It’s far from this being about the stupid graduation, Dad.”

“Then what is it about?” he asked.

“It was your guys idea for me to even come to this stupid school to begin with! And I complied with it. I’ve complied with everything you guys want. And it’s just funny to me that after all of it—all of this—you can't even be bothered.”

She couldn’t hold it in. The frustration, anger, and resentment she felt was all bottled into one. But there was also the lingering sense that no matter what she did, her father would never care.

“I am proud of you, Korra,” Tonraq said carefully. “But my hands are tied.”

“Yeah. Like always,” she muttered bitterly.

Her father must have heard because he went quiet for a few seconds.

“Is there something you would like to say to me?” he asked.

Korra clenched her jaw. “No,” she said.

“Are you sure?”
Korra hesitated, and she realized that this was the only chance she had. She opened her mouth to speak, ready to unload on him and finally unleash the years of pain and loneliness she went through because of him and her mother. She wanted to tell him about how everything they did up to this point ended up making her into an even bigger mess than she already was.

“Why?” she blurted out quietly.

“Why what?”

“Why am I never good enough for you?” she asked.

“Korra—”

“I wasn’t good enough for you while I was home and you sent me away,” she said, interrupting him. “But now I’m here and it’s like I don’t even belong to you anymore. This is your first time calling me in months! And even then, you barely even call to begin with! And I just want to know why? Are you really that ashamed of me?”

The words came tumbling out of her mouth. They were things she’d been too afraid to say out loud, but now they were out there and she couldn’t take them back.

“You… I…” He seemed stuck and without words.

“Just tell me, Dad,” she said, her voice breaking and wavering with emotion. She felt so utterly small.

Why was her father struggling so much? All he had to say was that she was overreacting, that he loved her and was sorry for making her feel that way. Then maybe… maybe things would get better for them. It would be far from perfect, but at least the door would be open for them to actually talk it out instead of months of ignoring.

“You’re just… not who I hoped you would be.”

She froze. Her voice caught in the back of her throat and no air came out. It was like she’d been punched in the gut a thousand times.

“I have to go,” she choked out.

“Kor—”

“And tell Mom she doesn’t have to come either.”

She hung up and threw her phone elsewhere, as if it had been the cause to all of her problems. Her eyes were wide, with tears threatening to fall as she stared at nothing. A thousand individual needles were stabbing at her chest and she couldn’t bear it. She needed someone to talk to, but she realized there was no one. It was becoming her new normal now, but it didn’t make it hurt any less.

She looked at her graduation gown hanging from the closet door and glared. After wiping away her unshed tears, she got up from the bed and went over to rip the garment from off its hanger. After bundling it into a ball, she threw it in the back of her closet.

If her dad didn’t care about that stupid ceremony, why should she?

There was a car honking outside.
“Ah. I didn’t think they’d be here so soon,” Unalaq said, rushing around and grabbing his bags.

“Huh?” Korra asked. She was sitting on the couch, staring at the TV, but not really paying attention. Her mind was elsewhere.

“When did you say Asami was coming to pick you up again?”

At that name, Korra snapped out of it and looked over at Unalaq. He was looking at her expectantly.

“She’ll be here soon,” she said.

There was another honk.

“Okay. I have to get going.” Unalaq went and grabbed his final bag at the door.

“Bye,” Korra said absentmindedly.

That seemed to trigger something in him and he turned around, narrowing his eyes at her.

“It’s only a two-day trip,” he warned.

Korra rolled her eyes. This wasn’t the first time she’d been told this. “I know.”

Unalaq ignored her tone and kept the stern look on his face. “And I’m only two hours away.”

“I know.”

“And you’re sure Mr. Sato said it was okay for you to sleep over?”

“Of course,” she said, not missing a beat. “I practically live there, remember?”

“Korra,” Unalaq said, looking right into her eyes. “You’re graduating in three days, so I’m telling you right now: Don’t do anything stupid.”

She gave him a reassuring smile. “I won’t.”

It started off with maybe six people Korra actually knew who showed up at the house, and then friends of those people. Soon enough, there were over twenty people in her uncle’s house.

It wasn’t the night she had planned in the slightest. For one, she was only expecting ten people at most to show up. And two, it was supposed to be a chill type of environment where people slowly wound themselves up by the end of the night, and then crashed on the floor. What wasn’t planned was someone blasting rap music off a loudspeaker and people participating in a loud and aggressive game of beer pong.

There was no real reason for why she chose to throw a party, aside from the thought of it being better than sitting alone in the house to think about things. Anything that allowed her to shut her brain off was better at this point. She accepted the noise and the strangers inside of the house, and how some frat boy made an ass out of himself by falling on one of the side tables and knocking over a lamp.

At least she had enough sense to sit on the bottom of the steps in order to prevent people from going up there and causing an even bigger mess.
She was drinking a beer when some guy she didn’t know came up to her.

“This your party?” he asked.

“Yup,” she said, taking another swig from her bottle.

“So then, you’re Korra?”

“Unless anyone else wants to claim the name here, I guess I am.”

“I think I’ve seen you around at other parties. You go to NYU, right?”

“Sure. Let’s go with that.”

The stranger shyly rubbed the back of his neck and then sat beside her on the steps. He had brown skin, curly hair, and the typical “pretty boy” smile that Korra was used to seeing from most boys in school. He might have been in his early twenties, but she didn’t really care enough to give him a full look.

“What’s wrong? Not having fun?” he asked.

Korra rolled her eyes and then finally sneered at him.

“If you don’t want me to kick you out, I highly suggest you go find someone else to talk to. You’re killing my buzz.”

Despite her threat, the nameless boy laughed full-heartedly and then threw his hands up in defense.

“Okay. I see you’re not much of a talker.”

“Gee, what tipped you off?”

“That’s no problem with me, though. We don’t have to talk.”

Korra shot him another look, but she paused after seeing the playfulness in his eyes. It was a silent offer, or a challenge in a way; one that she could either accept or decline.

With the alcohol running through her veins and feeling like she was on cloud nine, Korra didn’t really let herself think about it and leaned forward.

In total, she probably kissed about three people in her life, all of them being random strangers in the dark. The only difference this time was that she could see the person clearly.

This kiss, like all of the others, wasn’t spectacular or mind blowing in any way, but it wasn’t bad either. Their legs were jammed together since they were sitting in such a tight space, but that didn’t keep Korra from stopping. In fact, she threw herself into it even more, desperately trying to let herself go. All she wanted was to let go.

What did have her stop was how wrong it felt. While his lips were nice and soft, they didn’t feel right against hers. And his rough hand on her cheek had her recoiling in on herself. She always imagined gentle hands on her face, running through her hair and kissing her slowly but surely with sugary sweet lips...

She pulled back and slowly opened her eyes. A pair of light brown ones met hers, and a feeling of disappointment formed in her gut.
“Do you wanna take this to your room” he asked, breathing against her mouth. His hand was still on her cheek.

She could’ve easily said yes. They could go upstairs and make out, possibly leading to something more, and it would’ve felt good for the night. But she knew that in the morning she’d wake up and feel disgusted with herself.

“No,” she said, pulling away finally and standing up. The guy appeared stunned by the rejection as he looked up at her. “Get out,” she told him and then walked off.

She wandered into the kitchen where she saw a few people doing shots. When someone noticed her walk up, they offered her a small, plastic cup that she happily took.

She gladly joined the group as a way to distract herself from what almost happened, as well as all of the other shit going on in her mind. After three shots, it became easier and easier. And so did everything else. That empty feeling in her chest became more bearable, and she could feel herself slipping into that place where she didn’t give a shit about anything or anyone.

More people came and some went, but Korra was too unbothered to keep track. Some even came up to her and tried to spark a conversation or tell her how "cool" she was. She told them to fuck off. It didn’t make sense for her to care what people thought about her now, especially when they didn't even know the first thing about her.

As the hours passed, it all seemed to go by in a blur.

The sudden announcement of the cops arriving put everything to a halt.

It was an all too familiar situation. She remembered sitting in the police station a few years ago, twiddling her thumbs and anxiously waiting for her dad to come and pick her up. The only difference this time was that her dad was a whole plane ride away.

Since she was the only underaged person at the party, and it was her house, she was the only one taken in while everyone else was let off with a warning. The only reason the cops were called in the first place was because of a noise complaint, but once they saw all of the alcohol involved, they shut the whole thing down and told everyone to go home. Of course a few people who got spooked couldn’t help themselves and snitched on her.

She looked up at the clock and saw that it was twenty minutes past two in the morning. Her uncle was still in Washington and wouldn’t be there until the morning. He sounded calm and well-mannered when she talked to him on the phone, but Korra knew he was anything but.

For now, she had other pressing concerns.

“Korra.”

Her hands shook when she heard her name from that familiar voice. She looked up and saw Asami walking up to her. There was sleep in her eyes but also concern. Korra looked away, not wanting to see that expression from her.

And just like that, she was back to thinking about all of the things she desperately wished to forget.

There were voices coming from behind Asami. It was Hiroshi talking to the officer who brought Korra in. His face was as hard as stone and he showed no hint of emotion on his face.
“We’re letting her off with a warning,” the officer said. “All of the alcohol at the party belonged to people of age. But we did give her a pamphlet of resources about underage drinking and where she can go to get help if she needs it.”

“I see…” Hiroshi said.

The officer continued to brief him on what exactly happened at the party, but Korra closed her ears.

Asami sat down in the empty chair beside her.

“Korra,” she said again in a whisper. “What happened?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she said dismissively.

“You really think I’m going to accept that? You owe me an explanation.”

“Why are you even here?” she turned her head, meeting Asami’s gaze reluctantly.

Asami looked taken aback, hurt, and confused at the same time.

“You called me, remember?” she said in an offended tone. “I know you’re not that drunk.”

“I told you not to come. All you had to do was tell your dad and he could have come and got me, then dropped me back off at home.”

“I practically had to beg him to even do this!” Asami hissed in a whisper and leaned forward.

Korra swallowed and looked away again. It was hard to believe that weeks passed since the last time they spoke or in the same room together. The fact that they were meeting again like this, under these circumstances, was unfortunate to say the least. For a while, she thought her anger over what happened finally subsided, but their interaction right now just proved how much she wasn’t ready to be around Asami again.

They didn’t speak for the rest of the minutes they sat there, waiting for Hiroshi to finish up talking to the officer. He finally turned to them and pointed to the door.

“Let’s go, girls.”

There was a black car outside waiting for them. Hiroshi got into the driver’s seat and unlocked the doors for them both. Unsurprisingly, Asami chose to sit up in the front. It was for the best.

“Where am I taking you, Korra?” Hiroshi asked, his voice chipped.

“Back home.”

“She can just stay with us until her uncle comes back home,” Asami butted in.


Korra flinched at the same time Asami did. She didn’t understand what was said, but it was enough to have her contemplating jumping out the car and walking by herself.

“It’s not that big of a deal,” Asami said in a whisper.

From where she sat, Korra saw Hiroshi shoot Asami a glare. He jammed his key into the ignition and turned the car on.
“It’s fine if he takes me home,” she said abruptly.

Asami didn’t turn back to look at her. Instead, she slumped into her seat and didn’t say anything else after that.

“What’s your address?” Hiroshi asked.

Korra quietly rattled it off.

Once the car started, the only noise to come from it was the soft humming of the engine.

Korra leaned up against the window and looked in front of her at the passenger seat where Asami sat. She found herself reminiscing back to a month ago when it was just her and Asami sitting in the car and she listened to Asami vent about her fears. It suddenly struck her that she was unintentionally bringing one of them to life.

That look Hiroshi sent Asami’s way wasn’t only filled with irritation, but also disappointment. It was a look Korra knew all too well, and it was being directed at the one person who least deserved it. All because of her...

She always ignored the fact that in the grand scheme of things, her and Asami were different. It never felt important. They were just two girls who found solace in one another and understood each other when the rest of the world didn’t. It was all that should have been important.

But it wasn’t. Because no matter how much Korra always tried to close that distance between them, it would still be there. It was only a matter of accepting it that was the problem.

Her eyes drifted over to the side view mirror. The streetlights from outside flashed by as they drove, and for a brief moment, Asami’s eyes met hers and they openly looked at one another.

“If you want to make a mess out of your own shitty life, go ahead. But quit dragging Asami down with you.”

Those words, which had only been an afterthought, now rang loud in her ears.

She looked away first and blinked away the wetness she felt in her eyes.

It sucked that it took her so long to realize the truth behind those words.

They arrived at her house thirty minutes later and she mumbled a quiet “thank you” before jumping out the car and making a beeline for the house.

“Korra,” she heard.

She turned and saw Asami getting out of the car despite her father’s yelling. She walked a few steps forward and then stopped. Her mouth was open as she tried to form her words, but nothing came out. She looked conflicted.

Korra sucked in a deep breath, waiting for her to say something. Anything. But after a few beats passed, she realized that nothing would ever come.

“You should go,” she said and didn’t wait for a reply before turning around and rushing inside the house. After slamming the door shut behind her, she leaned against it.

Once again, a silent house greeted her, though all of the chaos from the party was there as a reminder of her sins; of everything that was wrong with her. And right outside was a girl who
always had so much faith in her.

It was as if she sealed her fate right then and there.

Unalaq was quiet as he stood in front of her while she sat down on the couch. He hadn’t spoken a word to her ever since he got home that morning. All he did was take one good look at his messy house, then at Korra, and then proceeded up to his room for the rest of the day. In the meantime, Korra made that her opportunity to clean up.

The house wasn’t *that* bad, but all of the empty cups in the room, along with some beer bottles on the floor, let the guilt finally sink in for her.

She didn’t attempt to start the conversation first, so she waited it out. There wasn’t anything she could think of to start with anyway. Unalaq simply watched her with a deep frown on his lips. The uncomfortable silence lingered on.

“Tell me why you did it,” he finally said.

She looked down at her lap and clasped her hands together. There was no simple answer to that. She didn’t even know if she *had* an answer.

“I don’t know,” she said quietly. “I’m so—”

“Don’t,” he cut her off. His voice trembled along with his hands. “Don’t even think about apologizing right now because I don’t want to hear it.”

Korra shut her mouth and looked away.

“You’ve really got a lot of nerve to do something like this under my roof,” he continued. “Do you even know what this could have done to me if they hadn’t let you off with a warning? Do you even care?”

She kept her head turned to the side. “I didn’t think it would get out of hand like that.”

“Exactly. You didn’t *think*. You never do,” Unalaq said and then scoffed. “Then again, neither did I. You’ve never done a thing to make me trust you, so I shouldn’t have expected anything less.”

Korra didn’t know what it was about those words, but she suddenly found herself shaking with anger. Everything she faced in the past few years led up to this moment right here. It didn’t matter who her anger was aimed at. All that mattered was that she had it and was willing to unload on anyone in her path.

“Whose fault is that?”

“What did you just say?” Unalaq said, stepping closer and looking that much closer to blowing a fuse.

“You can’t talk about how I’ve never done anything to make you trust me when you’ve never done anything either,” she said pointedly. “You never gave a shit about what I did, and the only reason it matters now is because of how much of a negligent uncle it makes you look like.”

Unalaq’s face scrunched up, and he peered down at her with a look of disgust.

“Don’t blame your own self-destructive behavior on other people. It’s pathetic, Korra.”
“I’m leaving,” she said, getting up. This was the last thing she needed to hear.

“Oh. So you’re grown up enough to have a party in my house, but not enough to have a grown conversation?” Unalaq blocked her path. “Sit down.”

“No,” she said, glaring up at him in defiance.

“You’re such a brat,” he said, and then forcefully shoved her down onto the couch. “A selfish, irresponsible, and reckless brat.”

Korra was shocked at first when she fell hard into the couch. But then it was immediately replaced with fury as she looked up at her uncle again.

“I’m not listening to you,” she said angrily.

“That doesn’t surprise me. You never listen.”

She tried to get up again, and this time Unalaq actually helped her, but he held her there by the arm.

“Get your fucking hands off me,” she warned.

“So what really made you do it?” he asked, ignoring her. “If it was some sort of sad attempt at getting your parents attention, it did the opposite effect. I talked to them both earlier this morning and they don’t even want to look at you right now.”

Korra was struggling to get out of his tight grasp. She wanted to close her ears. His words were doing even more damage to her already broken psyche.

“I don’t care,” she said, but the shakiness in her voice betrayed her.

“And that’s a real shame, too,” Unalaq said. “You really had an opportunity to do something different with your life; to change. But you sabotaged yourself. You threw everything your parents gave you back into their face, and you spit in mine. So, you know what? You can get out.”

Korra stopped struggling and froze. She stared up at Unalaq in disbelief.

“What?”

“I told you the last time that if you pulled this kind of crap again that I wouldn’t be afraid to give you a taste of the real world,” Unalaq said. “This is me making good on my promise. You’re no longer welcome in this house.”

Her whole body was shaking at the implications of his words. He was kicking her out, getting rid of her, leaving her alone to rot. And from the steely look in his eyes, she could tell that he was being dead serious.

“Where am I gonna go?” she said. “I don’t have anywhere...”

Or anyone.

“I guess you should have thought of that before, huh?” Unalaq said, showing no signs of sympathy. He let her go finally, and she almost stumbled from the lack of balance she felt.

She stared up at him, looking as lost as she felt. The anger was still burning inside of her, but she also had fear: the fear of the unknown, and the fear of being completely and utterly alone. There
were no written answers for her, and Unalaq wasn’t going to give them. She would have to figure them out for herself.

“I’ll be out by tonight.”

She didn’t give him a chance to reply and shoved by him to run upstairs to her room. The adrenaline pumped through her veins once she got there and slammed her door shut, locking it. As she looked around the room, she noticed that all of her stuff was scattered everywhere after almost two years of making it her home.

She marched over to the closet and opened it. Her trembling hands reached for her suitcase and she pulled it out. After sitting the bag on the bed and unzipping it, she started throwing every piece of clothing she had into it. She didn’t have a lot, but it was enough.

She walked back over to the closet and drew it open wider. Sinking to her knees, she started reaching for her shoes, only to pause when she noticed the red gown bundled into a ball on the floor. Slowly, she reached for it, along with the cap.

In the midst of everything, she forgot that she was supposed to be graduating the next day.

That gown, which was supposed to symbolize growth and moving on to something better, didn’t apply to her anymore. All it symbolized now was that she could never keep anything good in her life. And all of that time she spent thinking about what she was going to do afterward was put to waste.

Unalaq was right. She sabotaged everything she had going for herself. She didn’t realize what she had while she had it, and now she was left with nothing.

And as much as she wanted to blame everyone else; to hate everyone else, it was really herself that she hated the most. She hated herself so much that it made her sick.

Everything leading up to this moment was because of her. She was a hopeless case; worthless.

“You’re just… not who I hoped you would be.”

She squeezed her eyes shut and a broken noise finally escaped from the back of her throat. She brought her face into the gown and sobbed, drenching the garment in her tears.

She was nothing.

PART 2 (END)

Chapter End Notes

"Damare" - a very rude way telling someone to "shut up" in Japanese.
“There’s so much we have ahead of ourselves that we get to experience—to learn. As we move forward, I’m sure none of us will forget the memories we’ve had here and look back on them fondly. However, we can’t let these moments define who we are. It’s hard to let go sometimes, but you have to in order to be ready to embrace something new…”

Asami searched over the crowd from where she sat on stage, partially listening to the speech one of the other valedictorians was giving.

Under the heavy and harsh light, she saw her fellow classmates in their seats, listening on. A majority of them looked like they couldn’t contain themselves since this was one of the only speeches left—the last one being hers. Then, all that came after would be their names getting called and walking across the stage to receive their documented proof of finishing high school.

It should’ve been one of the most exciting moments of her life. In fact, it was something she always dreamed about when she was younger. This moment would officially separate herself from her father’s success and she would be seen as someone who could flourish without being encased in his shadow. She expected butterflies, chills, and that overwhelming feeling of being elated at finally reaching this great accomplishment in her life.

But she couldn’t feel anything. Not when her eyes kept going over a certain row of students and coming across the empty seat where Korra was supposed to be.

She searched high and low before the ceremony began to find her best friend, but there was no sign of her. It made her stomach churn.

Regret. That was one of the biggest things she felt at the moment.

She regretted going out to that stupid party and dragging Korra there with her. When she woke up the next morning, she felt sick about what happened. Although, granted a couple of details were a little foggy for her, she remembered most of it. She remembered breaking up the argument between Mako and Korra. She remembered taking Mako outside to calm him down. And she remembered leaving with him.

For one night she chose to be reckless, and it ended up being one of the worst decisions she ever made. And when Korra called her out for what happened, it felt even more embarrassing and upsetting to the point where she lashed out.

Once she got over the initial anger and hurt she felt after their fight, she fully realized the weight of her words and the look on Korra’s face once she said them. That image stayed in her mind for weeks, even now.

All she wanted at that time was to hurt Korra as much as Korra hurt her, but she took it too far. Way too far.

So, of course, it was only rational for her to believe that she was the one to blame for Korra’s absence now, and maybe it was rooted even deeper than that.

When she saw Korra the other night at the police station, it damn near broke her heart. Those eyes, which were always so bright and full of excitement, were downcast and lacking their usual vibrancy. She looked so tired. Defeated. Broken...
And Asami realized afterward how, more than just the party and their fight, she regretted not saying anything the most. She had her chance to say something all those weeks they went without seeing or speaking to each other. Her biggest chance to say something was right before Korra turned away and ran inside the house. Even if she had no idea where to start, or what she wanted to tell Korra, it would have been better than not saying anything at all. And now it felt like she missed the opportunity.

The sound of everyone clapping took her out of her thoughts and she started clapping as well. The other valedictorian was walking back from the podium, practically beaming. She sat down right beside Asami and turned to her in excitement.

“That was so nerve racking,” she told her in a whisper. “How did I do?”

“You did so great,” Asami said reassuringly and gave her a smile. She felt awful for having been so into her own thoughts that she missed a majority of her classmate’s speech.

The girl smiled back. “Thanks. I’m sure you will, too.”

Asami looked ahead again. The principal had gotten up from her chair and was walking over to the podium.

“And now I introduce to you our final speaker before the main event: Asami Sato. She’s one of the most brilliant students I’ve come to know in the past four years, graduating at the top of her class. I have no doubt in my mind that she will go on to do extraordinary things and set a wonderful example for the Class of 2010…”

Asami looked over the crowd again. Row by row, she searched for Korra, hoping desperately that something changed from five minutes ago when she last looked. She hesitated for a split second when she saw Mako sitting there—the tallest one in his row near the front—looking directly at her. When their eyes met, a tiny smile appeared on his face. Asami forced herself to look away, ignoring the conflicting feelings she had in her gut. After everything that happened with Korra, she couldn’t bring herself to fully face him. Right now, he was just a reminder of all the mistakes she made with her best friend.

Once again, she reached the row where Korra was supposed to be and didn’t see her. Her heart sank into her chest.

As much as she fretted about what was coming next and how unprepared she was, the one person—the only person—she was absolutely sure would be right beside her was Korra. Even when they fought or stopped talking for a while, there was never a doubt in her mind that they’d find their way out of it stronger than ever. But now, even that seemed impossible and it made her feel more lost than she already was.

More clapping occurred and she blinked. The principal stepped away from the podium and extending an arm out for her.

Immediately, she got up and plastered a smile on her face as she walked over. There were whistles and she heard a couple of people shouting out her name in encouragement. But it all sounded like an echo in her head. None of it felt real. She didn’t want it to be real.

The walk over to the podium felt longer than it was. On the way, she may have shaken the principal’s hand, but she felt so far removed from herself that she couldn’t remember. There were too many lights in her face and so many people in front of her. So many people, and yet the only
person she wanted to see wasn’t.

“Wow,” she spoke clearly into the microphone. “I can’t believe we made it!”

More cheers erupted, mostly from her fellow graduates who couldn’t sit still for the lives of them. She laughed and could hear the artificial sound in it—the fakeness. There were only two people who could recognize it from a mile away.

“We’ve all grown and learned so much these past four years,” she went on. “I’ve met so many people who helped shape and mold me into the person I am today. My wonderful teachers, my friends… my family. My father is always telling me to be ready for whatever comes my way, and I take those words with me wherever I go. I’m so excited to apply that to the real word as I experience all of the new adventures I get to have…”

Bullshit.

Everything coming out of her mouth was stuff she made up from the night before she had to submit her speech in for approval. And in all honesty, it was pretty generic. She never got the inspiration she needed, especially not after everything that went on in the past few weeks. In fact, that only made her speech even harder to figure out.

She felt like a fraud on that stage, giving a speech about hope and the future when she didn’t even want to think about her own. So much changed in so little time, and it left her off balance. As someone who always had a plan or tried to be one step ahead of everything, it frightened her that she had none of that.

Her mouth continued to move, repeating every single word she memorized from her notecards. She couldn’t see anyone from where she stood, and she thought of it as a good thing. This way, she could at least think that Korra was actually there, watching her with that teasing smile of hers while at the same time being so obviously proud.

Once the speech finally ended, everyone clapped and she smiled politely. Tears formed in her eyes and, to everyone else, they could’ve been interpreted as her having a bittersweet moment.

She knew otherwise, though.

“‘We’re sorry; the person you are trying to reach is unavailable at this time. Please leave a message after the tone.’”

Beep!

“Hey, Korra. It’s me… again. I tried stopping by your house a few times, but no one’s been home. Or you’re just ignoring me… Look, I know we’re not on good terms right now, but please call me back. I just wanna talk.”

Asami ended the call and sighed. She looked down at her phone and turned it around in her hand.

Only two weeks passed since graduation, but it felt like an eternity in her mind. Korra’s silence was really eating at her to the point that she was starting to lose sleep. There was so much she had to say and so much she wanted to fix, but she couldn’t do that when Korra was avoiding her this much.

She tried to distract herself with her part time job, but her boss only gave her so many hours in a week. The rest of her time was spent in her room alone. Her father wasn’t home most days, and
while any other time she would have been upset, she didn’t mind it so much now. She just wanted to be alone by herself to think. Mako kept trying to call her, but she kept ignoring him. The only person she wanted to hear from was Korra right now.

There was no way she could keep this up forever, right? At some point, she’d have to answer the phone just to yell at Asami to stop calling.

At that thought, she almost called again but stopped herself.

Or maybe she was just pushing too hard? They both said a lot of things to each other and Korra probably just wanted some space. It wasn’t the first time this happened after one of their fights (although, it never lasted this long). One of them eventually ended up caving in and calling a truce. Most of the times, it was Asami, but Korra had her moments, too.

But this time, with how big of a fight they had, things felt a lot different. They both let out their poorly worded frustrations in the heat of the moment, and that couldn’t just be forgotten about like all of the fights they had previously. They had to talk it out and put whatever resentments they had on the table. That was the only way to make it work.

She put her phone to the side on her desk, but her eyes still lingered on it. After a minute, she finally looked away, only to stare at the small object that lay flatly beside her computer. She reached for the bracelet and held it in her hands.

Ever since her and Korra’s fight, she hadn’t worn it. But not having it on made her wrist weightless now. Every time she would look over at the thing, it taunted her.

She twisted and turned it around in her hands, looking at every intricate design engraved into each shell. It was one of the most well thought out and personal gifts she’d ever received.

Without giving it a second thought, she clasped it back onto her wrist again.

One week, she told herself. She would allow Korra one week of silence on her part, but after that—if Korra didn’t reach out to her first—she wouldn’t stop until she heard her voice.

Korra was stubborn, but so was she.

The mall was packed for a Wednesday, but since it was officially summer break, it wasn’t so out of the ordinary. The place was noisy, but even that couldn’t distract Asami from her thoughts.

Another week passed, just like that, and she still hadn’t heard back from Korra. She resumed calling, texting, leaving voicemails, and even stopping by the house when she could. But nothing changed. It was frustrating, upsetting, and a bit concerning. She knew Korra was mad at her, but this was beginning to get ridiculous. Unless there was something she was missing…

“Hello. Earth to Asami.”

Her eyes refocused and she looked at Mako, who was looking at her with a frown on his face. They were sitting at a table in the middle of the food court. She only just realized that most of her food went untouched.

“What?” she asked.

“You weren’t listening to a thing I was saying, were you?” he asked, clearly offended.
Immediately, she felt guilty.

“I’m sorry. I was just… thinking about Korra.”

She watched as his expression changed, and he looked more annoyed at being ignored than anything. He didn’t know much about the fight that she and Korra had, only that they had one. She thought best to just keep him out of it; however, she couldn’t deny how much this was putting an even bigger strain on their relationship. There was already enough on her mind that she didn’t want to put their issues on top of everything else. But staying in seclusion wasn’t good for her either, so she finally reached out to him the other day and he gladly accepted her offer about hanging out. She wondered if he regretted that now.

“Have you tried talking to her?” he asked after a minute.

She bit her lip and nodded. “Yeah, but she hasn’t been returning my calls.”

He shrugged. “Then there’s nothing you can really do. If she doesn’t want to talk to you then so be it.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Do you really think that’s something I want to hear right now?”

Mako sighed and gave her a look. It was the same look he’d been giving her for months now whenever it came to Korra.

“Look. I know you thought she was your friend—”

“She is my friend,” she corrected him immediately. “My best friend.”

"You've known her for what? Five whole minutes now?" Mako said sarcastically.

"Two years, actually," Asami responded back in the same tone. "What's your point?"

"My point is that it’s a little ridiculous how you're always acting like you've known her as long as me."

"Seriously?" Asami said, giving him an incredulous look. "Are you really going there with me right now?"

Mako shrugged again. "I'm just speaking the truth. We grew up with so many people from that school, and yet for some reason you latched onto some newbie with an attitude, not to mention some serious issues."

"She's twice the friend anyone has ever been to me," she said defensively, and with every word she felt her temper rising. "If you ever bothered to actually listen to a thing that I say, you would've realized that."

“Oh, I’ve listened,” Mako said with the roll of his eyes. “And the only thing I’ve gotten from this entire thing is that maybe you didn’t mean as much to her as she did to you.”

She didn’t expect that comment to hurt her as much as it did, and the fact that he said it so matter-of-factly really put her off.

“You’re being an asshole right now,” she told him.

“I don’t think I am. I think I’m telling you things you don’t want to hear because you’re scared to admit them to yourself.”
“Don’t for one minute act like you know Korra better than I do.”

“Whatever.”

Mako looked down and started angrily picking at his food.

Asami stared at him with disbelief in her eyes. She couldn’t believe the way he was acting right now. If the roles had been reversed and he was the one torn up about one of his friends, she wouldn’t hesitate for one second to be by his side and comfort him. And the fact that he could barely even do that for her was really eye-opening.

She never should have told him anything about Korra in the first place. He was so stuck on his already perceived notions of her that he didn’t want to see what Asami actually saw—what she knew. It was one of the many things they fought about time and time again, but she always told herself that he would come around. Now, she was beginning to see how naïve she was. Or maybe, deep down, she always knew and was just in denial.

Whatever the case, Mako would never understand. And because of that, for the first time since they’d known each other, Asami couldn’t understand him.

She defended him time and time again because, like with Korra, she always knew there was a side to him that no one else could see or understand. She knew how he operated and how tough it was for him to come out of his shell. But how many times could she keep on using that excuse? How many times had she already used it?

They grew up together and knew so much about each other, but there was always a wall between them. And as much as Asami liked to believe she’d torn down most of it, it seemed like there was some part of Mako that she still didn’t know. She cared about him—loved him—but that wasn’t enough. And as much as she hated to admit it, at times it felt like she was only holding onto their relationship for him, and that wasn’t fair for either of them.

“This isn’t working,” she said quietly.

Mako looked up at her. There was no look of confusion in his eyes or a sign of disagreement. All he seemed to do was contemplate her words.

“No, it isn’t,” he agreed.

For the rest of the time, they sat there in silence.

It was an ugly gray outside and she could see that it was just beginning to sprinkle. She sat in her car, idly watching the house in front of her.

This radio silence went on for far too long and, at this point, all of her anger melted away and she was just flat out worried about Korra now. She made her decision to wait out there as long as she had to until she finally saw some form of life in that house.

As much as she tried to keep from being paranoid, she couldn’t help but think that something had to be wrong for Korra to go almost an entire month without speaking to her, despite their problems. All she needed was one simple response and that would be good enough for now. Everything else could wait. She would never be able to forgive herself if something bad happened to Korra and the last real words she ever spoke to her were words she didn’t even mean.

She mentally slapped herself. No. Everything was fine. Korra was fine. Assuming the worst was
extremely bad for a person like her.

The light dimmed in the sky and became overtaken with dark clouds as the rain picked up. She’d been sitting there for two hours now and her stomach growled in protest, but still, she wouldn’t leave.

Even if their friendship was deteriorating before her eyes, and even if Korra absolutely hated her guts right now, she wasn’t going to just give up and throw in the towel. They’d gone through so much together in the short time they knew each other, but the kind of relationship they built—what they had—was too special. That was why no matter how many times Korra shut her out, or acted like she didn’t want to be around her, Asami would continue to reach out to her.

They were Korra and Asami, after all. And no matter what kind of ups and downs they had, that special bond and understanding they shared would prevail. It had to.

She was startled when she heard her phone ringing from where she placed it on the dashboard. She grabbed at it immediately, hoping and wishing that it was Korra calling. At this point, she’d willingly let herself be cussed out for looking like a stalker so long as it meant getting to hear the sound of Korra’s voice again.

To her disappointment, it was just Mako.

She ignored the call with a groan and put her phone back in place.

Talking to him was the last thing on her mind now that she officially put an end to their relationship. He was pretty pissed about the way she ended it, but she knew it was for the best. All they did now was fight about everything, and it wasn’t healthy at all. They needed space, and if she looked like the bad guy for not answering his calls or messages, then so be it.

There was also the fact that she knew now how much he wanted to ignore everything about her situation with Korra completely. And if he couldn’t realize how important this was—that Korra was—to her, then their relationship really was beyond just hanging on loose strings.

Just then, headlights flashed in front of her eyes and her heart leaped in her chest. This was it.

Unalaq parked in the driveway and waited a minute or so before turning the car off. Asami immediately sprang into action and got out of her car, ignoring the fact that she didn’t have an umbrella to block out the rain that steadily began to fall over her. She held her breath as she watched Unalaq get out. For a second, she thought the passenger side would open as well, but to her disappointment that didn’t happen.

Unalaq hadn’t noticed her yet and started sprinting to the house to get inside and out of the rain, using his briefcase to cover himself.

“Mr. Unalaq!” she called out as she ran up the driveway.

He turned in question and his eyes widened when he saw that it was her approaching.

“Oh, hello, Asami,” he said politely. “It’s been a while.”

“I’ve tried stopping by a few times, but no one’s been home.”

“Ah, yes. I’ve been out of town for the past couple of weeks for business and only just got back a few days ago.”
“Oh…” Asami said.

That was certainly a relief for her to hear. If that was the case, then maybe nothing bad happened at all and she really was just being paranoid.

“So then… Korra’s just been with you all this time?” she asked.

For an instant, she saw a flash of surprise on his face before he quickly masked it.

“No, she hasn’t been,” he said.

Asami tried to meet his eyes, but he seemed hesitant to look back.

“Well, is she home?” she asked, pointing to the house behind him.

“No,” he said with the shake of his head. “If she’s not with you, I don’t know where she is.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” she asked, sounding wary.

“Korra left about a month ago. I haven’t seen her since.”

Everything seemed to freeze. The rain going against her skin felt a thousand times colder in that moment.

“What?” she said after a long pause, as if she hadn’t heard him.

“Like I said, I was under the impression she was with you, but apparently that’s not the case.”

“I… haven’t seen her,” she said numbly.

Faintly, she heard Unalaq mumble something under his breath, but she didn’t quite catch it.

“What?” she asked. Her body began to shiver and shake.

Unalaq shook his head. “Nothing. Anyway, you should probably get going before it gets really nasty out here.”

He turned away from her and started up the porch.

“Wait,” she called out. “Aren’t you even worried about her? Do her parents know about this?”

At that, he paused on the step he was on and turned toward her once more. He looked intimidating like that in the suit he was wearing. He almost reminded her of her father.

“Korra wants to be an adult, and technically she is,” he told her. “I have no control over what she chooses to do with her life anymore. Although, I do wish her the best of luck wherever she is.”

“But—”

“Goodnight, Miss Sato,” he cut her off. “It was nice to see you again. And please tell your father I said hello.”

She was so dumbstruck that she couldn’t even say anything. All she could do was watch as he walked through the door and closed it, leaving her out there. The longer she stood in place, the more his words began to sink in.

Slowly, she made her way down the driveway and back to her car. When she got inside, she barely
noticed how drenched she was from the rain. She didn’t feel much, really.

*He’s lying,* was the first thing to pop in her head. Korra told her a couple of things about her uncle that seemed far-fetched, but they suddenly made all the sense in the world now. There was no way he was telling the truth.

She reached onto the dashboard and grabbed her phone. Her hands were so wet that she needed to wipe them on her jeans in order to properly dial.

None of this made any sense.

*Ring…*

It wasn’t possible.

*Ring…*

Korra wouldn’t just leave like that without any warning.

*Ring…*

Korra wouldn’t leave *her*.

“We’re sorry; The person you are trying to reach is unavailable at this time. Please leave a message after the tone.”

She hung up and dialed again with shaky hands.

“She’s there, come on,” she whispered as she listened to the now dreadful sound of the phone ringing. She leaned over in the passenger seat and looked up at the room that she knew Korra stayed in. The lights were still off.

It had to be some kind of sick joke that Unalaq was in on. Any moment now, the front door would open and Korra would come out, laughing at Asami’s expense. She would get mad at first, but would eventually end up laughing at herself, as well. And then they’d hug it out, apologizing at the same time and crying about how ridiculous they’d both been. Everything was supposed to work out fine between them because they needed each other. They were supposed to take on this crazy, cruel, and confusing world together.

“We’re sorry—”

She let out a frustrated cry and threw her phone in the passenger seat. Leaning forward, she rested her hands on the steering wheel and put her forehead against it. She couldn’t control the broken sob that escaped her.

It was her fault.

She just wanted to go back, reverse the clocks and make it right. That final night she saw Korra stuck out the most. If she hadn’t hesitated—if only she had just *said* something—then maybe that could’ve changed whatever was in Korra’s mind. And maybe that was what Korra was waiting for.

Why didn’t she try harder? She could’ve done so much more. But now it was apparently too late for that.

The tears were stinging in her eyes until a few of them finally fell. She hit the steering wheel in anger.
All of this was preventable, but she let stubbornness and selfishness get in her way. She wanted things to go her way so much that she couldn’t see how that was hurting their friendship. Korra was right all along. She was just desperate to ignore the truth. And because of that, Korra left with no reason to come back at all.

She suddenly felt like she couldn’t breathe. Her heart felt like it was contracting and she didn't have enough air in her lungs. She tried to tell herself to calm down, but that only seemed to make things worse.

*She’s gone. She’s gone. She’s gone.*

For a second, she worried that her episode would last forever. But eventually she realized that in order to breathe, she had to let go of all the air she was holding in that felt like it was choking her.

The sound of the rain became clear in her ears once again, and she heard it hit hard against her car. She also realized that she never stopped shivering. In fact, she only shivered more violently. Individual drops of water fell from her hair and into her lap, along with her tears.

There had to be a way to fix this. All she had to do was find Korra and tell her everything she should have. And then maybe that would convince her to come back.

This wasn't the end for them.

There was smiling and fake laughter, greetings and forced small talk. That was all it ever felt like these days.

She stood beside her father as he introduced her to a bunch of people whose names she couldn't be bothered to remember. They looked at her as if she was one of her father’s prized possessions rather than just seeing her for her. She always learned to ignore those looks, but now she was just beginning to accept them.

“I must say, seeing a young woman with so much ambition go into a predominantly male field is very impressive,” an older woman said to her and then looked over at Hiroshi. “You must be so proud.”

Hiroshi wrapped his arm around Asami and gave her shoulder a squeeze.

“I know she’ll do some outstanding work. Soon enough, we’ll have both left our mark at that school.”

“Oh?” said a man who stood close by, clearly listening in on the conversation. He looked at Asami with a smile. “So you’re really going to Cornell after all? What are you studying?”

“She’s double majoring in mechanical engineering and business management with a minor in political science,” Hiroshi spoke for her.

“Wow.” The man’s eyes widened. “You’re definitely going to have a busy six or seven years,” he said with a laugh.

“Asami actually has enough credits from high school that roll over and she can start as a second semester sophomore.”
The man sputtered and looked between her and her father.

“Well that’s… certainly impressive. Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” Asami said with little emotion attached to her voice. All she wanted was to go home.

After another twenty minutes of just standing there, her father finally finished mingling with them and led her away. They were heading for another group of executives now.

“You’ve been pouting the whole night,” her father said in a low whisper.

“I don’t feel well,” she said as an excuse.

“Then you should have stayed home.”

“As if you would have let me.”

Hiroshi shot her a brief—but noticeable only to her—warning look.

“Mr. Sato, can I get a photo of you and your daughter?”

They both stopped and turned to look over at the over-eager photographer standing there.

“Of course,” her father said.

Once again, he wrapped his arm around Asami and grinned. Asami mimicked his expression.

Once the photographer walked away, Hiroshi turned to her again.

“These people can help you make it far in your career. Don’t take that for granted.”

Asami tried to keep her face as calm and neutral as her father’s, but she could feel herself beginning to slip.

_This isn’t what I want_, she wanted to tell him—to scream at him—but she couldn’t. After all, she already made her decision.

“I’ll try harder,” she said.

Hiroshi opened his mouth to say something, but then glanced over her shoulder and stopped.

“I have to step out for a second,” he said. “Stay here.”

“What? Why?”

“Just do as I say,” he said and shot her another warning look.

He walked away, leaving her there. She turned and watched him go through the crowded ballroom, shaking hands and greeting people as he passed. In the doorway, she thought she saw someone standing there from the corner of her eye, but when she looked, there was no one.

She glanced around, feeling lost and out of place. This was something she always feared: being left alone in a room full of all these people. But then again, maybe this was her karma for leaving Korra that night.

Before anyone could come up to her, she made up her mind to just go to the bathroom and wait it out. She kept her head down, refusing to make eye contact with anyone so that they wouldn’t start
up a conversation with her.

Once she made it out of the room, she looked around for her father, but he was nowhere to be found.

The women’s restroom was just down the hall and she all but shoved the door open once she approached it. Unfortunately, she was not alone. There were two women washing their hands at the sink who seemed startled by her abrupt entry. But once they saw it was her, they gave her a smile and wave. She waved back to them and then quickly went into one of the restroom stalls.

Leaning against the door, she waited for the two women to leave. A minute passed with her just listening to their hushed voices as they spoke, and then finally, she heard them walk out. It was silent.

She allowed her hands to tremble at her sides.

Everything about this was becoming tiring. She was sick of the parties and the limelight; she was sick of all the pressure and expectations. It made her want to curl up in a ball and implode on herself.

She reached into her mini purse and pulled out her phone. At this point, it was done without any command the way her fingers dialed the familiar number.

She closed her eyes and listened to the long pause over the line before hearing the inevitable voice that came through:

“We’re sorry; you have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service…”

The first time she heard that message, it crushed her. Now it only caused her to stare blankly ahead.

She hung up the phone and placed it back in her bag.

The hope that she had in the beginning slowly began to fade as more months went by without hearing from Korra. There was nowhere for her to look either because she didn’t have anyone to reach out to. Tahno and his friends were her first choice, but they only seemed to be found when they wanted to be.

She had no answers for it, and all that did was produce more questions. Unalaq was anything but forthcoming about any information he had, and aside from him, the only person who could give her answers was the person who went M.I.A.

Only three months went by, but it felt like much longer than that. And now she would be leaving for Cornell in two weeks to embark on a journey all on her own. It was amazing how one minute she could go from feeling like she had everything, to having nothing at all.

There were nights that she’d dream of having gone away with Korra. She would’ve found some fashion institute to go to, and Korra would eventually find her own thing. They’d travel together wherever their hearts would take them, and it would be full of excitement and freedom. Of course, it wouldn’t always be sunshine and rainbows, and sometimes life would get hard, but at least they’d always have each other to fall back on.

But right now, in reality, she was falling backward into an endless abyss.

How was she supposed to move forward? How could she just get over losing one of the most important people in her life? It wasn’t possible. Not when there were so many things left to say.
Not when everything was so unfinished between them.

She breathed in and out, trying to keep it together. Breaking down right now was not an option.

After collecting herself, she came out of the bathroom stall and gave herself one look in the mirror.

Fine. She looked fine. No one would be able to tell how much she was falling apart.

After letting out a long exhale, she made her way to the door and touched the handle.

She had no choice but to go on and fully embrace a life she didn’t want but would eventually become her own.

Interlude II (END)
Thanks to ":)" for making this AWESOME playlist for RwtP. It makes me so happy that you guys are so invested in this story as much as I am.

https://open.spotify.com/user/diahade/playlist/4BGFxioYTcTV4hwGdhgEJk?si=tczy4V-zQtSOAbk5IkvFIA

PART 3: Rebuilding

A long, drawn out silence followed after Korra finished telling her story, creating a sense of stillness and uncertainty.

Asami stared off in thought, her eyes drifting over to the window. It was dark out now and the city lights could be seen from down below. The kitchen light was on, which was enough to allow some light into the living room, but hardly enough. She'd been too wrapped up and invested in what Korra was saying to even think about getting up to turn another light on. But the way it looked now kind of fit the somber mood.

There were so many things to digest; to absorb. She didn’t know where to begin. Her mind was spinning from all of the time she spent trying to picture every scene, every thought, and every emotion Korra felt in the way she described it. At times, she thought she was reliving some of their moments, and it left her feeling even more disjointed.

“You haven’t said anything in the past five minutes.”

At the sound of her voice, Asami slowly turned her head to meet Korra’s gaze.

Everything was different now. All that she thought she knew had been flipped and turned upside down. And the woman in front of her now… she was the most different.

“I…” she started, but couldn’t form any other words. It was impossible to speak when a rock was in her throat. But she needed to say something. Korra honored her word and didn’t walk away. She stayed until the very end and told her side of how things played out, even if on the inside it was killing her. Asami owed it to her to say something. In fact, she owed Korra a lot.

Everything about Korra’s story stirred her. She felt so much heartbreak, so much sadness, so much guilt…

Korra let out a deep sigh. “Don’t do that.”

Asami’s eyes widened in response.

“Don’t do what?” she asked.

Korra’s body language read as uncomfortable, but her facial expression was sad.
“Feeling responsible isn’t going to help you move on. It’ll only do the exact opposite.”

Asami looked down at her lap.

Korra could analyze her so easily, back then and even now. She wished she could conceal her feelings more, but with everything she just learned, it was impossible to do in this situation.

All that time she spent being bitter and upset because Korra left should have never been directed at her in the first place. There were so many factors that played into it. Her parents, her uncle kicking her out, the fight they had… her feelings.

She was so angry with everyone all of a sudden, including herself. All of the people who should’ve loved Korra unconditionally turned their backs on her when she needed them the most. Asami couldn’t imagine what that must have been like for her. It was enough to bring tears to her eyes, but she knew that Korra probably wouldn’t appreciate the sympathy (or pity), so she looked away and blinked a couple of times to try and compose herself.

“I never knew,” she said after a while. “When your uncle told me you left, I was under the impression it was of your own free will. He made it seem that way, at least.”

“Heh. It figures that bastard wouldn’t own up to it,” Korra said. “But he’s kind of right. I left and didn’t bother to try and come back.”

“Have you talked to him since then?”

Korra shook her head and looked away finally. “I don’t have anything to say to him and he clearly wasn’t all that torn up about what happened.”

“But he had to have gone looking for you, right? I mean, when he found out you weren’t with me, he seemed surprised.”

“I’m sure my parents let him know I wasn’t kidnapped or anything.”

“Wait,” Asami said, trying to put more of the pieces together. “So, you did speak to your parents after all of that?”

“Briefly.”

“And do you speak to them now?”

Korra let out a short, breathless laugh. “That’s another story.”

Asami clasped and unclasped her hands in anxiousness. She had so many new questions forming in her mind.

“Why didn’t you ever just tell me what was going on with them and your uncle?” she asked gently.

“It’s not like I never wanted to tell you,” Korra replied. “I guess I was just… scared.”

“Scared?” Asami repeated in confusion. “Why?”

“For a lot of reasons,” Korra said. She leaned her elbows on her knees and stared ahead at the photographs that sat on top of the mantel, squinting her eyes. “You always saw me as this fearless person, and I always felt like I needed to live up to that. And being vulnerable in front of you—or anyone—was really hard for me.”
The guilt seemed never ending for Asami at this point. She had no idea that her idealization of Korra made her feel that way, although it made all of the sense in the world.

“And,” Korra spoke again, “I think there were a few times where I just wanted to be the one you could talk to without it being mutual. Focusing on your pain was easier for me because it took me away from my own, at least for a little while.”

Asami gripped the ends of the couch cushion.

“I never wanted that,” she said, feeling herself becoming more emotional. “I always wanted to be there for you and you should’ve let me be. We were supposed to tell each other everything. If you had just come to me after what happened, I could have helped you.”

“No, you couldn’t have,” Korra denied. “I was a lost cause at that point.”

“No, you weren’t!” Asami said angrily and turned to her. “You were troubled, and there were people around you who should’ve been there to support you. I should have been there.”

“Stop blaming yourself.”

“You can’t expect me not to feel responsible in some way,” Asami said, raising her voice in frustration. Korra seemed taken aback by her outburst, but it needed to be said. There were a lot of things she needed to admit. Not just to Korra, but to herself, as well.

“I shouldn’t have said what I said to you that day. I should’ve fought harder to keep you in my life, but I didn’t because I was so mad at you. And for what? Because you didn’t like my boyfriend? God… I just… You were my best friend and I abandoned you. I should’ve done more. I’ve always known that and it’s one of the biggest regrets I have in my life.”

She sounded borderline hysterical, but it was because everything she felt from so long ago came back full force. As much as she thought she moved on from it, hearing about their situation from Korra's perspective upset her all over again, but in a different way than before. She watched for Korra's reaction anxiously, thinking that there was so much more she needed to say but at the same time knew none of it would ever be enough. Nor would it undo the past.

“This is exactly what I meant when we talked about closure earlier,” Korra finally said.

Asami squeezed her eyes shut before looking away. Of course Korra was right about that. This type of closure that she was seeking was impossible. In fact, this wasn’t even closure anymore. It was just reopening a bunch of barely stitched up wounds.

So then, if that was true, how was she ever going to let any of this go?

“Asami,” Korra said, gaining her attention once more. Her expression was calm and a lot more patient than Asami probably deserved.

“What?” she answered, looking into cool, blue eyes.

“I know you’re going to beat yourself up about this no matter what I say,” Korra started, “but I’m telling you that you don’t need to. I spent… a long time being angry at everything and everyone. But I put all of that stuff behind me and I moved on, just like you said you did.”

“But now—”

“It doesn’t change anything,” Korra interrupted, although her voice was gentle. “I know you think
it does, but it doesn’t.”

Asami shook her head, but she didn’t want to argue.

“How can you be so calm?” she asked. “Even when you were telling me all of that, you didn’t even seem fazed.”

A sad smile appeared at the corner of Korra’s mouth and she looked away for a second before meeting Asami’s again. She shrugged.

“I’ve been through a lot worse.”

Asami took in a deep, shaky breath. Her lip trembled, and as hard as she tried to keep from shedding any tears, that one sentence was enough to break her resolve. She wiped away at them and kept her eyes lowered. She didn’t want to meet Korra’s gaze until she got herself under control. It was so unfair that she was the one crying over this stuff, as if she hadn’t been one of the main causes to some of Korra’s inner turmoil.

What could possibly be worse than what Korra just told her? She wanted to ask, but she knew that was beyond her jurisdiction. Korra didn’t owe her anything.

“I wish I could go back,” she admitted with a sniff and finally looked up at her. “There’s so many things I could’ve done differently.”

Korra turned toward her and leaned her head against the couch. She watched her closely, eyes searching.

“But you can’t,” she whispered. “And I can’t either.”

They stared at each other openly and Asami could feel something swirling inside of her that she had no words for. All she knew was that the woman in front of her dealt with a lot at too young of an age and she just wished there was a way to take away all of that pain.

“Maybe you’re right about not needing to apologize,” she eventually said. “I have too much to apologize for.”

“That’s not the reason why I’ve been saying that,” Korra told her.

“Then what is it?”

Korra blew out a puff of air and tucked a piece of hair behind her ear.

“I wasn’t a good friend to you,” she said. “A lot of the stuff we fought about was because of me and my emotional baggage. And let’s not pretend I was a good influence on you either.”

Asami blinked in confusion, but after a second she realized where Korra was getting at.

“You don’t think you deserve an apology?” she asked in disbelief. When she didn’t receive a verbal reply, she turned toward Korra more, to the point where her knee ended up on the couch and bumping against Korra’s thigh. “Korra…”

“But can we not?” Korra finally said. “Please?”

Asami frowned. She had no idea what would make Korra think she was unworthy of an apology, but she didn’t push any further. Instead, there were a few other things she hadn’t verbally addressed since Korra finished her story.
“Um. The way you felt about me…” she started, but didn’t know how to phrase it.

“Ah, yeah.” Korra rubbed the back of her neck. “What about it?”

Asami bit her lip and looked down in shame, before meeting Korra’s eyes again.

“I honestly had no idea,” she said.

“It wouldn’t have made much of a difference if you did anyway.”

Asami wanted to tell her that she was wrong, but the truth was she didn’t know herself. She had so many things going on back then with both Mako and Korra. If anything, Korra admitting her feelings would have just made things more complicated. Not to mention the fact that she never thought about having a romantic attraction to her girl best friend…

“If I had known, I would’ve at least been considerate of your feelings.”

“Oh you would’ve gotten weird and never spoken to me again,” Korra said humorously.

“No.” Asami disagreed. “I can’t believe that’s something I would have done. Especially to you.”

She felt so confident in what she said. In fact, it offended her that Korra would even think otherwise.

“I guess we’ll never know,” Korra ended up saying.

Asami could only give a nod in response. There was so much they’d never get to know.

She hesitated before asking her next question.

“If we never got into that fight and you hadn’t left, would you have ever told me?”

Korra paused and then raised her head and looked up in thought. The question seemed to stump her by the way her eyebrows knit together.

Asami held her breath as she waited. She didn’t know what triggered her to ask that question or why it mattered. She just knew that she wanted to hear Korra’s answer.

“Probably not,” Korra said.

“Why?”

“Because for the most part I always knew I never stood a chance—falling for a straight girl and all. And I had a lot of bad shit going on in my life, but you… You were probably the one good thing I had. And I didn’t want to mess any of that up.”

“Even though it all got messed up anyway?”

“Heh. Yeah.” Korra scratched her cheek. “Plus, everything with Mako kind of just made me think it would’ve been pointless.”

Asami bunched her fists at hearing Mako’s name. She had so many conflicting feelings about the stuff Korra told her about him. They were things that, back then, she never would’ve been able to imagine him saying to anyone, especially not to someone who he knew Asami cared so much about. Mako was never forthcoming about it either.
But even still, some of the things she did know. She remembered that night they went out to that party and hearing the tail end of what Mako said in front of everyone about Korra dragging her down. And then for her to turn around and just leave with him?

She put her face in her hands and groaned out loud.

It would’ve been weird if she all of a sudden called Mako out for his behavior back then when they hadn’t talked about Korra in years, wouldn’t it?

“You’re wasting your time being mad at him,” Korra said, practically reading her mind for the second time that day.

“It’s not right,” Asami argued. “He was wrong and he owes you an apology.”

“Oh please.” Korra scoffed. “If you think I’m still hung up on a few words some preppy douche said to me in high school, you’re wrong.”

“It’s not about that. It’s about the fact that he was being an overprotective asshole and you didn’t deserve that. And it wasn’t even your fault about what happened that night at that party. You just took the fall for me.”

“It’s unnecessary,” Korra warned her. “You would just be digging up old skeletons.”

Asami sighed in frustration. Not because of Korra, but because she felt so helpless.

“There has to be something I can do,” she whispered to herself.

“There is,” Korra said and Asami met her gaze. “Forget about it.”

Asami gave her an incredulous look. There was no way she could do that. To just forget? No. And no matter how many times Korra told her to, she wouldn’t just let it go.

“It’s not that easy,” she said.

“Sure it is. I told you and now you can move on with your life and stop being so stuck on stuff that happened forever ago.”

“You really don’t get it, do you?”

“What’s there to get?”

“How much you... meant,” Asami blurted out. “How much you meant to me.”

It was hands down one of the most embarrassing things she ever said out loud, but she didn’t regret saying it at all. Korra needed to know how much of an important role she had in her life for the short time she was in it. Even if they weren’t exactly the same kind of feelings Korra had for her, there was still something about their friendship that overwhelmed Asami whenever she thought about it. And from the way Korra paused and how so many different emotions flickered in her eyes, that sentence clearly had some kind of emotional weighing on her.

"There’s nothing we can do about what happened back then,” Korra reminded her. “You’re doing something good with your life, so just keep it that way. Don’t get stuck on things you can’t change.”

“Who says it’s not too late to change things?”
“What?” Korra’s eyes widened.

Asami swallowed and got nervous all of a sudden.

“We’ve gotten all the way up to this point. Why not try and make an effort to be in each other’s lives again?”

“That’s impossible,” Korra said, though she still seemed surprised by Asami’s offer. “It wouldn’t work.”

“You can’t know that.”

“I do. We’re on completely different pages, our lifestyles are different, and let’s not forget that you’re with a cop who would probably arrest me if he ever figures out what I’m doing.”

“Detective,” Asami said.

“How?”

“Mako’s… actually a detective now.”

Korra folded her arms and scoffed. “Great. Well, that’s even more of a reason.”

“He won’t get in the way,” Asami said earnestly. “I won’t let that happen again.”

“So then your plan is to what? Be out with him in the day and at night time we stay hauled up in this place?”

“I mean, I do want to tell him about what’s been going on eventually, but only when you’re ready.”

“That’s just the thing, though,” Korra said. “I’m never going to be ready for that. The only way you could pull this off is if you cut ties with him completely. And do you really think you could do something like that?”

Asami sighed and looked away. Even though this situation was different from before when they were younger, she still felt like some things would never change. She was always going to be stuck in the middle.

“Exactly,” Korra said when she didn't respond.

She couldn't bring herself to be annoyed with how Korra sounded so sure of herself. Although she wished there was something she could say to prove Korra wrong, or make her see things in a different light, there wasn’t. Korra made up her mind already and had some pretty legitimate reasons to not want to get involved with Asami again.

And also…

“You don’t trust me,” she said.

Korra stiffened but tried to cover it up by folding her arms.

“I don’t trust anyone.”

Asami wasn’t all that surprised by that confirmation, but that didn’t stop her from feeling like a knife was lodged inside her gut. And it only went deeper when she reminded herself that she had
no right to feel that way. It wasn’t like Korra had any reason to trust her after what she did in the past.

“Look, I know that I was being an asshole to you in the beginning,” Korra said when the silence stretched between them, “but none of the stuff I’m saying right now is because I wanna be malicious or hurt you. I’m just being realistic.”

“I know,” Asami said. “I understand now. And the way you acted before… I understand that, too.”

It did make sense in the grand scheme of things. Korra had been suppressing so much. She didn’t like talking about her past (with good reason) and wanted to avoid it as much as possible. Asami could only imagine how hard it was for her to open up about so many of those things. And while Korra wasn’t making her feelings obvious on the outside, Asami had a feeling that—like when they were younger—she was bottling things in.

“Are you okay?” she asked in concern.

“I’m fine,” Korra said, but didn’t quite meet her eyes.

Asami worried her lip.

“And are you okay?” she asked again, this time with a whole new meaning attached to it.

Korra didn’t respond at first. In fact, she seemed hesitant to answer. Asami saw a flash in her eyes that made it appear like she was remembering something. She looked haunted in a way. However, it quickly faded once she blinked a few times and remembered that she was in Asami’s apartment.

“I’m better than I was,” she said quietly.

It wasn’t the answer Asami hoped to hear, but it was better than nothing. However, that one look was engraved in her mind now, and it also raised those questions again about where Korra went after she left and how—why—she ended up back here.

Korra must have saw the questions formulating in her head, because she opened her mouth to most likely protest.

“Don’t worry,” Asami said before she could even form a syllable. “I won’t ask. You’ve given me enough.”

Korra closed her mouth but continued to stare. Asami returned the gaze, refusing to look away because she knew that Korra was probably trying to decide whether or not she was telling the truth. She didn’t want to fight it. She wanted Korra to be able to read her just as clearly as she’d done all of those previous times. And if she had to sit through endless hours of Korra’s silent analyzations she would if that meant gaining her trust back again.

“I should… probably get going,” Korra said and stood up.

Asami frowned and got up as well. “So, that’s it?”

“That was all you really needed to know,” Korra said as she grabbed her coat off the couch where she placed it and shrugged it on.

“Korra,” Asami started and ran her fingers through her hair. “I know that you think it’s far fetched, but it doesn’t have to end this way. We can make this right.”
Korra sighed and used both hands to flip her hair out from where it was tucked inside the neck of her coat. “And what if I just want to get on with my life?”

“Is that really what you want?” Asami asked.

“I…” Korra paused and once again seemed hesitant.

“It’s okay,” Asami said. “You can tell me.”

Korra let out a deep breath and looked down at the floor. She stuffed her hands inside her coat pockets.

“I’m not saying that I want to just forget everything, okay? I know that not all of it was bad. But a lot of the stuff outside of that small bubble isn’t good for me to think about. And being in the same room with you now— looking at you… It just…”

She trailed off, unable to finish her sentence, but it was enough for Asami to fill in the blanks. It was also enough to make her stomach drop.

“I remind you of everything,” she said quietly.

It was a hard pill to swallow, but not one that she could reject.

“I know that’s unfair to you,” Korra said in what sounded like a regretful tone.

Asami shifted and crossed an arm over her body to hold onto her elbow.

“I can understand, though,” she said. “And I know I can’t stop you from feeling that way, but I at least want to try and mend it—fix us.”

“All you’re ever going to want from me is stuff that I can’t give you,” Korra told her. “And if that’s your reasoning—”

“It isn’t,” Asami said, stepping forward. “It’s nothing like that.”

“So what? You just want to make up for lost time?”

“No, I just want…” Asami stopped herself. She could feel herself becoming anxious and willing to say anything or do anything to get Korra to stay. But that wouldn’t work. She needed to be honest.

“This talk we had was good. Really good,” she said. “And I don’t expect anything more than you gave me. In fact, I think you gave me more than I deserve. But now that I know all of this, and how a lot of that stuff could’ve been avoided if we just talked it out… I don’t want to walk away from it and not try.”

Korra had an unreadable expression on her face, but then she lowered her eyes.

“You’d regret getting mixed up with someone like me,” she said eventually.

“I never regretted it before.”

“It’s not like back then. We’re not in high school anymore and the kind of stuff that I do—the stuff that I’ve done —will only create problems for you.”

“I don’t care,” Asami said automatically. “I don’t care about any of that.”
“You say that now.”

“Don’t underestimate me. I’ve changed too, and I’ve done things that I’m not proud of either.”

For some reason, Korra laughed.

“You really can’t take no for an answer, can you?”

Asami knew that it was said in a lighthearted way, but it still made her flinch. Once again, she was forcing something on Korra that she clearly didn’t want.

“You’re right. I’m sorry for pushing.”

Their eyes met and held and Asami hoped that she looked as sincere as she felt.

“I... really should get going now,” Korra said.

Asami nodded but didn’t give a verbal response.

They were both silent as they walked over to the door. Asami watched Korra put on her shoes and she was just about to walk out of the apartment.

“Korra,” she called out.

Korra paused as she opened the door and turned to her.

Asami swallowed and then took a deep breath.

“Thank you for telling me all of that.” She folded her arms. “And if you ever do decide to change your mind... just call me.”

As she figured, Korra didn’t respond and only gave her a small nod before walking out the door and closing it behind her.

She stood there for a long minute before walking over to the kitchen and plopping down on one of the stools.

Now that Korra was gone, it left her alone with her thoughts.

There were so many things that she misread back then; so many signs that she missed. If only she realized them sooner.

Now she had no idea what to do. It was a lot to sift through in her head, and a few of those things were some of her own mistakes. She always knew that she wasn’t innocent in the way their friendship ended, but just knowing now (although she had her suspicions) how much of an affect her words and actions had on Korra really made her want to kick herself a thousand times over.

But Korra looked practically unfazed as she talked about all of it. There were a couple of times while she told her story that Asami couldn’t help but tear up or show some type of emotion. But Korra never paused and her voice never wavered. Asami didn’t know whether it was because she really removed herself from feeling any type of way about it, or if she was just—once again—hiding away her true feelings. Either way, it pained her to think about it.

She looked over at the clock. It was just now going on 9:30. They talked for so long, and it all felt so natural; so good. It was unfortunate that it had to end.
And it was selfish of her to ask what she did of Korra—she knew. Her former best friend had no reason to trust her again or want to try and resume some semblance of what they had. It was asking way too much...

But she still hoped for it anyway.

Six years was a long time to spend away from someone with no contact whatsoever, but it wasn’t impossible to come to some mutual understanding, or to try and reach for something different—maybe even something better.

But that wasn’t her decision anymore: It was Korra’s. And whatever decision she went with, no matter how much it hurt Asami, she would just have to accept it.

Korra got back to her apartment an hour later. She threw her keys on the side table and locked the door in both places before making her way to her room—ignoring the way her stomach growled as she passed the kitchen—to lie down. That didn’t last for long though, because with so many things racing through her head, it was difficult for her to not move around.

She tossed and turned, trying to figure out which side to be on that wouldn’t cause all of her thoughts to manifest. When she realized how much that wasn’t working, she finally got up and started pacing around for a while, biting her thumbnail anxiously in the process.

I said too much, she thought to herself.

A lot of the things she told Asami were things she never spoke about with anyone. There were people who tried to get those things out of her before and she never relented. But now that it finally happened, it left her feeling exposed, which was something she wasn’t comfortable with. She guessed that was just the tradeoff that came along with refusing to open up to people.

When the pacing began to tire her out, she finally sat down on her bed and closed her eyes. She thought that focusing on her breathing would calm her down.

It worked for about a minute or so, but then she started seeing flashes of so many things she tried to erase from her mind: some of the stuff she told Asami, while the other things she kept repressed.

It was those repressed things that made her feel a rush of panic that started up her spine and made her break out into a cold sweat. She did a sharp intake of breath and jumped to her feet.

She went to the bathroom, tripping over one of her unpacked boxes, and flicked the light on before making her way over to the tub. She stripped out of her clothes in seconds, letting them fall to the floor and then drew the shower curtain back. She stepped inside the tub and took a deep breath before putting her hand on the knob. The minute the freezing water came pouring out of the showerhead, she shrieked and cowered back, but then her hand stretched out and held onto the handle at the side to keep her rooted in place.

She stood underneath the showerhead for a solid five minutes, shivering and gasping, all while trying to eliminate the terrible feeling in her gut and those dreadful memories of hers that caused it. Once that finally subsided and she felt a bit more like herself, she turned the shower off. Her hair was dripping all over, making her head feel weighed down.

This was the one thing she’d been so afraid of happening, and yet she still went against herself. And it was all just for Asami’s sake.

She brushed her hair away from her face and let her hands rest at the back of her neck.
No, she thought. That wasn’t fair. Asami didn’t know what bringing up all of this stuff would do to her, and Korra was the one to give in, after all. As much as she tried to deny it, there had to be some part of her that actually wanted to tell Asami. Maybe she subconsciously wanted to let those things off her chest after holding them in for so long, especially when the opportunity was at her fingertips. It wouldn't have been the first time she did that with Asami.

But now it just made things even more confusing for her with Asami’s offer at the end of their conversation. She figured that once she told Asami all of that, it would be over and they’d lay all of that stuff to rest for good. She had no idea Asami would suggest that the two of them start over, or whatever it was that she wanted to do. Although the idea of it had been brought up before, the fact that Asami really wanted to act on it, and actually thought it was possible, stumped Korra.

She turned the shower on again, this time to a warmer setting.

Their friendship—while having its good moments—was also emotionally exhausting. There were also so many factors that came between them (most of them still being there). She would’ve been an idiot to actually say yes to that. But like she already knew, Asami still had some kind of emotional grip on her. It was as undeniable at this point as it was frightening, and that pissed her off.

How was it possible that after so many years she spent training her body and becoming physically strong enough to beat down anyone who crossed her path, that she still showed so much weakness? By now her mask should’ve been as hard as stone, but somehow some of the edges were slowly beginning to peel off. And if she wasn’t careful; if she didn’t just *end* this like she knew she should, the mask would easily slip right off.

Letting out a frustrated sigh, she grabbed the soap bar and rag from the side and began to wash herself.

She needed to get her mind off of this, because as much as she knew herself, she also knew how unpredictable she could be, as well. If she let this situation—and all of those past memories she locked away—continue to eat away at her, there was no telling what she would do.

*A fight*, she realized. She needed to fight. Her fists were practically trembling at her sides with the need to punch into something. All of the anxiety she was feeling, all of the anger, and all of the memories would wash away the moment she stepped inside that octagon and only had one mood: to kick a person’s ass.

After finishing up in the shower, she got out and dried herself off.

Tomorrow she would go see Varrick and demand that he put her in a match, and she wouldn’t take no for an answer.

Before she could even fully phrase the question, Varrick was already shaking his head and dismissing her with a wave.

“No,” he said with finality.

Korra stepped forward, not willing to back down. “With all due respect, sir… I really need this.”

Varrick gave her a long look and removed his glasses, placing them inside his jacket.

“You hear that, Zhu Li? She ‘needs this,’” he said after studying her.
Zhu Li turned from where she was watching two guys sparring in the ring, but she only gave Korra a once over before turning away.

They were in one of his many spots around the city where underground matches took place. This one just so happened to be above an old, Chinese restaurant. Everything seemed chaotic since the place still needed to be set up, and there were quite a few people in the room moving things around. A couple of fighters were there, too, helping with some heavy lifting. Korra could feel their eyes on her every time they walked by.

It was early in the morning and cold outside to the point where rain or snow would possibly fall at any minute, but that didn’t stop her from putting on her favorite pair of running shoes and jogging all the way over there. She was still sweating and trying to catch her breath from the long and strenuous cardio.

If she had been anyone else, Varrick’s body guards would have most likely stepped in and told her to beat it, but they knew her and they knew how she operated. When she wanted something, she went for it and no one could stop her. That was one of the reasons Varrick liked her so much. Although, right now that seemed questionable.

“Look, kid,” Varrick said. “I’m not going to put you in a match just because you want one. That’s not how this whole schtick works. Capisce?”

“It’s been a month since my last match as an undercard,” Korra pointed out. “Don’t you think having one of your best fighters out for so long is starting to hurt your revenue?”

From beside her, Zhu Li snorted and Varrick outright laughed.

“Quite the contrary actually,” he said. "If you think fighting is the only thing they come for, you're sadly mistaken."

Korra swallowed thickly and tried not to look as uncomfortable as she felt. She knew that another large reason why Blackstone and the other underground fighting leagues were so popular was because of all the dealing that went down on the inside. She didn't want to acknowledge it, though. Especially not right now.

"That will only keep them entertained for so long," she argued. "And all of the hype surrounding me will die if it hasn't already."

“I’ve been in the game for a long time, sweetheart. I know what the crowd wants, and they definitely want you.”

“So then why—”

“Timing, kid. It’s all about timing.”

“And promoting,” Zhu Li added, though her eyes were still trained on the ring.

“That too.” Varrick nodded. “But you don’t need to worry. I was already planning to put you on the card in a few more weeks. Two or three tops.”

Korra sighed. “That’s too far away,” she said.

“The black market is like a sea of desperation. Did you know that?” Varrick randomly asked.

“I had no idea,” Korra said in a flat tone.
“You’ll get your match soon enough, but in the meantime, I can increase my revenue by getting these suckers to come to every event with the hope that they get to see you and even bet on who your first match will be.”

“That’s a little disingenuous, don’t you think?”

“Have you met me?”

She had to refrain from rolling her eyes.

“I’m ready,” she said firmly. “I’ve done nothing but train these past few weeks. Kuvira can vouch for me.”

“I talked to Kuvira the other week. She said your head wasn’t in the game.”

Korra bunched her hands into fists. Of course Kuvira would tell him that; however, she couldn’t be mad. For the past few weeks, she’d been distracted and sloppy in her performance. Kuvira was just looking out for her.

“Just let me show you what I can do,” she said earnestly. “Put me in a fight with anyone tonight and I’ll beat them down in three seconds.”

“Did you—Did she not hear a word I just said?” Varrick asked, looking around at everyone.

“Varrick, please,” Korra begged. She never did that.

“I’m not putting my cash cow in a non-advertised event. And besides, you look like you’re running on low fumes. How long has it been since you last slept?”

The urge to throw a fit never felt more tempting, but Korra knew all that would earn her was a patronizing laugh and pat on the head.

“Forget it. Never mind.”

She walked away, passing by the two bodyguards and a couple of fighters she knew who had been listening in on the conversation. A few of them shook their heads at her in disappointment, but she ignored them and made her way out of the building. Once she hit the pavement and a few raindrops hit her face, she took a deep breath before breaking out into a run.

She wanted to feel her legs tire out, for her heart to accelerate, and for her lungs to give out. There was nothing else she could do right now. She was stuck with her feelings eating away at her and it fucking sucked.

“What the hell were you thinking?” was the first thing to come out of Kuvira’s mouth once she approached Korra in the gym.

Korra was busy punching away at a speedbag, watching her fists go back and forth as she tried to concentrate. She already figured she’d be hearing from Kuvira at some point that day. Unfortunately, she never left that high school atmosphere where everyone loved to talk behind people’s backs instead of minding their own business.

“I had to try something,” she said.

At a glance, she saw Kuvira put a hand over her eyes in frustration.
“You really shouldn’t have done that,” she said.

“It doesn’t matter anyway. He said no.”

She stopped hitting the bag and walked away from it to go over to the large punching bag. As she figured, Kuvira was right on her heels.

“That’s not the point,” Kuvira said. “This isn’t a game, Korra. It’s serious. And if Varrick didn’t favor you as much as he does, you would be suspended for doing something that bold. Do you know how many people were blowing up my phone? They’re calling you—”

“I don’t care,” Korra immediately cut her off, not wanting to hear it. “And I get it, okay? What I did was above my pay grade. Please don’t yell at me right now.”

Kuvira’s face changed and she actually looked at Korra as if she were really seeing her for the first time.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” Korra said, adjusting the strap to one of her gloves.

When she didn’t hear a response at first, she assumed that Kuvira dropped it, but then she gasped in surprise when her coach grabbed her by the chin and lifted it to properly stare her down.

“You look like shit,” she said after her assessment.

Korra jerked her head away. “Gee, thanks.”

“Did something happen?”

“No,” Korra breathed out in annoyance.

“Korra, I swear to God—”

“I don’t wanna talk or be berated,” she snapped. “All I wanna do is the one thing that I’m good at, but I can’t. So can you please just let me deal with this in whatever way I want to?”

She sent the bag a hard punch, making it swing back and forth.

Her only outlet was being denied to her, and no one understood how bad that was. Fighting was her greatest escape, and without it, she had nothing.

“I have an idea,” Kuvira said after a minute, causing Korra to look back at her. “Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

“And go where?”

“No questions. Just come.”

Korra gave her a skeptical look, but Kuvira ignored it in favor of walking over to Korra’s gym bag and stuffing her things inside it before standing up. She threw Korra’s coat over to her, which she caught easily. No other words were spoken between them once they left the gym. It wasn’t raining anymore like earlier, but it was still cold and dreary out.

Even though it was killing her not to ask Kuvira where the hell she was taking her, Korra remained silent.
They walked a couple of blocks and took a fifteen minute bus ride before ending up at an old looking apartment building. There was a doorman standing there that gave Kuvira a curt nod before letting them pass. They walked inside without even a second glance.

Once they made it to the elevator and got in, Korra finally caved.

“Okay, so unless you moved within the last week, there’s no way you live here.”

“’Aren’t you the perceptive one?’ Kuvira teased. “You’re right, though.”

“So then where—”

“Patience, young Padawan.”

Korra rolled her eyes and folded her arms. “Nerd.”

“We should go and see the new one together now that I think about it.”

”Pass. I’ll only fall asleep.”

”Tch. Your loss.”

They took the elevator up to the second highest floor and got out. Korra followed Kuvira down the empty hallway until they stopped in front of the desired destination. Kuvira pulled out her keys from her back pocket and used the one key Korra had never seen her use before. They walked in the apartment a second later.

Kuvira tooted her ear up and listened for a second before shrugging.

“I guess we’re alone,” she said and turned on the lights.

It was a dainty apartment that looked like nothing special. In fact, it looked like the one Korra lived in. However, one thing that stood out was the cargo elevator at the end of the room, which was exactly where Kuvira led her to next.

She used the key to unlock it and the elevator opened. They stepped inside and Kuvira pressed the ‘up’ button. The ride was slow, even though they were only going to the floor above, and Korra tapped her foot against the floor impatiently.

“With all of this secrecy, this better be good,” she said.

Kuvira didn’t reply and only smiled.

Finally, the elevator stopped and opened.

Korra definitely wasn’t unimpressed.

The space was huge, with a singular blue mat to cover the entire floor. There was training gear, punching bags, and some other exercising equipment. However, Korra’s eyes didn’t immediately go to any of that. Instead it was the empty ring in the middle of the room that caught her attention. For her, it was the brightest thing in her eyes.

“Surprised?”

Korra looked over at Kuvira finally and saw the smirk on her face.
“You own this place?”

“Hah! Hell no!” Kuvira laughed at the question. “It’s Varrick’s, of course.”

“How long have you known about it?”

“Almost four years now, I think.”

“And you never thought about telling me?”

“This is a privilege for people on the main roster who show Varrick the most promise.”

“So basically, a secret-secret club.”

“Precisely,” said Kuvira. She led Korra over to the ring and dropped the gym bag to the floor. She took off her shoes before hopping onto the outer belt, then climbed through the thick, black ropes. Korra mimicked her actions and climbed inside, as well.

“Am I allowed to be here, then?”

“I don’t see why not.” Kuvira shrugged. "You’re on the main card now. Not to mention you’re like Varrick’s shiny new toy.”

“I’m no one’s property,” Korra said with a glower.

“No, you’re not,” Kuvira said. She walked over and put a hand on her shoulder. “Trust me. I know.”

Korra relaxed and then looked away.

“So, what? Did you show me this in an attempt to make me feel better or something?”

“Nope,” Kuvira said. “You said you wanted to fight, so let’s fight.”

Korra’s eyes widened. “What?”

“You heard me.” Kuvira shrugged off her coat and threw it out of the ring. Underneath it she was wearing a faded Metallica shirt paired with some jeans. “Let’s go.”

“I don’t want a spar,” Korra said, sounding hesitant, but there was a feeling of excitement forming in the pit for her stomach, too.

“I know,” Kuvira said patiently.

“So we’re just gonna fight like this? You don't even have any hand protection.”

“I don’t need it for this. Besides, you won’t even be able to put a hand on me. I can’t say the same for myself with you, though.”

Korra felt a twitch above her eyebrow. She knew that Kuvira was just trying to rile her up, and it was definitely working. This wasn’t the kind of fight she wanted between them at all, but right now she wasn’t going to complain. She’d take whatever was given to her at this point.

“Kya’s not here, but I’ll try to clean you up the best I can afterward,” she said, sounding just as cocky as her coach, if not more.
“We’ll see about that, rookie,” Kuvira said, warming up by bouncing from side to side on the mat and loosening the joints in her shoulders.

Korra removed her coat and threw it to the outside. She cracked her neck and rolled her head around once. She didn’t need to do that much since she’d been running on high energy practically all day. Once she stretched her legs, she got in her fighting stance, bringing her open-finger boxing gloves up to her face.

“Those jeans better stretch,” she said teasingly.

“Nothing you haven’t seen before, right?” Kuvira smirked.

They circled each other and, in an instant, everything turned utterly serious.

With their light banter, Korra felt calmer, but it wasn’t enough to keep her completely distracted from everything that happened the night before. All of those past memories were playing in a constant loop in the back of her head, taunting her and reminding her that as much as she tried to ignore them, they’d always be there and be a part of her. There was no sealing the door shut anymore now that she opened it.

When Kuvira lurched forward, Korra’s response was a second too late. She ended up in a headlock, feeling Kuvira’s arm wrap around her neck in a tight hold. She pushed against it to try and relieve the pressure, but it felt like their bodies were two immovable objects going against each other.

Eventually Kuvira’s grip loosened, and it was enough for Korra to shove her away and put some distance between them.

She realized just then that they didn’t give any kind of rules for this fight, but she didn’t really care for following any at this point. If they ended up beating each other bloody, then they’d just patch each other up.

This time, she advanced on Kuvira first and took a swing at her head, which Kuvira easily avoided and pushed Korra back.

“Come on,” she said, giving her another shove. “Don’t tell me this is all you’ve got. Then again, you’re not really focusing at all.”

“Don’t be my coach right now,” Korra growled. Angrily, she rushed at Kuvira and they locked heads, but she gained the upper hand by kneeing Kuvira in the stomach, hard. Kuvira hunched over with a groan and let go. Korra immediately took advantage of that and she jammed an elbow between the middle of Kuvira’s shoulder blades.

Her coach fell to one knee on the mat.

“So much for me not being able to put a hand on you,” Korra said with a smirk. She reached out and grabbed Kuvira by the shoulder, prepared to pull her up, only to let out a surprised noise when Kuvira grabbed her by the wrist and used the momentum to rise up. She now had Korra’s arm twisted behind her back in a tight hold. Korra stumbled as she was walked forward and they ended up on the ropes. She could feel Kuvira’s breath against her ear.

“You’re letting your emotions be your driving force again. I thought we worked on that.”

Korra struggled to get her to loosen up, but Kuvira wouldn’t budge. So instead, she stomped down on her foot and threw her head back, crashing right into Kuvira’s. The hold finally loosened and she used the ropes to push Kuvira off her completely. Kuvira pivoted back and wiped at her mouth.
“Don’t tell me that’s all you’ve got,” Korra mimicked.

She charged forward, only to come face first into Kuvira’s elbow.

Stumbling back, she covered her mouth and nose where the impact landed the most. It was enough to draw blood, but it didn’t feel like anything was broken or a tooth was knocked out. But just as she realized this, Kuvira took advantage of her daze and swooped in behind her.

She managed to tuck her arms under Korra’s armpits and lock her hands behind her neck. Korra struggled in her hold, waving her arms around and trying to throw Kuvira off, but it didn’t work. Then she felt Kuvira’s knee bump against hers, which gave out and made her fall forward.

For a second, Kuvira’s hands disappeared from the back of her neck, only so that she could put one arm in a submission lock and force Korra all the way down on her stomach.

Korra cried out at the feeling of her arm being bent backward and facing the threat of being pulled from its socket.

“Well?” she heard Kuvira huff out. “What’s it gonna be?”

Korra shook her head. She refused to tap out or call it quits. Even if Kuvira ended up breaking her arm, she still wouldn’t.

They stayed in that position for a solid minute or two before Kuvira let out an irritated noise and finally released her hold.

Korra felt instant relief in her arm, although it was throbbing.

“You’re too stubborn for your own good,” Kuvira said from above her.

It took a moment for her to regain her breath, but she was finally able to get up on her hands and knees. A hand appeared in front of her face. When she looked up, Kuvira was looking at her expectantly, if not smugly.

Korra growled and slapped it away. She surged upward, wrapping her arms around Kuvira’s torso —ignoring the pain in her arm as she did—and used all of her strength to throw her coach (along with herself) onto the mat.

“Fuck!” Kuvira arched into her. Her eyes were squeezed shut as she tried to get over whatever aches she felt, and then she raised her hand to tap on Korra’s thigh twice, signaling for her to move from on top of her.

Korra rolled off and onto her back. Her chest rose and fell as she breathed in and out deeply. From the corner of her eye, she could see Kuvira doing the same.

She stared up at the ceiling in thought and felt the last rush of adrenaline leave her, making her suddenly tired. All of the exercise and energy she put out the whole day was beginning to take its toll on her body, and she knew she’d be waking up the next morning in all sorts of pain.

“This wasn’t exactly the fight I had in mind for us,” she said after catching her breath. From beside her, she heard Kuvira give a tired laugh.

“Hardly. I was going easy on you.”

“I know. You barely took a swing at me.”
“I think I made my mark, though. Let me see.”

Korra turned to her and Kuvira’s fingers touched underneath her chin to raise it up slightly so that she could examine her bloody nose. Meanwhile, Korra’s eyes went to Kuvira’s mouth, locating the wound she left on her bottom lip.

“You’ll live,” Kuvira said and pulled away, facing forward once more.

Korra turned away as well and closed her eyes. It was so quiet, but she didn’t mind it at all. While she always appreciated the sound of a large crowd from all around her, yelling and screaming her name, it was equally as nice being alone and without all of those eyes on her, constantly watching her every move and waiting for her to screw up.

“Are you feeling better now?” Kuvira asked.

Korra thought about it before opening her eyes.

Aside from the very beginning of their fight, she wasn’t distracted with anything pertaining to the night before. All that existed was her and her opponent. It was how it was supposed to be, how she wanted it to be.

But now that it was over, those thoughts from before returned at full throttle.

“No,” she answered truthfully.

Kuvira turned her head and faced her again, but Korra kept her eyes trained on the ceiling.

Ever since last night, the only thing she thought she needed was to hit someone in order to finally dispel her from the distress she was in. And while it worked for a solid five minutes, it wasn’t a permanent solution. It was something she probably should have realized, but that feeling of hopelessness inside her was too strong to not try and do something about.

“I don’t know what to do anymore,” she said out loud and lifted her hands to rake her fingers through her sweaty hair.

“We could fuck.”

At that, she burst into laughter and looked over at Kuvira, who was wearing an amused smile on her face.

“Unfortunately, I don’t think that’s gonna help me at all,” she said, grateful for the brief shift in tone.

“Mm. Shame. Lord knows I need a stress-reliever.”

"I don't think we ever had a stress-relieving fuck."

"Nope. Just a bunch of hate-sex mixed with some competition."

"Yup. That's how I remember it."

They went quiet again.

“I’m going to take a wild guess and say that this has something to do with what you told me about last week?” Kuvira asked, getting serious again.
Korra nodded.

“What happened to you not letting that interfere with your training?”

“I don’t know,” she said and then sighed at her dishonesty. “Okay, maybe I do, but I thought this was the only way to finally take my mind off of it.”

Kuvira finally sat up and then grabbed Korra by the arm—the one she almost dislocated—to pull her up. Korra hissed, but still allowed herself to be lifted.

“You know, I’ve known you for a while now, and I’ve seen so many different sides of you that I can’t even count ‘em,” Kuvira said. “But one thing I’ve never seen is you being this stressed out over something.”

“It’s a stressful situation,” Korra admitted.

“Well, do you wanna know something that’s a lot better than just punching it out?”

“What?”

“Using your words.”

Hearing that answer made Korra drop her shoulders. She wanted to tell Kuvira that, no, it wouldn’t work. But as she already discovered, her only outlet wasn’t working. There were no other options except for actually talking it out or drowning herself in a bottle of Jack Daniels.

“Fine.”

The minute she started talking, it was like she couldn’t stop. She left out a couple of details, such as not actually mentioning Asami by name, as well as their history. Only the basic information was needed, anyway: that her former best friend from a long time ago appeared out of the blue and was trying to insert herself back in her life even though it was impossible. She started from the day Asami showed up, to everything that happened in between, and ending with what happened last night, including her episode in the shower, which caused Kuvira’s brows to raise the most.

She unloaded all of her complicated feelings despite the apprehension she had throughout. Ironically, it was the comfort of being inside of the one place she never allowed herself to think that she was able to share more of her thoughts with Kuvira than she ever did. Even Kuvira seemed surprised by how much she was revealing. She listened intently and without interrupting. And when Korra finished, she gave her a thoughtful look.

“Well, that’s definitely a tough situation.”

Korra sighed. “Yeah.”

“And you haven’t had an episode like that in a while.”

“I know.”

“Damn,” Kuvira said, leaning back on her hands. “This person must have meant a lot to you back then, huh?”

Korra looked away. “Yeah,” she said again.

“And you must still mean a lot to her now. I mean, all things considered.”
Korra shook her head. “It’s nothing like that for her. She’s just… upset with the way I left things.”

“Yeah…” Kuvira agreed. “But she’s obviously not over it if she’s been holding onto this for so long. That’s gotta mean something.”

“I think it just means that I suck at people skills,” she said.

“Well, how do you feel about her in general right now?”

“I don’t know,” Korra said.

Truthfully, she didn’t. It was too many different things at once that she felt whenever she was in Asami’s presence. There was anger, hurt, confusion, nostalgia… heartache.

“The one thing that I do know is that she reminds me of things I don’t care to think about ever again.”

“That’s probably your issue right there.”

Korra looked over at Kuvira, who was now unraveling her messy braid and shaking her hair out.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s like what I said last week: Your past is just finally starting to catch up with you. I think it’s about time that you face it rather than fear it.”

“I’m not scared,” Korra said defensively.

Kuvira paused while combing out the tangles in her hair to give Korra a deadpanned look.

“Korra, no one avoids talking about their past unless there’s something they want to hide, they regret, or feel ashamed of. I think you’re in a losing battle with yourself at this point.”

“And what if I do face it?” Korra questioned. “What if all this person does is create even more problems in my life and it fucks me up all over again?”

“That’s the fear talking,” Kuvira said as she put her hair in a ponytail. She dropped her hands and gave Korra a stern look. “You’re stronger than that and you’re a lot stronger than you were before.”

“But—”

“I’m not going to let you go down that road again,” Kuvira said. “If I have to drag you to this very ring and beat some sense into you, I’ll do it. I’ve done it before, and I’ll do it again. But we’re not even close to reaching that point yet, so right now you should give yourself a chance to be at peace with all of those secret inner demons you have.”

Korra closed her mouth and looked down in her lap, wiping at her nose as she did. When she pulled her hand away, some blood came along with it.

Peace, she thought. It wasn’t a word that she really believed for herself, just like closure. There were a lot of things she wasn’t at peace with, and that was because she spent so much time avoiding it all. That way, it was easier for her to keep herself rooted in the present rather than drowning in the past like she did for so many years.

And even though it pained her to admit it to herself, she was a little scared. She was scared of not being able to deal with her problems.
Sighing, she looked up at Kuvira again.

“Who knew this whole 'using words' thing would actually be helpful? You could be the next Oprah.”

Kuvira laughed.

“I know. Crazy, right? You’ve been missing out.”

“Clearly,” Korra smiled. “I don’t know how you’ve dealt with me for so long.”

“You’re definitely not as bad as before,” Kuvira said. “You were a living nightmare the first time I met you. Do you really think I wanna go through that again?”

“Doubt it. I don’t wanna go through that again myself.”

“Okay, so then there we have it. We’re never going back to that. Deal?”

“Deal.”

“And can we both agree that this tragic fight between us never happened?”

They shared a look.

“Deal,” they both said at the same time and bumped fists.

It smelled like fresh bread and pastries in the bakery, which was exactly what Korra needed to keep her calm and less nervous.

She spent the whole week turning the idea over in her head and losing herself in her own thoughts. Kuvira wasn’t wrong in calling her over-analytical that one time.

But this wasn’t something she could think about in five minutes and reach some kind of decision right after. There were so many times she changed her mind, thinking of all the worst possible outcomes that could stem from this. If it all blew up in her face, she would have to pick up all of the fragile pieces of herself and glue them back together, and she didn't know if that would be possible to do again.

She came out of her thoughts when she saw the door of the bakery open and Asami walked in. She looked around for a second before spotting Korra sitting in the corner.

Korra inhaled deeply and breathed out slowly. The nerves returned, along with the feeling of wanting to get up and run out, but she remained in place.

She wasn’t the only one with nerves either from the way she saw Asami take a breath before making her way over. On her way though, she was suddenly stopped by an old couple sitting at a table. The old lady had a magazine in her hands and pointed at something inside it as she spoke. Asami seemed confused at first, but when she saw what the lady was pointing at, she smiled politely and said something to the couple. She reached into her purse and pulled out a pen, all while listening to the them seemingly bicker about something. At one point, the old man beckoned Asami closer and whispered something in her ear that made her laugh out loud while the old lady glared at her husband. Asami wrote something down on the magazine before handing it back over.

Korra watched the interaction with interest, unable to take her eyes off Asami. Everything about her seemed so sophisticated and even more eloquent than she was when they were teens. It
reminded Korra of the way she felt about her presence back then and how the room always seemed brighter and warmer whenever Asami was there. Her stomach fluttered.

After another minute, Asami shook both of their hands and waved goodbye before finally making her way over to Korra.

“Sorry about that,” she said as she took off her coat and sat down. The dark purple turtle-neck she wore accentuated her eyes, making them appear even greener.

Korra nudged her head over to the old couple. “Signing autographs?”

“No,” Asami rolled her eyes. "They were just arguing about how to spell a word in a crossword puzzle.”

Korra smiled. "Look at you being the proper citizen."

"Yup. The perfect photo opportunity."

"I don't need to worry about paparazzi coming and snapping pictures, do I?" she asked, half-joking and the other half being serious.

“No... I don’t get photographed all that often these days.”

Korra noticed the hesitation in Asami’s voice and how she looked the slightest bit awkward now talking about what just happened.

“I guess even now old men can’t resist you.”

At that, she watched Asami’s face break out into a grin and she laughed, looking as genuine as she did while talking to that couple.

“Yeah. I guess I do still have that problem.”

Korra smiled but looked down at the table.

“Thanks for meeting me,” she said after the laughter died down.

“Thanks for calling,” Asami replied.

“Listen.” Korra licked her lips. “I’ve been thinking a lot this past week about what you said and what I said…”

“Okay…”

“I still don’t think any of this is a good idea,” Korra continued. “Everything that happened was forever ago and we’re both on different trajectories. Not to mention you’ve got someone in your life who I really don’t care to ever see again.”

“Mako and I aren’t—”

“It doesn’t matter,” Korra said with the shake of her head, not wanting to get into it. “It still creates one huge elephant in the room for us.”

“So then… Why did you call me here?” Asami asked. She looked anxious but eager at the same time.
Korra rubbed the back of her neck and sighed before letting her hand drop back down to the table once again.

“I don’t want fear to be the reason why I can’t deal with my past,” she admitted.

Asami’s brows raised, but she seemed to automatically understand where Korra was getting at.

“Does that mean you want to try and make this work?”

“I’m willing to talk with you some more. That’s the most I can say.”

“Oh,” Asami said, looking slightly disappointed. “Okay.”

“It’s kind of unrealistic to think we could ever have the same thing we had when we were younger, right?”

“That’s not exactly what I had in mind.”

“Then what?”

Asami bit her lip, and Korra’s eyes went to it for a split second before meeting her gaze again.

“I just think we owe it to ourselves to know each other,” she said. “We let so many things get in between us when they shouldn’t have, you know? We were young and immature back then, but we’re grown up now. And I think if we’re just patient with each other—if we listen to each other—we’ll avoid a lot of those communication issues we had in the past.”

Korra leaned back in her seat and watched Asami. Her explanation, while simple, made sense. A lot of their issues would have never happened if they just talked, but the end result would’ve most likely ended up the same. It just would’ve happened more later on down the line.

“And what if it all goes wrong, anyway?” she asked.

Asami didn’t respond right away and looked at her thoughtfully.

“Then at least you didn’t let fear get in your way. And at least we both tried.”

They both shared a meaningful look.

Korra didn’t know whether it was the sincerity behind those words, or if it was how Asami seemed so sure and assertive when she said them, but she found herself wanting to believe it. All of those negative feelings and that anxiety she felt over this entire situation seemed to quiet down in her head. She still had her doubts, but it wasn’t so doom and gloom anymore. In fact, she even felt the slightest bit of acceptance.

Neither of them knew how this could end, but maybe that was the point. Maybe trying was all they needed.

“Are you hungry?” she asked. Underneath those words she was asking a different question.

_Are we really doing this?_

Asami gave her a reassuring smile.

“Starved.”
Reflections

The beginning of the week was always the worst for Asami. There were papers to sign, meetings to hold, and phone calls to answer. Some of the times she just let everything pile up to the end of the week, but that always created a chaotic environment and she ended up hating herself for not doing anything sooner.

Her hand was cramping by the time she got done signing the last document.

“All done, Rita,” she said after placing her pen to the side.

Her assistant walked over and collected the documents.

“I’ll have these faxed over soon,” she said.

“Great,” Asami said and stood up to stretch. She looked over at the clock and saw that it was just a little after noon. “I think I’ll take my lunch break now.”

“Oh wait, there’s some mail for you, Miss Sato,” Rita said. She walked over to the glass table and grabbed all of the envelopes before coming back over and handing them over.

Asami took them and started flipping through. At first, all she saw was junk mail, but then she stumbled across it...

There was a letter with her name on it, written in that distinguishable cursive handwriting that always sent chills down her spine.

She gritted her teeth together and had to force herself from taking the letter and tearing it to shreds. Instead, she sat back down and tapped her finger against her desk in agitation.

“Thank you,” she said curtly.

There was no response at first and her assistant hadn’t moved from her spot.

“If you want me to just return those to sender so that you don’t have to look at them, I can do that for you,” she said.

There was sympathy and pity in her eyes, which immediately made Asami look away in rejection.

“If you could just send those faxes, that would be great,” she said.

“Of course.”

The older woman left the room, closing the door behind her as she went.

Asami sighed and put her face into her hands.

She felt horrible for dismissing Rita like that and would apologize profusely when she was in the right headspace to do so, but right now she didn’t want to receive any pitiful or knowing looks. For years, she had to go through being under people’s watchful gaze when it came to her father. She thought that with every passing year, things would become easier, but that never seemed to be the case. And to make matters worse, the holiday season was finally here, which just made everything fresh in her mind once again. Her mother was dead, and her father was going to spend the rest of his life in prison. She had no one else.
Hiroshi did a good job at keeping his side of the family estranged from them. He always called them opportunists. Asami never even got to know much about her mother’s side of the family either, including her grandparents. Apparently none of her mother’s side approved of their marriage and despised her father so much that they cut her mother off completely. It was only when she died that they reached out, but her father quickly shut them down. They weren’t even invited to the funeral. But after everything Asami ended up learning about her father over the years, she didn’t exactly blame them for not taking a liking to him. It just sucked that they never wanted to meet her.

It was crazy how fast time flew by. Four years passed since her father was sentenced and two since she took over his company. People called her crazy and doubted she’d ever be able to undo all of the damage caused. In fact, she was still working on getting the company’s image back in good graces. Not a lot of people were jumping at her feet to partner with her or give her a chance, but that only motivated her to keep working hard and prove to everyone that the company wasn’t doomed. She couldn’t even remember the last time she had a vacation, and it didn’t look like she’d be getting one anytime soon—not that she’d want one anyway. Focusing on work was enough to keep her from falling into that seasonal depression trap. As long as she kept moving and had something to do, she wouldn’t have to think about how she didn’t have a family anymore.

She reached for the letter and stared down at it, looking at her father’s handwriting. Her name was always written so neatly on the envelope, as if the letter inside would contain the best news in the world and her father was just on some trip at one of the Virgin Islands and writing her about it. But she already knew the content of it would be like every other letter he sent her: one filled with a half-hearted apology, excuses, and claims of love.

The letters only angered and upset her whenever she did actually read them. Why couldn’t he understand that? Why did he keep sending them knowing that she would never respond? She just wanted it to stop, and she knew that there was only one way to do that.

She let the letter fall back on the desk.

This was the last thing she wanted to do, but if it could finally put an end to this, she would have to give in.

She always promised herself that she would never visit her father under any circumstances. For all she cared, he could rot in his cell and she wouldn’t lose an ounce of sleep. After he was finally sentenced, she remembered hearing about the paparazzi being lined up outside of the facility waiting for her to show up and visit just to get some kind of scoop about her being in support of him.

It made her sick that for so many years she was stalked and harassed about the rumors surrounding her father’s involvement in selling illegal weapons to the black market. She didn’t want to believe it in the beginning. Her father, while not the most pleasant man in the world, was never involved in any type of controversy before. He denied it when she asked him about it, of course. But it was the way he always dismissed her or raised his voice at her when she continued to ask about it that set off the warning alarms in her head. It also made it harder for her to pretend that everything was okay between them when it hadn’t been for years.

And now she knew the truth.

She could still vividly remember that day of the verdict, where she sat in the back of the court by herself and heard that one single word that changed her life forever. In that moment, she realized that she was officially on her own.
The prison was cold when she entered, and the chair she was sitting on was too hard for her bottom. She looked around at all of the other visitors at separate tables. Some were just by themselves like her, but there were a few families there, as well. Her eyes lingered on a pair of two children sitting in their mother’s lap. They didn’t look scared or nervous at all. It almost looked like they were used to being there, and that made her skin crawl.

Looking down at her watch, she saw that she needed to be back at the office in an hour. It was just her luck when she read on the website that her dad’s day for visitors was on a Tuesday. It gave her a whole day to think about what she needed to say, and after that, she would hopefully never have to hear from him again.

It startled her when a buzzer went off and the door leading to where the prisoners were located opened and, in a single file line, all of the men walked through in their green uniforms. Asami tensed up as she watched them all come in and immediately walk over to their visitors. It didn’t take long for her to notice her father.

He aged. There were a couple of wrinkles under his eyes, and she could see quite a few patches of grey in his hair. He also appeared much thinner. Overall, he looked strikingly different.

She didn’t rise to greet him, nor did she offer any type of hello. All she did was wait for him to sit.

“Asami,” Hiroshi said, sounding like her name was a breath of fresh air. “I’m glad you’re here.”

She looked elsewhere: at the walls, the floor, the couple beside her looking at each other lovingly from across the table.

“Don’t be,” she eventually said and met his brown eyes.

She watched as his mouth pulled into a straight, thin line.

“Did you hear that they’re finally moving me?” he asked and looked around the room. “Allenwood, Pennsylvania. It’ll be high security and I even hear they have a former pirate leader in their presence.”

Asami tried not to give away any reaction to that news. Apparently because of the overcrowding in a couple of the federal prisons, her father was placed in the Queensboro Correctional Facility for the time being. She wasn’t all too sold on that, though. In fact, she had a theory that someone was being paid off to keep her father there instead of moving him. With all of the connections he had, it wouldn’t have surprised her if he made some kind of deal. All she wanted was for him to do his time properly and live a miserable life in his prison cell. It frustrated her that it took all the way up to now for that to finally happen.

“I’m sure you’ll fit right in,” she said bitterly.

“I think there are a couple of people there that I already know.”

“Good for you.”

Hiroshi stared, but Asami glared right back. The way he appeared so calm about everything angered her.

“I know you probably have some questions for me,” he said.

“You had your chance to explain everything and you lied to my face,” Asami said, trying to keep the hurt out of her voice. “So, no. I don’t have any more questions. In fact, I have nothing to say to
you. All I want is for you to stop writing me. Especially at my workplace. Do you even know how that makes me look?”

Hiroshi didn’t respond at first, nor did he look stunned or hurt by her demand. He took his glasses off and used the bottom of his shirt to wipe at them.

“You’re looking more and more like your mother,” he said.

“Don’t talk about her,” she said venomously. “You have no right to talk about her after everything you’ve done. Do you hear me?”

Again, he didn’t respond and put his glasses back on. Her fiery gaze met his cool and calculated one. Even if his appearance was different, his expressions and mannerisms were all still the same.

“As for sending the letters to the corporation, that was the only place I could get in touch with you after you sold my house.”

Her nails dug into her skin. She didn’t know why him calling the house “his” angered her so much. His name might have been on the deed, but that place was just as much hers and her mother’s as it was his. Maybe it was because all her life it was “my, my, my” with her father. Never “ours.”

“It’s not like you left me much of a choice in the matter,” she said.

“Did you read any of them? The letters?” he asked.

“No,” she lied. “I don’t care about anything you have to say. I’ve had to pick up the mess you’ve made for years now and that’s enough. I already have the weight of Future Industries on my back, and what you’re doing isn’t helping in the slightest.”

“And you’ve done an excellent job in getting it back off its feet,” Hiroshi complimented. “I’ve read quite a few articles about you in the newspaper. I always knew you’d come up with brilliant, new ideas for the company.”

“Yeah, a company that you destroyed,” she reminded him.

He watched her closely but said nothing. She always remembered being intimidated by that gaze, and she hated that some part of her still wanted to lower her eyes out of fear or insecurity. Even though he was locked away, those years of constantly following behind him and being in his shadow messed with her.

“It may not mean a lot coming from me, but I’m so proud—”

“Stop it.” She cut him off in a voice so chipped that a few people’s eyes shifted on her. She was beginning to tremor from all of the anger she felt. “I’m only going to say this one more time and I hope it sticks. Stop writing me. I don’t want to hear from you ever again because you make me sick. You were a horrible CEO and father, and I absolutely hate the fact that I’ve had to call you mine for all these years. Goodbye.”

She got up and grabbed her bag from the floor.

“If you really feel that strongly about me, why take over running my company?” Hiroshi asked just as she was about to walk away.

She stopped just then and fully faced him once more.
“I don’t owe you an explanation,” she told him. “Besides, since you’ve apparently been up to date on your news, and—judging from your guest list—have some people on the outside giving you updates, you should already know the answer to that.”

“The one thing I’ve always taught you is to tell the press what you want them to hear. You answered everything the way I would’ve answered if I was put in that position.”

Asami glowered and sat down in the chair again, scooting her chair in loudly.

“I answered everything truthfully. You abandoned everyone, and they needed someone to step up before everything you built went down in flames. So I did. If I hadn’t, all of those innocent people wouldn’t have jobs to go back to and would’ve had a difficult time finding one because of your name being attached to them. I did what was right.”

Hiroshi smiled, much to Asami’s displeasure.

“That may be partly true, but I know underneath all of that, there are other reasons.”

Asami tensed, and she started bouncing her foot up and down in irritation. His words struck a chord with her, and she felt the need to deny, deny, deny.

“You never paid any attention to me when I was younger, so stop pretending like you have any idea what I’m thinking or feeling.”

“Remember when you were really young and how you always told me you wanted to join the ballet when you were older?” Hiroshi asked suddenly. “You would beg me to enroll you in dance classes and throw the biggest temper tantrums when I told you no.”

“What does this have to do with anything?” she said through her gritted her teeth. She remembered exactly what he was talking about, but it didn’t give her feelings of nostalgia. All it did was stab at her heart.

“You still went on and did what you wanted anyway. Even when I disapproved,” said Hiroshi. “You definitely had your mother on your side, though. Yasuko took you to those lessons behind my back. I think that’s what encouraged you to keep going despite how I felt. And then she died—”

“Don’t,” Asami said, looking away in anguish. She didn’t want to hear anymore because she already knew where this conversation was going.

“I may not have given you the attention you wanted, but I did pay attention,” Hiroshi concluded. “I always knew what you really wanted… and what you didn’t. But I’ve also always known that the universe has a better plan for you, Asami. Anything else you thought of for yourself was below your full potential. I’m not going to apologize for steering you in the right direction.”

“You pushed me to be who you are, so don’t pretend like you were doing me any favors. You wanted me to be your second in command and do all of your heavy bidding behind the scenes and would’ve eventually dirtied my hands without even caring. Kind of like how you didn’t care about any of your employees. So, tell me, Dad: Was the money really worth it after all of this?”

“I thought it was.”

She was taken aback by the fact that he didn’t even look away in shame or pause to think about his actions. She thought that he would have at least tried to deny it or give her some bullshit excuse, but no, he was flat out admitting to being a greedy, selfish, money hungry bastard. It made her feel even more disgusted by him.
“How long?” she asked, despite herself.

“How long what?”

“How long were you doing all of this stuff behind my back? The secret meetings, the late night phone calls, all the times you disappeared for a while and didn’t bother to tell me where you were? Did mother know?”

“No.” Hiroshi shook his head. “It started long after she passed.”

Asami’s hands clutched onto her knees as she took in the information. It relieved her to know that her mother never knew of her father’s shady business deals, but it also made her scared to think of what would’ve happened if she never died and lived to see what happened to the man she married today. Would she have divorced and left him? Or would she have stuck by his side and been in denial about it?

“How could you do this?” she asked, her voice breaking. “You believed that technology had so much power and could change the world in a positive way, and then you turn around to try and help a bunch of terrorists.”

“I was helping them do it to the people who deserved it,” Hiroshi said, finally beginning to lose his composure as he leaned forward. “I got my way to the top, and along the way I had to see and hear a lot of things from the people around me. They’d smile in your face, and then behind the scenes they’d plot behind your back. This country is full of people like that.”

“That’s not an excuse!” Asami yelled at him.

“You think I’ve done terrible things?” asked Hiroshi. “Just wait until you get further along in this business, musume. I wouldn’t be astounded if you’ve already done some things you aren’t proud of.”

Asami’s blood went cold.

“I’m nothing like you,” she denied.

“Not right now, but eventually you’ll understand exactly what I’m talking about after having to get your hands dirty on numerous occasions. I can already see it in your eyes how much all of this has changed you. Maybe you’ll even decide to finish what I started.”

“You’re sick.” Asami gave him a disgusted look. This conversation was turning dark and grim, and the look in her father’s eyes throughout began to grow more sinister. “You wrote about how much you regretted what happened, but that was all just a ploy to get me here and listen to your twisted explanation.”

Hiroshi tilted his head to the side and gave her a curious look.

“I thought you didn’t read any of my letters?”

Asami, realizing her mistake, scooted out of her chair and got up. If she didn’t feel like an idiot for coming there in the first place, she did now. Her father was still as manipulative and cunning as before. And no amount of jail time or solitary confinement would change that. Maybe it would only make him worse.

“Never contact me again,” she told him and walked away without another look. She exited from the visitor’s entrance and passed one security guard on her way out.
It was a mistake to come there. Putting herself through that torture didn’t seem worth it. A simple letter would have worked, with just a sentence that told him to leave her alone. It would’ve been so much better than this.

She finally got out of the building and breathed in the fresh air. It was snowing and even colder out there than it was inside, but at least it was comforting. More comforting than her father had ever been.

She sat in her kitchen, gripping the edges of the newspaper in her hand and staring down at the photo of her father. In big words underneath, it read: “SATO CONVICTED.”

It was an old paper from three years ago after the trial ended. The only reason she had it was because some assholes littered them all over the lawn of their house. She kept it as a way of torturing herself in the past, but held onto it, refusing to toss it out and instead keeping it stashed in the back of her closet. This was her first time looking at it in a while.

She opened it, turning right to the page where the story was on. Her eyes immediately went to the photo of her walking out of the courthouse with an indiscernible look on her face. It made her wonder how much she really had changed from then and how much she had to overcome since.

Her eyes settled on the first paragraph and she prepared herself to read the article for the billionth time, as if she didn’t already know what was said in it or have it memorized.

There was a knock on the door.

Quickly, she put the newspaper underneath a stack of papers and a bunch of junk mail before getting up and walking to the door. When she looked through the peephole, she saw Mako standing there with two brown bags in his hands.

Confused and caught off guard, she opened the door.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“Well hello to you, too,” he said sarcastically and made his way inside. “A little help here?”

She took one of the bags out of Mako’s hands and brought it into the kitchen, strategically putting it in front of the stack of papers. Reaching inside, she pulled out a couple of ingredients for stir fry.

“I took a chance that you might be home. We haven’t had a homemade dinner together in a while, so I figured I’d surprise you,” Mako told her. “I haven’t heard from you in a while either.”

Asami looked away in guilt.

“Mako, I really appreciate this, but—”

“No. No ‘butts,’” Mako interrupted her. “Do you really think I don’t know what’s been going on with you?”

Asami’s pulse quickened. “You do?”

“Of course.” Mako’s eyes lowered. “It’s that time of the year for the both of us.”

Asami sighed in part relief, but also at the truth of his words.

The end of the year was hard for a lot of reasons, but this year it felt like there were even more that
sprung up. Her and Mako always looked out for each other during this time, whether it was through a simple text or just going over to each other’s place and checking up on one another. They’d been doing that since junior high. Even when they were fighting or didn’t speak to each other for a while, they still did it.

Which was why she felt awful now for ignoring his calls and texts for the past two weeks.

After learning everything that happened with Mako and Korra in the past, her feelings were all over the place. She knew that Mako changed over the years and grew up, but there was still a part of her that wanted to revisit the conversation and air everything out once and for all. They hadn’t spoken about Korra in years, and she was beginning to think that was a mistake on her part. In all honesty, after Korra left, their relationship suffered tremendously. They went their separate ways for a while, but still kept in touch. It was only when the allegations against her father sprung to the surface that he tried to be in her life fully again, which had its own set of issues for a while.

But in letting him back in her life and choosing not to talk about Korra again, how much between them had really gone unsaid?

It would be better to just sit him down and talk about it, but she knew she couldn’t do that. At least not right now. So despite the one-sided awkwardness, she didn’t argue with him and let him start up the stove that she barely used.

“Oh yeah,” Mako said as he started cutting up vegetables. “Another reason I came over was because I wanted to tell you that Bolin and Opal are coming up here to visit for a few weeks.”

“Really?” She perked up. “I thought you said he wouldn’t be coming this year for the holidays?”

“I guess they changed their minds at last minute,” Mako said, smiling as he took a red pepper out of the bag and started cutting it. “I think Bolin said something about wanting to visit before Opal becomes too pregnant and she can’t fly anymore.”

“That’s smart. When are they coming?”

“Sunday night. They’re staying until New Years. Do you want to come and pick them up from the airport with me? We could go get dinner and hang out like old times.”

“Yes, of course!” Asami said excitedly. “I can’t wait to see them both.”

“So does that mean you’ll be spending Christmas with us this year?”

She hesitated.

“I’ll have to see what my schedule looks like.”

Mako paused at the sound of her voice and looked over at her.

“What’s up?” he asked, putting his knife to the side.

“Nothing,” she said.

“Asami, I love you, but you’re a horrible liar and I am a detective after all,” Mako said. “First you dodge Thanksgiving, then you go M.I.A for weeks, and now you’re trying to get out of Christmas dinner.”

“I’m not trying to get out of anything. I just don’t know what my plans are right now.”
She was growing irritable and felt a headache coming on.

“Hey,” she heard Mako speak gently. She was rubbing at her temples and looked up at him. Mako wore a concerned expression, but it also looked like he was ready to sit her down in a chair and interrogate her at any moment.

Asami folded her arms and looked away. She was already hiding enough secrets from him, and adding more would only make her feel even worse than she already did.

“I went to see him today,” she said quietly.

“Who?”

“My dad.”

It went quiet, and when she looked up, she saw confusion and anger in Mako’s eyes.

“Why would you do that?” he asked.

“You know that he’s been writing me,” Asami reminded him. “I just wanted him to stop.”

“Asami, he’s going to write you whether you like it or not. You should’ve just kept ignoring him.”

“You don’t think I know that?” Asami said angrily. “I already feel like an idiot for going there in the first place, so don’t make it worse!”

That did the trick. Mako immediately calmed down and his facial expression turned solemn.

“What did he say?” he asked.

“It doesn’t matter. He’s the same cold-hearted, manipulative bastard he was before. All going there did was reinforce the fact that I don’t have a family anymore and probably never did for a long time now.”

“Hey, that is not true.” Mako stepped forward. “You know how much my family adores you.”

She sighed. “I do.”

“And you know that we’re always here for you, right?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Because sometimes it feels like you don’t.”

“I appreciate everything you guys have done for me over the years. You know that,” she told him. “But it still doesn’t make any of this easy for me.”

“I know.” Mako touched her shoulder. “I just don’t want you to forget that you have people in your life who care about you, so don’t shut us out. Don’t shut me out, okay?”

Asami nodded, but kept her eyes lowered. “I won’t,” she said.

Mako pulled her forward and she allowed him to wrap his arms around her. She felt a light kiss at the top of her head.

They stayed locked in that embrace for a long while and she stared ahead, wishing for that feeling
of loneliness inside her to go away.

It was around nine p.m. and the bar had a pretty decent crowd, but not so big to overwhelm Asami. She thought it was quaint, with old stools and wooden floors. Old and new pictures of musicians, vinyls, and records covered the walls wherever she looked.

She passed by a couple of guys playing pool and then made her way around a group crowded over by a jukebox, arguing about which song to play next.

After making her way to the bar, she sat down in a huff beside a brown-haired woman taking sips from her beer. She was wearing a black cap and a matching racer jacket.

“Vodka tonic, please,” she told the bartender the minute he came up to her. He nodded and disappeared from her view.

“I’m guessing you had a bad day?” said the woman beside her.

Asami looked over at her and narrowed her eyes.

“What tipped you off?”

Korra chuckled and drank some more.

“How long have you been here?” Asami asked.

“Not that long. A few minutes.”

After Asami finished having dinner with Mako, he got called into the station and had to leave. While his company was appreciated, she still felt off after he left. So at the spur of the moment, she texted Korra and asked if she wanted to go out for a drink. She was nervous about whether or not Korra would reply since everything was still pretty new between them, but to her surprise, Korra replied not too long after and said yes.

They hadn’t really gotten a chance to see each other since meeting at the bakery two weeks ago, which went pretty well. They didn’t talk about anything deep or special, but still, it was a starting point for them, and she was okay with that. They already covered a lot of ground as it was, and she wasn’t feeling needy or desperate for Korra to reveal everything in one breath as if every day was the last time they’d ever see each other.

But since they hadn’t really seen each other and only really communicated through text, she wondered on the car ride over how this would go. It was a welcome distraction from what happened with her father earlier.

Her vodka tonic came a minute later and she picked it up to take a long drink before setting it down again.

“I really needed that,” she said, wiping at her mouth.

“Today must’ve been really bad then.”

Asami waved her hand in dismissal. “Nothing all that important in the grand scheme of things I guess.”

Korra shrugged. “If you say so.”
Asami took another drink. She wanted to think that she’d eventually get over it. Today was the only time she visited her father, and since she knew that he was still as much of a scumbag as he was while being a free man, now she wouldn’t ever have to wonder if he would ever really change.

Just then, someone called out Korra’s name. They both turned and saw a guy walking up to them. Asami couldn’t keep her eyebrows from shooting up at the guy’s appearance. He was at least 6’4, with a large, but sculpted body. His long, dark hair went past his shoulders but was pulled back into a low ponytail that exposed his broad, tattooed shoulders. He was clearly in his late 30s or early 40s, but he definitely looked good for his age.

But what was really unexpected was the huge grin he sported that made him look as harmless as a baby bird. Both him and Korra slapped hands and embraced for a brief second before pulling apart.

The bartender came up to them and asked the big guy what he wanted, to which he responded by ordering a round of beers for the guys over at the pool table on the other side of the room.

“What’s up with you?” he asked Korra once the bartender went away. “I haven’t seen you around lately.”

“That’s the big bosses fault,” Korra said, leaning back and placing her elbows on the top of the bar. There was a shadow over her eyes due to the cap she was wearing. “I’ve been on an unwarranted vacation.”

“Yeah, I think I heard something about that.” He gave her a sympathetic look. “That’s rough.”

“It was, but I’m going to be full-time starting this week. Keep it on the down low, though.”

“Oh, for real?” He looked at her in excitement. “Congratulations. I know you must be thrilled.”

“Thanks,” Korra said coolly.

They were clearly talking in code so that the few people around them wouldn’t eavesdrop. Asami kept quiet and just listened, despite her confusion. She found herself more interested in Korra’s mannerisms and how she interacted with the guy. Everything about her seemed so laid back. Maybe it was the outfit she was wearing, or how she talked in that low but smooth voice of hers. It was weird to think that this was the same girl who, back then, would stand on top of tables and live for the thrill of a party and the excitement of the unknown.

She felt uneasy thinking about how much life could change a person. Things were far from simple back then, but compared to now, maybe those times were easier.

The bartender came back after a few minutes with a large tray full of drinks and placed it on the counter.

Korra’s friend reached out and grabbed the tray, balancing it like an expert.

“Also, I’m supposed to ask if you would come over for a round of pool? I’m sure you could swindle a couple of ’em over there.”

“Nah,” Korra said and nudged her head over in Asami’s direction. “I’m with someone.”

The tall man looked over at Asami, finally noticing her, and smiled.

“Pardon my manners. Ignoring beautiful women isn’t something I usually do.”
Asami glanced over at Korra and saw that she was rolling her eyes.

“That’s very sweet of you,” she said politely.

“I'm Ghazan.”

"Asami."

From behind him, the guys at the table started yelling over at Ghazan to hurry up.

“You can join us for pool too if you want. I’m sure the guys won’t mind; although, they’ll be a little pissed that you took the best pool player of the bunch.”

Asami looked over at Korra with an amused expression. “Oh really?”

“Yup. I’ve never beaten her, at least. And I beat everyone.”

“Well that’s definitely something.”

“So what do you say?”

“Another time, Ghazan,” Korra told him.

“Aw. Come on.”

“We’re busy.” It was said with finality and left no room for argument.

Ghazan was still smiling but finally backed off.

“All right. Next time. I hope I didn’t disturb you.” He got a steady grip on the tray before turning away from them. “Sorry, boys! She’s taken by the pretty woman for the night.”

Everyone at the pool table collectively groaned and then started booing loudly, which actually pulled a laugh out of Korra and a blush from Asami at the wording. Given what she knew now about the extent of Korra’s feelings for her back then, she figured that hearing something like that was too soon. Apparently Korra didn’t share that same embarrassment.

The younger woman finally turned and faced the bar. She picked up her beer and finished the rest of it before sliding it down the countertop. The bartender didn’t miss a beat and grabbed it. When Korra glanced over at her, she gave Asami a curious look.

“What?” she asked.

Asami, realizing she’d been staring, looked away.

“Look at who the cool one is now,” she mumbled as she picked up her glass and drank the rest.

“What?”

“I said we could have played pool if you wanted. I mean, I’m no expert, but I wouldn’t have minded.”

“I have to be in the particular mood for it,” Korra said.

“Or do you just not want me being over there?”

“Both.”
“You think I’d embarrass you in front of your pals?”

“Not exactly,” Korra said. “Those guys are sloppy drunks most of the time, and you wouldn’t want to see them when they’re angry.”

Asami grinned. “Is that your way of saying you’re trying to protect me, Korra?”

Korra hummed. “You must want it to sound that way.”

“That wasn’t an answer to the question, but I’m gonna go with yes.” She laughed when Korra glared and then she gestured the bartender over to ask for a refill. “And another one for her too,” she said, pointing at Korra. “Whatever she wants. Just put it on my tab.”

“Sure thing.”

When she looked over at Korra, she was met with a raised eyebrow.

“I owe you for the Starbucks incident,” she explained.

“Ahh. Well I guess that was a wasted five dollars,” she said sarcastically and then looked over at the bartender. “I’ll have what she’s having, Rick.”

The bartender gave Korra a respectful nod and walked off with Asami’s empty glass in his hands.

“Okay. Now I’m starting to think that you just invited me here to show off,” Asami said. “You must frequent here a lot.”

“It’s only fair that I get to choose a place on my turf this time around, especially after you got me out of bed on a Tuesday night.”

“Oh please. It was only 7:30 when I called, and you definitely don’t strike me as the type of person to be in bed so early.”

“I can be if I’m persuaded.”

Asami’s eyes widened. She was glad she wasn’t drinking anything, or else she would have spit it out. And she was even more surprised when Korra started laughing.

“You really do make it too easy,” she said.

Asami breathed out with a huff. “Your lack of having a filter is as astounding as it was back then.”

“And you still have one of the most expressive faces I’ve ever known,” Korra responded.

Asami smiled at that. It made her giddy how they were reminiscing and that Korra remembered the little things about her: from the fact that she only drank almond milk, to wearing her heart on her sleeve.

“I guess some things never change,” she said.

“I guess so.”

The bartender came back just then and placed their drinks on the table. They both grabbed for their respective ones.

“To some things never changing,” Asami said, proposing a toast.
Korra rolled her eyes but still clinked her glass against Asami’s anyway and they both took a sip.

Asami felt significantly better than how she was earlier. While her father’s words to her were still lingering in the back of her mind, they were a lot quieter now. She didn’t know if it was because of the drinks, Korra’s presence, or both. Their back and forth banter felt similar to how they always used to speak to each other, whether it was a serious conversation, or they were just teasing each other. Either way, they were attempting to have some sort of reconciliation, and the air between them became lighter. And Korra, while still maintaining that rough around the edge persona, was at least trying, which was all Asami ever wanted.

“Well?” Korra said, taking her out of her thoughts. She realized that she spaced out.

“Huh?”

“I asked what you think is the biggest thing that’s changed about you.”

“Oh,” Asami said. She had to take a long pause and think about it. “That’s kind of a hard question. But I guess personality wise, I’m a lot more confident about speaking up and making my voice heard. Characteristically, I’d say I’m not as flashy as I used to be with my appearance.”

She watched Korra’s eyes as she looked her up and down for a second, her eyes wandering over her simple outfit that was partially covered by her coat.

“You were never flashy. You just knew how to dress. I don’t really see much of a difference here other than the fact that you look even more sophisticated.”

“Wow, a compliment,” she said.

“Gee. Try not to sound so shocked,” Korra said, twirling the glass in her hand. Asami noticed just then that there was a faded scar that went across her knuckles. “I can give credit where credit is due.”

“I’m sure you can. You were just never someone who paid much attention to what I wore back then.”

“I didn’t want to inflate your ego. You already had enough people fawning all over you and your sense of style.”

“They were just appreciating all of the hard work it took,” Asami said half-jokingly.

“Are you still designing?” Korra asked.

“No, uh, I haven’t done anything like that in years.”

“Hm.” Korra took a sip of her drink but didn’t comment any further.

Asami fidgeted with her glass.

“Your turn,” she said. “What’s the biggest thing that’s changed about you?”

“Hmm.” Korra thought about it for a second as she sat her glass down. “Well obviously the fact that I’m totally ripped now.”

Asami laughed.

“Be serious,” she said, nudging the other woman with her elbow.
“That was serious,” Korra said, smirking.

“Well what about personality wise?” Asami clarified.

Korra drummed her fingers on the counter and thought about it some more.

“I’m definitely not as crazy or loud as I used to be,” she decided.

“Mm. I actually thought that when you were talking to that guy earlier.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Well I’m glad to know that we’re on the same page about me being boring now.”

“You’re not boring at all,” Asami disagreed. “You’re very mysterious, and that’s interesting within itself. I’m sure a lot of people are curious about you.”

Korra’s eyes met hers. “Like you?”

Asami slowly nodded. “Like me.”

“Hn.” Korra lifted the glass to her lips. “You’d be disappointed.”

“I doubt it,” Asami said with the roll of her eyes and took another sip as well.

Korra gave her an interesting look.

“What about you?” she asked.

Asami paused for a split second as she put her glass back down.

“What about me?” she asked, not meeting Korra’s eyes anymore.

“You’ve been very curious about my past, but I don’t think you’ve been all that telling about yours.”

Asami tensed and her brows knit together. She hadn’t expected for Korra to turn the tables back on her, especially on today of all days. They were having such a good, lighthearted conversation, too.

“You’re not wrong,” she said. “But I also thought you didn’t make it a priority to know people’s business.”

“I don’t,” Korra agreed. “I’m just saying that maybe we’re not so different about not wanting to be upfront about things in our past.”

Asami tensed and her brows knit together. She remembered a couple of weeks back when she snapped at Korra for questioning her living arrangements. And now all she could think was how much of a hypocrite she was being for pushing the truth out of Korra when she could barely even talk about her own without blowing up at someone. There were some things that were too personal; too heavy, and not easy to come forth about.

But like before when she thought of telling Korra about her father, she wasn’t sure if she wanted Korra to know. They were still working on the whole trust thing and rebuilding some type of
friendship or whatever. It felt so out of place to blurt all of that out right now. If anything, Korra would just see how messed up her life really was and not want to deal with anyone else’s emotional baggage along with her own. That was enough to make Asami recoil from that idea.

However, there was still some parts of her life that she could share with Korra, and for right now that would be good enough.

“I ended up going to Cornell,” she admitted.

“I know,” Korra said, which caused Asami to look over at her in astonishment.

“You do?”

“I saw the photos in your apartment, remember?”

“Oh, right,” Asami looked down in embarrassment. She didn’t know why her mind immediately jumped to the conclusion that Korra had actually found out somehow. Besides, Korra already told her she didn’t know anything.

“How did you like it?” Korra asked.

“It was everything I thought it would be.”

“That doesn’t sound like a compliment.”

Asami shrugged. “It was an okay school and it helped me learn what I needed to.”

“You don’t regret going there?”

“No,” she said quickly—almost too quick—and when Korra met her gaze with a calculated expression, she felt the need to clarify. “I mean, it was stressful a lot of the times, but it got me to where I needed to be.”

“And where is that?” Korra asked.

Asami hesitated and wanted to look away from what felt like a challenge.

“I’m the CEO of a company now,” she said truthfully but didn’t expand on it.

Korra nodded; although, didn’t seem all that surprised.

“They didn’t name you ‘most likely to succeed’ for nothing.”

Asami watched for Korra’s reaction closely to see if she’d notice even the briefest change in her facial expression, but Korra appeared neutral.

“It’s not like it came easy to me,” she said.

There were many sleepless nights she had, with her mind refusing to shut off because of all the ideas running through her head faster than she could write down. And then there was the added stress of figuring out how to keep the already drowning company from going belly up, gaining the peoples trust again, and finding people to work with and for her. It was far from easy.

“I’m sure it wasn’t, but you’re probably the only one who could pull it off.” Korra finished her drink and looked over at her. “Even with the hard times, it must be an adventure for you. If it’s something you actually wanted for yourself, that is.”
“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“That was just a hypothetical.”

Asami breathed out and then led by example to down the rest of her drink. She wiped the corner of her mouth.

“You didn’t tell me that you turned all sociological in the past six years,” she said.

“Maybe that should have been my answer earlier,” Korra mused.

“Did you take those kinds of classes when you were in school?”

Korra looked at her in confusion, but then she seemed to remember telling Asami about how she attended college.

“I don’t even remember what classes I took,” she said finally.

“What was your major?”

“I didn’t have one.”

“So, does that mean…”

“Yes,” Korra answered. “It was a community college and I only lasted a semester there.”

“Oh…” Asami said, suddenly feeling awkward. “My mistake. When you told me that you went to school I kind of just assumed…”

“No worries.” Korra waved her off.

Asami paused, not knowing if Korra was uncomfortable speaking on this subject or where to even take the conversation next.

“Is there any particular reason why you didn’t finish?” she asked.

Korra folded and unfolded her fingers.

“It just wasn’t for me at that point in my life,” she said after a while. “I kind of forced it on myself because I thought I had something to prove. But then stuff happened and I became more interested in my current activities.”

“Have you thought about going back?”

Korra shook her head. “It’s not something I see myself being fully invested in—at least, not right now.”

Asami nodded and looked away. She nursed her empty glass and stared at the dissolving ice cubes.

“That’s smart,” she said. “Sometimes jumping into something isn’t always the best decision.”

Flashes back to when she was in college popped into her head. All she wanted at that point in time was to please the only person in her life that she had left. It pushed her to the breaking point so many times, but she didn’t care and was willing to lose herself in the process. Little did she know how much wasted time she spent.
“You okay?” Korra asked.

Asami opened her eyes, not realizing she closed them. Korra was looking at her with curiosity, and maybe even a bit of concern.

“Yeah. It’s just getting stuffy in here,” she said.

"Tipsy already?” Korra said teasingly.

"No." Asami gave her an exasperated look. One of these days she'd prove that she knew how to handle her liquor.

“Do you wanna go for a walk?” Korra asked.

“Sure. Some fresh air could do me some good right about now,” she admitted.

“Okay. We can go.”

They both paid their own separate tabs, though Korra only had to pay for the beer, and then got up to leave. They were on their way out, but as they walked by the pool table and neared the door, Korra stopped abruptly.

“Give me a sec?” she said.

Asami nodded and watched with curiosity as Korra walked over to the group of loud guys by the pool table. They all greeted her welcomingly, but she walked over to Ghazan specifically and he had to lean down to listen to her whisper a couple of words in his ear.

Asami folded her arms and looked elsewhere. Now that she was closer to the door, she was also closer to the speakers and could clearly hear “Don’t Look Back in Anger” playing from them.

She imagined Korra coming in here all the time and being so well-liked, even if she didn’t see that herself. Korra gave off that vibe of being a badass, but not making a big deal about it.

She looked back over at the table and saw Korra still talking with Ghazan. Her hands were stuffed into her back pockets as she spoke. Asami had no idea what they were discussing, but it seemed like an interesting conversation. Another thing she couldn’t help but notice was how much Korra blended in well with the group of people around her; however, there was still something about her that made her stand out. If Asami was just some random stranger walking in, she knew that the first person her eyes would’ve landed on was Korra. It was something about her presence that demanded attention. She looked more confident than anyone else in the room.

After two minutes, Ghazan gave her a firm head nod and then Korra walked away. Asami noticed a few guys watching her lustfully as she left the pool table.

“Ready?” she said once they were side by side.

“Yeah.” Asami nodded.

She let Korra go before her, and just as they walked out the door, she shot another glance over at the table of guys.

It was forty degrees outside, but it felt like thirty with the wind chill. Asami folded her arms to keep her hands from getting cold. They walked down the sidewalk in an unhurried pace, passing a couple of closed shops and some late night open restaurants with Christmas decorations out on
display.

She rubbed her hands together, trying to keep them warm.

“I can’t believe I forgot gloves,” she muttered to herself.

Korra reached into her jacket and pulled out a pair.

“Here,” she said.

“Don’t you need them?”

“I have warm pockets.”

Asami hesitantly took them from Korra’s hands. She put them on and they provided instant warmth and comfort.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Mhm.”

They walked side by side, occasionally having to move over for people walking in the opposite direction. Korra absentmindedly started humming the chorus to the Oasis song.

“What did you need to talk to that guy about?” Asami ended up asking.

“Business related inquiries,” answered Korra.

Asami chewed on her bottom lip.

“Were all of those guys from Blackstone?” she asked. There was no one else around them, so she didn’t see the harm in asking.

Korra nodded. “Ghazan was the only fighter in that bunch. The rest just like to come and watch.”

“He seems cool,” Asami said. “Intimidating, but cool.”

“He’s approaching 40, but he’s still got it. I think he’s been in the game for almost twenty years.”

Asami’s eyes widened. “Really?” she asked in disbelief. When Korra gave her a nod, she whistled. “Wow. That’s impressive. Especially if he hasn’t been caught.”

“Oh, he has,” Korra said. “He’s originally from Pakistan, but he left due to some legal trouble and started traveling around the world to fight in underground rings. I’m pretty sure he’s been in well over 50 of them. But every time he gets caught or close to being caught, he flees the scene. Brags about it all the time.”

“He must love living life on the edge,” Asami said.

“I think we all do.”

They stopped at a crosswalk, where the light was green and the cars sped past them. Korra pressed the button a couple of times in hopes of getting the light to change.

“Is that the reason why you do it?” Asami asked after a minute.

Korra folded her arms and leaned against the pole with an amused expression on her face.
“Haven’t you fulfilled your quota in this round of twenty questions?”

“You don’t have to answer. I was just curious,” Asami said. She reached forward and pressed the button beside Korra’s hip out of impatience. A small group of people were walking up now and stopped a couple of feet away from them. They both went quiet, understanding that the conversation needed to be put on pause.

The light finally turned red and they were given the signal to cross the street. The rowdy group passed them in a hurry, talking loudly and excitedly. They couldn’t have been any older than twenty-one.

Asami looked up at the tall buildings they went by; so tall that she couldn’t see anything else aside from the dark-lit sky above her. It almost felt like she was surrounded by a bunch of walls.

“It’s so suffocating sometimes,” she said out loud.

“What is?” Korra asked as she kicked a random rock.

“This city,” she said. “I know how much you hated it here, but I don’t think I ever truly realized why until a couple of years later.”

Korra didn’t say anything at first. She gave the rock one final kick to the side.

“I thought you loved it here.”

“I do… For the most part,” Asami said. “I guess sometimes I just wish I could get away from it more often. I mean, I have lived here all my life.”

“You make it sound like you’re chained here,” Korra said.

“I am.”

“Why?”

Asami shrugged. “People need me here.”

“I see you’re still putting other people above yourself.” Korra shook her head.

“What’s so wrong about that?”

Korra didn’t respond at first.

“You were always that way back then, so I guess I shouldn’t be all that shocked that it’s the same way now,” she finally said.

“Mm.”

“That must be exhausting, though.”

“What? Caring about people?”

“No.” Korra rolled her eyes. “Feeling like you have to carry everyone else’s weight.”

“Are you trying to tell me you’ve never felt that way?”

“From where I’ve been and the kind of life I live, I’ve learned that you don’t have any time to be
selfless. It’s considered a weakness, and people use that against you in the long run.”

Asami noticed how deep Korra’s got as she spoke near the end. There was a hint of bitterness in her voice, as well. Even though she had no idea what Korra went through, she had no doubt that what she said, in her case, was true.

“I guess it’s just one of those things where different circumstances lead to different outlooks on life,” she said.

“I did warn you that we have different lifestyles.”

“Yeah. You did.”

They were just about to walk past a convenience store when Korra stopped.

“Mind if we stop in here? I need some things.”

“Sure.”

They walked inside and the cashier grunted a hello to them. Asami followed Korra down the aisle and toward the very back of the store where all of the drinks were. Korra walked over to a particular section and grabbed a personal sized jug of two percent milk. After closing the fridge, she continued down the aisle and stopped to grab a can of green tea.

“Want anything?” she asked Asami absently as she searched.

Asami looked around the shop, trying to spot anything appealing or that she needed. They approached the frozen goods section and her eyes lit up at all of the selections of Ben and Jerry’s they had. She opened the fridge and grabbed a chunky monkey.

“Ice cream in forty-degree weather?” Korra said from behind her shoulder.

Asami looked over at her with a smile.

“I will not be shamed for having cravings.”

Korra looked down at the small pint in her hands.

“At least you made a good choice.”

They headed back up to the front, Korra grabbing a few more things on the way: protein bars, beef jerky, and sunflower seeds.

She dropped everything on the counter for the cashier, who immediately started ringing things up, and then she gently pried the ice cream out of Asami’s hands and placed it along with her purchases.

“You really don’t have to pay for me.”

“It’s no big deal,” Korra said.

“You’re just trying to pay me back for paying you back.”

Korra smirked. “Maybe.”

Asami rolled her eyes but couldn’t bring herself to be annoyed.
“15.67,” the cashier said.

Korra pulled out her wallet from her back pocket and got her card out. She put it in the card reader and took a minute to enter her information before the transaction was approved. The cashier handed over the two bags and Korra took them before handing the separate bag with the ice cream over to Asami.

“Thank you,” Asami said politely.

“Yup.”

They walked back outside and fell into step beside each other. It grew peacefully quiet between them for a while.

“I’m good at it,” Korra spoke quietly.

Asami gave her a questioning look. “What?”

“You asked me earlier why I do what I do: I’m good at it.”

“I’m sure you’re good at other, safer things, too,” Asami said.

Korra shook her head. “I guess you wouldn’t understand.”

“I didn’t mean to come off as judgmental,” Asami said.

“No, I get it,” Korra said. “What I’m doing is dangerous, among other things.”

“You can’t just take it out on a punching bag or something?” Asami asked gently.

“That’s not enough for me.”

“Well, what about joining the WWE or MMA?”

Korra laughed outright.

“Those two things couldn’t be any more different from each other.”

“Oh,” Asami said and blushed at her lack of knowledge on the subject. “Well, at least you wouldn’t get in trouble for those things.”

“No, I wouldn’t,” Korra agreed. “But it’s not what I want. I don’t want to put on a show for other people. When I’m in that ring, it’s like everything else just fades away. The only thing on my mind is winning.”

Asami nodded in understanding. “The crowd certainly enjoys you.”

“They enjoy the streak,” Korra corrected. “Without that, I’ll just be looped in with everyone else.”

They randomly stopped at a bench near a bus stop. Korra sat down and Asami followed in suit.

“You don’t feel any pressure from that?” Asami asked.

“No, because then I’d be letting it define who I am. I win because I’m good, and if or when I do lose, it will be because that person was better than me that day.”

“You’re really passionate about this, aren’t you?”
“It may be crazy and risky, but I’ve never really been what qualifies as ‘normal.’”

“Everyone’s unique in their own way.”

Korra scrunched her nose.

“Great. Now it feels like we’re in some cheesy Disney Channel sitcom.”

Asami laughed. “I think we’re a little too old for that demographic,” she said.

“True. My show would be TV-14. Maybe even rated M. Or R.”

“Geez. What do you plan on doing on this hypothetical show?”

“A bunch of things that a lot of people couldn’t handle.”

Asami smiled and looked down. Her grocery bag dangled from her wrist and she watched it twist and untwist in fascination.

“Is that really the only reason why you do it?” she asked after a while.

Korra looked up at the sky, similar to what Asami did earlier, and seemed perplexed.

“It’s the one thing that makes me feel like I belong somewhere.”

She looked down finally and met Asami’s gaze. Asami swallowed thickly.

Just watching Korra talk about it and seeing that fiery spark in her eyes made Asami want to hear more about it. She also felt like there was more to it than what Korra was saying.

“You’re making it really hard for me to disapprove of this,” she said.

Korra chuckled and adjusted her hat.

“Even Asami Sato can embrace the bad side every once in a while.”

It was meant to be a joke, but Asami couldn’t keep from stiffening at that comment.

*If only you knew,* she wanted to say. In fact, she wanted to tell Korra so many things in that moment: about her father, the company, and Varrick. She was bottling in too many things, and at any minute she’d burst.

But her and Korra were actually in a good place right now. They were talking and getting to know each other more, and Korra even seemed to be letting her guard down. If Asami were to bring all of this crap up now, it would more than likely set them back a few pegs. She wanted to tell her and be out in the open with it, but it wasn’t the right time.

Maybe sometime soon, though.

A cold wind blew by suddenly, making her shudder and wrap her arms around herself. For some stupid reason, she thought of her father and wondered if his cell was as cold as he was.

“You look upset,” Korra said.

“I’m fine.”

Korra gave her a skeptical look and seemed to wait for Asami to change her mind, but she
eventually let it go. Her attentiveness and generosity throughout the night almost made Asami spill the beans again.

Korra pulled out her phone and woke it to look down at the time.

“It’s getting kind of late,” she determined.

“Yeah,” Asami looked at her watch. A whole hour and a half passed by just like that. “I kind of need to catch up on some work that I blew off earlier.”

“You’re a workaholic.”

“I guess I have my father to thank for that,” she said bitterly, and her eyes widened once she realized she said that out loud.

She looked over at Korra, who was zipping her jacket. It didn’t look like that comment fazed her in any way.

“Are you going to get an Uber,” Korra asked.

“Yeah...” Asami said after recovering from her slip up.

She pulled out her phone and opened up the app. Any other time she would have driven herself, but she didn’t want to have to worry about parking and walking a long distance at night.

After a few minutes of typing and figuring out where they were, she got the confirmation that a car would be there to pick her up in five minutes. She put her phone back in her pocket and looked at Korra once again.

“Are you taking the bus?” she asked.

“No. I live close by.”

“Seriously?” Asami looked around. Now that she got a good look at where they were, she remembered driving down the street they were on after her and Korra parted ways that first night.

Korra shrugged. “If you were going to drag me out of bed, I at least wanted to go somewhere closer to me.”

“I suppose that’s fair,” Asami said. “You’re so good at hiding things that it’s almost scary.”

“It comes with practice.”

Asami gave her a small smile and looked ahead. There was another gust of wind that swirled around them, whistling loudly and blowing her hair as it did.

“Have you regretted coming back at all since you got here?” she asked quietly.

It was a completely random question, and Korra seemed very surprised at the sudden shift in topic.

“Why are you asking me that?” she said.

“I dunno. I guess sometimes I look out at this city and I wonder what would’ve happened if I left, too. And knowing how much you used to hate it here… I’m just wondering if you regret coming back to all of it when you were so miserable.”
Korra’s expression turned hard, and at first Asami thought she might have crossed a line, but then Korra looked away and her shoulders dropped.

“All the time,” she answered quietly.

They didn’t speak again after that, but the silence between them wasn’t uncomfortable. It just meant they were both in their own thoughts.

Two minutes later, a silver Nissan pulled up to the curb.

“That’s you.” Korra stood up and stretched. She looked down the road as a couple of cars passed by. For once, it felt utterly quiet in the loud city.

Asami got to her feet as well. She was about to walk over to the car, but stopped herself.

“I had a really good time tonight,” she said.

A corner of Korra’s mouth twitched upward.

“It definitely didn’t suck.”

“Are you doing anything this Saturday?” Asami asked.

Korra nodded. “I’m working ‘full-time’ now, remember?” she said.

“Ah. Yeah…” Asami scratched the side of her head. Realizing she was still wearing Korra’s gloves, she took them off and handed them over. “Thanks again for these.”

Korra reached out and took them, her fingers brushed against Asami’s for a brief, but long second.

“You’re welcome,” she said in that low and smooth voice of hers. It created an interesting feeling in Asami’s gut and her breath hitched.

The moment passed, and she walked over to the car and opened the backdoor. When she looked back, Korra was still beside the bench.

“Are you sure you don’t need a ride? I could ask the driver to take a quick detour.”

Korra shook her head. “I’m good.”

“Okay… Well, I guess I’ll see you sometime soon?”

“I’ll call you.”

Asami narrowed her eyes. “Will you really?”

“I will. Promise.” Korra gave her a reassuring smile.

Asami smiled back and then got inside the car, putting her bag of ice cream in the seat beside her. She waved and Korra responded with one of her own. The car pulled off after that.

Despite how awful her day had been, it ended off on a good note. Her and Korra’s conversations were getting better with each time they met. Plus, she got to know a lot more about her life these days, even if it wasn’t exactly legal. But knowing how much fighting meant to Korra made her want to see things from her perspective. She wanted to know Korra, even if her lifestyle wasn’t one that she was familiar with. There were reasons why Korra chose to do what she did, and that was
enough to make her hold back any further judgement. She never used to judge Korra for her party
girl behavior, so why should this be any different?

Even though she didn’t know what kind of things Korra went through, she wanted to understand
more than anything. And then, maybe Korra would want to understand her, too.

She clasped her hands together and put them in her lap. They were still warm from the gloves and
she could feel the goosebumps that had risen up her left arm starting from her hand. The same hand
that Korra’s brushed against.

A few days later, Asami walked into her office, trying to refrain from yawning as she did so. She
spent the whole night there working on models and concept art that when her alarm went off at five
in the morning, she was startled awake on top of her desk. Then again, it shouldn’t have been that
shocking since it happened so often.

She only had enough time to go home, shower, and eat breakfast before heading back in the office
for another long day of work.

When she walked through the door, she noticed that her assistant wasn’t there like usual to give her
a rundown of what her day would look like. Asami didn’t mind it all that much though since her
brain still wasn’t functioning properly. A whole pot of coffee was calling her name right now.

As she approached her desk, she saw a bouquet of flowers sitting there. With a raised eyebrow, she
grabbed them and found a card tucked right in the middle of it. She took it out and opened it to
read.

*I would love to do business again with you soon. Your help was very much appreciated last time.*

-V

Asami didn’t realize how much she was gripping the note until her hand started shaking.

“Those flowers are so beautiful.”

Her head jerked up and she saw Rita walking in with a couple of papers in her hand and a smile on
her face.

“Yeah,” Asami said, putting them to the side and feigning a smile herself.

“Are they from anyone special?” Rita asked, giving her a mischievous look.

“Oh, you know. Just some guy I met at an event a few months ago,” she lied and placed the card
back inside the flowers. She wanted to put them in the trash bin so bad.

“How sweet! Are you going to give him a chance?”

“You know me. I’m too busy.”

“Everyone deserves a chance at love, Miss Sato,” Rita said. She walked over to the desk and
dropped the papers in front of her. “Here’s a few messages I took for you this morning. Some
assistant to a person with the name of Raiko wants to meet with you soon.”

Asami swallowed. “Perfect.”

“I’ll leave it to you then. Let me know if you need anything.”
Once her assistant walked out of the office, Asami finally sat down in her chair and put her hands up to her mouth.

It felt like one thing after the other was happening and she was just on a rollercoaster waiting for the ride to end. Everything her father told her was starting to come back to the forefront of her brain again, taunting her. Was this how it all started with him? He did a simple favor for someone on the opposite side of the tracks and then, before he knew it, he was joining those very same people?

After taking a moment to breathe, she grabbed Varrick’s note and looked down at it again. The card was made of some weird type of paper and was flimsy to hold. She was about to tear it up, but she noticed there were more words at the bottom of the note in tiny print that she hadn’t noticed before. Squinting, she raised the card to her face. She saw that it was only an address to a place in Brooklyn with the date for this Saturday coming up.

Asami pulled her chair up to her computer and moved the mouse around to wake the screen. She opened her browser and immediately typed the address into the search bar. When the results showed up, she saw that it was another old warehouse.

She realized immediately that it must have been the next location to a Blackstone Fighting League event. Nervously, she bit at her lip.

That was also where Korra would be this weekend.

This had to be part of Varrick’s plan. She hadn’t seen nor heard from him since that night she found Korra again. He must’ve figured that since she came looking for Korra once, her being present would get Asami there twice.

It was certainly tempting.

If she went, then maybe that would mean she could really see what Korra was talking about the other day and why she chose to do all of this. And at the same time, she could tell Varrick that she wasn’t going to be involved in any more of his elaborate and diabolical schemes.

However, if Korra found out she was there, she’d more than likely think that Asami was following her around or something. And she’d most definitely be pissed since she made it very clear that she didn’t want to see Asami there again.

So the best thing to do would be stay hidden and out of sight. That could work.

…Or she could just not go and ignore Varrick forever and not run the risk of this messing up everything with Korra.

With a groan, she placed her head in her hands again.

The answer should have been easy for her, but it wasn’t. If she didn’t go and lay down the law with Varrick, then his little messages would continue until she relented. Varrick wasn’t the one to be ignored (much like her father), and the worst thing that could happen is if he or one of his goons showed up at her office to stir things up.

This wasn’t just about seeing Korra, but it was also about putting an end to something that could eventually damage everything she built at this point with the company. She was nothing like her father, and one small lapse of judgement wasn’t going to change that.

After weighing all of her options, she finally made up her mind.
She just hoped that she was making the right decision.

TBC...
I've made a playlist for this story if anyone cares to listen to it.

The warehouse was old, dirty and dark, with lights that flickered on and off in a couple of spots that made it seem all the more haunting. However, it could be ignored due to all of the commotion going on in one particular room. There would be loud cheering one minute and then booing the next. It had been going on that way for about forty-five minutes.

“It’s pretty lively down there.”

“Mhm.”

Korra was minding her business as she slowly wrapped the athletic tape around her hands. From where she stood, she could see everything from down below. A size-able amount of people surrounded the ring where two people were currently fighting inside it, but it wasn't as crowded as usual. Varrick informed them all in an email that they were keeping things more tight-knit for "safety reasons." And of course it had to happen on the week she made her debut on the main card.

“How are you feeling?” Kuvira asked from beside her, distracted as she texted.

“Good,” said Korra as she looked at her now all taped up hands.

“Are you excited? Nervous?”

“Excited definitely, but not nervous.”

Kuvira stopped what she was doing and finally looked up at Korra, giving her a scrutinizing gaze for a second.

“Now that I think about it, you’ve been oddly… chipper this past week.”

“As opposed to what on my normal days?”

“Well, to put it nicely: like something crawled up your ass and died there.”

Korra flipped her off but Kuvira only responded with a chuckle before looking down at her phone again. Korra went back to getting her mind cleared from any and all distractions. In all truth, she felt a lot more relaxed than usual, especially considering the fact that she was about to make her first appearance in the ring after what felt like ages.

Varrick made good on his promise and gave her a match. From what she heard, her opponent was from one of the few gangs they always went up against called the Agni Kai. She was a new addition to the main card in her fight club as well, which ticked Korra off because she wanted a long timer, but she eventually got over it. Another stepping stone, she thought.

When she talked to Asami a few days ago and got the chance to explain some of the reasons why
She chose to do all of this, she went back home that night thinking about this new opportunity she had and how it could only get better from there. She was confident in her skills; she knew that she was good. And pretty soon, she’d be challenging people who could match her passion and strength. People like Kuvira for instance…

She felt a drop of water hit her shoulder. Looking up, she frowned at the old, rusted pipes from above.

“You would think Varrick of all people would find less trashier places to host these events rather than this.”

“And that’s exactly why he does it,” Kuvira said as her thumbs kept pounding on her screen. “We’re lucky he decided to go through with having this one.”

“Did something happen?” Korra asked in a casual tone, even though that comment sparked concern.

“Eh. You know how it is. Every once in a while the feds get the tip off and Varrick’s warned to cool it for a while. I’m sure it’ll all blow over soon.”

Korra nervously looked around the empty space they were waiting in, self-conscious about someone watching them.

“How can you be so sure?” she asked.

“Because that’s how it always is.” Kuvira looked up at her with an odd look. “And I doubt we’ll ever be busted. Varrick has a lot of connections inside that corrupt law enforcement. Some of those guys are probably here right now.”

“That’s… so fucked up,” Korra said.

“You’re just now figuring this out?”

“Well no. Not really,” Korra said. “But Varrick really does need to stop being so reckless. We don’t know who we can trust.”

Kuvira arched a brow. “Is there something you know that he doesn’t?”

Korra felt conflicted. She didn’t know the extent of Mako’s investigation or if he even had any actual leads, so she didn’t want to spark a panic amongst everyone if there wasn’t one. She would need to ask Asami first, and then if she thought it posed a threat, then maybe she’d tell Varrick. However, there was no telling what Varrick would do with the information. For all she knew, he could hire a hitman to take out anyone he found to be a threat. And as much as she disliked Mako, she did not want to have his blood on her hands.

“I was just concerned,” she ended up saying.

“Okay, well don’t be right now. All you need to think about is the fight. Get focused.”

“I would be if you put that god damn phone away from more than two minutes at a time,” she said in irritation. “Who are you texting anyway?”

“Fucking Zhu Li,” Kuvira grumbled. “She’s been hounding me all week about this stupid fight Varrick wants me to do next week.”
“Why do you sound so mad about it?”

Kuvira opened her mouth and then hesitated. She looked away impassively but Korra could see the guilt in her eyes.

“He wants me to go against someone from the Triple Threats.”

Korra’s jaw clenched. Had Kuvira not sounded like that, she would’ve just ignored the small shudder she felt every time the Triple Threats were mentioned, but since she did have that tone, the shudder intensified.

“Please tell me he’s not making you do what I think he is.”

Her coach sighed. “He technically can’t make me do anything. Besides, I could use the extra money.”

Korra’s hands clenched at her sides.

“You would willingly let someone kick your ass just to get some extra cash?”

“You know it’s more complicated than that.”

“How complicated could it be when you just said that he can’t make you do anything you don’t want to do?” Korra folded her arms.

“You’re just going to get pissed off if I tell you.”

Korra’s eyes never left Kuvira’s face, but when she noticed that Kuvira wasn’t quite meeting her eyes, she faltered.

“He gave you an ultimatum, didn’t he?”

Kuvira folded her arms as well but still refused to look at her.

“You shouldn’t be thinking about any of this right now,” she said.

“What was it?”

“Korra—”

“Just tell me,” she said impatiently.

Kuvira sighed and brushed her long braid off her shoulder, then she finally met Korra’s gaze.

“Either I lose that match, or I stop coaching you.”

Korra let out an aggravated groan and turned away. Of course this was happening now. She should’ve seen it coming from a mile away.

“That bastard,” she said angrily. “Wasn’t it already enough that I had to go against the Triple Threats in my last match as an undercard? It’s like he’s punishing me.”

“It’s going to be fine, Korra,” Kuvira reassured her. “And it’s not like I haven’t done this before. It was just during a time where I couldn’t afford not to.”

“I don’t want you to have to do that for me, though,” Korra said and turned to her. “You need to go
and tell him that you’re not going to coach me anymore.”

Kuvira’s eyes widened. “Are you joking right now?”

“Why would I joke at a time like this?”

Loud cheering from the crowd commenced. One of the fighters was down on the mat bleeding from the nose and didn’t seem to be getting up anytime soon. Kuvira’s challenging gaze met hers again and Korra didn’t look away.

“You told me yourself that you still have things you want to learn,” Kuvira said, her voice stern.

“Yeah... but who says you still can’t teach me those things?” Korra gave her a mischievous look as an idea formed in her head.

At that, Kuvira’s serious expression disappeared and she ended up grinning.

“You know, Korra, sometimes I forget how brilliant you are.”

“One of these days you’ll learn not to underestimate me,” she said, laughing. “Now go. Tell Varrick and Zhu Li to shove it where the sun doesn’t shine and that you’re finally free of me.”

“But what about your match? Don’t you want me in your corner one last time? I like Varrick’s guys and all, but having them in your ear during a match can be incredibly aggravating.”

“Nah. I’m fine going solo this time around. I think it’ll make an even bigger statement that you’re not there like always. You were kind of like my training wheels in a way.”

Kuvira stepped closer and bent over to grab Korra’s gloves on the ground. Without being given a cue, Korra raised her hands and let Kuvira put them on. After securing them, she looked up and met Korra’s eyes.

“You’re sure about this?” she asked.

Korra shrugged. “There’s probably no better time to do it.”

Kuvira smiled and patted her on the shoulder.

“You better kick some serious ass out there. Don’t embarrass me.”

“Please. I’ve got this in the bag.”

“I know you do.” Kuvira gave her shoulder one final squeeze before pulling away. “I’ll see you soon. Good luck.”

“I think you’ll see me a lot sooner than you think.”

Kuvira raised an eyebrow. “What does that mean?”

“Less than a minute,” Korra replied.

Kuvira laughed. “You’re not serious.”

“I am.”

“You’ve never beaten someone that fast. I mean, not in the first round at least.”
Korra smirked. “I will tonight. You admitted that I was getting faster.”

“Yeah. In terms of speed. As for actually taking someone out in the first round, I have no idea.”

“Do you believe I can do it?”

“I do,” Kuvira replied without any hesitation.

“Then just watch and let me do my thing.”

Kuvira smiled and nodded.

“I’m rooting for you, rookie.”

“Not a rookie anymore, but I appreciate it.”

Kuvira gave her one last look and then left the area they were in, walking down the steps and into the loud room of rowdy people. Once Korra was alone, she exhaled loudly. She felt so exuberant as her pulse raced. Not having Kuvira by her side tonight would be one of her biggest challenges against herself, but she’d find a way to get through it.

This was something she’d have to get used to if she was ever going to get as far as she wanted to go. Kuvira taught her so many things, and Korra learned so much, but there was stuff she needed to learn how to do on her own. She’d be more respected that way, too. Besides, this new way of training seemed a lot more practical than Kuvira getting her face kicked in.

Just then, someone in all black from down below walked halfway up the steps and gave her the 5-minute signal with his hands. She gave him a firm nod and moved her neck from side to side, cracking a few muscles as she did.

It was now or never.

Asami felt a weird sense of déjà vu when she walked through the hyper and over-aggressive crowd as they watched two people trade blow after blow inside the ring in the center of the room. But a few things were different this time around.

For one, the crowd wasn’t as massive as it was before, so it was easier to get around, and two, a lot of the theatrics were cut out. There was no music or any flashy lights set up, and it all seemed a lot more compact.

Another thing that was different was her choice of dress. She didn’t want to stick out like a sore thumb that much like she did the last time, so she opted for a pair of ripped, black jeans paired with a white shirt that tied up in a knot in the front, along with a black denim jacket underneath her coat. She was far from wearing a bunch of grunge-like makeup or having a bunch of tattoos and piercings all over her body, but she thought the look would suffice.

A couple of people who actually weren’t looking at the ring catcalled her as she walked by, but she paid them no attention. She had a destination in mind and wasted no time getting there. All she had to do was ask where Varrick was and someone pointed her in his direction.

He was standing over by a wall with his arms folded and a smirk on his face as he watched the match currently going on. There was no VIP section to block him off from everyone else, however he wasn’t being flocked by a bunch of people like last time either. The only person beside him was Zhu Li, who was texting on her phone and would occasionally lean over to whisper something in
The bodyguards weren’t that far from them as they looked on, engrossed in the match but occasionally looked around for trouble. One of them looked her way as she approached, but he was the same guy from the last time and let her pass by easily. He probably knew that Varrick was expecting her.

Varrick didn’t notice her at first, but when Zhu Li looked up from her phone and saw her, she gave him a slight nudge with her elbow. The businessman looked down at her, then over to where she was staring, and finally met Asami’s eyes.

“Oh, hey there,” he said. “I didn’t think you’d show up. You’re just in time actually. Your little friend will be up there soon.”

“I thought I made it clear the last time that it would be the only time I did you any favors,” Asami said, cutting off the pleasantries.

Varrick’s mouth turned downward and he looked like a mix between surprised and impressed that she was speaking to him that way.

“You know, you show a lot of initiative. I like that in a woman. Ain’t that right, Zhu Li?”

The woman in question only rolled her eyes in response and kept her head in her phone. Varrick laughed anyway and wrapped an arm around her waist.

“I’m a businesswoman so having initiative is my job,” Asami said flatly.

“Speaking of, I really do appreciate all of those designs you gave me. I sold them to the highest bidder and they’re looking to have those thingys built and on the shelves by no later than next March. You have a very brilliant mind, and Raiko has it coming for trying to screw me over.”

Asami’s stomach clenched, feeling uneasy by the way he praised her. She didn’t want it, and all it did was create a sinking feeling in her gut, reminding her that what she did was wrong.

“You’ve already got what you wanted from me,” she said. “We had a deal and we equally got something from it. I don’t want any part of this anymore, so please don’t send me any more messages.”

“Is this supposed to be your good conscience kicking in or something?” Varrick asked, sounding bored.

“Something like that. I know that what I did was wrong and I’m taking steps to make sure nothing like this ever happens again.”

“Ah. I see what’s going on here.” Varrick smirked and slid his hand away from Zhu Li’s waist. He folded his arms and gave Asami an all-knowing look. “You saw a side to yourself that you never thought you had and now you’re spooked.”

Asami shifted uncomfortably. She didn’t think he'd hit so close to the mark.

“I’m not going to let myself be used by you anymore or fall more into this than I already did,” she said.

“I’m sure you know that no matter how hard you try to be a good person, it still doesn’t change the fact that you did something bad, right?” Varrick said. He was clearly trying to manipulate her and
make her doubt herself, but Asami went down this road before with other people, and she wasn’t going to let that happen again, especially when she had so much to lose.

“Maybe so. But that doesn’t make me a bad person. And I’ve learned from this mistake,” she said.

Varrick nodded in response, as if he understood and wouldn’t fight her on it.

“Okay then,” he said simply.

Asami relaxed and let her shoulders drop a bit. “Okay.”

Realizing the conversation was over, she turned to walk away.

“Does Korra know that you took such a big risk just to see her?” Varrick called out over the loudness of the crowd.

She stopped and turned back to face him.

“What?” she said. Her voice was calm, but she knew the look on her face read as hostile.

“I just think it’s interesting that you went to such great lengths—breaking your own personal code of ethics even—just to find one person. I wonder what Korra thought about that when you told her. Or did you?”

“Are you threatening me?” she said, stepping forward. A bodyguard was there in a flash to stand between them. From over his large, broad shoulder, she saw Varrick holding up his hands in defense, eyes shut, and poking his bottom lip out.

“It was only an observation,” he said. “But you getting so defensive just makes it all the more clear to me.”

Asami was about to reach out and grab him—bodyguard be damned—and set him straight on a couple of things. She couldn’t believe the nerve of the man to bring Korra into this situation.

“Uh. Am I interrupting something?”

Asami turned her head to the voice who spoke and then immediately looked the other way.

“Oh hey, Kuvy.” Varrick gave a friendly wave and smile. “Did you need something?”

“Yeah, for you to never call me that again,” Asami heard Korra’s coach say. “Also, you can go ahead and cancel that match for me that you had planned for next week.”

“Oh?” Varrick patted his bodyguard as a signal for him to move out of the way. “That’s certainly an abrupt change of heart.”

“She was just arguing with me about it five minutes ago,” Zhu Li chimed in.

“Rookie says she’s cool with it,” Kuvira said.

“Well that’s good, I guess.” Varrick rubbed his chin. “I figured she’d put up more of a fight. Or did you not tell her about our little deal with the Triple Threats? Honestly, that girl just needs to let all of the bad blood go. But hey, all of her anger works in my favor.”

“Varrick, for once, could you not act like such a sociopath?” Kuvira asked.
“I could, but there’s too much money that needs to be made. And speaking of, I have another proposition for you if you don't wanna do that match...”

Asami had enough. There was no reason for her to be standing there anymore after their exchange. Varrick obviously wasn’t thinking about it all that much, and she already said what she needed to say.

Without another word, she walked away from the small group.

“I hope you stick around for your girl!” Varrick shouted after her.

She got lost in the crowd, looking over at the ring and seeing the two opponents facing off. Both of them bled in the face, but one looked far worse than the other. Their match was over, and they were both struggling to get cleaned up by the people at their aide before escorting them out.

By then, the crowd moved on and were talking excitedly to one another. A lot of the conversations had Korra’s name attached to them.

“She’s gonna choke,” someone said. “I bet she gets her head knocked off in round two.”

“Oh please! She’s not gonna go down like that! She’s gotta strong chin.”

There were people passing around hundred-dollar bills as the wait continued, some of them sweating. It felt a little too hot near the ring, so Asami settled for being near the back, close to the entrance from where she came in. It was pretty dark everywhere else except for the ring so Asami doubted that Korra would see her, but she still took precautions just in case. She was quite pleased with herself for getting there at around the right time. Earlier, she texted Korra and wished her good luck but didn’t receive a response back. It didn’t really bother her because she knew that Korra was probably busy getting herself mentally and physically prepared.

She’d been anticipating this for the past two days. Even though she got a good idea of Korra’s fighting skills and how good she was, the first time around she’d been too clouded by her own anger and judgement to fully experience this world of Korra’s.

She didn’t get to see how much being in the ring was somewhere Korra actually wanted to be and how she felt like she belonged there. It still concerned her that this was Korra’s “home” now and that she only seemed most satisfied by physically hurting someone or being hurt—which probably needed its own psychological breakdown of—but she was willing to overlook it for the time being. If it meant getting to understand who the Korra standing before her was now, she’d willingly let it slide for the moment.

As if on cue, people started cheering loudly as the crowd cleared a path for someone to come through.

The announcer in the ring raised the microphone to his lips.

“WHO’S READY FOR THE NEXT MATCH?”

The crowd cheered even louder, whooping and hollering. Asami folded her arms and drummed her fingers out of nervousness. A couple of people were already cheering Korra’s name. The energy felt similar to the first time. There were people all around her excited and practically salivating at the chance to see blood—some eager to see Korra’s. It angered her, but she kept herself under control.

“LET’S GIVE A BIG WARM WELCOME FOR A NEW MEMBER TO THE MAIN CARD OF
A few people cheered loudly for a dark-haired woman who made her way inside the ring. She raised her arms in the air, and when the crowd cheered even louder, she grabbed the ropes and shook them hard, getting the crowd even more hyped. On her black sports bra, there were big letters on the front of it that said “AK.” The two other people who accompanied her were wearing similar attire. Even though Asami could only see from far away, she could tell that the woman was insanely strong.

“And now, let’s give it up for the girl who’s been keeping us waiting for weeks on end. Also making her official debut on the main card: Give it up for Korra!”

The crowd was only warming up before, because once they heard Korra’s name, the place went ballistic.

She didn’t see Korra at first, but she noticed that the crowd separated and cleared a path on the opposite side of the room where Raven entered from. A few seconds later, Korra was walking up the steps and climbing through the ropes. She had an intense expression on her face as she stood in her corner. The only acknowledgement she gave the crowd was a raised glove in the air. That was enough for them, though, from how they continued to cheer her on.

Asami felt a smile from creeping up on her face. It was clear who the favored one to win was, and she was happy that Korra had so many people rooting for her compared to the few who didn’t. She wondered what it was like for her to hear so many people chanting her name and cheering for her so adoringly. Did it motivate her? Did she not care for it? Or was she solely concentrated on her opponent and not really paying attention at all?

Korra wore similar attire to her opponent that showed off her overall physique. She wasn’t joking the other night when she said she was ripped. It was one of the first things Asami noticed about her change in appearance. Korra always had a nice figure when she was a teen, but this was on a different level. Even from afar, Asami could see Korra’s rock-hard abs and how toned her arms and legs were. She wasn’t overly bulky, but there was no mistaking that she had a serious gym regimen and diet she stuck with.

The fight started off the way it did the last time, with the announcer saying a couple of words before getting out of the ring, and then it was just Korra, her opponent, and the referee. He stood between them both and talked for a minute, but once he finished, both fighters nodded in understanding before bumping gloves with each other and parting ways to their opposite corners. The opponent, Raven, met the two people she came with on the apron of the ring. They rubbed her shoulders and brought her close to whisper in her ear.

Asami finally noticed that there was no one in Korra’s corner. She looked around for Kuvira, but it was useless trying to pinpoint her in the darkness. She remembered the conversation she heard between Varrick and her. Did that have something to do with why Kuvira wasn’t at Korra’s side?

Korra didn’t look the slightest bit bothered by not having anyone there. She actually looked even more confident as she waited.

“Whoop her ass, Korra!” said someone in the crowd when the cheering went to a lull, but it picked right back up after that.

Asami worried her lip and she folded her arms, digging her nails into her jacket. Could she really handle seeing Korra be hurt again?
Ding!

Apparently she had no other choice.

She watched Korra take a few calculating steps forward, gloves raised mirroring her opponent. They went in a circle, watching each other closely and keeping their eyes locked on one another. Even with the chaotic scene around them, there was a stillness in the air as people waited with bated breath for the first punch to be thrown. Asami couldn’t take her eyes off Korra even if she wanted to. She wondered what was going through her head at that very moment.

But then, something in the air shifted, and before Asami knew it, one of them struck at the other and fists started flying. The crowd yelled in tandem, jumping up and down as they tried to see the fight in its entirety.

Asami winced when she saw Korra take a few hits to the face, but it didn’t seem to slow her down at all. She gave as much she got, striking the woman in the chest precisely, and then to the face twice. Once her opponent stumbled back, arms raised above her face in protection, it was a one-man match from there. Korra didn’t stop at all until she got the other woman into a corner and the referee had to get her to back off.

Raven finally stood up straight and wrung her arms out. She nodded at the referee before he finally moved away and let the fight continue, but then Korra advanced on her once more, giving another punch to the face. Raven got somewhat of another hit in, just below Korra’s left eye, but again, Korra didn’t stop. She continued her assault until her opponent had fallen to the ground.

“She’s gonna win it in the first round!” somebody close to Asami shouted. The people around her agreed with that statement, and Asami did too once she saw Korra climb on top of the woman and start punching at her nonstop.

Suddenly, the referee came in and pulled Korra off. He gave one look to the woman lying on the ground and then waved his arm in the air, giving some sort of signal until a bell went off.

Most of the crowd cheered as the announcer yelled into the microphone that Korra, in fact, was the winner. The energy all around the room put Asami on an absolute high. It felt like her heart was pumping at a thousand beats per minute, and she could feel a bit of sweat forming at the top of her head.

Korra stood up, removing her mouthguard, and then the referee came over to raise her arm in the air to declare her victory. Once he let go, he quickly walked over to the defeated opponent and kneeled beside her.

The fight by so fast that Asami didn’t even think she blinked once. However, seeing Korra win, and that calm but satisfied expression she wore to the point that a small smile appeared on her face made Asami smile, too. But at the same time, she felt like she just witnessed something she wasn’t supposed to see.

She looked around one last time before walking out the door nearest to her.

It was nice in the moment to see Korra do something she loved to do, but Asami also recognized that this was something that Korra felt was a part of her and where she could be herself. Did Asami really deserve to see that? Who was she to come and invade Korra’s space like this without her knowing? And, of course, it took her actually coming out there and witnessing it to realize how wrong it felt.
This was all so stupid.

Korra deserved to know as much about Asami the way Asami knew so much about her now. She didn’t want to be a hypocrite anymore, because if they were ever going to keep this thing growing between them healthy, she needed to be honest. And the first thing she needed to come clean about was being there tonight and her connection to Varrick.

Even if it ended up changing things between them; even if it scared her, at least she’d be taking steps to not keeping anything from Korra anymore. Whatever happened after that would have to be something they worked through together.

Just like they should’ve done a long time ago.

Korra used a compact mirror to get a good look at her cheek. It was slightly puffy and she winced at the touch, but it would only be a small bruise in the morning. At most, it looked like she got into a bar fight. A bar fight that she successfully won.

Smirking, she dropped the mirror into her bag and zipped it closed before pulling the strap over her shoulder. Aside from one other person in the room, there was no one else. The warehouse didn’t have any typical changing rooms, so all of the woman were hauled up in an office space, while the men changed in a different area.

She always found it weird how Varrick forced these sort of “bonding” rituals for them. With other fight clubs, all you had to do was show up, fight, and then leave. But with Blackstone, if you did anything like that, you would be given the cold shoulder by everyone. That was one of the reasons why Korra wasn’t well-liked when she first came onto the scene.

She checked over her area to make sure she grabbed everything before heading out. The other woman in the room waved her goodbye and congratulated her once again. Korra nodded at her politely.

There was a backdoor at the end of the hallway that led to the area where a few people parked their cars. She shivered after pushing it open and a gust of wind blew in.

Finding Kuvira wasn’t hard since there weren’t that many cars. She was standing near her black Nissan Sedan with two other women—one with long, dark hair in a ponytail that reached the middle of her back, and the other with fiery red hair. They were all talking as they passed a cigarette around.

“That ref didn’t know shit!” the dark-haired woman, Jargala, said as Korra walked up. “I can’t believe he had the nerve to claim I was ‘finished’ when I was perfectly capable of going another round. Right, Ginger?”

“Whatever you say, babe,” said the red-haired woman, who soothingly rubbed her hand up and down her girlfriend’s arm.

“There you go with the refs again,” Kuvira said. “Just admit you can’t take a hit and quit it with the bullshit excuses.”

“Oh, fuck off.” Jargala rolled her olive-green eyes, but then she looked over at Korra and smirked. “Now let’s all turn our attention to the woman of the hour who beat her opponent in forty-five seconds. And in her first match on the main card, too.” Sarcastically, she bowed down.

“Try not to sound so bitter,” Korra said. She looked at Kuvira, who was now taking a puff from the
cigarette, and glared. “I thought you quit.”

“I only do it on occasions,” Kuvira said nonchalantly and passed it back to Ginger.

“She started back up again after you stopped giving up the goods.” Jargala shook her breasts but stopped once Ginger nudged her in the side with an elbow.

“You’re an idiot,” Kuvira said, unbothered by her comment.

“Maybe it’s the blood loss,” Korra offered and then pointed up at the three-inch gash going across Jargala’s forehead. “How many stitches did Kya have to give you anyway?”

“Ha. Ha.” Jargala laughed humorlessly but then lifted a hand to cautiously feel at her head. “Too many. Kya has good hands, though, so I wasn’t too bothered.”

“Does she now?” Ginger said, pulling away slightly, but still having a glint of humor in her eyes.

“Mhm. I told you before that I wouldn’t mind a threesome.”

“Can you guys not?” Korra said, making a disgusted face. “No one wants to hear that.”

“Since when did you become such a prude? Besides, I know you’ve probably done much worse.”

“Maybe it was the same day you became so shitty at fighting.”

Both Ginger and Kuvira started laughing, but Jargala just glared.

“I could beat you—the both of you,” she said, pointing between Korra and Kuvira, “anytime and anywhere.”

“That sounds like a challenge. I’d be down for that,” Korra said as she leaned against the car. “There haven’t been that many matches between any of us lately.”

“Well, if you did your homework, Korra, you’d know that it’s because fight clubs are becoming more popular and everyone wants to fight this one.” Jargala reached for the cigarette in Ginger’s hand and took a drag from it, then blew out the smoke to the empty space beside her. Afterward, she let the stick of tobacco fall to the ground and put it out with her foot.

“Like I give a shit where they come from,” Korra said. “All I care about is having a good opponent.”

“I’m going to throw up,” Jargala said. “You and Kuvira belong together. Both of you are fucking obsessive when it comes to this shit.”

“I think you could learn a lot from Korra,” Ginger said, giving Korra a flirtatious look. “She’s got a ton of skills.”

“And what would you know?” Jargala asked, narrowing her eyes. “You haven’t fought anyone in ages. I keep getting asked if you’re just a groupie these days.”

“And like a good girlfriend, you obviously tell them no.” Ginger patted Jargala’s cheek before giving her a chaste kiss on her pouty lips. “Don’t be mad. You know how I like it when you’re jealous.”

“Now I’m going to throw up,” Kuvira said and looked over at Korra. “Are you ready to go?”
“I thought you’d never ask,” Korra replied.

“Uh, excuse me?” Ginger stopped them and frowned. “Kuvira, you said you’d come out with us tonight.”

“Did I?”

“Yeees. And, Korra, you haven’t been out with us in weeks!”

“Clubbing isn’t really my scene anymore.”

“Oh, please,” Jargala said. “Just say you don’t want to come out with us. It’s no big deal.”

“Okay. I don’t want to go out with you guys.” She pulled out her phone from her coat and turned it on.

“Please, Korra?” Ginger’s hand covered her phone and she peered up at her with sad eyes. “First drinks will be on me. And we don’t even have to go to a club either. Right, Jar?” She turned and looked over at her girlfriend.

Jargala shrugged with indifference. “I don’t care as long as there’s drinking involved.”

Ginger turned to Korra with a satisfied smile. “So will you come now?”

Korra pressed her lips together. She was still on a high from her fight, and going out did actually sound like fun, however she was content with just going back home and reliving the moment in her head. And… maybe there was a small part of her that wanted to find out what Asami was up to. She said she didn’t have any plans tonight, so maybe she was just at home watching a movie or something. Plus, the night was still young, so maybe they could go get a drink and be low key like they were just a few days ago.

“Koorra.” Ginger poked her in the cheek.

Finally, Korra looked at her and then over at Kuvira, who was also waiting for her response as well.

“What do you want to do? It’s your car.”

Kuvira shrugged. “A few drinks wouldn’t hurt. It’ll have to be somewhere near my place though.”

Korra sighed. “Well I guess—”

“It’s settled then!” Ginger said before she could finish. “Let’s go to Club Cache!”

“I thought you said we didn’t have to go to a club?” Korra said.

“Well we don’t have to, but it’s only a ten minute walk away from where Kuvira stays. That way, we can all get freshened up and take our time.”


They all put their stuff in the back of Kuvira’s car, although it took a while because Jargala and Ginger had so much stuff.

“This is why I never take you guys anywhere,” Kuvira said after throwing her duffle bag in the passenger seat. “All of you will have to sit in the back.”
“Fine with us,” Jargala said. She dragged Ginger along with her to the other side of the car.

“You guys better not fuck beside me,” Korra said as she climbed in on the opposite side from them, clearly annoyed.

“Oh, please. We’re not rabbits,” Ginger said, but was contradicted when Jargala nipped at her throat after they sat down.

Korra rolled her eyes and pulled out her phone once again. She hadn’t looked at it since this morning. Surprisingly, she saw one message from Asami that wished her good luck with her match tonight.

The car started and Kuvira turned up the radio as some old, rock music blared from it. Jargala and Ginger were fooling around, not really paying attention to Korra, who was still looking at the message. Her thumbs hovered over the keyboard for a second before she finally decided to write back.

*Thanks. It went well.*

Thirty seconds passed before Korra saw the little ellipses appear to indicate that Asami was writing back.

*I’m happy for you. No missing teeth or anything?*

Korra smiled.

*Nope. Can’t say the same thing for the other person though.*

Asami responded back with a sad face.

“Ooh. Looks like someone’s making you smile,” Jargala said as she leaned into Korra’s shoulder and looked down at her phone. “Who’s Asami?” she asked, butchering the name completely.

“Do you mind?” Korra said, looking over at her with a glare.

“Oh, and she’s being secretive about it. A new boo, perhaps?”

Ginger gasped and pushed Jargala back to get a good look at Korra. “You’re seeing someone, Korra? Since when?”

“I’m not seeing anyone,” she muttered in agitation.

“So then a late night booty call?” Jargala suggested and elbowed her in the ribs playfully. “Damn. And here I was thinking you finally got all of the hoeing outta your system.”

Korra rolled her eyes and focused her attention on outside the window. She hoped that by not saying anything, they’d drop the subject. A second later, she got another text from Asami.

*Is there any way we can talk?*

Korra looked over at the two women sitting beside her. Ginger was leaning over Jargala to put her head between the two front seats.

“Did you know anything about this, Kuvira?” she asked in what sounded like a sympathetic tone.

“Am I supposed to?” Kuvira said from the front. “And can we all just mind our own business?”
“Is that why you wanted to stay in for the night then?” Jargala asked Korra, ignoring Kuvira’s suggestion. “Because if so, don’t let us pussy block you.”

Ginger covered her mouth. “Sometimes you’re too lewd for your own good,” she chastised and then turned her eyes back to Korra. “Why don’t you invite her to hang out with us?”

“Even if I was dating someone, I wouldn’t bring them within a ten-mile radius of you guys,” Korra said.

“You’d have to keep them around longer than a day to do that,” Jargala said once she successfully removed Ginger’s hand from her mouth. “You can literally get any man or woman you want, but you act like one of those assholes who’s ‘too afraid of commitment.’” She used air quotes.

“No one asked for your opinion.”

Just then, her phone started ringing. And, of course, it was Asami.

Her heart sped up as she held the phone in her hand and didn’t answer.

“Aren’t you going to get that?” Jargala asked, a mischievous look playing on her face when she saw the caller ID.

Korra ignored her and resumed looking out the window. She wasn’t going to answer the phone in a car of nosy people with no sense of boundaries. Asami was going to have to wait until tomorrow.

The phone was suddenly ripped out of her hands.

“What the hell are you doing!” Korra yelled. She reached over to try and take the phone back, but Jargala evaded her.

“I’m doing you a favor,” Jargala said and then answered. “Hello! You’ve reached Korra’s phone.”

Korra’s eyes widened.

“Hang up or I swear to God I’ll beat the crap out of you,” she threatened.

Jargala only rolled her eyes, but she listened intently to Asami, whose voice Korra could hear from where she sat, although she couldn’t make out her words.

“Yeah. This is her friend,” Jargala spoke into the receiver. Asami said something else and then she barked out a laugh. “You’re funny. Yeah, she’s got a few she keeps around. And speaking of, a group of us are going out tonight. Korra would love it if you stopped by. Club Cache if you’ve ever heard of it?”

Korra reached for the phone again and Jargala angled her body toward Ginger, who was now laughing hysterically; loud enough for Asami to hear over the phone.

“Jargala, cut it out and give her back the phone,” Kuvira said from the front and turned down the music as she drove.

The dark-haired woman ignored her and kept talking.

“Has Korra ever told you that you have a very alluring voice?” she asked.

At that, Korra finally had enough and yanked Jargala by the ponytail.
“Ah!” Jargala cried out and pulled the phone away from her face. Korra took that opportunity to successfully grab it out of her hand and then shove her away.

“Fucking asshole,” she muttered, but it was drowned out by Ginger and Jargala’s fits of laughter. She raised the phone to her ear. “Hello?” she said.

“Your friends must love messing with you,” she heard Asami say, sounding amused.

“I wouldn’t actually call them friends,” Korra said, giving the two beside her the side-eye. “More like acquaintances that I’d need to be really drunk around to not be annoyed.”

‘You love us,’ Jargala mouthed. Ginger hugged her from behind as they were leaned against the car door.

“How very blunt of you,” Asami said.

“When have you known me not to be?”

Asami giggled. “Very true.”

“Well, anyway, sorry about that. I’ll be sure that it doesn’t happen again.”

“It’s fine. I probably should have known you’d go out and do something afterward.”

“It was kind of a spur of the moment decision,” Korra said, scratching her cheek. She suddenly remembered Asami’s text right before she called. “Oh. Wasn’t there something you wanted to talk about?” Korra said.

“Uh, yeah. But it can wait.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay,” Korra drawled, unsure of what to say now. “I guess I’ll leave you to it then.”

“Does that mean I’m not invited to the after party?” Asami asked in a joking tone.

Korra paused and opened her mouth. She glanced over at the two women beside her who were making finger motions with their hands, urging her to speak more.

“I don’t know if it would be your scene,” she said and started playing with the door handle.

“Ah. I figured you’d say that.”

“But… if you wanted to come, would you?” Korra asked. Oh god. What was she doing?

“Oh, uh.” Asami seemed stunned by the question. “Yeah, I would. Would you want me there?”

“I… wouldn’t mind it. But I don’t want you to be uncomfortable or awkward.”

“I won’t make it awkward if you don’t make it awkward.”

“Um… okay,” was the only thing she could say.

“So I’m invited then?” Asami asked.
“Yeah.”

“All right. I can be there in an hour and a half or so. And then… maybe we could go to my place afterward and talk?”

Korra raised a brow in concern. “Okay… Are you sure everything is all right?”

“Yeah. I just… It will be. I’ll see you in a few. Bye, Korra.”

“Bye.”

The call ended and Korra brought the phone down from her ear.

Did that really just happen?

She had no idea what came over her. She didn’t even think about what all of the negatives to inviting Asami were… she just did it, and Asami actually agreed to it. They were going to hang out with Korra’s group of people, which was something very hard for her to imagine. Also, why did Asami sound so ominous on the phone near the end when she said she wanted to talk?

She was disrupted from her thoughts when she heard Jargala whistle.

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard you speak to someone so nicely before. You must have it bad for this booty call.”

Korra rolled her eyes. “Touch my phone again and you die.”

“Aw. Lighten up, buddy.” Jargala moved from out of Ginger’s arms and slid over to lean against Korra. “I have a feeling that someday you’ll thank me for this.”

“I’m not willing to bet on it,” Korra said monotonously and shrugged her off.

“I will say that whoever that was sounded sexy as hell. Then again, you’re always getting hot chicks. Except for that one time you were super drunk on New Year’s and tried to get it on with that greasy-haired blonde chick you kept insisting was from Game of Thrones. I don’t know what the hell you were thinking.”

Korra sighed. “What are the chances you’ll be on your best behavior and not say anything to embarrass yourself?” Korra asked.

Jargala shrugged. “Depends on how drunk I get.”

Now Korra was definitely regretting inviting Asami out tonight. It only spelled trouble. While she learned to be less hostile and speak with more restraint around Asami, none of the people around her would do such a thing. Except Kuvira, maybe.

She looked at the seat in front of her and saw the back of Kuvira’s head, focusing on the road. She hadn’t spoken a word since her phone call with Asami ended.

This really wasn’t a good idea at all.

Asami stood outside in the cold near the line where people were waiting to get inside of the club. She texted Korra a minute ago to let her know that she arrived and was about to get in line, but Korra told her to just go right up to the guy at the door and say her name.
Spontaneity was one word to describe her actions tonight. She didn’t know why Korra asked if she wanted to come out with her and her friends, but it made her happy that she did. After leaving the fight, she had it in her mind to talk to Korra and hopefully find a way to get out everything she wanted to say that night. She searched for her after the fight but was unable to find her and decided to leave. Luckily, Korra answered the phone earlier, and now Asami didn’t have to wait until tomorrow to see her.

But also, as quenched as her mind was from everything she saw tonight, Asami realized there was still a lot she didn’t know about Korra. Hearing her over the phone hanging around the people she surrounded herself with kind of made her feel… jealous in a way. They were people who obviously felt comfortable enough around Korra to joke around with, and Korra didn’t act like the type of person to be around just anyone. It made Asami think about how the two of them were still in this weird phase of something she couldn’t even put her finger on. Friendship? Acquaintances? But then, neither of those words felt exactly fitting...

She walked up to the man at the door checking IDs. He looked down at her expectantly. The hard features on his face made him look intimidating to say the least.

“Asami,” she stated. “I’m here with Korra.”

The man nodded. “Go ahead.”

Asami smiled at him and made her way through.

There was a walk-in area just before getting into the actual club. As she made her way inside, she ended up bumping right into Korra.

“Hey!” she said. Her hands reached out automatically to grab onto Korra’s forearms and steady herself. Korra seemed just as stunned.

“Hey. You made it in,” she said.

“Yup.” Asami let her go. “Thanks to you I didn’t have to wait in a line. Is that guy out there a friend of yours?”

“He owes me a couple of favors,” Korra said.

Asami smiled. She looked over Korra’s face and saw that she didn’t have any bruising or swelling, but under the dim lighting she couldn’t be sure.

“I’m glad you’re in one piece,” she said. “You look nice.”

“It’s a borrowed outfit.” Korra played with the blue button up shirt that tucked into a pair of dark jeans. It was hard to believe that only two hours ago she was beating the crap out of someone.

“You do, too.”

“Thanks.”

Just then, a group of people walked through the entrance and were headed inside the club. They both had to move to the side near a wall in order to let them through.

It felt so surreal to be in this environment with Korra. Asami wondered how many times she went out to a club with her group of people. Did she have fun and let out more of her wild side like before when she was a teen, or was she as chill and smooth as she was in the bar with her just a few days ago?
“This isn’t weird, right?” she asked, raising her voice loud enough to be heard over the music.

“No, it is,” Korra said with a smile.

“Well, should I go then?”

“No!” Korra said quickly. “It’s just that the people inside that I’m with can be a little bit too much at times. They’re pretty ruthless.”

“You’re pretty ruthless yourself.”

“True. But they are ten times worse.”

“So then, what should we do?”

Korra turned her head to the side, looking contemplative.

“Everything’s always complicated with us, don’t you think?”

“Do you really need an answer to that?”

It was a sound that Asami enjoyed every single second of hearing, but it didn’t last long enough in her opinion.

“I guess what I’m saying is that I don’t want things to be complicated with us for once. We should just go with the flow and not think too hard about it.”

“Okay.” Asami worried her bottom lip. She noticed Korra’s eyes lower for a second before meeting hers again. “If that’s what you want.”

“Yeah... It is.”

“All right.”

They walked into the club room after that with Korra leading the way and shouting back at her over the music to stay close. Asami did as told and didn’t lose sight of Korra. They were walking through the dance floor, where few people stood, but most danced. There was a Spanish song blasting from the speakers. It was a Latin dance club and it felt very fast paced with everyone moving in tempo with the music.

The room was filtered in purple and blue lights, but the booths had orange lamps inside them that gave more vibrancy. Korra led them over to a particular booth where two other women were sitting: one with red hair and the other with dark hair that fell over her shoulders and down to her waist. They were both very beautiful, however the latter was using her front facing camera on her phone to try and fix her bangs over a bandage going across her head. Once they saw her and Korra approach, they immediately stopped what they were doing.

“Well hello,” the raven-haired woman said over the music. “Korra, don’t be rude. Introduce us.”

Korra rolled her eyes and looked over at Asami. “This is Jargala and Ginger.” She looked over at the other two women. “This is Asami.”

Asami smiled. “Hello. I believe you’re the one I spoke to on the phone?” She pointed to Jargala.

“You remember my voice. I’m flattered,” she said.
Ginger stood up and addressed Asami fully, squinting her eyes. “You look familiar. Are you a commercial model?”

“Uh no,” Asami said, laughing nervously. Her pulse quickened. Since she never went out that much to public events, she was never really in the spotlight that much these days. The last time she was ever on the cover of a magazine was when she was named top successful entrepreneurs under 25 back in March. But that didn’t really generate enough buzz for people to call her out in the middle of the street.

“Well you totally should be,” Ginger chirped. "Your face and eyes would get you so many places in the modeling world.”

“Excuse her,” Jargala intruded. “She loves to vicariously live through other people after her failed attempt at an acting and modeling career.”

“I did not fail,” Ginger said. Asami finally noticed that she had one of those subtle but noticeable New York accents. “I’m just putting it off for the time being.”

“Uh huh. Sure, babe.”

Asami sighed in relief when the topic shifted onto something that wasn’t her. It almost felt like she was playing with fire now. Hopefully she wouldn’t run into any other issues for the night.

“Ah, finally!” Ginger said, looking over both her and Korra’s shoulders. “You were taking forever.”

Kuvira walked up to the booth and carefully placed the tray of drinks on the table.

“Next time, how about you go and wait in that long ass line,” she said, giving Ginger an annoyed look. She straightened up and looked over at Korra, and then her eyes finally landed on Asami. “Oh…”

Asami swallowed. Of course Kuvira was here. Why didn’t she think of that possibility before agreeing to come? And also, the bigger question was did Kuvira recognize her? Even with the low lighting in the warehouse, Asami clearly recognized her. And if Kuvira did identify her and actually pointed it out right now, that would be bad. Korra couldn't find out like this. Because if she did, there was no telling how she’d react.

“You must be Korra’s friend. I’m Kuvira.” She stuck her hand out.

Asami fought to keep the shock out of her face. Reaching out, she shook her hand firmly. “Asami.”

Korra, who was standing between them, looked very stiff for whatever reason.

“How about we all sit?” Ginger offered and looped her arm in Kuvira’s.

Asami went first and sat down, with Korra following right behind her. Ginger and Kuvira sat opposite to them with Jargala. Afterward, they passed each other their drinks. Asami was surprised to see that there was one for her, too.

“So, Asami,” Ginger said innocently while stirring her drink. “How do you and Korra know each other?”

“We’re, uh…” She looked over at Korra questioningly.
“She’s an old friend from high school,” Korra said. At the same time, she shared a look with Kuvira.

“Woah, seriously?” Jargala scooted in closer to Ginger and placed an arm on the table as she looked at Asami directly. “Please tell me you have some major dirt on her.”

“What makes you think I have any dirt?” Korra glared.

“Oh please. You’re the most private person I know, and that only means you have a lot of secrets.”

“Or maybe I just don’t like broadcasting my life out there like other people who can’t seem to live without their social media.”

“You sound like such a baby boomer right now,” Jargala said with a laugh. She reached inside her purse and pulled out a cigarette.

“Can you not do that right here?” Korra said.

“Why? It’s allowed.”

“Not everyone wants to be around your second-hand smoke all of the time and actually want to live.”

“Yeah, yeah. At this point, I’d rather die from cancer than hear you preach to death about it.”

Asami immediately looked away, but from the corner of her eye she saw how Korra’s head turned to hers with quickness. She hadn’t been prepared for that comment, nor did she expect to feel like someone just rammed her over with a car.

“Geez, Korra! Keep that evil face in the ring. It’s borderline scary,” Ginger said.

Asami finally looked over at Korra again and saw that, indeed, Korra had a murderous expression on her face, as if at any moment she’d jump over the table and strangle Jargala. Immediately she reached out for Korra’s arm and leaned close to her ear.

“Korra, it’s okay,” she said in a low, calming voice.

Because of how loud the music was, she doubted that Korra actually heard her. But then Korra turned her head, their faces ended up being closer than they’d ever been; so close that Asami finally noticed that there was a faint bruise that started to show up on Korra’s left cheek. But when she looked directly into Korra’s eyes, she saw that they held apology, a spark of worry, and regret in them.

“I said something insensitive, didn’t I?”

Asami reluctantly turned away from Korra to look at Jargala. All three women on the other side of the table were looking between the two of them.

“My mother… died from cancer,” she admitted slowly.

“Shit,” Jargala said. The sarcastic look she’d worn since Asami first saw her washed away as she dropped her cigarette back into her purse. “I’m an asshole.”

“At least you admit it,” Korra said, sounding pissed.

“It’s okay,” Asami reassured her. “You didn’t know.”
“Still. I apologize,” Jargala said sincerely.

Asami nodded and gave her a polite smile back.

“I guess I made things turn dark pretty quickly, huh?” she joked.

“You fit in pretty well with this group then,” Jargala said. “Kuvira over there loves using a shitload of dark-humor to cope with the fact that she’s an orphan.”

“And you only encourage her by awkwardly laughing along,” Ginger said, giving her a judgmental look.

Asami hesitantly looked over at Kuvira, who was stirring at her drink.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

Kuvira shrugged. “You can’t help who your parents are.”

Asami nodded. That was something she could definitely agree with.

“I guess the world still has a long way to go with being politically correct and what not,” Ginger said. “A lot of people just say shit and don’t think twice about how it could possibly affect the people around them.”

Jargala groaned. “Come on and cut me some slack. I just apologized.”

“All right, all right. I was just saying.” Ginger rolled her eyes and sipped from her straw. “Anyway. Asami, why don’t you tell us more about yourself?”

“What is this, a job interview?” Korra said before Asami could even open her mouth.

“You’re just scared she’ll say something that will incriminate you.” Ginger grinned.

“It would be interesting to learn what you were like when you were a teenager,” Jargala said. “But what I really want to know is if you were naturally born with that stick up your ass.”

“That would probably make you feel better, seeing as you were dropped on your head as a baby,” Korra retorted.

Ginger started laughing. “You two kill me.”

Asami smiled as well. It was fascinating to see Korra interact with these people. They all had attitude, but they had a ton of personality as well. And even though Korra looked irritated by them, Asami could tell that she was used to their behavior. Even if they weren’t her “friends” she was obviously comfortable enough around them.

Realizing she’d been looking at Korra for longer than normal, she looked away, only to catch Kuvira’s eyes on her.

“Can we just get a small bit of a hint of what she was like?” Ginger said, bringing Asami’s attention back to her. The red-head was clasping her hands together and looking at Asami in earnest.

Asami smiled.

“She was the realest person I ever came across.”
Korra looked at her finally. She seemed nonplussed by the answer. Asami only responded with a slight shrug.

“That’s so vanilla,” Jargala said and finished her drink in one go. “I wanted something juicy: like how many girls she was fucking in the bathroom stall.”

Asami’s jaw dropped and laughter erupted from the table.

“That look on your face just now was priceless,” Ginger said between breaths. “You’re too cute.”

The blood rushed to Asami’s cheeks. She never usually got embarrassed or flustered, but it felt like it happened a lot whenever Korra was involved these days.

“You know what we need? Water,” Korra declared and stood up. She looked down at Asami. “Wanna come?”

“Yeah.” Asami nodded and got up.

They weren’t too far from the bar, but the line was indeed as long as Kuvira made it out to be. Korra folded her arms and didn’t say anything as they waited. Asami couldn’t tell if she was irritated, embarrassed, or both.

“You were right about them being ruthless,” she said, loud enough for Korra to hear.

“Jargala loves the sound of her own voice. Especially when she’s drunk. Don't mind her.”

“She’s very straightforward and blunt. I like it. And I can tell that Ginger’s probably the peacemaker of you all. She’s nice.”

“What about Kuvira?” Korra asked and looked over at her.

Asami slightly paused.

“She, uh, seems cool,” she said. “I can’t really say anything about her personality, but she’s kind of on the quiet side. Like you.”

Korra nodded and looked away.

“Are you starting to regret agreeing to this?” she asked.

“No. Are you?”

"To be honest, I’ve been regretting it since the moment I got off the phone with you."

Asami laughed. "We've only been here for five minutes. It isn't going that bad. Besides, I know they mean well. And... I wanted to come."

“Why?” Korra asked, turning to her.

“Different reasons. But… I think one of the biggest ones was that I hoped you would want me to get to know this side of you. Kind of like how I want you to know me.”

She hated that she had to shout over the music, and that what she was saying deserved to be said in a private setting, but she didn’t want to deny Korra of anything.

Blue eyes met hers, and once again, they seemed to be searching. It was clear that she had
something on her mind that she wanted to say, but it never came. So instead, she looked away.

They eventually got their water and headed back to the table. Jargala and Ginger were hip to hip, talking in each other’s ears and giggling while Kuvira looked onward, obviously annoyed by them.

“Are they a couple?” Asami asked just before they made it back to the table.

“Mhm,” Korra responded.

They sat down and put the drinks on the table.

“Well that seemed a lot faster than the last time,” Ginger said.

“Yeah, we thought Korra may have snuck off with you in a corner somewhere,” Jargala said. “It’s not like it’d be the first time she did that.”

“You guys make her out to be some kind of player.” Asami looked over at Korra, smiling. “You’ve got that much game, huh?”

“Oh, like you wouldn’t believe.” Jargala laughed. “A few times, back when I was still single, I’d drag her along to all of the clubs. She’s like a magnet. And whoever she didn’t want, I was the second best in line.”

“That’s nothing to brag about,” Ginger said, pinching Jargala’s cheek and making her wince.

“It’s the truth, though! Besides, it’s been awhile since I’ve seen her like that. At least not since that whole thing started.” She pointed between Kuvira and Korra.

Korra tensed up again and Kuvira rolled her eyes.

“The next drinks are on you, Jargala,” Kuvira said.

“What? Why?”

Ginger sighed. “Babe, I love you, but you are so dense sometimes.” She leaned away from her to scoot beside Kuvira and place her head on her shoulder.

Asami tried not to have any sort of reaction to that reveal, but she did notice how awkward the atmosphere became. Korra and Kuvira were obviously uncomfortable, and that made Asami feel uncomfortable, too. The tension inside the booth was palpable and doing exactly what they both agreed to avoid. Would Korra not be so awkward right now about that comment if Asami wasn’t there? If so, that didn’t make any sense. She made it pretty clear that she didn’t mind Korra’s sexual orientation, hadn’t she? Or was it something else?

So much for not overthinking tonight. And it was far from over.

**TBC…**
Under the Flames

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The club was bustling, and the Spanish music continued to blast from the speakers, playing louder than ever. Since it was the peak hour, there were people everywhere and the room began to feel overheated from all of the bodies stuffed in one room.

Korra was tired of it.

This was usually the normal time where she’d want to call it a night and head home for a good night sleep, but that didn’t look like it was happening any time soon, especially when the people around her had other plans.

She looked around the room from where she sat, her eyes searching for the two people currently missing from their small group. But because the room was only filtered with purple and blue lights, it was too dark to actually see into the crowd. Korra’s irritation grew and she sighed out loud.

“You seem tense, Korra.”

Her eyes shifted from the crowd and over to Jargala, who was smirking. Kuvira sat next to her, stirring her drink as she looked at her phone.

Korra eyed her for a second before placing her elbow on the table and leaning forward.

“Let me ask you this question, Jargala: Are you trying to get under my skin tonight,” she asked.

“I get under your skin no matter what I do, don’t I?” Jargala said, looking amused. “But no, not really. It’s just nice to see you squirm for once.”

“I’m not squirming. It’s your girlfriend who went off to dance with another woman.”

“Ginger can do whatever the hell she wants. I don’t own her, nor am I feeling particularly threatened,” Jargala said coolly. "If you asked me, it seems like you're being oddly possessive over someone you allegedly aren't even dating.”

Korra sent her a nasty glare but turned her eyes back over to the crowd.

After a while of sitting and talking, Ginger started whining about wanting to dance. Jargala obviously couldn’t afford to move around that much because of her head injury, so she had to sit out. But Kuvira and Korra didn’t want to entertain her either. So when Ginger surprisingly singled out Asami and asked if she wouldn’t mind dancing with her, the sympathetic woman hesitantly took the bait and allowed herself to be pulled onto the dance floor before she could even properly say yes. The two of them hadn't been seen for the past ten minutes.

“I will admit that she’s hot, though,” Jargala spoke again. “She gives me cute, girl next door vibes. I wouldn’t say she’s your type in terms of personality, but if we’re talking looks then most definitely.”

“You know nothing about my type,” Korra said, eyes still glued on the crowd.

“Kuvira would know. Wouldn’t you?”
Korra’s eyes immediately shifted to the silent woman across from her, who casually sipping her drink. When Kuvira put the glass back down on the table, she gave Korra a knowing look.

“She definitely likes people who give her a challenge.”

Korra’s eyebrow quirked. “Does Asami seem challenging to you?”

“You would know her better than I do,” Kuvira said and looked away.

“This conversation is ridiculous anyway since I’m not even into her like that.”

“Yeah, sure.” Jargala snorted and took out a piece of gum from her bag and started chewing on it.

Kuvira suddenly got up.

“Where are you going?” Korra asked.

“Bathroom.”

“Is everything good? You’ve barely said a word.”

“I think I’m just tired. I’ll be right back.”

Kuvira walked off.

“Okay? That was weird,” Korra muttered. She’d known Kuvira long enough to know when there was something heavy weighing on her mind, and this situation kind of felt that way.

“You should go and have a talk with her,” Jargala said. “Something’s up.”

Korra looked her way. “Did she say something to you?”

“She doesn’t have to. It’s written all over her face.”

When Korra gave her a lost look, Jargala rolled her eyes.

“She’s clearly jealous.”

Korra started laughing.

“That’s ridiculous,” she said.

“Is it really?” she asked, not seeming to share the same amusement. “You guys dated for a while —”

“No, we didn’t,” Korra said immediately. “Both her and I know what that really was and never wanted anything more from it.”

“Really?” Jargala gave her a skeptical look.

“Yes,” Korra said.

“Have you guys even talked about that messy situation at all?” Jargala asked. “I mean, I don’t know exactly how that whole thing started, but it was awkward as hell when you guys stopped fucking around. I’m sure she must have some feelings about that whole thing still.”

"I don't see why. She's the one who ended it."
"And you really think that was easy for her?"

Korra bit the inside of her cheek. She was ready to chew Jargala out for talking about things she didn't know the first thing about, but at the same time she knew those words held some truth. Her and Kuvira really hadn't talked about the fall out of what happened between them. Kuvira just suddenly put a stop to things, which caused some straining between them for a while (and some slight bitterness on Korra’s end), but they were both professional about it for the most part and didn’t let it get in the way of their working relationship. But things were really good between them right now, and Korra wanted to keep it that way.

“If Asami comes back before me, don’t be an asshole,” she warned.

“Yes, ma’am.” Jargala mock saluted.

Korra got up and headed toward the bathroom. On her way, she looked around for Asami and Ginger but didn’t spot them. It was beginning to irritate her that she was feeling like she needed to have her eyes on Asami at all time. Asami was a grown woman, and Ginger was a relatively harmless person, so it really shouldn’t have bothered her so much. But still, seeing Asami interact with them was odd. It was like mixing her past with her present. Surprisingly, it wasn’t going as bad as Korra thought it would. Aside from Jargala’s uncensored remarks at times, Asami didn’t seem put off by any of them. It probably only made her even more intrigued knowing her.

She finally reached the bathroom and went inside. There was a group of women checking their faces in the mirror and chattering loudly, likely under the influence. She stood by a wall near the stalls and waited. About a minute later, a toilet flushed and Kuvira came out of a stall. She looked over at Korra in surprise.

“Hey,” she said as she walked over to a sink that wasn’t occupied to wash her hands. To Korra’s luck, the group of women finished with their pampering and made their way past her to go out the door. Once they were gone, Korra checked under the stalls for a brief second. When she saw that there was no one else but them inside the bathroom, she locked the door.

“You’re gonna piss a bunch of people off by doing that,” Kuvira pointed out as she dried her hands with a paper towel and looked at her through the mirror.

“They’ll deal,” Korra said as she walked over. “Are you sure everything’s okay?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Kuvira said but didn’t meet her eyes. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

“Well, I was talking to Jargala just now…” she started.

“Yeah…” Kuvira said, waiting for her to get to the point.

“And she kind of has this idea in her head that you’re... jealous or something.”

Kuvira looked over at her with a serious expression, and then laughed, similarly to how Korra did earlier at the accusation.

“It’s funny because I am. But not in the way she probably thinks,” she said.

Korra’s eyes widened at the confession.

“Really? Why?”

Kuvira didn’t say anything at first. Her expression became unreadable.
“She’s the friend you were talking about a few weeks ago,” she said matter-of-factly.

Korra swallowed but nodded. “She was.”

“I’m glad you’re working things out with her. She seems really genuine about you.”

“Thanks...” Korra rubbed at the back of her neck.

“And I think it’s pretty clear that she means more to you than you let on.”

Korra tried but failed to keep her shoulders from bunching.

“How did you get under that impression?”

“You can cut the bullshit now. It’s just us,” Kuvira said.

Korra sighed. This was exactly why she initially never wanted to bring Asami up to Kuvira. It felt so uncomfortable.

“I… may have had feelings for her back then, but that doesn’t mean I do now. Besides, she’s definitely straight.”

“Yeah, she does come off as straight.” Kuvira nodded in agreement and then paused for a moment, looking away, and then meeting Korra’s eyes again. “But from my perspective. The way she looks at you...”

“What?” Korra asked, feeling anxious.

Kuvira shrugged. “I don’t know... Not to sound like some sappy romance novelist or whatever, but it’s kind of like you’re the only one in the room she sees who matters; the only one who’s worth it.”

Korra had to force herself to breathe, and at the same time her pulse quickened.

“You’re just imagining things,” she said in denial. "She doesn't know any of you guys, so she's probably uncomfortable. And it's not like Jargala is making any of this easy with her big mouth.”

“It’s just my observation of things. And... I wanted to tell you that before I go on and tell you something I think you should know if you don’t already...”

Korra looked at Kuvira curiously. “What is it?”

“She was there at the fight tonight. I saw her.”

Korra’s mouth opened in surprise. “What?”

“I’m 95 percent sure it was her. And she was with Varrick. It didn’t look like they were having a friendly conversation either.”

“What did he say to her?” she asked immediately, ignoring the shock at what she was hearing for a moment and feeling worried instead.

“I honestly don’t know,” Kuvira said. “But she seemed a lot less calm than him and was getting in his face. One of his bodyguards had to step in.”

Korra’s mind spun. She was having a hard time picturing anything that Kuvira was saying because none of it sounded like Asami. Why was she even there? And how in God’s name did she get
wrapped up with a guy like Varrick in the first place? She should have pressed Asami on it the first time she mentioned Varrick’s name out loud to her. It pissed her off yet extremely concerned her at the same time.

Varrick, while looking harmless and physically inept on the outside, was a criminal mastermind. As if him being well-known in the black market wasn’t intimidating, the man had *multiple* targets on his back before and probably still did. He wasn’t someone you just casually bumped into on a street corner or found in a coffee shop. He usually sought *others* out. And the fact that Asami was somehow on his radar…

It suddenly dawned on her.

Was this what Asami wanted to talk with her about later? It couldn’t have been anything else, right?

“What do you think it means?” she ended up asking Kuvira, her voice echoing in the bathroom stall.

“I don’t know,” Kuvira said, shaking her head.

“Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“Because I didn’t know for sure until we all sat down, and this is our first time being alone together since the start of your match. Besides, I assumed you knew at first, but then I realized she never came up to us while we were there.”

Korra ran her fingers through her hair in frustration. Kuvira was right, of course, but she didn’t exactly feel like she was in her right mind at the moment.

“I didn’t know,” she said, folding her arms and sighing.

“What are you going to do?”

That was the same question she was asking herself.

Asami clearly wanted to talk about *something*, and from how she sounded on the phone, Korra was almost positive it had to be about what Kuvira just told her. Whatever it was, it couldn’t have been good, and that made her stomach flip with uncertainty and fear.

“I don’t know,” she said defeatedly. “She said she wanted to talk later but…” she trailed off, still trying to form her thoughts.

“You should hear her out,” Kuvira said. “Like I said before, she seems genuine and I find it hard to believe she’d be some sort of henchman of Varrick’s.”

“Of course not,” Korra said, feeling annoyed. She already knew that there had to be some deeper explanation behind this. But the fact that Asami was there tonight *again* without Korra’s knowledge alarmed her. It also made her think about how they were supposed to be working toward being honest with each other. How could Asami want that if she was sneaking around behind Korra’s back?

“Maybe she just got caught up in a bad situation and didn’t want to tell me,” she said out loud, trying to reassure herself.

“Yeah, maybe so,” Kuvira said. “But until you confront her about it, you won’t know for sure.”
Korra nodded but still felt weary.

“She confuses me so much,” she said and leaned her back against the sink. “And she thinks I’m the difficult one.”

“Would you say that she’s challenging?” Kuvira said, smirking.

“Don’t joke right now. I’m being serious here.”

The smirk slowly left Kuvira's face and she placed her hand on Korra’s shoulder, squeezing it. “Just keep an open mind. It’s not like we’re all that innocent either. We actually work for the guy.”

“Yeah, but she’s supposed to be better than that,” Korra said. “She is better than that.”

“You’re putting her on quite the pedestal,” Kuvira said. “But no one’s perfect, Korra. We all make mistakes and do things we’re not proud of sometimes. You of all people should know that.”

“It’s not about her being perfect. It’s just... She’s just too good of a person for this,” Korra admitted in a hushed voice.

Kuvira went quiet, and when Korra raised her head, she noticed that Kuvira was looking at her considerably. After a few seconds, she reached up and tucked a piece of hair behind Korra’s ear.

“If you know that, then I’m sure you guys will figure this out,” she said with a small smile.

Korra sighed.

“Now I’m wishing that all of this was just because you were jealous.”

Kuvira chuckled and dropped her hand. “I am. But for different reasons.”

“Why?”

This time, Kuvira sighed.

“Because she can actually give you what you really need.”

Korra frowned. “Don’t get all cryptic on me.”

Again, Kuvira smiled, though sadly this time.

"When you first told me about her, it was clear to me that the reason why you were struggling so much was because you were fighting the idea of opening up to her. You did it with me all of the time. But the only difference is that this time, with her, I think the small part of you that does want to open up actually won the battle."

Korra swallowed and looked away. "Kuvira..."

"No, it's okay," Kuvira said. "I know that it's hard for you. And I'm definitely not mad at all. I'm glad there's someone you can finally open up to about everything. Even if it isn't me."

Korra's chest throbbed. It made her feel like crap to know that Kuvira felt this way. Because, in all actuality, Kuvira should've been the one she could open up to after everything, but Korra always held back. And she knew it wasn't fair at all, but somehow that's just the way things were.

"You are important to me," she emphasized. "Everything that you've done for me in the past isn't
something I could easily forget. I hope you know that."

Kuvira nodded. "I do."

"And there's no telling what could happen. Knowing me, I won't end up telling Asami anything."

"Somehow I doubt that."

"Why?" Korra looked at her curiously.

"Let's just say I have good intuition." Kuvira folded her arms. "She isn't like the rest of us. She's calm, patient, respectful and kind. And maybe that's the type of person you need after everything you've gone through."

Korra looked down.

"Or I'd just end up ruining her," she said quietly.

Kuvira frowned. "What would make you think something like that?"

Korra shook her head. "It doesn't matter. It's never going to happen anyway. I've been there and done that."

"Well, technically, you can't really say you've 'done' that," Kuvira said.

Korra let out a breathy laugh, feeling the seriousness of the moment between them finally pass.

"You're an idiot."

"Well at least I've never fallen for a straight girl. Seriously, rookie, I thought you knew better than that."

"Yeah, yeah. I was young and dumb."

The sound of someone trying to get into the bathroom caught their attention. Then there was a loud knock and yelling could be heard.

"We should go," Korra said and turned toward the door.

"Hey." Kuvira reached for her arm. Korra faced her again. "Are you sure you're not going to give it a shot? With her, I mean."

"I already said I'm not into her like that," Korra said. The knocking outside continued.

"You aren't?" Kuvira asked.

"No."

"Really?"

"Really."

Kuvira continued to stare but said nothing else. Finally, she let go of Korra's arm.

"Let's head back," she said.

Korra nodded and turned quickly. She went to the door and unlocked it, but when she opened it, there were two women outside the door glaring at both her and Kuvira. She ignored them both as
they started yelling at her in Spanish and kept walking.

Her thoughts went back to Asami. They’d been treading so lightly around each other, being cordial and getting to know one another. But under the surface of that, there were a lot of things that the both of them were keeping from each other that needed to be said. It was starting to create an imbalance between them, and before everything fell off, Korra wanted to nip it in the bud.

But at the same time…

Everything was so peaceful between them. All of the lighthearted teasing, the long, casual conversations, and Korra feeling like she was finally able to let go and unravel fast from the grip Asami had on her. It was refreshing, and she found herself wanting to hold onto that.

It felt ridiculous since Korra could only count on one hand how many times they’d hung out in the past two months (and only two fingers for how many of those interactions weren’t of them fighting). So how was she letting herself crumble so easily? Why did Asami still have that power over her? It didn’t make any sense. And despite what Kuvira or Jargala said, her feelings for Asami were in the past and would stay that way.

So what if she was Korra’s first love? So what if ever since then she closed herself off and never let herself feel anything close to what Asami made her feel?

And even if she did feel something now, she was older, wiser, and knew not to go down that road again. It was impossible and not worth thinking about anymore.

Besides, first loves were meant to just be first loves, right? That’s why when they broke your heart, you got a better understanding of life.

Or, at least that’s what was supposed to happen, anyway.

Asami laughed when Ginger pulled her off the dance floor, making Asami twirl her as she did so. They were both sweaty and Asami could feel her hair sticking to her forehead, but she didn’t really mind it.

Ginger was fun and loved having the attention on herself by the way she dragged Asami to the middle of the dance floor and started moving to the beat as if she was the one to control it. Any time a guy tried to come up and dance between them, she’d wag her finger at them and tell them to get lost. Asami liked her a lot. She had a feeling that if Ginger went out by herself, she would’ve made a ball out of it anyway. The red-head had a lot of energy and it brought out more energy from Asami in return. It had been awhile since she allowed herself to go out to a club and dance. It would’ve been even more fun if she hadn’t been feeling so anxious.

They made it back to the table where Jargala was sitting there alone, drinking.

“Where’s the married couple?” Ginger asked as she sat down next to her and expertly took the drink from her hands to sip out of it.

“Bathroom. They’ve been gone for a while, though.”

“Oh geez.” Ginger rolled her eyes. “Are they having a lover’s quarrel?”

“Nope. Just a little talk.” She rubbed at the band aid on her forehead and hissed.

“Stop touching it,” Ginger said.
“It fucking hurts,” Jargala whined.

Asami worried her lip and looked around. Leaving Korra was the last thing she wanted to do. She was feeling paranoid about Kuvira suddenly remembering her and then ratting her out. But when Ginger practically begged her to dance, she couldn’t stop herself from saying no. Sometimes she really hated being a “yes” person.

Everyone around the table noticed the incredible amount of tension between Kuvira and Korra after Jargala made a reference to their relationship, so maybe they were off discussing that? And while she was curious about the context surrounding it, she knew that it was none of her business. And if she was going to ask about it, the only person she wanted to hear about it from was Korra.

She felt a hand touch hers and looked across from her at Ginger, who was regarding her seriously. Jargala also leaned forward with her arm on the table and a hand under her chin.

“Well they’re gone, here’s your chance to spill the beans,” Ginger said excitedly.

“What?” Asami asked, smiling in confusion.

“Are you and Korra really just friends?”

“Yes,” she said slowly and looked between the two women. “Why do you ask?”

“You guys are giving me vibes.”

“Same,” Jargala said, taking her drink back. “It’s not exactly sexual tension. But maybe something more on the emotional side? Or a mix of the two.”

“Exactly!” Ginger snapped. “You read my mind, babe.”

“You guys never messed around or anything?” Jargala asked.

Asami’s mouth opened slightly in surprise and shock at the two’s comments. They came out of nowhere, for one. And two, she hadn’t realized that this was what people were getting from her and Korra’s interactions.

“That’s a little invasive, don’t you think?” she said finally, a blush rising on her cheeks. “But no. We haven’t.”

“Weird.” Ginger pouted. “I’m usually always right about these things. You guys would make a hot couple, though.”

“I’m, uh, not actually attracted to women.”

“Ha! That’s even hotter,” Jargala said. “I’ve been with a few ‘straight’ women before and they were definitely questioning themselves after the deed was done.”

“You’re such an egomaniac.” Ginger rolled her eyes and then looked over at Asami. “So you’ve never thought about her in that way? Not even once?”

“No,” Asami said, but she noticed there was a split second of hesitation in her voice before she said it.

“Hmm. Well, either way, it’s good to see that outside of this group Korra has someone like you around. You know about what we do, right?”
Asami nodded. “I do.”

“Korra’s really talented,” Ginger complimented. “I think her main problem right now is learning how to stop taking herself so seriously.”

“As if that’ll ever happen,” Jargala said. “We don’t hang out with her all that much, but she can be cold as ice sometimes.”

“I’m… sure there are reasons for that,” Asami said, trying to come to Korra’s defense. Ginger and Jargala looked at her expectantly, but she bit her tongue. She didn’t want to talk about Korra anymore while she wasn’t there. Besides, it wasn’t a topic for any of them to discuss.

As if on cue, Korra and Kuvira returned. Asami scooted in and let Korra sit beside her again while Kuvira sat on the other side with Jargala and Ginger.

“What was taking you guys so long?” Jargala said, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively.

“Nothing your perverted mind is thinking about,” Kuvira said.

Asami looked over at Korra, who was already looking at her.

“Did you have a good time out there?” Korra nudged her head over to the dance floor.

“Yes.” Asami pulled her hair over to one side of her shoulder. “Ginger’s got some moves.”

“Damn right I do,” Ginger chimed in, although she sounded distracted.

Korra’s eyes never left hers. Something felt weird between them. Asami couldn't tell if she was just being nervous or if it was something to worry about.

Just then, Ginger let out a loud squeal that caused everyone to look over at her.

“Jesus. You’re gonna break someone’s eardrum,” Kuvira said, cautiously rubbing at her ear.

“Hasook’s having a party up at his penthouse right now,” Ginger said excitedly and showed Jargala the phone. “We’re totally going, right, Jar?”

“Hell yeah.” Jargala grabbed the phone and started typing on it. “And he owes me fifty bucks. Kuvira, are you down?”

“You guys have to come back to my place and get your shit anyway.”

“What about you guys?” Ginger asked, looking over at both Korra and Asami.

“Actually,” Korra started and looked over at Asami. “We’re going to have to pass.”

“Aww, really?” Ginger made a sad face.

“Are you okay with that?” Korra asked Asami.

“Of course.” Asami nodded.

As much as she enjoyed getting to meet Korra’s exuberant group of friends, there were things they needed to talk about, and she could feel herself growing antsy by the second.

Everyone got up from the booth and made sure to grab their stuff and put on their coats before
exiting the club. It took some time since there were so many people pushing and shoving. Korra helped lead Asami through the crowd, constantly checking behind her to see if Asami was still there. It was a small but nice gesture.

Once they made it out, Jargala sighed in relief.

“Thank God. It was getting so hot in there,” she said. “And we didn’t stay very long.”

“You guys were total killjoys anyway. Asami and I were the only ones who actually danced.” Ginger looked over at Asami and gave her a wink.

“I’ll make it up to you,” Jargala said. “Should we catch a cab here or walk back to Kuvira’s first?”

“I don’t really care,” Ginger said as she zipped her parka up all the way. “But actually, I could use a touch up and I need to charge my phone so let’s just walk back.”

“Sounds good. What are you guys gonna do?” Jargala asked Korra and Asami.

Asami looked over at Korra expectantly and Korra matched her look.

“Your place?” Korra asked, even though they already decided on that earlier.

“Mhm.” Asami nodded in confirmation. She yelped when she was suddenly pulled into a hug by Ginger.

“It was so nice meeting you, Asami. I hope Korra brings you around more often. Have a Merry Christmas.”

“Thanks,” she said and gave the woman a pat on the back. “Merry Christmas to you, too.”

When she finally pulled away, she grabbed Jargala’s hand. Jargala waved at them and then led Ginger off down the sidewalk.

Kuvira started following after them, but then she stopped and turned.

“I still have your stuff back at my place,” she told Korra.

“Oh yeah.” Korra rubbed the back of her neck. "I’ll come and get it tomorrow or something.”

“That’s fine.” She looked over at Asami for a second before looking at Korra again. “I’ll see you later. Text me.”

“Okay.”

Kuvira finally turned her eyes to Asami and, once again, stuck out her hand.

“It was nice meeting you, Asami,” she said.

Asami smiled and took her hand. “Nice meeting you, too.”

Kuvira gave them one final wave before walking off to catch up with Ginger and Jargala.

When they were finally alone, Asami looked over at Korra.

“You know, you could’ve gone with them if you wanted to.”

“I can only take Jargala and Ginger in small doses,” Korra said.
“Fair enough.”

They walked down the busy sidewalk in the opposite direction the other three left in and stopped on a corner to get a taxi. But since it seemed like everyone was trying to get one at the moment, Korra eventually just said screw it and pulled out her phone to get an Uber.

“Four minutes,” she announced.

“Awesome.”

Korra remained for a while, looking in deep thought about something.

“Everything okay?” Asami asked, fiddling with the hem of her coat nervously.

Korra’s eyes met hers and she looked contemplative.

“I kind of want to wait until we get back to your place.”

Asami swallowed but nodded. “Okay.”

They went quiet again, but Asami felt her stomach forming knots. She was nervous about what she would say and how Korra would respond. This could potentially end up ruining things, but at this point she was damned if she did and damned if she didn’t. All that mattered was that Korra knew the truth. After everything that happened with them, it was only right. She just hoped that any conflict between them afterward could be resolved. If it meant taking a few steps back, that was okay, but she didn’t want everything that they reached up to this point to dissolve.

The car came a few minutes later and they both got inside. The driver was annoying, trying to get them both to talk, but when they kept giving him one-worded responses, he finally gave up.

To distract herself, Asami repeated her work schedule for the next week in her head several times. She did that often when she had too much on her mind. In a weird, backward sort of way, it calmed her down and gave her the chance to gather her wits. She wanted this conversation between her and Korra to go well, and if she didn’t have her head on straight, she’d most likely end up blowing her chance at explaining herself properly.

When they finally got back to her place, she got out of the car and Korra followed after her. There was a gate right in front of her building that immediately locked up after 11 p.m. and needed a key. She pulled hers out and opened it to let them both in. Still, they didn’t talk, but Asami’s heart sped up more and more the closer they got to her apartment.

After what felt like a long elevator ride, they made it up to her floor. Her one and only neighbor had gone on a vacation for a whole month, so her floor was as empty and quiet as ever.

They entered her place and rid themselves of their coats and shoes.

“I didn’t realize how late it was,” Korra said, breaking the silence between them.

After turning the lights on in the kitchen, Asami looked down at her watch. It was just approaching 12:30.

“Do you have somewhere to be tomorrow?” she asked.

Korra shook her head, her eyes never leaving Asami’s.

Asami let out a deep breath.
“Korra.”

“Asami.”

They both stopped when they spoke at the same time.

“You can go,” Asami offered.

Korra nodded and folded her arms in the chilly room.

“I know you were at the fight tonight. Kuvira told me.”

Asami froze. Everything she wanted to say completely left her.

“She did?”

Korra nodded again. “She said she saw you and Varrick talking.”

Asami sighed and looked down.

“I can explain. I was going to tell you.”

“I know,” Korra said calmly, and Asami raised her head. “I know that’s why you were so eager to talk with me tonight.”

“I… It’s complicated,” Asami said. “Varrick and I had this deal where if I gave him something, he’d help me find you. But then he sent me a message earlier this week and wanted to strike up some kind of partnership that I didn’t want at all. I went there tonight to tell him that, but then I think he threatened me about telling you. And that’s where Kuvira came in and I walked away.”

She caught her breath. All of her words came out as a jumbled mess, and she only hoped she made sense. Judging by the look Korra was giving her, she thought she did.

Korra sighed heavily. “You really shouldn’t have done that.”

Asami felt a sinking feeling in her chest at the disappointment in Korra’s voice. “I know…”

“Varrick’s not a good person, Asami. He’s going to hold this over you forever.”

“I know…”

“So then why would you even want to risk that?”

“Because I thought he was the only way I’d get to see you. If I had known exactly where you were and how to get in contact with you, I wouldn’t have gone to him at all.”

Korra raked a hand through her hair and turned from Asami to walk over to the kitchen and sit at one of the stools at the island. Asami stood in place, not knowing what to do. She had no idea what Korra was thinking right now and it worried her.

“I’m gonna have a talk with him,” Korra said after a minute. “I don’t like the fact that he’s trying to reel you into something you don’t want and using me as leverage against you or whatever.”

Asami blinked. “That’s it? Aren’t you going to, like, yell at me or something?”

To her surprise (and relief) Korra let out a small chuckle, then she patted the seat next to her.
Hesitantly, Asami walked over. She sat down on the stool and clasped her hands together, struggling to meet Korra’s eyes.

“I had a good day today,” Korra spoke softly. “A good week actually. I don’t think I’ve ever been or felt so calm. And that’s pretty rare.”

“So… you’re not mad?” Asami asked with caution in her tone.

Korra made a face.

“I definitely wasn’t happy when I heard about it,” she said. “But I think I’m more confused about why you didn’t say anything than I am mad.”

“I didn’t know how you were going to react,” Asami admitted. “I’ll tell you what I had to do for him—”

“No,” Korra stopped her.

Asami looked at her incredulously. “Don’t you want to know?”

“No, I do.” Korra sighed. “Or maybe I don’t. I don’t know.”

Asami just stared, unsure of what to say. Korra looked conflicted, as if she was at war with her own thoughts.

“It’s stupid, but I feel like we’re in this bubble where everything’s fine and we’re not fighting for once. And there’s this part of me that wants to be selfish and tell you to keep it to yourself for tonight because I want it to end on a high note rather than a low one. It’s like I wanna press pause…”

“Pause…” Asami repeated. “Why?”

Korra let out a deep breath and glanced away. But then, bright, honest blue eyes met Asami’s, and her breath hitched.

“Because I’m not ready for the bubble to pop yet,” Korra said. “And because I want to give myself the chance to know you—really know you.”

Asami sat still, struggling to bring air into her lungs. She couldn’t believe that this conversation was taking such an unbelievable turn. Hearing those words was something she desperately wanted. She hoped for it. And yet it felt so undeserved. She wasn’t upfront with Korra about a lot of things, and they needed to be addressed. Korra was just delaying the process. However, if they could both give into their selfish desires for one night—press pause, as Korra said—then maybe it would lessen the impact.

“I should’ve warned you before, but I’m… kind of a train wreck,” she admitted, looking down.

The sound of Korra’s soft laughter made her lift her head.

“If you’re a train wreck, then I’m a plane crash.”

Despite the seriousness of the moment, Asami smiled. She didn’t know why, but she suddenly felt so emotional. Like a small, but heavy weight had been lifted. She still wanted to tell Korra everything, and she eventually would. But it was the fact that Korra was still being so patient and understanding that really moved her. The swirl of emotions was back in the pit of her stomach, as if
Korra sat on the edge of the bed, absentmindedly playing with a loose thread on her jeans. The light from Asami’s bathroom was on and she could hear her shuffling around for a couple of minutes.

Since it was so late, they both decided to eat a late-night snack (peanut butter and jelly sandwiches), and then proceeded to get ready for bed before going back downstairs to sit at the fireplace for a while.

Korra had no idea that things would turn out the way they did tonight, but she wasn’t complaining. Asami didn’t seem to have a problem with it either. The two of them still had a lot of things they needed to discuss and acknowledge, but right now, Korra was willing to put it all to the side. She felt like after everything, she wanted to give Asami the chance to show the side of her that Korra, up until now, didn’t want to get to know.

In the beginning, she’d been pretty adamant about keeping Asami at arms-length, but something changed tonight. Regardless of the whole Varrick situation, she found the honesty behind Asami’s words from earlier—about wanting to get to know each other—more moving and powerful than anything. She’d only ever felt that way one time, and coincidentally it was with the same person.

Just then, Asami appeared from the bathroom with a few things in hand: an unused toothbrush, a t-shirt, and some night pants. She also changed into her own pajamas as well.

“I hope these fit,” she said and handed them over. “It gets kind of chilly in here at night.”

Korra got up from the bed and took everything out of her hands.

“Thanks,” she said. “I guess I owe you one now.”

Asami chuckled. “This will be a never-ending game with us, won’t it?”

Korra smiled. “Maybe.”

“Well, everything else you need is in the bathroom. You can use whatever.”

“So generous,” Korra teased.

“Of course.” Asami flipped her hair behind her shoulder. “I’ve always been hospitable, haven’t I?”

Korra nodded. “You have.”

She walked by her and made her way to the bathroom.

“Just meet me downstairs. I’ll get the fireplace going.”

“Okay.”
Asami left and Korra went in the bathroom and shut the door. She looked at her reflection. Her left cheek was slightly puffy and would definitely bruise in the morning, but it was nothing compared to the fights she’d been in before, or the pain.

She went over to the sink and put Asami’s clothes on top of the clean countertop. Asami neatly set the face wash, toothpaste, mouthwash, and hairbrush out for her. Korra smiled. This felt so familiar; like old times. She remembered sneaking into Asami’s house in the late-night hours after a party and going into the bathroom to see her clothes already laid out for her. Sometimes Asami would be asleep before she came in the bedroom, but then there were the times she stayed up waiting. And when Korra was ready, she’d climb in Asami’s bed and they’d end up talking for the rest of the night.

After brushing her teeth and washing her face, she put on the clothes Asami gave her. She had to roll up the pant legs up at the bottom, but they still fit snugly.

Untangling her hair with her fingers, she went through it a few times after with the brush. She still had yet to get it cut, and now it grew just past her neck, barely brushing her shoulders. But to her admission, she liked the idea of growing it out this time around.

After finishing up in the bathroom, she turned the light out and walked out the room.

Asami’s place was so quiet. While the interior design was nice, it felt pretty empty. It reminded Korra of her own apartment and how she felt whenever she slept in it. But that stemmed from moving from place to place and never staying there often. The reason she barely had any of her boxes unpacked was because she was in the kind of mindset where “home” was just a place you slept and nothing more. If she had to pick up and move the next day, she’d have no qualms with it. She wondered if that was how Asami felt too, or something similar. Asami already admitted to not really sleeping there in the first place.

She walked down the steps of the apartment and saw Asami sitting in front of the fireplace, attempting to light it. When she heard a quiet curse, she smiled.

“Need some help?” she asked.

Asami turned and looked at her.

“It’s ridiculous. I can use a blow torch any day of the week, but I can’t even light a stupid fireplace.”

Korra walked over and sunk to her knees beside Asami. She stuck her hand out and Asami sighed in defeat before handing over the match and box.

Korra took them and easily lit the match. She threw it in the pit afterward.

“Thanks,” Asami mumbled and got up. She took a couple of pillows off the couch and threw them to the ground where they were sitting. There were two water bottles on the table and Asami handed them to Korra before walking over to the wall nearby to turn off the lights. The fire was slowly starting to build in front of them. There was also a lit candle from behind that gave them enough light so that they weren't completely in the dark.

“No Christmas tree?” Korra asked.

“Nah. I’m not really a holiday spirit kind of person these days.”

“You and me both.”
Asami sat down beside her once again and grabbed a pillow to place in her lap.

“Are you hungry still?” she asked. “I can get some chips or something.”

“No. I’m fine.”

“Okay… Did you want to watch TV?”

“I’d… rather just sit and talk with you if that’s okay?” Korra said.

“Of course that’s okay,” Asami said in a soft tone.

Korra nodded but didn’t say anything else after. She raised her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around them as she looked at the fire, waiting for it to grow and light up the room. Looking up, she saw the mantle with the photos and stared at them, even though she could barely see them in the dark. Her eyes always seemed to go to them every time for some reason.

“It’s weird,” said Asami. Korra looked over at her and saw that she was looking at the photos as well.

“What is?”

“A photo can tell so much, yet so little about your life,” Asami said. “In all of those photos, everything looks perfect and I’m clearly happy. But there were a lot of times where I really wasn’t.”

“No one has the perfect life,” Korra said.

“But everyone always saw my life that way. At least until…”

Korra watched Asami’s expression change. Her mouth drew into a deep frown and there was sadness in her light green eyes.

“You were always holding onto other people’s expectations of you and thinking you had to be perfect all the time,” Korra reminded her.

“That’s true,” Asami agreed and ran her fingers through her hair. “I think I drove myself crazy to the point where when everything wasn’t perfect, I just kind of… snapped. At everyone.”

“That’s hard to imagine.”

“Trust me, you left at the right time. I’m sure you wouldn’t have wanted to be around me.”

Korra looked away at that, ignoring the slight pang she felt in her chest.

“I’m sure you had Mako to look after you,” she said.

Asami let out a deep, breathy laugh.

“Quite the contrary actually. Him and I fought a lot more once you were gone. We were in this really awkward stage for a long time.”

Korra shifted uncomfortably. She didn’t know if she wanted to hear about this or not, much like how back then she didn’t want to hear about their relationship issues.

“But clearly you guys have patched things up,” she said.
“Yeah, but even that took a long time… and growth on our parts.”

The fire spread now, crackling and popping every so often to fill the silence. Korra didn’t respond. She wondered if Asami was trying to subtly imply something; like she was also speaking about them in the same instance. If she was, she hadn’t necessarily been wrong. Over the past few weeks, Korra felt like they’d both grown. Asami had a lot more patience, and Korra became a lot more reasonable. But the key difference was that Asami and Mako had so many years together to work through their differences, whereas for them it was coming several years later.

“I guess you can really tell who’s your friend if they can stick by you in your darkest moments,” she said.

Asami’s head turned and she looked at Korra intently.

“I don’t blame you for leaving, Korra,” she said.

“No?”

Asami shook her head and then faced the fire once more. It lit up her side profile and played with the shadows that danced across her face.

“I mean, how can I? You felt like you had no one on your side. And when you feel like you have no one, why stay?”

“It…” Korra started but stopped herself.

“It’s more than that,” she wanted to say.

“But you’ve clearly found someone who understands you now more than ever,” Asami continued.

“Huh?”

“Kuvira.”

Korra looked at her blankly, not understanding. “What about her?”

“Well, Jargala mentioned that you two were a thing earlier. And while you were off with Kuvira, her and Ginger talked about you guys and gave off the impression that you were still a thing.”

“Oh did they?”

“Yeah.”

Korra blew out a puff of air in irritation.

“They talk a lot. Especially about things they don’t even know.”

“So then it’s not true?”

“Well… yes and no.”

“Oh…” Asami said. “Well, it’s none of my business anyway.”

Korra pursed her lips together and looked away. She could feel some awkwardness coming off of Asami, but she couldn’t gauge what for. If anyone should be awkward, it was her. Her history with
Kuvira (as well as her sex life) was aired out all night long. If she hadn’t been so used to Jargala’s lewd humor and “I don’t give a fuck” attitude, she might’ve been more embarrassed. But still, them talking about it in front of Asami of all people made her uncomfortable.

“We’re not in a relationship,” she finally said. “I’m not even the relationship kind of person.”

“Why not?”

Korra sighed and pushed her bangs out of her face.

“Reasons,” she said cryptically and looked over at her. “In my eyes, all relationships do is cause more unwanted problems. And with all of my issues, I can’t really see someone wanting to be with me long-term. And I’m not waiting with bated breath either.”

Asami lowered her eyes. “Do those issues involve your lack of being able to trust people?”

“That’s part of it,” Korra said.

Asami went quiet.

“It’s because of me, isn’t it?” she said a few seconds later.

“What?” Korra furrowed her brows. “Why would you think that?”

Asami sighed. “Never mind. It’s silly. And maybe even a little conceited.”

“I won’t judge. Besides, I’m really curious now.”

Asami tucked her hair behind her ear and looked at Korra.

“I just… I know I really hurt you. And I know that you know it wasn’t my intention, but that doesn’t mean it didn’t affect you. I broke your trust and now you have trust issues, so I guess it wouldn’t be farfetched to think that I might have made you put off from wanting to be in a serious, committed relationship.”

“That’s… an interesting theory,” Korra said. She unwrapped her arms from her legs and placed them behind her. “But I had trust issues back then too, remember? I mean, I can’t lie and say they didn’t worsen after what happened between us, but you shouldn’t blame yourself for that. As for me not wanting to be in a relationship… That has nothing to do with you either.”

She left it at that and didn’t go any further. Instead, she grabbed one of the throw pillows around her and squeezed it.

“So you’ve never been in a relationship?” Asami asked curiously.

“Not a real one.” Korra squeezed the pillow again. “But these days I just stick to messing around and not making it complicated. Or, at least I try not to.”

“So you and Kuvira…”

“Her and I…” Korra sighed. “You know what you were saying about how you would drive yourself crazy to the point of snapping at other people?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, Kuvira is— was— like that for me. Except I wasn’t just snapping at her. When I first met
her, I was in a... really dark place at the time. And I’d take all of my frustrations and anger out on her because she was the only one who was there.”

Asami looked away, pondering for a moment. “So when you say *all* of your frustrations, you mean —”

“All of my frustrations,” Korra said with a nod.

“Ah.” Asami’s eyes averted to the ground.

“I know Jargala said a couple of things about me tonight that might make you see me differently. I could you tell she was wrong, but she’s not. Casual sex isn’t for everyone, but for me, it works.”

“No. I’m not judging,” Asami said quickly. “That’s not what I was thinking at all. It’s just that I… can kind of relate to what you’re talking about.”

Korra’s eyebrows raised. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Asami said and didn’t meet Korra’s eyes.

“Should we change the subject?”

“Yeah. Or maybe just get back on topic?”

Korra nodded. “Okay.”

“So to summarize it all up: You and her used to be a thing, but now you’re just friends?”

“Correct.”

“That isn’t awkward or anything?”

“Is it awkward between you and Mako?”

“...Touché.”

Korra smiled and stretched her legs out in front of her.

“Her and I are too alike. We’re both hotheaded, pushy, and overly competitive.”

“Is that why it didn’t work out?” Asami asked.

“No. It all comes back full circle with my trust issues. She got tired of my lack of confidence in her, so she ended it and told me that we needed to keep it professional.”

“So then I *am* partially the reason,” Asami said, frowning.

“There are a lot of reasons why I don’t trust people these days. It’s not all because of you, Asami.” Korra lightly bumped into her shoulder. “Don’t be so conceited.”

Asami looked over at her and smiled, but then it slowly went away.

“I’m really sorry, Korra,” she said.

It was unexpected—the wave of pain caused by those words that made Korra inhale and exhale deeply. As hard as she wanted to ignore it, she still felt it in her core. After going for so long without caring about people being unable to understand her or why she was so closed off, deep in
her mind she beat herself up about it. Because she knew the reason for all of her failed relationships with the people in her life were because of her.

“Don’t worry about it,” she said a few seconds later, pretending to be unbothered. “Besides, I’d be an idiot to trust three quarters of the people I know now.”

“But there’s the one quarter that you can trust,” Asami challenged. "People like Kuvira, right?"

“You’re really stuck on this whole me and Kuvira thing, aren’t you?”

“Well, I don't know.” Asami shrugged. "I mean, you guys seem really close. I saw that the first time I watched you fight. She seems like someone who has supported you and encouraged you for a while."

“That’s what coaches are supposed to do. Although, we don’t really have to worry about that anymore since she isn’t coaching me.”

“Really?” Asami said in surprise.

Korra nodded. “That’s also another reason why our little affair was messy.”

“That makes sense. But then… Maybe it could eventually work out now? Even if you guys share those same personality traits, that’s nothing that can’t be worked through. Especially if you care about each other.”

“Is this you giving me your blessing?” Korra asked, slightly teasing.

Asami looked at her seriously. “I just think you should be with someone who will treat you right and who you can be open with. I don’t want anything to hold you back from that. And you shouldn’t either.”

Similarly to earlier with Kuvira, Korra felt a throbbing in her chest. If she didn't know any better, she'd guess that the two of them teamed up and planned to say all of the same things to her. However, she did know better.

Asami always had a way with words that could move Korra like no other. And it was because when she said them, you could tell she actually meant them. But more than that, her saying what she just did made Korra feel like she could believe it.

Asami was more than calm, patient, respectful, and kind. She was a lot more.

“Kuvira’s my friend, but we both know that making it anything more than that is just a recipe for disaster,” she said finally. "We have mutual respect for each other, and I'm fine with keeping it that way. It needs to be that way."

Asami nodded. “I get it.”

“I’m still surprised you reacted so calmly to the fact that I’m into women.” Korra switched topics.

“Why? Did you expect me to act like some disgusted homophobe?” Asami asked, sounding offended.

“Well, no. I… honestly don’t know what I expected.”

“I just can’t believe that I never knew, or that you didn’t at least tell me.”
“I thought you would’ve figured it out a long time ago.”

“Nope,” Asami said. “I was completely clueless. And you said a few people knew?”

“Knew or speculated,” Korra said.

“No one ever confronted you, did they?” Asami asked, sounding worried.

“Nah. The most I’d get were odd looks and glares. And then there were the ones who knew how I
felt about you… I don’t know how many people it was, but the word always traveled fast in that
school, which is why I’m so surprised it never got back to you somehow.”

“Did you like any other girls before me?” Asami asked.

“Nope.” Korra shook her head. “You were the first.”

“Wow,” Asami said.

“But I didn’t like you specifically because you were a girl, if that makes sense. I mean, don’t get
me wrong, you were always beautiful to me, but it was everything about you as a person that won
me over first. I honestly thought you’d be the only girl I’d ever be attracted to.”

Asami didn’t respond, but Korra could see under the yellow and orange light that her cheeks were
beginning to redden. She looked like a mix between shy and embarrassed.

“You’re being so honest,” she said.

“Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Well, yeah… But hearing you talk about me that way after everything is…”

“Embarrassing?” Korra offered.

“Among other things.”

Korra nodded and played with the tassels attached to the pillow.

“I didn’t really want to make a big deal out of liking other girls, though. Mainly because I didn’t
feel that kind of pressure that other teens did about coming out. I didn’t care.”

“You were worried about me finding out,” Asami reminded her.

“I didn’t care if people found out that I liked girls,” Korra clarified. “People telling you that I had a
thing for you was mortifying to me.”

“You could’ve just told me,” Asami mumbled. “But I get it. You didn’t want things to change
between us.”

“Right.”

They sat there for another few minutes in comfortable silence.

“And you?” Korra said after a while.

“Hm?” Asami raised one knee and rested her head on it.

“How’s life like for you in the dating pool?”
Asami’s face scrunched up. And if Korra were to be honest with herself, she found the expression quite cute.

“I don’t have the time,” Asami said. “I haven’t been on a date in a while. Unless you want to count casual business dinners.”

“Mako doesn’t take you out from time to time?”

“We go out, but not on dates.”

“Mm.” Korra continued playing with the pillow.

“We really are just friends, Korra,” Asami said. “We learned a long time ago that being a couple didn’t work for us.”

“You don’t have to explain,” Korra said, dismissing the subject. She didn’t know why she kept bringing up Mako in the first place. All talking about him did was irritate her, and she didn’t want their conversation to go that way. But now, she couldn’t come up with anything to say, so she just stayed quiet. The moments of silence between them were comfortable anyway.

When she finally looked over at Asami again, the dark-haired woman had her eyes closed as she lay her cheek against her knee. She looked serene under the warm light illuminating from the fire that warmed them both. Korra found herself unwilling to look away.

And then green eyes opened and settled onto hers. Neither of them said anything, or looked away, and Korra held her breath as her pulse quickened. There was so much intensity behind that look Asami was giving her. It was similar to how Asami would, on a few occasions, look at her with that weighty look in her eyes without even knowing she was doing it. Korra suddenly felt hot, like another small fire was building, but this time inside of her. If Asami kept looking at her like that...

“Are you tired?” she asked after finally finding her voice. It was lower than normal.

Asami blinked, as if coming out of a trance, and then slowly nodded.

“Yeah,” she said.

“I guess we should go to bed then.”

Asami nodded again and then looked away from her finally. She stared at the fire one last time and then got up to turn the lights on. Together, they put out the fire and cleaned up the mess of pillows they made.

“Did you want to sleep down here or…” Asami trailed off.

“It’s whatever you want,” Korra shrugged. “If you have an air mattress upstairs, then that’s fine.”

Asami frowned. “Why would I have you sleep on an air mattress? My bed’s plenty big enough for the both of us.”

Korra kept herself from looking surprised.

“You’re comfortable with that?”

“Well, we did share a bed all the time whenever you slept over,” Asami said. “Unless you’re uncomfortable with it?”
“I’m not.”

“Okay.”

That solved everything apparently, and they headed upstairs to Asami’s room. Korra saw that it was raining outside from Asami’s small patio. It was loud enough to hear, but soft enough to create a calming atmosphere, similar to the one downstairs. The only light inside the room came from an oil lamp that plugged into the wall.

They both walked over to either side of the bed and pulled back the sheets before climbing in.

“It’s really soft,” Korra mentioned as she lied back and rested her head on the pillows with a sigh.

“Yeah. It usually puts me to sleep fast.”

“Even though you barely sleep in it?”

“I do sleep in it,” Asami said, turning on her side to face Korra. “There’s just a couple of times where I accidentally sleep elsewhere… or not at all.”

“That’s insane. You should sleep more,” Korra scolded.

“Noted.”

Korra closed her eyes and let the sound of the soothing rain wash over and calm her. She felt hyper-aware of Asami being next to her. There was a reasonable amount of distance between them, but being in bed and having Asami so close made her feel self-conscious. Asami always had a dominating presence, no matter where she was.

Which reminded her…

“You saw my fight?” she asked.

It was silent for a few seconds.

“I did,” Asami responded quietly.

“What did you think?” Korra opened her eyes and looked over at her.

“It went by pretty fast. I don’t even think I blinked.”

Korra laughed.

“What else?”

“You were really fast,” Asami said.

“Is that all?”

Asami gave her a knowing smile. “Are you fishing for compliments right now?”

“I might be.”

Asami rolled her eyes.

“You were amazing, of course,” she said. “But I’m pretty sure you already knew that.”
“Yeah, but I don’t mind being told again from time to time,” Korra said. When that pulled a laugh from Asami, she couldn’t help but smile herself.

“You’re so cocky. Even in the ring, I could tell that you knew you were the real deal.”

“It’s all part of the persona. It’s not like you can walk in there being a chicken shit. I’ve known a few people to talk big outside the ring, but once they’re actually standing in it, they’re shaking in their boots. That’s why I hated being an undercard.”

“Undercard?” Asami looked at her curiously.

“Basically the appetizer before the main course,” Korra explained. “I’d get matches every now and then, but I was never a main event, nor did I fight as much as I wanted.”

“Ah, okay. I understand,” Asami said. “So now you’re a main event?”

“I’m on the main card, yeah. That first time you came and saw me was actually my first time main eventing.”

“Really?” Asami said in surprise.

“Mhm.”

“Huh. That’s interesting,” Asami whispered to herself. She looked perplexed by something.

“What are you thinking?” Korra asked.

Asami looked at her, but she seemed hesitant.

“If I tell you, you can’t laugh or make fun of me.”

“Okay?” Korra said, amused and turned on her side to face Asami more. The dark-haired woman worried her bottom lip between her teeth and Korra’s eyes immediately fell to it. God, why did she always have to do that?

“Don’t you think it’s too much of a coincidence that I showed up during your first time as a main eventer?”

“Uh, sure?”

“The only reason I knew you were back and in a fight club was because I was in a bar one day and randomly heard some strangers talking about you.”

Korra raised a curious brow. “What are you saying?”

Asami lifted a shoulder but kept her eyes locked on Korra’s.

“That maybe there’s a reason why those things happened. Maybe because they were supposed to.”

Korra stopped breathing for a second.

“You really believe that?” she asked after a beat.

“I do. I don’t really have an explanation for it, but maybe it doesn’t need one? I didn’t hear from you for years and suddenly we’re here right now. That’s not a coincidence for me.”
Korra’s heart hammered against her chest, threatening to burst free from her ribcage. She felt her lips go dry and wetted them, but she noticed Asami’s eyes flicker downward for a second before meeting hers again.

“Who knows?” Korra whispered.

“Or I’m just crazy,” Asami said.

“Or that, too.”

Asami laughed again, breaking the intensity of the moment, but her eyes were shining in the darkness. Korra could see the small dimple she had in her right cheek whenever she smiled so brightly. And she laughed so freely that Korra found herself wanting to listen to it all night and into the morning. Just like back then.

Fuck. She was so screwed.

Asami covered her mouth as she yawned.

“What time is it?” she asked.

“I don’t know. I lost track.”

Asami turned away for a second and looked at the alarm clock on the night stand.

"It’s 3:30 in the morning," she said and faced Korra again. A small smile appeared at the corner of her mouth. "This gives me memories. Good ones."

Korra knew how she felt. All those nights they spent up together just talking about anything, whether it was serious, or it involved so much laughter that they both had to remind each other to be quiet. Those were the only times Korra thought she’d never be able to leave New York.

“Thanks for having me over,” she said, her voice very quiet.

“Thanks for staying,” Asami whispered just as quietly. Her eyes were drooping, and she was struggling to keep them open.

“Goodnight, Asami.”

“Night, Korra.”

Asami turned away and closed her eyes, relaxing more against the pillows. A couple of minutes passed, and just like that, she was out like a light.

After watching her, Korra turned onto her back and let her eyes close.

A lot happened tonight, and some of it was things that Korra couldn’t even begin to decipher. But one of the things she realized was that her and Asami’s relationship was slowly beginning to take a turn on her side, and if she wasn’t careful, she’d end up exactly where she was a long time ago.

However, she realized that this could all be a ruse she was playing on herself. She was just remembering good times and old feelings because of how they were acting around each other now and how familiar it was. It would surely pass. At least, she hoped it would.

Instead of dwelling on it more and driving herself crazy, she focused on her breathing and the sound of the rain so that it would lull her to sleep.
Chapter End Notes

I listened to "Equation" by Sinead Harnett A LOT when I wrote this.
It was still dark in the room (aside from the oil lamp bringing in some light), meaning that only a few hours had passed since they both went to sleep. The rain hadn’t let up either, and occasionally there would be a rumbling sound of thunder in the distance, along with some flashes of lightning.

Asami listened to it for a couple of minutes before opening her eyes finally. She looked over at her alarm clock on her nightstand and saw that it was only seven in the morning. It didn’t surprise her that she got such little sleep or that she woke up so early. She was used to being awake much earlier than that, after all. But since she hadn’t planned on going into the office, or doing much of anything for the weekend, she could afford to sleep in longer than usual.

She turned over onto her right side and faced the lump beside her bundled in sheets. Korra was on her back, her chest rising up and down in a steady rhythm as she snored softly through her mouth. Her forehead was creased in the middle while she dreamt of something Asami could only imagine. Was it intense, unpleasant, or scary? Korra used to always make the weirdest of faces in her sleep, and a lot of the times Asami would have to stifle back her laughter. But this time, in the darkened room and with the soft pitter patter of the rain outside, she really looked at Korra, and she was surprised to see the innocence on her face that made her look so vulnerable and unguarded.

It almost felt surreal that Korra was asleep beside her right now. Their entire conversation a few hours ago was still fresh in her mind. She meant every word of what she said, and she could see by the look in Korra's eyes that she believed her. They were both so honest and open with each other, and it amazed Asami how much she got to learn about Korra in that one or two-hour long talk. She felt so grateful that Korra actually stuck around and offered no opposition to sleeping over, let alone in her bed. Asami couldn’t help but smile a little.

She didn’t know if it was intuition or just her being hopeful, but it really felt like they were on the edge of reaching the point of something. Could it be friendship? Or were they friends right now? And was it possible that they were slowly starting to fall back into the kind of friendship they had before? She didn’t want to get ahead of herself, but something just felt so incredibly right between them. Even during their quiet moments, Asami still felt at ease. Between Korra’s openness and her patience, there was definitely a shift in their dynamic. Asami only wished she could put her finger on it. But she was happy nonetheless. She understood what Korra meant about wanting to put things on pause. It gave them more of a chance to appreciate what was happening right now.

Remembering what Korra said about how she wanted to get to know her too made her stomach flutter. Knowing that she felt that way made Asami giddier than she probably should have been. But now that they established that, it made her a lot less panicked than before. No matter what happened, she would remember last night and hold onto it dearly.

With her mind feeling somewhat cleared, she shut her eyes. She felt the warmth from the sheet, as well as Korra’s body’s heat, and relaxed. As she drifted off once again, she wondered how long it had been since she hadn’t felt so cold in her bed, or how the warmth of another person beside her made her feel so comforted.

By the time she could remember, she had already fallen back asleep.

Korra stirred before opening her eyes. The unfamiliar scenery almost made her shoot out of bed in a panic, but after remembering, she instantly relaxed. Looking over, she saw that Asami was still
asleep with her back turned. Her long, dark hair splayed out on the pillow like a curtain. Korra stared for a solid ten seconds before looking away.

She sat up and instantly felt the throbbing pain in her face. With a raised hand, she touched at her cheek and winced, but gently rubbed at it in circles, trying to relieve some of the tension. Her head was slightly throbbing as well, but that was nothing some ibuprofen couldn’t fix.

She pulled the covers off and then carefully made her way out of the bed in order to not wake Asami. Afterward, she wandered into the bathroom and opened up a medicine cabinet. Her eyes searched for a couple of seconds before landing on some Advil. She grabbed for the bottle and uncapped it, taking out three pills and putting them in her mouth, then she used the water from the tap to swallow them down.

When that was done, she threw some water on her face and then went to brush her teeth. When she looked in the mirror, she saw the bruise beginning to form on her cheek. It wasn’t that bad, but it was noticeable.

Asami walked in a minute later, surprising Korra.

“Did I wake you?” she asked between brushing.

Asami groggily shook her head and reached for her own toothbrush. Figuring that she was still trying to wake up, Korra didn’t say anything else. If she remembered correctly, Asami was usually always grumpy after waking up.

She finished brushing her teeth in silence and then walked out of the room to give Asami some privacy, which she thought to be appreciated after hearing the door close behind her a few seconds after leaving.

Yawning, she went back to the bed and got under the covers. It was cold in the apartment and the drizzle from outside made her want to stay inside forever. Lying back, she closed her eyes, listening to the rain as she thought about everything that happened in the past twenty-four hours. In retrospect, winning her first fight on the main card took a backseat to everything else.

Last night had definitely been something. Korra felt lighter but weird at the same time. What her and Asami shared about each other was nice, and Korra felt like they were finally getting to understand one another; however, in the forefront of her mind was the stuff she thought about right before going to sleep…

It was possible that she was just overthinking things after Kuvira gave her own perspective of how she perceived Korra's relationship with Asami. There was also all of the nice things that Asami said about Korra that didn’t help her train of thought. She wanted to say that she was just confused, but that sounded like a lie even in her own head. And if that wasn’t the case, then that meant she was actually starting to have feelings for Asami again, which sent her mind into a slight panic mode.

She felt it last night: all of those old, long-buried feelings returning to the surface again and turning her world on its head. It was crazy and almost made her want to head straight for the door, but she stayed in place. There was still the possibility of what she thought before about this all being a ruse, so she tried holding onto that idea instead of freaking herself out even further.

The bathroom door opened some minutes later and Korra raised herself on her elbows. Asami walked out and, upon seeing Korra in bed, came over to lay down beside her. Her hair was now tied back, and her face looked freshly washed and oiled. She looked over at her nightstand before turning to Korra.
“Did you know it’s the afternoon already?” she asked, her voice still sounding like she just woke up.

“It feels like it,” Korra responded, trying to keep the edginess out of her voice.

“I haven’t slept in this late in a long time.”

"How do you feel? Hungover?"

"Nah. I kind of feel... sort of refreshed in a way."

Korra hummed. “You probably needed the sleep. You being a workaholic and all is finally catching up with you.”

“Maybe.” Asami yawned and then turned on her stomach. She folded her arms beneath her head and looked over at Korra tiredly. “How’d you sleep?”

“Fine.” Korra cleared her throat.

“At least you didn’t kick me this time around.”

“I don’t kick.”

“Oh, you definitely do.”

Korra rolled her eyes, feeling the easiness between them before coming back.

“Well I guess you’re lucky then. I give hard kicks.”

“Yes, you do. My shins can attest to that.” A small smile appeared at the corner of Asami’s lips, but it went away after a minute and her expression looked concentrated—as well as concerned—as she stared at Korra’s face and lifted her head from the pillow.

“That looks like it hurts,” she said.

Korra touched her bruised cheek.

“It’s no worse than a papercut for me,” she said.

Asami frowned. “That’s not a comforting thought, you know?”

Korra laughed. “I guess I’m not used to someone worrying about me getting my face busted up every now and then. It’s kind of the normal.”

"You don't get odd looks on the street?"

"I try not to draw attention to myself. However, a lot of people here are too busy with themselves to really notice or care."

“You've never had anything broken before, have you?” Asami asked.

“I had a tiny fracture in my nose once, but other than that, no.”

Asami hummed and faced forward, resting her chin on her forearm. She looked at the wall, appearing in deep thought.

“I’m glad I got to see you in your element, even though I didn’t enjoy watching you get hit.” She
looked at Korra again. “You looked really happy and content up there.”

Korra looked away for a second. She wasn’t exactly sure what to say to that. While it was true that fighting and winning satisfied her, did it really make her happy? When Kuvira told her that in the beginning she wasn’t sure if Korra’s heart was really in it, she was right to have questioned her motive. It wasn’t always about being the best for Korra or getting recognition and praise. More than any of that, it was about escaping.

“What are you thinking right now?”

Korra’s head turned at the softness in Asami’s voice, and she looked into equally soft green eyes. Asami patiently waited for her response as she stared back.

“I think it’s something I enjoy, for sure, but it’s also something that…” she stopped herself. Asami’s gaze was still locked on hers as she listened intently. Korra swallowed. “It keeps me from being more reckless than I already am,” she finished.

Asami nodded, as if she understood, but Korra knew that she didn’t.

“Do you see yourself doing it for a long time?” she asked.

Korra shook her head. “It’s a dangerous game, and I’ve been in it for a while, but I don’t want to constantly have to look over my shoulder or watch my back, ya know?”

“That must be scary.”

Korra shrugged. “It’s part of doing it for the thrill of it, I guess.”

“But what if you get caught?”

“Then I guess I’ll be living in a real-life Orange is the New Black situation,” Korra joked.

“That’s not funny,” Asami said seriously.

Korra sighed and brought her hand up on the pillow between the two of them.

“I know,” she admitted. “But you’ll just have to believe me when I say that nothing bad will happen. Varrick has it under control.”

Asami still looked apprehensive, but she didn’t say anything. Instead, she averted her eyes to Korra’s hand between them.

“How’d you get that scar?”

Korra glanced over at the old faded mark going across her knuckles.

“I punched a mirror.”

Asami’s eyes immediately lifted to meet hers and they held each other’s gaze for a long, silent moment.

“That must’ve really hurt,” Asami said quietly. There was no judgement in her tone.

Korra nodded slowly. “At the time, I don't think I really felt it at all.”

She vaguely recalled that moment. It went by in a blur. One minute she'd been staring at herself in
her bathroom, and then her fist was suddenly going through the mirror. There was the sound of glass shattering and the feel of it splitting her hand open. It was an out of body experience: all of the blood, her hysteria, Kuvira all of a sudden being there and screaming at her, the trip to the hospital... It almost felt like a completely different life and, in a way, it kind of was.

Asami went quiet again after digesting that and turned around on her back. She folded her fingers on top of her abdomen and looked up at the ceiling in thought.

“If that’s not what you want to do with your life, then where do you see yourself in the next five years?”

“That’s the million-dollar question isn’t it?” Korra blew out a puff of air. “For a long time, I lived not even thinking about what would happen the next day—let alone in five years.”

“That doesn’t sound ideal.”

Korra shook her head. “So, I guess, to answer your question: I haven’t really had a clear, HD picture of what my life looks like that far ahead.”

“But you have a picture?” Asami asked for clarification.

“Eh. I definitely don’t see white picket fences or living in a billion-dollar mansion for myself. But maybe something simple. Like living in a nice place that’s in a good, quiet neighborhood. Maybe with a dog.”

“You like dogs?”

“The me five years from now does.”

Asami giggled. “I could see you with a white Labrador or something of the sort.”

“Hn.”

“It sounds nice, though. Peaceful.”

*There goes that word again,* Korra thought.

“How about you?” she asked.

Asami hummed. “I haven’t gotten the chance to think about it. I mean, I have my schedule and make plans for the whole year, but never beyond that. But who knows? Maybe I’ll move to a secluded area so that no one can find me.”

“That sounds lonely,” Korra commented. “You’re so used to the city life.”

“Very true.” Asami sighed. “But it’d be nice to get away for at least a year. Maybe go backpacking somewhere.”

“That’s more realistic. For you, at least.”

It went quiet again.

Korra found that she liked this: having these casual conversations with Asami, talking about random things on their minds, and that sense of normalcy between them. She got to learn a lot more about Asami, even in the little things she did. She was someone who liked to work and put her best foot forward, she loved making other people happy, but she also loved getting her way. On the
outside it looked like she was living the perfectly balanced life with little worries about anything. But there was also something there underneath it all.

No matter how subtle it was, Korra could tell that there was a part of Asami that was unhappy—sad even. It was as obvious now as it was back then. And again, Korra oddly felt the need to try and mend that. It was sort of like a knee-jerk reaction. Just like the first time Asami invited her over and there was that moment of silence between them after Asami spoke of getting her mother’s name tattooed. The sadness in Asami’s voice couldn't be missed, and the impulse was strong on Korra’s part to say or do something, even if it was as simple as telling Asami to eat her food. She should've realized then that even with her cold responses and the tension between them, the soft spot she had for Asami never went away.

A loud, whistling wind blew against the doors and windows, making them both look over.

“‘I guess it’s going to be storming all day, huh?’” Asami said.

“‘On and off,’” Korra stated matter-of-factly.

“Is your sixth sense tingling?”

“‘Mhm.’” Korra closed her eyes.

“I don’t think you ever told me where you learned that from.”

“My mom,” she said thoughtfully. “‘It’s a trick she taught me that she learned from her mother and her tribe. I picked up on it pretty quickly. My mom used to tell me it was because I was born under the full moon. It coincided with her always telling me I had the ‘spirit of a wolf.’”

“You never really told me about your culture or anything before, but it always sounded so interesting,” Asami said.

“I don’t know much.”

“Don’t you know some of the language?”

“A few words. I used to know a lot more, but when I was around thirteen or fourteen, I stopped listening to my mom whenever she tried to teach me about it. And then she finally gave up.”

A sudden image of her mother popped in her head. Her long, brown hair that she would always put in two braids, her soft but hoarse voice, and her vibrant eyes that matched Korra’s own. Korra wondered what she was doing right now.

“It’s been so long,” she said out loud, although she didn’t mean to.

“Since you’ve seen them?” Asami guessed.

Korra nodded.

“Do you… still talk to them?”

“My mom calls a few times a year,” she said.

“And your dad?” Asami asked gently, in a quiet whisper.

Korra swallowed. Her eyes were still closed as she shook her head, unable to verbalize her answer.
She didn’t think of her parents often, more or less because it always filled her up with so much emotion and pain. They were a sour subject for her, and she was honestly surprised with how much she managed to tell Asami about them already without shutting down or turning into a mess.

“I shouldn’t have asked,” Asami said immediately. Her voice held concern, and Korra felt so ashamed for wearing her feelings on her sleeve so much.

“You’re fine,” she said. “It’s fine.”

The words sounded as fake in her head as they did when she said them out loud. No, it wasn’t fine. She felt a twisting feeling in her gut. It was a knife that had been plunged there for years but for a long time she was numb to. Until now.

The bed shifted, and then the feathery touch of Asami’s hand on her bare arm made Korra open her eyes and look over. She saw the hesitation there, as Asami’s hand barely touched her, but it emitted warmth. So much warmth that Korra found herself yearning for more of it.

“Sorry,” Asami said, her voice still hushed but her hand staying in place. “If you don’t want me to—”

“It’s okay,” Korra said without letting her finish. “I don’t mind.”

Asami relaxed, as did her hand, and she fully let it rest on Korra’s arm before moving it up to Korra’s shoulder and giving it a firm squeeze. Korra took a shallow breath in and closed her eyes again, letting herself feel the electric bolts that shot up her arm just from that simple touch alone. It was more intense than it had ever been, and she knew right then and there that what she was feeling definitely wasn’t a ruse.

Asami pulled her hand away after a few minutes and let it rest between them. Korra immediately missed the contact.

“Do you plan on leaving any time soon?” asked Asami.

“Did you want me to now?”

“No,” Asami said. “I’m fine with whatever you want.”

Korra drummed her fingers against her stomach.

“What if I wanted to stay for a while?” she said, finally looking over at her.

Asami paused, and she seemed surprised by the suggestion, but then a pleased smile grew on her face.

“I’d like that,” she said.

Korra smiled back at her.

“I’ll stay then.”

It was, indeed, supposed to rain all day with a few breaks in between, according to the weather report.

Korra was finishing her waffles as she watched the television from across the room. There was nothing on, so they kept flipping through the channels constantly until they settled for watching
the marathon of *Catfish* on MTV. Every five minutes, either her or Asami would make some snarky comment about it and laugh at the ridiculousness they were seeing from some of the people. It was a beautiful segue from their heavy conversation earlier.

“How could this woman even believe for one minute that this guy was forreal?” she said between bites.

“Because men are serial manipulators and society has normalized it. God help us.”

Korra laughed. She realized that Asami could be so witty when she wanted to be. It was only noticeable before in brief instances, but Korra really saw it now. Her responses to whatever sarcastic comment Korra made were very tongue-in-cheek, and Korra enjoyed the back and forth they had going on. They fed off each other well.

About an hour later, they both finished their breakfast and washed their dishes. They sat on the couch for a while and watched the show some more before finally deciding to go upstairs and get changed. Asami let Korra borrow more of her clothes. This time it was just a plain, grey sweatshirt, and Korra wore the jeans she had on last night. Her curious mind got the better of her and she ended up sniffing the inside of the shirt. She inhaled a very sweet (and probably really expensive) perfume and let it fill her nose to the brim before she exhaled. It smelled magnificent.

She smoothed out the shirt after that and fixed her hair.

“Are you decent?” she called out from the bathroom.

“Yeah, you can come out,” Asami said, her voice muffled from the door being partially closed between them.

Korra walked out of the bathroom just as Asami finished putting on a red sweatshirt over a black tank top. When she turned around, Korra saw that the shirt had Cornell written in big letters on the front of it.

"Embracing your school spirit?” Korra asked teasingly.

"Shush. It's just comfortable to wear around the apartment,” Asami said.

Korra chuckled and walked over to the corner of the room where she put her clothes from last night and searched through them. “So what should we do now? It’s only three o’clock.”

“I don’t know about you, but I haven’t had my daily dose of coffee today. We could go to this spot just up the street if you’re up for it. It’s stopped raining for now, so we can easily walk.”

“That’s fine with me,” Korra said, distracted as she searched through her things for her phone. Once she found it, she turned it on and saw that she had quite a few messages. One was from Kuvira, who texted her this morning to ask if everything was cool. The rest were drunk texts from Jargala from last night. One of them asking if she had “gotten laid” yet.

Rolling her eyes, she ignored the slew of texts from Jargala and only wrote Kuvira back to let her know she was fine.

“Are you assuring your people that I didn’t kidnap you?” Asami asked. She was now sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Well, you did give them total serial killer vibes last night.” Korra looked up and smirked.

Korra walked over and put her phone in her back pocket. “Ginger took a liking to you.”

“Yeah.” Asami twirled the end of her ponytail with her finger. “She was pretty cool.”

“They all liked you,” Korra said.

“Even Kuvira?”

Korra nodded. “None of us really hang out a lot together as a group, but the fact that they welcomed you so easily makes me think you gave them a good impression.”

“That oddly makes me really happy,” Asami said, grinning.

“A bunch of lunatics liking you makes you happy?” Korra teased.

“You guys are a fun group and it’s an interesting dynamic to watch. I guess I kind of forgot what that’s like since I don’t go out that much or hang out with a lot of people.”

“Because you work a lot,” Korra deduced.

Asami nodded. “Which reminds me that I probably have a lot of messages that I need to answer since I turned my phone off last night.”

“You live a very hectic life.”

“You have no idea.”

“Tell me about it,” Korra prompted her.

Asami sighed. “It’s all pretty boring really. All I do is go to a bunch of meetings, answer emails, and work on projects. The projects are fun, but I don’t get to do them nearly as often as I want. Also, I travel, but I don’t really have time to explore or actually visit the places I’m in since I’m stuck in a building all day.”

“Being a CEO never sounded appealing whenever you told me about it. And it still doesn’t.”

“It’s definitely not for everyone,” Asami said quietly. “I wasn’t really sure if I could do it.”

“But you did.”

Asami looked up at Korra, who was still standing. She looked conflicted and nervous all of a sudden.

“What?” Korra asked.

“It’s Future Industries.”

“Huh?”

“I own Future Industries now.”

“Oh.”

Neither of them said anything after. Korra was busy absorbing the information while Asami looked down at her hands in her lap. She was timid now as she waited for Korra’s reaction, but Korra
didn’t really have one—at least for right now. In fact, she wasn’t even surprised by the revelation.

“It makes sense,” she offered, not really sure of what to say.

Asami raised her head and met Korra’s eyes.

“Does it really?” she asked, her eyes narrowing.

“Should it not?” Korra asked.

Asami took a deep breath and got up.

“We should probably get going,” she said.

She sidestepped Korra and headed for the door, and before Korra could stop herself, she reached for Asami’s arm. Asami stopped and turned to her.

“You okay?” Korra asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Asami said and smiled, but it was so incredibly forced that Korra almost cringed. She eyed Asami for another minute before finally pulling away.

“Okay,” she said.

Asami nodded and walked out of the room.

That was weird, Korra thought as she followed after her. Just now, the atmosphere completely changed between them. There had clearly been something on Asami’s mind, but she was holding back because… Korra had no idea why. The only reason she could see that was because it mirrored what she’d been doing this whole time: holding back and being unwilling to share information about herself.

It was certainly interesting and made her curious, but she wasn’t going to push it out of Asami. That wasn’t something she ever did with anyone and she didn’t want to start now. If someone wanted her to know something, they’d tell her. But it didn’t look like that was the case.

Or… maybe Asami wanted her to ask?

She felt like her headache was coming back.

All of this was starting to get complicated again, and it made Korra wonder how long it would take before they finally had to come out of the bubble and face reality. Only time could tell, but she dreaded it with each and every minute that passed.

They went to Caffe Noi, one of Asami’s favorite coffee shops (that wasn’t Starbucks) and sat at a table, drinking their hot beverages. It wasn’t crowded, likely because of the rain and the fact that it was a Sunday, which was nice. The two of them made light conversation, talking about how good their drinks were and the dreary weather, but Asami felt like she was struggling to follow along.

She’d been so close to telling Korra about her father, but at the last second she chickened out. It frustrated her to a living end because why couldn’t she just say it? Why was it so hard?

She thought that maybe it was because she was too embarrassed and ashamed, which definitely held some truth to it, but it was also something else. For some reason, she was holding onto this idea that she needed to be perfect in Korra’s eyes and act like everything was fine.
After finding out how much of a brave face Korra put on in front of her years ago, Asami thought she needed to return that. She wanted to be the one who Korra could rely on without making it all about herself. She felt that way when they were talking in bed earlier and Korra spoke of her parents. That raw emotion that Korra showed on her face affirmed to Asami that Korra didn’t open up at all to people. And the fact that she actually let herself become so unguarded around Asami sparked something huge for them. If Asami could be the person Korra ended up confiding in—if she gained that trust—then maybe they’d develop a deeply powerful bond that the both of them had been lacking for several years.

But still… things needed to be mutual between them in order for that to happen, which meant that Asami definitely needed to tell Korra about her father soon. But she was so scared of the thought of Korra knowing and then pulling back. It hurt her to even think about it. And also, Korra was the one person in her life who didn’t know it all. It felt so nice to not have someone look at her with pitiful eyes and treat her normally for once, and she didn’t think she was ready to lose that just yet.

“You look like you’re in deep thought.”

She looked up from her coffee cup and noticed Korra watching her intently.

“I am,” she said.

“What happened to us not overthinking things?” Korra asked.

“I’m not.” Asami wrapped her hands around her cup. “At least, I don’t think I am.”

“Do you… want to talk about it?”

Asami paused briefly, unsure of how to answer.

“Yes… and no.”

“What’s stopping you?”

Asami opened her mouth to say everything she’d been thinking about just then: about her hesitation, her hang ups, the irrational fear she had, and everything in between. But it didn’t come out. Mesmerizing blue eyes stared back at her, waiting patiently.

“What you said about your parents earlier…” she started slowly. “I can understand how you feel. My dad’s no longer in the picture either.”

Korra’s brows raised slightly in surprise, but then her mouth pulled into a frown.

“What do you mean by that?” she asked.

Asami swallowed. “I… don’t talk to him. He’s not a part of my life anymore.”

She was so annoyed with herself. The raging battle of tug and war was happening in her head, with one side screaming at her to just say it and the other telling her not to take the risk.

Korra didn’t say anything at first and instead looked down at the table.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she said.

Asami folded her arms on the table and looked down as well.

“Can’t help who your parents are, right?” she reiterated Kuvira’s words from last night.
“Yeah, but I would’ve thought after…” Korra started but trailed off.

“What?” Asami asked when she saw the look of confusion on Korra’s face.

Korra turned her gaze back to Asami.

“You own Future Industries,” she said.

Asami’s pulse quickened. “I do.”

“So then how do you and your dad not talk when you both own it?”

“I… He’s not a part of the company anymore either.”

Korra seemed lost and Asami couldn’t blame her. Nothing she was saying made sense without the huge piece missing from the picture.

“Are you happy there?” Korra asked after the silence between them stretched too thin.

“It makes me happy that I’m doing something that’s helping advance technology and giving people more jobs.”

“You realize that’s not actually an answer to my question, right?”

Asami sighed and rested her hand behind her neck as she tilted her head to the side.

“Does it really matter if I am? It’s where I belong.”

There was a flash in Korra’s eyes. She looked so… disappointed.

“If that’s how you feel,” she finally said and picked up her coffee to drink.

Asami wanted to put her head down in failure. It felt like no matter what she said, she would never be able to get it right. This wasn’t easy in the slightest, but it didn’t have to be so goddamn hard either. They were both finally coming down from the high of just being comfortable in each other’s presence again, and it was all because of her. Korra wasn’t even doing anything wrong.

More time was what she needed, but she felt like there was none left. And really, when would ever be the right time for something like this?

“Do you wanna head back?” she asked. It was far from anything she actually wanted to say.

Korra nodded. “Yeah. That’s fine.”

They both got up and Korra walked before her. Asami watched her back and felt something unsettling in her gut.

Korra was only a few feet from her but seemed so far away.

Unfortunately it started raining just as they left the café. Neither of them remembered to bring an umbrella, so they had to hightail it back to the apartment building that was five minutes away. The rain picked up halfway between their run, and their hoods kept falling off to the point that they didn’t care anymore. By the time they made it back, they were drenched, shivering, and laughing at themselves because of how horrible they looked now.
It was a welcome distraction from the conversation they just had, but Korra didn’t mind it. Things got kind of weird for both of them, so it was nice to get her mind off it. Asami didn’t seem to be in the greatest mood ever since they left to go and get coffee, so to see her smile for even just a moment pleased Korra.

But, of course, the distraction didn’t last for long, and Korra started thinking about what Asami told her. It didn’t make sense for a lot of reasons how Asami could own the same company her father did even though they didn’t talk. Back then, the only way it made sense for her to own it was because she felt pressured into it. But now she just willingly owned it without him? Korra knew something wasn’t adding up.

They both took off their shoes at the door and placed their coats in the closet. Asami took her hair down and shook it out, causing drops of water to fall on the floor.

“I’ll go get a towel from upstairs,” she said as she walked into the kitchen and sat her purse down. She used a couple of paper towels to wipe it off. “I can’t believe you didn’t see that downfall coming.”

“I did, but it was pretty inevitable,” Korra replied.

Asami gave a small smile. “I bet you didn’t miss this rain in all of the years you were gone. I’ll be right back.”

There was something about that sentence that made Korra pause. She gripped the counter as she watched Asami walk out of the kitchen.

“Asami,” she called out.

“Hm?” Asami turned and looked at her, running her fingers through her hair.

Korra’s hands fell to her sides, but she had them bunched in fists now. She hated herself for saying what she was about to say.

“There’s something you should know,” she spoke quietly.

“What is it?” Asami asked.

Korra closed her eyes for a second and took a deep breath.

“I didn’t leave New York immediately after I left,” she admitted.

Asami’s lips parted and the middle of her forehead crinkled together in confusion.

“How long did you stay?” she asked slowly, as if she was forcing the words out of her mouth, afraid of the answer Korra would tell her.

“A year.”

Korra watched a mixture of different emotions go across Asami’s face and it made her chest ache. She looked surprised, hurt, confused, but most of all, betrayed. Everything Korra knew she’d be.

“A year?” Asami repeated, looking like she didn’t believe it at first. It took a few seconds for the shock to wear off, and then she gave Korra a blank look before lowering her eyes. “Is that all you needed to tell me?” she asked, her voice sounding distant.

“Yeah...” Korra said.
“Okay.”

Asami walked away after that and Korra listened to her loud footsteps as she walked up the stairs. When she heard the sound of Asami’s bedroom door closing, Korra leaned against the kitchen counter and put her face in her hands.

Of course that didn’t go well. She already knew that it wouldn’t, and now she was regretting having said anything at all. Everything was fine, but she just had to go and admit that. What had gotten into her anyway? Asami wasn’t exactly in the best of moods, and this might have just ruined it entirely. God she was so stupid!

She dug her palms into her eyes before lifting her head.

But this was what Asami wanted, wasn’t it? The truth. And if she couldn’t handle it, then what the hell was the point to any of this? She was the one who said they needed to listen to each other and be honest with each other, so why was she suddenly cowering away?

She looked down and saw that she was creating a puddle on the counter from her hair dripping on top of it. Sighing, she went and grabbed some paper towels and wiped at the countertops, her mind elsewhere at the moment.

Were they really just fooling themselves? Maybe they were holding onto something unsalvageable at this point. Both of their lives were difficult as it was and didn’t seem to be getting any easier. In fact, maybe them being in each other’s lives was catastrophic.

But at the same time...

Everything from last night and earlier popped into her mind. It all felt so right. It was something Korra had been without for so long that she forgot how good it could be: to just be in someone’s company and talk for so long and, for a moment, not having to worry about anything. It gave her so much warmth, belonging, and purpose—more than any fight in some shabby ring could do. How could any of that be catastrophic?

She realized that she’d still been wiping at the counter absentmindedly and finally stopped. Just as she leaned over to throw the paper towel away, her hand bumped a stack of papers and caused them to fall onto the floor. Cursing, she threw the paper towel in the trashcan and walked over to the mess of papers. Bending down to pick them up, she saw that it was all just a bunch of files, along with old magazines and junk mail.

Her hand froze.

Just as she was about to pick up another piece of mail, her eyes landed on the single newspaper on the floor. She set everything else to the side and slowly reached for it, her hands shaking as she did.

Sinking to her knees, she stared down at it in awe. The front page had a huge photo of Asami’s father on it, and underneath it in big, bold letters said, "SATO CONVICTED."

When she was finally able to form a proper thought, she opened the newspaper and it landed on the exact page where the story she wanted was on.
(NY) – After a year of accusations and two years of investigation, CEO of Future Industries Hiroshi Sato has been sentenced to 100 years in prison after selling illegal firearms in the black market.

On Thursday, the jury reached a verdict and declared the CEO guilty of all crimes, which caused the courtroom to erupt in cheers and took a minute to get under order.

Hiroshi Sato, who pleaded not guilty throughout his two year trial, did not react to the news immediately. It was only after noticing his daughter, Asami Sato, sitting near the back of the room that he began to shout and curse at the judge, pleading his innocence.

Asami Sato has chosen not to release a statement at this time.

In early 2012, rumors surfaced of Hiroshi Sato’s supposed ties to the black market for selling a mass of weapons to multiple international terrorist organizations.

The FBI attained a warrant to search Future Industries in September 2013, where they found over $500,000 worth of firearms stored inside the latest model of Satomobiles that were in development and set to be auctioned off…

Korra continued to read, but the feeling of bile rising in her throat made it difficult. When she finally finished, her eyes went to the photo at the side of the story with Asami walking out of the courthouse. Korra barely noticed she was partially covering her mouth as she continued to stare. She closed the newspaper and looked at the front page again. Hiroshi’s dark eyes stared back at her, his gaze piercing, his facial features hard. Water from her hair dripped onto the newspaper and fell on the picture.

An old memory came to her, one that she buried so deep that it felt like a surprise slap across the face once she remembered it. Her hands shook violently.

A sharp knock on the door startled her. She immediately reached for all of the fallen papers on the floor and stood up, then placed them all back on the kitchen counter. Her heart was racing, but at the same time it felt like it dropped into the pit of her stomach.

All of it made sense now. Everything about the way Asami was acting and why she looked so hesitant earlier, why she didn’t speak to her father and how he wasn’t involved with his own company anymore, and why she was so defensive that one time Korra asked about her house. This was what Asami had been keeping from her this whole time.

After everything and all of Asami’s talk about how she wanted Korra to be honest with her, she was keeping something this big hidden all along. Korra revealed so much about herself, yet she got so little in return. Anger was only one word of many to describe what she was feeling right now. She exposed herself to Asami, only to feel like a fool once again.

She was ready to march upstairs and demand some damn answers. They needed to have a talk right now and she wasn’t going to take ‘no’ for an answer.

Or, at least that was the plan, until the front door unlocked and opened.

When Asami got to her room, she went over to her bed and sat down, ignoring the fact that she was getting her sheets wet. She stared ahead, not really looking at anything, just thinking.
Korra stayed here for a whole year before leaving and just… ignored her. Asami vividly remembered all those times she stayed awake worried and scared to death about what happened to her best friend. She sent so many texts and left voice messages begging Korra to pick up or just send her one little message to let her know that she was okay. But there was nothing.

And now Korra was telling her this.

She sucked in a deep breath and let it out shakingly before leaning forward and putting her head in her hands.

She didn’t want to be upset. After all, she was now aware of all the struggles Korra faced back then. But at the same time, she felt like she had the right to feel the way she did. How could Korra do that to her? What possible reason could she have for putting Asami through that kind of torture? But more than any of that, knowing that Korra left just before the rumors about her father started was what got Asami the most.

Korra could have been there. There were so many times Asami wished for that, because Korra was the one person she needed by her side through it all, and yet she stayed away purposefully. And now those old feelings of bitterness were starting to re-emerge. Back then, she came up with reasons in her head and blamed herself about why Korra never came back, because it was easier to do that than sit around and be angry. But maybe she was right to be bitter all along.

She understood that they weren’t on good terms and that Korra’s uncle kicked her out. She understood that Korra was feeling alone and abandoned. But did she really not know how much Asami had been hurting, too?

Those few years after Korra left were some of the worst in Asami’s life. She’d been so cold and lonely because Korra was always that bright, warm spot in her life; the one who could tell her things—words that she needed to hear whether she liked them or not—and in the end, would say it was going to be okay. Asami never thought she could depend on someone so much, but she’d been wrong. Once Korra left, Asami felt a void inside herself that could never be filled again. She could only recall one other time she ever felt that way, and it was when her mother died. And after Korra left, that was the last time she ever allowed herself to. There was a part of her that always held back from ever getting that attached to someone like she did with Korra. She never wanted to need someone like that ever again only for them to leave her again. And Korra was the reason for that. Because Korra meant the world to her.

All of her thoughts immediately paused at that one particular thought. Her breath hitched and her heart skipped a beat at the same time.

Korra meant the world to her.

A few seconds passed, with her frozen there on the bed, before she finally got up and walked out of her room, opening the door with a force she never knew she had.

If there was one way to describe what she was feeling like right now, it was like finding the missing piece to a puzzle she stopped working on years ago. It all clicked into place and came together so naturally, even though it took so long.

For being one of the top-ranked students in her class at an ivy league college, Asami Sato felt like the stupidest person alive right now.
She blamed it on her age at the time, and how obsessed she was with having the perfect life, perfect family, and perfect boyfriend. She’d been living in her own fantasy world for 18 years of her life before it all came crashing down. All those times she thought about how her connection with Korra stemmed from their codependency on each other, or how they only understood each other because of their similar situations, was more than that. It was something much deeper. And now, eight years later, she was realizing for the first time how deep it really was.

She ran down the stairs and reached the bottom step so fast that she was almost dizzy.

“Korra,” she called out, enlightened and disillusioned at the same time. What was she even going to say? And how would Korra react?

All of her racing thoughts washed away as fast as they came.

Korra was standing there in the kitchen with a hard expression on her face before meeting Asami’s eyes. She looked so angry that Asami could practically feel it from where she stood. And then she looked to the third person in the room, soaking wet, with a spare key in hand, and staring at Asami with a face as stricken as Korra’s.

Mako’s amber eyes met Asami’s with burning rage.

In the faint distance, she swore she could hear the sound of a bubble popping.

TBC...
It was quiet for a few seconds, with each of them too stunned to say anything. Asami’s palms began to sweat as she looked between Mako and Korra, who both seemed to be waiting for her to do something, or even just react to this unexpected situation.

“Mako…” she said slowly. “What are you doing here?”

The space between Mako's brows crinkled. He still looked upset, but there was a mixture of confusion and annoyance there now, too.

“I’ve been calling you, but your phone's been turned off,” he said in an icy tone. “We’re supposed to pick up Bolin and Opal from the airport, remember?”

“Oh, my God.” Asami brought a hand to her head. “I am so sorry. I haven’t had my phone on since last night. I completely forgot.”

Mako stared at her with disbelief in his eyes.

“You never forget anything,” he said and pointedly sent a look over Korra’s way.

Asami glanced over at Korra as well and saw that she was now looking off to the side with her arms crossed, as if she wanted to be as far away from this situation as humanly possible. She was probably thinking about bolting right now.

Asami turned her attention back to Mako and stepped toward him.

“It’s my fault, okay? I lost track of time and neither of us realized—”

“What is she even doing here?” he said bitterly. “Why is she here?”

Asami’s brows raised at his tone. It didn’t sound like him at all.

“I’m here because she wants me to be here,” Korra finally spoke, surprising Asami.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” Mako said, not even bothering to look Korra’s way.

“You’re talking about me; therefore, you might as well be.”

Mako eventually turned his head and addressed Korra properly.

“If you know what’s good for you, I highly suggest you stand there and stay out of it.”

“Guys…” Asami started, not even sure how to stop what was about to happen. It was like watching two cars going at full speed toward each other and being unable to do anything but watch.
“Was that supposed to scare or intimidate me?” Korra asked, looking amused. “Sorry, but you’re going to have to try harder than that, detective.”

Mako’s head quickly turned to Asami. “You’ve been talking to her about me?”

Asami opened her mouth.

“She’s been talking to me about a lot of things,” Korra spoke before Asami had the chance to. “A lot more than she’s talked to you about apparently.”

“Korra...” Asami started.

“That’s a really bold thing of you to say since I haven’t seen you around in years,” Mako said hotly, offended by Korra’s claim. “Don’t embarrass yourself by acting like you know anything about the kind of relationship her and I have. I’ve known her and been with her a lot more than you can say for yourself.”

"If you actually felt confident about that, you probably wouldn't be sounding so bothered right now.”

"That's rich, coming from someone who didn't have enough confidence to stick around and hightailed it elsewhere.”

“God, you haven’t changed a bit,” Korra laughed humorlessly. “I see that big, shiny badge of yours extended your ego even further. It makes sense, though, since you need compensation for your small—”

“Korra!” Asami said again, this time more urgently.

“And you haven’t changed that much either,” Mako said. “I see that you've somehow managed to get yourself into even more trouble, though. And while we’re on the subject, do you mind telling me where that shiner on your face came from?”

Asami’s heartbeat quickened and she looked between the two of them nervously.

Korra glowered. “I do mind, actually. And it’s none of your business.”

“Wow. What a shocker. It figures you’d try to shove away helping hands. Isn’t that what you did with Asami after using her for so long?”

Korra laughed. “You giving me helping hands? Please spare me with the good guy act. No ones buying it.”

Mako glared. "You're as hopeless as ever."

“Mako, stop it,” Asami said finally, walking up to him and placing a hand on his arm, forcing him to look at her. “Please. Let’s talk about this like adults.”

“How long has this been a thing?” he asked, ignoring her demand.

Asami looked down in guilt. There was a lot she wanted to explain, but everything was happening so fast that she didn’t think she had enough time to. Mako hadn’t looked this angry at her in years.

“Just for a little while,” she said quietly.

“Since October specifically,” Korra chimed in. There was smugness in her tone.
Mako’s eyes widened and he pulled his arm out of Asami’s grip.

“You’ve been talking to her for almost two months and didn’t say anything to me about it?”

Asami’s mouth opened, but she couldn’t find any real words to say other than, “I’m sorry.”

Mako glared at her and turned back to Korra.

“And you sure as hell know when to come crashing back into someone’s life when they’re doing so well for themselves. I’m guessing you couldn’t stand seeing her be happy, so you’re back to cause more damage?”

The accusation in his voice was clear and Asami had to pause for a minute at hearing it. She looked over at Korra, who was glaring right back at Mako, but her look was even more bone-chilling.

“As if you knew a thing.”

Mako fully turned his body in her direction.

“What I know is that you left your supposed ‘best friend’ all alone after she stuck her neck out for you so many times. You must’ve been really pleased with yourself after making her put up with all of your crap and then leaving her there to dry at the end. Newspapers and magazines don’t even cover half of the hell she’s been through over the years—”

“Mako, stop,” Asami said, reaching for him again. He had no idea that Korra wasn’t aware of what happened with her father, and when she looked over at Korra again, she saw that her face changed for the briefest of moments. She glanced at Asami before looking Mako’s way again.

“You’re still as judgmental as ever, which is exactly why I’m not even going to waste my breath on you anymore.”

“I’m sure that’s just the guilt eating away at you,” Mako said condescendingly.

“Enough!” Asami shouted, officially done with listening to their verbal spat. Mako finally looked down at her. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Mako gave her another disbelieving stare.

“Are you really on her side right now?” he said.

"There are no sides," Asami stressed. “We’re not kids anymore, Mako. We’re grown adults and we should all be able to sit down and talk about this.”

Mako took a step back, regarding her for a moment. When he finally met her eyes again, he shook his head.

“I don’t have time for this. There’s a taxi outside waiting for me.” He turned and walked away.

“Mako,” Asami called out.

“Oh, and don’t worry. I’ll just tell Bolin and Opal you said hi,” he said bitterly as he opened the door and left.

Asami stood there, shocked and dismayed by what just happened. This was far from how things were supposed to be. She imagined telling Mako at some point, but not today of all days. This was all turning into one giant mess.
“Asami,” Korra said, her voice cutting in-between Asami's inner turmoil. “We need to—”

“I have to go and talk to him,” Asami decided, interrupting her. She started walking to the door and looked back at Korra. “I’ll be right back.”

She didn’t wait for Korra’s response and was already out the door, deadbolting it before leaving. Mako was down the hall, waiting at the elevator. She ran up to him, hair still dripping and sticking to her face.

“Mako, please come back inside,” she pleaded once she reached him. “If you would just let me explain—”

“You lied to me,” he said, angrily pressing at the elevator button.

Asami sighed. “I know… and I’m sorry. I wanted to tell you about what’s been going on, but Korra was uncomfortable with that.”

“Why the hell do you even feel like you owe her anything?” Mako finally looked over at her. “She doesn’t deserve an ounce of the protection you’re giving her. And it’s fucking mind-blowing to me that she still has you wrapped around her finger.”

“You don’t understand,” Asami said. “She—”

“How long has she been back?”

Asami sighed again. “She told me two years.”

“And she’s only just now reaching out to you?” Mako asked. He looked disgusted. “That makes it even more obvious.”

“About what?”

“That she’s using you!” Mako raised his voice. “How can you not see that? You’re a successful CEO with a bunch of money and, all of a sudden, she magically comes back into your life again, but only after all of the drama with your father has died down?”

“Okay, let me stop you right there,” Asami said, holding her hand up. “First of all, I was the one who reached out to her first. And secondly, she knows nothing about what happened with my dad.”

“Oh, bullshit,” Mako said. “It was all over the news! And you’re saying she knows nothing about it? You’re being played.”

Asami let out a deep breath.

“You’re letting your anger get the best of you and it’s clouding your judgement,” she said calmly. “Korra’s never been like that with me and you know it. She’s been through a lot.”

“That’s pretty obvious with that shiner she’s sporting. Are you going to tell me about that or leave me in the dark once again?”

“I… Just come back inside,” Asami said, feeling desperate now. “I don’t want to say anything without Korra here.”

Mako rolled his eyes. “I guess you guys are really picking up where you left off, huh? Only this time I’m not as in the picture as I was before.”
Asami gave him a confused look at that cryptic comment. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Mako’s face contorted. He looked like he was going back and forth with something in his head, contemplating it. And then he finally turned to her.

“It means that, after all these years, you haven’t changed one bit.”

Asami stepped back, as if she’d just been shoved.

“How can you even say that?” she said. “You know that’s not true.”

“What I saw in there was exactly what I saw back then: you continuously making excuses for her.”

Asami looked at him in astonishment.

“You mean like I did for you?” she finally said.

“Excuse me?” Mako said, glaring.

“Our entire relationship back then was filled with excuses!” Asami exclaimed. “You are so quick to talk about everyone else that you can’t even see how wrong you were.”

“What are you talking about?” Mako asked. The elevator finally opened onto her floor but they both ignored it, letting it close.

“I let you get away with so many things and came up with a thousand excuses just so Korra would finally give you a chance. But it turns out you were being a jerk and a bully behind my back. Korra told me all of the foul things you said to her when I wasn’t around. I guess you’re not so innocent now, huh?”

Mako’s face turned stone cold and he looked away.

“I was just looking out for you,” he said.

“No. You were trying to push the one person who really understood me out of my life.”

“She was the one person?” Mako looked at her incredulously, eyes wide and clearly offended.

Asami, realizing her mistake, immediately regretted saying that out loud. “You know that’s not what I meant.”

“Oh, that’s exactly what you meant,” Mako said. He angrily pushed the button for the elevator again, but the elevator was already going to another floor. He cursed under his breath.

“I just meant that I could talk to her about a lot more,” Asami tried to defend herself. “You were there, but sometimes it felt like we weren’t on the same page. You always pushed me in a certain direction. Like my dad.”

Mako went utterly quiet. He brought his hand up to the wall beside the elevator and looked down at the ground, shaking his head.

“You’re really comparing me to that bastard now?”

Asami’s brows furrowed together in frustration and anger at herself. None of this was coming out right and she could see the hurt written all over Mako’s face.
“Of course not. Not that way. I didn’t mean it like that,” she said desperately. “You’re my best friend, Mako.”

“If that’s true, then why did you feel like you couldn’t tell me this? Since when do ‘best friends’ lie to each other, Asami? And why does her suddenly being in the picture again mean that you can’t trust me anymore?”

“I do trust you,” Asami insisted. “That’s why I want to talk this out.”

Mako shook his head again, but this time he looked furious, like he was about ready to snap.

“You wanna talk? Fine. Then let’s talk about how you’ve always resented me after she left.”

“That is not true!” Asami yelled in outrage.

“You shut me out,” Mako said. “You didn’t talk to me or anyone for months and pushed everyone who cared about you away. And even then, I was still there for you. I was by your side when that shit with your father went down and—surprise, surprise—even then, you were distant. You still are.”

“You knew what I was going through at that time,” Asami said, getting angrier and more defensive by the second. “I’m sorry if I didn’t hold your hand or give you brownie points for sticking around.”

“It’s not like I really expected that anyway,” Mako said, his scowl deepening. “You wanted attention from the one person who wasn’t giving you any, and now it looks like history’s going to repeat itself. But let’s not pretend that when you really had no one and actually wanted me around, you gave into your own selfish needs. All of those times you were lonely and feeling at your lowest, it was my bed you were trying to climb in—”

Asami slapped him. It was loud and echoed in the hallway. Her eyes widened at her own impulsivity, and she didn't realize what she did until she saw Mako cradle his cheek in his hand and felt the stinging in hers. Neither of them moved or spoke until the elevator dinged and opened once again.

Mako rubbed his hand under his chin and stared at her for a lingering moment before walking into the elevator.

“You know what’s really sad?” he finally said. “She’s going to leave you again, and this time you’re really going to be on your own.”

The doors closed.

Asami stood there in the empty, quiet hall and stared at the elevator for a while. Her chest felt tight and heavy and she had to force herself to breathe, but it came out as a gasp. Over and over again, Mako’s last words repeated in her head.

Angrily, she walked back to the apartment, wiping at her eyes. Of course he wouldn’t listen to reason when it came to Korra. She was wrong, apparently, for thinking that things were different. She thought they could get past all of the teenage drama and hurt feelings, but it was clear that Mako had been harboring some anger and animosity about it to this day. And Asami blamed herself for that. She shouldn’t have waited so long to confront their issues. She should’ve been strong enough to talk to Mako about Korra, but instead she let it sit and fester for so many years. And now it looked like she was going to lose her friend because of that mistake. It made her shiver just to think about it.
She entered the apartment, shutting the door loudly behind her. It was now just as quiet in there as it was in the hallway and Korra wasn’t anywhere in sight.

“Korra?” she called out. When she got no response and saw that Korra wasn’t in the living room either, she sighed and walked to the stairs. There was no telling what Korra was feeling right now. It all happened so fast, but there was no mistaking the bitterness attached to Korra’s voice or the anger in her eyes at Mako’s accusations. When those two were in the same room together, it felt like a draft suddenly entered and made it colder, even though their exchanges were so heated. Had it always been that way? Or were things just more intense?

Asami walked into her room and saw the bathroom door closed with the light on inside. Sighing again, she went and sat at the edge of her bed.

Obviously she needed to give Mako some space right now and not stir the pot. They were both angry and hurt by what the other said and trying to talk about it so soon after would only complicate things even further. She hated what Mako said to her, and it made her realize that if he really did feel that way… what exactly had their friendship been since they made the decision that it was all they could ever be? Did he resent her like he thought she resented him? And if so, why did he continue to keep her in his life if he thought that way?

The bathroom door finally opened and Korra came out of it. Asami looked up and saw that she changed out of the sweatshirt Asami gave her and into the shirt she wore last night. She spared Asami a glance.

“Work everything out?” she asked, although, from her tone, it didn’t sound like she cared to hear the answer.

“No,” Asami rested her elbows on her thighs and brushed her wet hair out of her face. “I’m sorry he was being such a jerk. He was way out of line.”

“He clearly has a lot of anger about this. I thought you had the situation under control.”

“I thought I did, too…” she said, pausing for a second. “He’s just confused right now and doesn’t know what’s going on. He wouldn’t even give me the chance to explain.”

“Sure,” Korra said, albeit sarcastically. She walked over to the bed and grabbed a plastic bag that was sitting on it. “Do you want me to have this dry cleaned?” she asked while throwing the sweatshirt inside of the bag and tying it.

“No. I can wash it.”

Korra gave a single nod and left the bag on the bed. She walked to the door.

“What are you doing?” Asami asked.

Korra stopped just as she reached the door and turned.

“Leaving.”

Asami quickly stood up.

“Why?”

Korra was quiet for a few seconds as she gave Asami a deciding look.
“Because I’m done.”

The words were said with so much finality and dismissiveness that Asami almost had to take a step back, but instead, she did the opposite and took a step forward.

“What does that mean?” she asked, her heart pounding.

“It means I’m done with this. All of this.” Korra pointed her finger in the air and motioned her hand around in a circle.

Asami tried to keep herself calm, but she knew she was close to losing it. All of this was taking a sharp turn rather quickly. What the hell had gotten into Korra all of a sudden?

“Why?” she asked.

“Did you not just see what happened down there?”

“Yes, I was present.” Asami folded her arms. “But that doesn’t mean you have to leave. We need to talk.”

“I tried talking to you, but you were busy trying to soothe Mako’s ruffled feathers.”

“You’re mad because I went to go and check on him?” Asami asked. “I care about him, Korra. I’m sorry that you hate him so much, but he’s still my friend.”

“Are you kidding me right now? It’s more than something as juvenile as that, but of course you don’t seem to get it.”

“Then help me understand!” Asami shouted. She was going to explode at any minute now.

“Do you really think I’m going to go through the same situation again?” Korra asked. “Him and I fight. You two fight. You get upset. Then you make up with him. Then we fight. Wash and repeat. I’ve been through it enough times already and I know how the story ends. And I get it, okay? You’ve known him longer and he’s been here for you this whole time, so the choice is obvious. I was so stupid for letting myself…” she trailed off and then shook her head. “You know what? It doesn’t even matter. I’m done.”

Korra turned to leave again.

“Wait a second!” Asami grabbed her by the arm. “A choice? You really think that I’m making a decision between you and him?”

Korra refused to meet her gaze and looked off to the side.

“I’m making it easy for you. You said the last time that you always felt like you had to choose, so now you don’t have to.”

Asami’s grip tightened. “It’s not like that now. He’s a part of my life, but I want you to be in it, too. There doesn’t have to be a constant battle between the two of you anymore.”

“Don’t be naïve.” Korra ripped her arm from Asami’s hold. “It’s never going to work out that way. Nothing’s changed and it won’t change. It can only get worse from here.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do!” Korra yelled. “None of this should’ve happened in the first place and it was stupid to even
think we could try. Now do us both a favor and let me go already!”

Korra left the room hurriedly while Asami stood still in shock.

The image of Korra leaving just now struck a chord with her. It gave her that feeling of dread and hopelessness. Mako was right. Everything was repeating itself once again, and she felt like there was no way to stop it; like it was destined to happen and crush her once again, but this time in a thousand more pieces. It really did feel like nothing changed.

Except that wasn’t the truth at all. She realized just before Mako had shown up that something did change. Specifically with her perspective on things. And before she could even admit it out loud, Korra was about to walk out the door and her life for good. It angered and upset her all at once.

She marched out of the room and followed after Korra, determined to have the last word and have her voice be heard. When she made it back downstairs, she saw that Korra was putting her boots on angrily.

“So that’s just it, huh?” she called out from across the room. “You’re just gonna move on and pretend that none of this ever happened?”

“That’s exactly what I plan to do,” Korra said.

“Then I guess I pegged you wrong before. When it comes to a physical fight, you’re ready to go. But when it’s something like this, the only thing you know how to do is run away.”

Korra stopped and then finally turned her head. A fierce and angry gaze met Asami’s.

“You don’t know a thing about me,” she said.

“I know a lot actually. The minute something gets too emotional or real and you feel vulnerable, you’re ready to bolt. You can’t handle this because, for so long, you haven’t had to. And it’s because you’re scared. It’s the reason why you’re leaving right now.”

Korra squared her jaw. She moved away from the closet and closer to Asami.

“I’m leaving because you and your boyfriend’s issues are the last thing I need in my life.”

“How many times do I have to tell you? We’re not dating!”

“You can say it a thousand times and I wouldn’t care.”

“It certainly seems like you do,” Asami said pointedly. “It’s like you want me to be in a relationship with him so it can be easier for you to hold a grudge or be mad at me.”

“I don’t want anything from you,” Korra said heaped. "All I want is to be out of here. Have a nice life.”

Asami’s nails dug into her bundled fists as she stared at Korra’s retreating back for the third time today.

“You’re such a liar,” she snapped. “You promised me you wouldn’t walk away again.”

Korra stopped, but she didn’t turn back right away. Her body was rigid and tense, like a bucket of cold water had been dumped on her. When she turned around again and looked at Asami, there was a calculated expression on her face.
“You wanna call me a liar? Why don’t you take a good look in the mirror first?”

Before Asami could open her mouth to ask what she was talking about, Korra walked over to the kitchen and reached for something. A second later, she held up the newspaper.

Asami froze when she saw her father’s face staring back at her. The air caught in her lungs.

“You went through my stuff?” she said when she could finally form words.

“No. I accidentally found it. But you know that’s not the point.”

Asami closed her eyes, feeling caught. “I was going to tell you.”

“Oh, were you?” Korra said with a look of doubt on her face. “Like last night when you were ‘going to tell me’ about Varrick? Or how about twenty minutes ago when I asked you directly what happened with him?”

“Do you really think that’s something that I can easily blurt out?”

Korra scoffed and put the paper down. “Unbelievable. And you want to know what the really fucked up part about it is? You kept pushing me for the truth for weeks, and yet you were hiding this bombshell. Do you enjoy being this much of a hypocrite?”

There were tremors going all throughout Asami’s body. She couldn’t believe that she managed to fuck things up this badly. First with Mako, and now with Korra.

"Can we just talk about this?" she asked in a despairing tone.

"No. I’m through talking with you. How do I know you’re not just going to tell me a bunch of boldfaced lies?"

"Because you know I won’t!" Asami snapped again. "You know I’m not like that. Besides, you’re the one who didn’t want me to tell you anything last night. You said you wanted to know me as a person before anything else and insisted on being in some stupid, hypothetical bubble."

“And clearly that was a mistake on my part,” Korra shot back.

Asami shook her head. “Don’t do that. Don’t say hurtful things because you think that being cold will make me push you out the door. It’s not going to happen. Not after everything.”

“How analytical of you." Korra glared.

Asami came closer.

“I don’t get it. We were so good this morning and last night. Why does this suddenly have to change everything?”

“Because it just does.”

“Give me a real answer, Korra.”

Korra looked down. She stared at the newspaper for a long, hard moment before finally meeting Asami’s eyes.

“You really are naïve,” she said. “At the end of the day, neither of us can really trust each other and maybe that’s for a reason. Once trust is gone, there’s no getting it back.”
“I don’t believe that,” Asami said firmly.

“Well, you should.” Korra walked away and opened the closet door before snatching her wet coat off one of the hangers.

Asami came up and stopped just a few feet away. Her entire body shook, and she hurt so much that she thought she was breaking.

“If that’s true, then why is it that you’re the only person who I still feel like I can tell everything to? Why is it always you who I feel like I can do that with?”

Korra didn’t say anything and put her coat on. It looked like she was trying to ignore Asami, but the look in her eyes told a different story.

“If you really felt that way, then you wouldn’t have drawn everything out like this, and I wouldn’t have found out the way I did,” Korra eventually said.

Asami paused and looked down. “You’re right.”

“Finally. Glad you realized that.” Korra zipped up her coat and headed for the door.

“When you left, I was miserable,” Asami called out, before she even knew what she was thinking. “That first summer you were gone, I barely ate or slept, and I cried a lot when I didn’t have to put on a show for the cameras. I didn’t talk to anyone. Not Mako. Not even my dad. I just... shut down. But my dad barely noticed because all he saw was me giving into what he wanted. And then all of the rumors about him started…”

Korra stood there, her back still turned so Asami couldn’t see her face, but her body was angled in a way that let Asami know that she was listening. She looked rigid, like Asami’s words were piercing through that thick wall of ice surrounding her.

“At first, I didn’t believe it was true because I never imagined that my own father could be capable of doing something so terrible. I didn’t want to believe it. So, when I asked him about it and he told me it wasn’t true, I didn’t ask any other questions. He was the only one I had at that time, and I didn’t want to lose him. I thought that if I just held onto him tight enough, then all of the rumors would go away and I could go on with pretending that everything was fine. But it wasn’t. It only got worse from there. I went to school and a bunch of people wouldn’t even look my way or would talk crap about me behind my back. I couldn’t even walk on the street or go to the grocery store without someone recognizing me and shouting at me about my ‘crooked’ father and how I should be locked up too because I was going to end up being just like him.”

Asami put her hand up to her chest and clenched at her sweatshirt, right over her heart that ached painfully as she spoke.

“And then there were all the times I’d go home and lay in bed at night, wishing that I could’ve been anywhere else but here. I wished for another life so bad. But also, I thought about you. I’d ask myself, ‘What would Korra say?’ or ‘What would Korra do?’ And it hurt me because you were gone doing whatever you wanted, probably not thinking about me as much as I thought about you.”

Korra still didn’t meet her gaze, but Asami looked down and saw that her hands were shaking at her sides.

“What would you have expected me to do?” she said quietly. “I couldn’t have done anything for you.”
“I expected you to be there!” Asami said, taking another step forward. There were tears in her eyes. “I expected you to at least care enough about me to know how I was doing and reach out. But you didn’t. And now you’re telling me that you were in New York for a whole year and didn’t say anything? I called you for months and left you all of those messages, and you knew how many times I called. But not once did you think to pick up the phone and answer. In fact, you went and changed your number instead. Were you sitting there laughing at how pathetic you made me feel?”

“You don’t know the first fucking thing about what I was going through at that time,” Korra said, turning around suddenly and walking away from the door. “Don’t sit here and pretend that you’re the only victim in this. You’ve been through shit? Well so have I.”

“So now it’s a competition? And how would I know anything about what you’ve been through when you don’t trust anybody to actually know anything?”

“I don’t have to explain my life to anyone! Especially you. We’re not friends and we haven’t been for a long time. Get your head out of the past already.”

Korra turned, but Asami immediately reached out and grabbed her by the arm. Korra struggled to break the hold, but Asami held tight.

“Let. Go.”

Asami’s eyes met cold blue ones.

“Fine. Go ahead and run, Korra. You’re only proving me right about what I said earlier, anyway. But if you think I’m going to watch you turn your back on me again, you’re wrong. You didn’t care about me the first time you did it, so I’m not going to care either.”

Finally, Asami released her and turned, walking away with a heavy heart. She felt her throat closing and her eyes welling up, but she’d be damned if Korra ever saw her shed any more tears for her. It was over and, like Korra, she was done.

“I went to see you a few months after I left.”

She froze. At first, she thought she only imagined those words, but when she turned around, Korra was still standing there, watching Asami.

“What?” she said, shocked and confused.

“I don’t even know why, but somehow I ended up at your house. You weren’t there, though. Apparently you were in school by then. At least, that’s what your dad told me.”

“You spoke to my dad?” Asami said.

“Oh yeah, I spoke to him,” Korra said. “And he told me how you were going to go on and do extraordinary things while, at the same time, letting me know how much of a piece of trash I was.”

Asami’s eyes widened and she suddenly felt lightheaded.

“He what?”

“Come on. Are you really surprised? He never liked me and it always showed, but I was definitely made aware of it that day. According to him, you were better off, and I was never going to amount to anything. He even went as far as offering me 50 grand if that meant staying away from you.”
Asami’s mouth was ajar, and it felt like a bunch of pins and needles were going up her arms, but they were only goosebumps. And the reason she felt that way was not because she was in disbelief, but because she had no doubt that Korra's words were true. She learned the hard way that her father was capable of doing something like that behind her back. He turned Korra away when she needed Asami the most. She thought she was going to be sick.

"I-I don't know what to say," she said.

“It's weird because the minute I saw that article, that memory popped right into my head," Korra said. "It should probably make me feel better knowing that he ended up being the one behind bars, but it doesn't. Because at the end of the day, he ended up being right. Everyone ended up being right about me: him, the kids at school, my dad, and even that shit-head Mako.”

“No, they weren’t.” Asami shook her head. “They weren’t, Korra.”

“They were,” Korra argued, glaring at her. “Stop pretending like you know me.”

“I do know you!” Asami said. “I know you better than anyone you just listed.”

Korra smirked nastily. “Let’s see how well you really know me then, shall we?”

Asami swallowed thickly at how dark Korra’s voice sounded.

“By the time I was 20, I already slept on 30 different people's couches. I had no money and I found myself letting these other people use me because I depended on them, and not just because I didn’t have any money or needed a place to stay. It was also because they had something I thought I needed more than anything.”

Korra slowly made her way toward Asami.

“The other night when you asked me why I do what I do, I left something out. It’s a pretty big reason actually.”

Asami didn’t say anything. She just watched as Korra continued to move toward her.

“Sometimes fighting isn’t enough for me,” Korra said. "The reason I choose to beat the crap out of people and get the crap kicked out of me is because it’s the only thing that makes me feel half as good as the way drugs used to.”

Asami’s stomach dropped.

“You can say how much you really know me, but you don’t,” Korra continued. "I don’t even really know myself. There’s two years of my life that I barely remember because I spent most of my days popping pills, getting drunk, or snorting a bunch of coke. And don’t get me started on some of the really hard drugs I used to take. Now those were a party. I’d sometimes wake up on a random person’s bathroom floor because I was so fucked up, and no one gave a shit. And then there were the times where I didn’t wake up——”

“Stop,” Asami said, looking away and closing her eyes. She couldn’t hear this.

“Those were the lowest points of my life,” Korra said. “But you want to know something really dark and twisted? It’s that sometimes I miss that old life. Because it was like an endless dream and I didn’t have to think about how shitty my life became. I'm pretty sure those few times I almost died were the most I ever felt anything in years.”
Korra was directly in her face, breathing hard and heavy, and Asami couldn’t avert her gaze.

“Please stop,” she said weakly.

“Why? It’s the truth.” Korra folded her arms. “And trust me, I have loads to get off my chest. Isn’t this what you wanted? Or is it suddenly too hard for you to handle?”

Asami shook her head, unable to will herself to speak. There were a thousand lumps in her throat. All of this was her fault. She wanted this, and now it was blowing up in her face. And what made it even worse was how much she really did want it to stop. She wanted to go back in time. Back to last night when they were sitting in front of the fire, with warmth spreading around them and Korra’s eyes peering into hers with so much openness that it made Asami’s breath catch. She wanted to go back to this morning when they were in bed and Korra let Asami’s hand run up her arm and squeeze her shoulder.

“Nothing to say?” Korra spoke again.

Asami shivered. “I shouldn't have,” she started, but because her voice was caught in her throat, the sentence died right there.

“Go ahead. Say it.” Korra’s eyes were glassy. “You shouldn't have pushed. This was never going to go the way you wanted. It’s not going to be a happily ever after.”

The tears were coming out of Asami’s eyes before she could stop them. She gasped for air and looked away.

“All I wanted was to know you,” she said, her voice breaking. “I didn’t know it would be like this. I never wanted to hurt you.”

“Don’t start feeling guilty now,” Korra said, her voice shaking with anger. “Just don’t.”

“Then what do you want me to be? What do you want me to do?”

“Nothing! Just let me go.”

“I can’t!” Asami yelled, finally drawing on all of the emotions she was feeling. “I wish I could, Korra, but I can’t because I’ve never been able to. Ever. You—” she stopped herself, not sure if she should continue or even if she could. “You meant so much more to me than you think.”

“I was just your emotional crutch,” Korra said in denial. “That’s the only reason why you’re holding on this much.”

“No, it’s not,” Asami said, wiping at the hot tears that raced down her cheeks.

“You never needed me.”

“I did.”

“You were better off without me.”

“I wasn’t!” Asami insisted. “Why don’t you get that?”

Korra’s angry expression finally broke; her brow beginning to smoothen out. But Asami barely noticed from all of the fogginess and wetness in her eyes.

“You say I never needed you and was better off without you? Then how come, for whatever
screwed up reason, I cried the most over you? Not breaking up with Mako for the billionth time. Not my dad going to fucking prison. But you and the fact that you weren’t there with me. You were the only person I ever needed, and it ruined me. I loved you! And you leaving me was one of the greatest heartbreaks I’ve ever felt in my life.”

She was panting afterward, and the tears continued to fall out of her eyes like a never-ending waterfall. Everything she said came stumbling out of her mouth so quickly, as though she’d been holding those words in for a long time but could never find the right way to voice them.

Korra stood there with her mouth open and eyes wide. The anger on her face completely washed away and she looked so startled and panicked that she was unable to move. But once that wore off, her expression turned heavy with sadness. Her mouth pulled downward, but Asami couldn’t say it was a frown because of how much Korra’s bottom lip quivered.

“You think I wanted to leave? You think I really had a choice?” she said, her voice a lot quieter now and shaky. “I wanted everything you wanted, but twice as much. And knowing I could never have that—never have you—killed me. There’s never been anyone else I’ve ever wanted as badly as I wanted you.”

Asami was trembling now. Her eyes squeezed shut on their own accord and she put a hand over her face, letting a few broken sobs escape her mouth.

She was crying for herself, for Korra, and for all of the stuff they had between them individually that forced them apart. It devastated her. And, more than anything, she wished that the two of them could have found some way to stay together, live better lives, and hold on to each other longer—forever.

She was ready to turn away and run upstairs to her room. This was too much to handle, and Korra ended up being right. She wasn’t emotionally able to handle this at all. Far from it. Her only regret was being in denial and not realizing it sooner. Because then, maybe that would’ve saved the both of them from this everlasting pain.

But as she was about to turn, Korra reached out with both hands to stop her. Asami struggled to get out of her hold and shook her head in protest. Her eyes were still closed and she could hear herself crying and begging to be let go. She didn’t want to break down like this in front of Korra. She was supposed to be strong and not let this phase her anymore.

But right then, in Korra’s arms, she felt more fragile than ever. And before she could stop herself, she was holding onto the other woman for dear life and crying hard into her shoulder. Korra stiffened at first, but slowly, she let the tension leave her and wrapped her arms around Asami, letting her hands rest on her lower back.

“I’m sorry,” Asami choked out, gasping into Korra’s warm neck. “I’m s-so sorry.”

She didn’t know how long the embrace lasted, maybe only a few seconds, maybe minutes. But one thing she knew for sure was that it wasn’t long enough.

Korra pulled away finally, but Asami desperately reached for her again, trying to go back into her arms, until she was stopped. A warm palm touched her wet cheek and she finally opened her eyes. Her breath caught once again when she saw the soul-shattering look on Korra’s face. Her eyes were watery, and her lip was still quivering. After a while, she took her thumb and wiped away at one of the tears rolling down Asami’s cheeks.

“Stop crying over a piece of shit like me,” she said, her voice wavering with emotion.
And before Asami could say anything, or even think about saying anything, Korra leaned forward slowly, hesitantly, and kissed the corner of her mouth.

Asami’s eyes widened as she stood there, frozen in shock. All she could feel was the softness of Korra’s lips partially against hers, and how Korra’s hand slightly moved into her barely damp hair. At that touch, Asami closed her eyes and a small whimper escaped her mouth.

Korra pulled away a second later and Asami opened her eyes. She was met with tears leaking out of Korra’s vibrant blue ones. Her hand was still in Asami’s hair and she sniffled.

“I’m sorry, Asami,” she said and let her go.

Asami could only watch as Korra turned and ran out of the apartment, closing the door loudly as she left. She stood there for several minutes and stared at the door, stricken with sadness, love, and heartbreak all at the same time.

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

**TW: drug use mention, referenced drug addiction, past overdose mention**
Chapter Notes

Special shoutout to @whysosolo on Tumblr for making this AMAZING fan art of Korra from chapter 17. Thank you again for drawing this and making the Korra in my story come to life! I adore you.

Songs to listen to for this chapter:
- Thinking About - Lauren Aquilina
- Worst in Me (stripped) - Julia Michaels
- Silence - Marshmello ft. Khalid

Also, be sure to checkout my playlist where all of these songs can be found!

A whistling wind blew against Korra’s face, swishing her bangs across her forehead. She stared at the house in front of her decidedly. It looked bigger than the first time she ever saw it and, for once, it also intimidated her.

She remembered Asami inviting her over for the first time. It was on a Friday, right after school. At that point, they were still in the ‘getting to know you’ phase, neither of them imagining getting so close so fast. But before Korra knew it, she found herself spending all of her time there whenever she could. In, what felt like, the short time they were friends, they created so many memories together. Those deep conversations, the stifled laughter in the dark during the midnight hours, the times they both let down their guards... All of those moments were stowed away inside that house, where they would stay.

Korra let out a deep breath. She had no idea how she ended up there. It was the second place (the first being Unalaq’s) that she’d been avoiding at all costs. The past few months went by so achingly slow, and yet she couldn’t recall anything. The only thing she was doing right now was existing. She felt like an empty, soulless, walking disgrace.

The last time she stood in front of Asami’s house, the two of them exchanged heated words that left them both in tears. If only things could’ve gone differently that day. Maybe then she wouldn’t have gone off the deep end and spiraled so hard. Maybe her and Asami would be in a car somewhere, traveling down an open road with the top down, blaring their favorite songs and singing at the top of their lungs. Korra yearned for nothing more than that.

She missed Asami. God did she miss her. There were so many times where she just wanted to pick up the phone and answer her calls. She wanted to tell her all of the things she couldn’t say to her, and apologize for leaving in such an abrupt manner. But she couldn’t bring herself to. She made a mess of her life, and she didn’t want Asami to see her in the state she was currently in. Right now, she’d sunken into such a low place that there was no one who could pull her out of it. Not her parents. Not even Asami.

Feeling the ache in her chest, she took a step back. There was no logical reason for her to be there. If Asami walked out of the house right now and saw her, Korra couldn’t even imagine her reaction. She feared seeing anger, hurt, and pity on her face.

There were voices all of a sudden, and the sound of footsteps shuffling through the grass. Korra
froze in place. She wanted to run, but her feet were glued to the ground. Instead, she held her breath.

Hiroshi appeared a second later from the side of the house. He was speaking in hushed voices with another male in a business suit. Asami was nowhere in sight.

Both of the men’s faces were hard and serious, like whatever conversation they were having was in confidentiality. When they both saw her standing there, they came to a stop.

“Miss Korra, isn’t it?” Hiroshi said after a pregnant pause, his tone sounding far from pleasant.

Korra finally released the breath she was holding. “Yes, sir.”

Hiroshi stared at her for a few seconds before turning to the man beside him.

“I believe we’re done here,” he said to the man, giving him a dismissive look.

The man didn’t look intimidated in the slightest and narrowed his eyes. Leaning forward, he whispered something into Hiroshi’s ear and pulled away, giving him another hard look, and then walked away after that, passing by Korra as he did. Once he was gone, the two of them stood there in silence.

Korra was unsure of what to do. She found it odd that Hiroshi was even there in the first place. Out of all the times she came over, he was either only home for a few minutes or never there at all.

“It’s been a while,” Hiroshi spoke first. “Have you gotten into any more trouble lately?”

His sarcasm was laced with bitterness and Korra almost flinched.

“No, I haven’t,” she said. “But thank you again for what you did for me.”

Hiroshi looked her up and down with scrutiny. She knew he could see the bags under her eyes, how wrinkled her clothes were, and the frizziness in her hair.

“I’m guessing you’re here to see Asami?” he asked.

“Um, yeah.” Korra rubbed at the back of her neck. It was better to say that than admit to randomly showing up out of the blue just to stare at their house with no plans on going up to the front door and knocking.

“Well, she’s been away at school for the past two weeks. She decided to go early and volunteer in helping with their welcome weekend.”

“Oh… right.”

It made sense. But at the same time, Korra started to realize just how much time went by. As expected, Asami’s world didn’t stop just because hers did.

“You haven’t spoken to her in a while, have you?” Hiroshi said in an all assuming tone.

“No. We’ve both just been busy, I guess.”

Hiroshi gave her another scrutinizing look.

“Right. Well. I should be going now.”
He turned away.

“Wait! Mr. Sato?” Korra called out. She watched as he came to a stop and, with a sigh, turned around.

Korra knew she had no right to do this after months of ignoring, but her heart begged her to at least ask about Asami.

“How is she?”

Hiroshi folded his arms and looked down at his wrist watch to check the time, indicating that Korra was wasting his.

“She’s good. Doing amazing, actually. I’ve never been prouder. Especially now that she doesn’t have as many distractions in her life.”

His words stung. There was no doubt in her mind that the only distraction he saw in Asami’s life was her.

“Look. About that night… I’m really sorry that I dragged you and Asami into that. You didn’t have to come and get me.”

“I didn’t want to,” Hiroshi said, his voice clipped.

“Right…” Korra said and looked down. “I’m very grateful anyway for what you did.”

Hiroshi didn’t say anything at first, causing Korra’s uneasiness to grow. When she looked up, she saw that he wasn’t even looking at her, but at the clear, blue sky.

“I’ve given my daughter a lot of what she wants,” he started. “I know she doesn’t see things the way I do, and that she doesn’t understand why I’m always pushing her so hard. But it’s because I know what’s best for her and that she’s going to have an amazing career once she gets older. I’ve noticed she’s been angry with me, and I’ve ignored that up until now. I let that angry teenager phase of hers go on for a while just to let her get it out of her system. But now that’s over and it’s time to grow up.”

“Mr. Sato—”

“You know what scared me the most when she called me at one in the morning, begging me to come and pick you up from a jail?” Hiroshi asked, the anger and disgust in his voice growing. “It was that she didn’t care one bit about how it made her look. That’s what really makes me sick: the fact that she was willing to throw herself into the flames for someone so inferior to her. And I knew then and there that I made a mistake with letting her get close to you. So here’s my offer, Miss Korra. I will give fifty-thousand dollars to stay as far away from my daughter as humanly possible.”

Whatever was left of Korra’s heart shattered in that moment, but she was so numb that she barely even felt it.

“I don’t want any money,” she said weakly.

“What do you want?”

Her throat closed up and she had to keep her tears at bay. She couldn’t say anything, because then she’d need to explain to him that all she wanted was the one person he was denying her of. But he
was right. The only thing she could offer Asami right now was pain. All of her recklessness and poor decisions led her down a path of destruction, and Asami didn’t need to be a part of that.

“You don’t have to worry. I’ll stay away from her,” she said, thinking she would be sick from hearing those words come out of her own mouth.

Hiroshi kept his arms folded. It didn’t look like he believed her.

“You don’t know how much your daughter has meant to me,” she continued. “She’s smart, and so incredibly talented. She’s going to do amazing things—”

“I know she is,” Hiroshi interrupted her again, his tone dismissive. All of the things she said, he already knew for himself.

Korra nodded, biting her lip for a minute to keep it from trembling.

“All I want is for her to be happy. So please. If you want to give me something, just give me that. Give me your word that you’ll let her be happy with whatever she chooses to do with her life.”

Hiroshi’s jaw clenched.

“I can assure you that she is happy where she is right now. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have things I need to do.”

He walked into the house after that, leaving Korra there to stare at the house once again.

She tried to grasp what just happened, but she was so lost. That one beacon of light and hope that she saw at the end of the tunnel finally faded out. And now she was truly in the dark.

She walked away, not giving the house another look.

If she was going to be in the dark, then everything she saw in the light needed to disappear.

The loud sound of money slamming down on the marble counter had customers turning their heads.

“Gin and tonic.”

Henry, the bartender, gave a disapproving stare.

“Maybe you should slow down a bit, Korra. That’ll be your third one in fifteen minutes.”

Korra glowered.

“Gin and tonic,” she said again, but this time in a more threatening tone. “I can climb across the bar and make it myself if you don’t want to do your job.”

Henry brought his hands up in defeat. “Coming right up.”

He walked away after that.

Korra leaned her head against her hand and gripped a chunk of her hair. She came in there with a mission to drink for the next thirty minutes. After a full three days of controlling herself and endlessly working out to the point of being physically unable, she thought she deserved it.
There were a lot of things she could call herself, but an alcoholic wasn’t one of them. That could’ve been the case a couple of years ago, but liquor was never enough to put her over the edge like more powerful things did. Sure, a therapist would tell her that drinking wasn’t exactly the best decision because of her issues with substance abuse, but she thought she had it under control for the most part.

The bar was packed for a Wednesday, full of the usual people she would always see. A few of them would nod and wave at her to come over, but she rejected their offers. The last thing she wanted was forced socialization. After all of the talking she did as of late, the best thing she could’ve done for herself was stay quiet.

Ever since that day, a bunch of suppressed memories came rising to the surface. And no matter how hard Korra tried to shake herself from them, they wouldn’t go away. They were like an annoying leech, sucking the life out of her.

She couldn’t even begin to understand what happened, so she didn’t try to. There were a lot of things she said that shouldn’t have been said at all, and now she was going through the process (or consequences?) of dealing with it. And she was dealing with it in the way she saw fit, by doing the one thing she’d grown to be good at: being self-destructive.

A drink was set in front of her. It was something pink and fruity with a lemon sticking out of it.

“This isn’t what I ordered,” she said, feeling testy and looking up at the bartender.

“Relax. It’s from the guy right over there,” he said, pointing to the left.

Korra looked over and saw that, indeed, there was a dark-haired man sitting over at the end of the bar, staring at her with a look of intent in his eyes. He was wearing a brown, leather jacket with a white shirt underneath. A tattoo peeped out from the top of his shirt that went up to his neck, and he had several piercings in his ears. He looked familiar, and Korra thought she may have seen him around a few times. Nevertheless, she rolled her eyes at him.

“Tell him he wasted his money,” she said, moving the drink away from her.

Henry sighed and finally gave her the drink she originally asked for.

“Don’t pass out on my bar,” he said.

Korra picked up her drink and sipped at it, deciding not to chug it down like the other two. She was supposed to meet up with Kuvira in an hour, so she couldn’t go too hard on the drinks without raising alarms from her former coach. All she wanted in the moment, though, was to escape from everything. Her thoughts, the emptiness in her heart, Asami... All of it.

It was cowardice, she knew. But since that was all anyone thought of her as, this was just her living up to the name. She’d been a fuck up all her life and ruined so many good things. Every important relationship she had was ruined because of her emotional unavailability. Something in her brain would automatically switch on and push the closest people out of her life because of her inability to accept the fact that they really cared about her.

Every look from Asami, every word she said, and every touch pierced through that one weakened spot of Korra’s and left her exposed. And instead of accepting all of it, that switch turned on. Asami’s words were only wasted on someone like her, anyway. As much as Korra could try to comprehend them, there would always be a wall blocking her from fully being able to receive them in the way Asami wanted her to. She didn’t trust anyone and the coldness inside of her would never
thaw.

If anything, Asami’s words only reminded Korra of how much she didn’t deserve them. Asami, with all of her warmth, generosity, and love, was better off using all of that on someone who could fully welcome it and not be so afraid of fucking it all up. Korra did her a favor by walking away.

She finished the rest of her drink in one gulp and wiped her mouth.

She thought that drinking would take some of the ease off of thinking about this stuff, yet there she was still thinking about it anyway, and to an even bigger extent.

The hunger she felt to escape her own mind grew, and she found herself wanting to give in to it.

“Miss Sato? Miss Sato, are you awake?”

Asami struggled to open her eyes, but once she did, she lifted her head from her desk. Her assistant was standing there with a concerned expression on her face.

“Yeah, sorry,” she mumbled. Looking at her watch, she saw that it was close to six in the evening. “I might’ve accidentally dozed off for a few minutes.”

“I don’t blame you,” Rita said with sympathy. “You’ve been working really hard this week. Not that you don’t work hard every day, but you’ve been moving so fast that I feel like I can’t keep up with you sometimes.”

“Sorry,” Asami offered.

“Don’t be. I just… Is everything all right with you? I know it’s not my job to pry, but having two kids and all makes me that way. You’ve been looking a little run down lately.”

“I’m fine,” Asami said. She was annoyed that Rita could see through her so easily. Now it made her wonder if everyone could tell that something was off with her. She already snapped at multiple people this week for not doing their jobs properly. Her marketing team may have caught brunt of it the most of it, but that was because it was the easiest thing for her to pick apart.

“All right. Well, I guess I’ll leave you to it then. Don’t forget you have a dinner meeting with those two investors in Chinatown at eight.”

Repressing a sigh, Asami nodded. She completely forgot about that.

“I’ll be heading out soon then,” she said. “Have a good night.”

“You too. And please try to get some rest.”

Rita left after that, closing the door behind her.

Asami put her face in her hands and dropped her shoulders. If Rita hadn’t come in, she would’ve very well slept right past the time for that meeting. For the past three nights, she hadn’t slept well at all, and instead of finding any problems with that, she just put herself to work instead. She answered every email and call and attended every meeting. She also spent a lot of time in the developmental area, working on as many projects as she could get her hands on.

Picking up her phone, she woke it to see if she had any notifications, but there were none—or rather, none that she deemed important. If she was smart, she'd finally get a work phone and a personal phone to keep things separate. But that was neither here or there anymore since her
personal life was in shambles.

Mako still wasn’t speaking to her, and she didn’t feel obligated to reach out to him either. His harsh words still upset her whenever she thought about them. At first, she felt sad, but after going over that scene multiple times, she became rightfully pissed off. He was the one who had been out of line, so it really shouldn’t have been her job to reach out first. However, the anxiety of not knowing whether or not he would call and apologize bothered her more than she wanted to admit.

Work was a blessing to her right now because it distracted her and kept her moving. But no matter how hard she tried to block out any painful thoughts, they always managed to slip through the cracks.

Again and again, she thought of those final moments with Korra: all of the anger, the revelations, and the tears.

When Korra finally walked out of the door, it sunk into Asami just how real that moment was and how much it devastated her. The rest of that day, she spent it in her bed crying and thinking about what she could’ve said differently and how she should’ve reacted.

With all of the talk she did and proclamations she made about wanting to know Korra, she found herself reeling back from the truth, unable to hear it all. The pain in Korra’s voice and the anguish written all over her face became too much for Asami. And knowing that she was the one to cause that made her so disgusted with herself. She felt like the shittiest person in the world.

She wanted to be the one who Korra could talk to about anything, and for them to be open with each other. She hoped for it and she actually had it in the palm of her hands but, ironically, it came at the price of losing Korra all over again.

She wouldn’t blame Korra for hating her now after all that she put her through. As unintentional as it was, she harmed Korra in the worst way by making her open up about things she wasn’t ready to talk about. And now, she tortured herself with the thought of Korra going off and dealing with that all by herself.

For her, Korra leaving—and the way that she left—signified the ending of a chapter that had been stretched out for far too long. She reached too hard for something unattainable. She forced it. Korra was the one who looked at things from a realistic standpoint and foresaw the end of their painful conclusion, but Asami’s stubbornness prevailed. She believed in her heart that things would end up working out between them and held onto the idea that their relationship could’ve been greater than before.

She should have known better.

Her and Korra… They just didn’t work. They were far from the people they were as teenagers, and it wasn’t anyone’s fault—that was just life. And with Asami trying to fix that, she only made things worse on both their ends. Her heart ached for Korra to the point where she felt like a permanent hole was left there. In fact, she was certain there was. And as much as she wanted to mend it, she realized that it just wasn’t possible.

She chased after Korra several times already, and bared her soul out loud, even when she still hadn’t processed all of her feelings. But even then, Korra still ran away. Asami tried to make sense of things—the hug they shared, Korra’s apology, and that kiss—but it all circled back to the fact that they reached an ending. Even if it wasn’t the conclusion Asami hoped for, it was still a conclusion, and she should’ve been grateful to even have that.
But still…

How could she move on after all that Korra told her? It raised so many more questions. And unfortunately, she’d never get the answers to them. However, as she sadly learned, she most likely wouldn’t have been able to handle it anyway. And, really, how many times was she going to let her heart be broken by the same person over again?

At that one thought, she leaned back in her chair.

It still left her speechless to think of her feelings for Korra in that way. They were a lot more complex than she gave them credit for. She wasn’t even thinking about what it meant for her sexuality wise. It all just seemed to click in place for her, making all of the sense in the world, no matter how crazy it sounded. Instead of disturbing her, this revelation gave a new meaning to the past.

She’d been in love with her best friend and never even knew it.

Asami released a shaky breath as she shuttered. It did nothing to expel the pain in her chest.

Unfortunately, the revelation came way too late. She couldn’t even imagine how she would’ve reacted to finding out her feelings when they were younger. There were a lot of things going on back then with Mako, the pressure she felt from her father, and every other teenage problem that one could think of. Adding having feelings for her girl best friend would’ve made things a hell of a lot more confusing for her.

The text notification sound from her phone finally took her out of her deep thoughts. She glanced down at it and saw that it was just a message from Bolin.

*Can we talk now?*

Asami worried her lip and pushed the phone to the side. She’d been dodging his calls and texts since Sunday. It was clear as day what he wanted to talk about.

Bolin always played the mediator between her and Mako whenever they were in an argument and stopped talking. Mako prided himself on being aloof and tough as nails, but he always ended up turning to his little brother for advice. That never sat right with Asami, though, and right now it pissed her off even more.

They were too old for this. She loved Bolin, obviously, but this had nothing to do with him and it should stay that way. He was just as in the dark as Mako was about a lot of things regarding this situation. And if she knew Bolin as well as she thought she did, he would try to talk her into “hearing Mako out,” which wasn't okay. She already heard what he had to say, and he made it loud and clear what his issues and feelings toward her and Korra were. There was nothing else she needed or wanted to hear from him right now.

Looking at her watch, she saw that twenty minutes passed just like that. This was why she needed to keep herself busy at every minute of the day. It led to too much thinking.

With a sigh, she started packing up her things and logged off her MAC. She didn’t want to go to a stupid dinner and talk business for two hours, but it was better than sitting there for another thirty minutes lost in her thoughts.

Moving on wasn’t easy in the slightest, and she’d always feel that ache in her heart whenever she thought about Korra, but eventually she’d learn to ignore it.
Korra huffed when her back hit the door, closing it all the way, and heard it lock a second later. The light was on, and the sound of the loud fan from above annoyed her, but she tried not to pay attention to it once a pair of lips crashed down onto hers. The man who bought her a drink earlier (she didn’t bother to get his name) ran his hands up and down her waist before finally settling them on her thighs and lifting her.

Korra easily wrapped her legs around his body and moaned at the feeling of his hips grinding against hers. They finally broke the kiss.

“Fuck. You’re so hot,” he said, breathing hard against her. “I’ve been wanting to do this with you for a while.”

“Stop talking,” she growled while working on getting his leather jacket off. With his help, he shrugged out of it. She was about to reach for his shirt when he grabbed for her wrists and halted her.

“Whoa. Slow down a bit,” he said.

Korra glared and pulled her hands out of his grip. She shrugged off her jacket and threw it onto the small sink beside them.

“I go at the pace I want. If you can’t handle that, then put me down and let me go find someone else more up to my speed.”

“Nope. I’m not letting someone with a nice rack like yours get away so easily,” the man said. He pulled away from her, creating some space between them to look her up and down. He whistled and ran a hand up her arm. “Damn you’re fit. And I’m digging your tattoos. Would be cooler if you had a full sleeve, though. Not to mention hotter.”

Korra rolled her eyes and was seconds away from putting this guy on his ass. “Can we cut the pointless chit-chat? I’m already getting bored.”

His eyes met hers once more and then he wasted no time in attaching his lips onto hers again. Korra sighed in relief at the fact that she didn’t have to hear his voice anymore.

This wasn’t in her plans tonight. She wanted a couple of drinks in order to not feel so empty, but they didn’t help at all. Instead, her sadness only increased. So now she was trying something different; something old.

One night stands were something she hadn’t done in a while, mainly because for the past couple of months she had a shit-ton on her plate, but also because a part of her slowly grew tired of them. They didn’t excite her as much as they used to, and those last few times that ended with her waking up in bed alone made her take a step back and reflect on what it was she really wanted and if she could go on with that same, old routine of treating sex like a cure for her loneliness.

All of that flew out the window now.

She realized that she had the right idea about things all along. This way was the easiest. She didn’t have to worry about attachment or abandonment because feelings weren’t a thing. They were unnecessary and unneeded. It worked for her.

She ran her hands underneath the nameless man’s shirt and felt his hard abs. One of his hands was on her ass while the other tangled through her hair. He was hard and rough with her, which was exactly what she was used to with men. This man embodied a lot of the past men she’d been with.
He pulled away from her lips and started trailing kisses down her neck and collarbone. She turned her head to the side and ended up opening her eyes.

She froze at the sight of herself staring back at her. Dull, blue eyes watched herself as she let this man—this stranger—have his way with her. And in that moment, she finally felt it: the dishonesty she had with herself.

Her phone vibrated from her back pocket, startling her a little, but the man didn’t stop. In fact, she felt his hand go under her shirt. Korra closed her eyes again, trying to fight the image she just saw of herself by finding that moment of escape, ignoring the feelings of wrongness. But she couldn’t.

Finally, she pushed his head away and untangled herself from his arms. Dazed, the dark haired man looked at her in confusion.

“What is it?” he asked.

Korra sighed and pulled out her phone, ignoring him for a second.

“Hello?” she answered.

“Where the hell are you? You said you’d be here an hour ago.”

Kuvira sounded irritated and strung out.

“Traffic. I’m not that far.”

“It starts in ten minutes. Hurry up.”

The line went dead after that. Korra put her phone away.

“I have to go,” she said.

“Right now?” the guy asked, flabbergasted.

“Yes.” Korra fixed her clothes and grabbed her jacket off the sink to put it on.

“Wow. Thanks for wasting my time.” The man grabbed his jacket off the floor and didn’t bother to let Korra move out of the way before opening the door and leaving in a huff.

Korra sighed and pressed her back up against the door, shutting it once again. She leaned her head against it and closed her eyes.

If that guy thought that he was the only disappointed one in this scenario, he was sadly mistaken. She would’ve loved to forget everything for at least five minutes and fall into heavy lust with the next person that walked in her peripherals. But her eagerness to actually go forward with it wasn’t there. Her heart wasn’t in it, and she realized that it had never been with her in the first place. It was still left back on the floor of Asami’s apartment. Nonetheless, it angered her.

In the short time she let Asami back into her life again, it was enough time to change her, or at least see herself differently than before. And she didn’t want that. Life was better when she was refusing to let others in and pretending that all of the skeletons in her closet weren’t there. At least she was living somewhat of a better life than she was living before. How wrong could it be for her to want to keep that old life of hers locked away?

She turned and looked at herself in the mirror again. What reflected back was someone she didn’t know, and it scared her. She didn’t know if this person was someone who she could stand looking
at, or if it was just someone new that she needed to be familiar with.

It was an unfathomable feeling: to be the person you were your whole life, and yet not know yourself at the same time. Korra hadn’t been this confused about herself in a long while. She didn’t feel any control or balance in her life, nor did she think it would return again.

Breathing in and out deeply, she gripped onto the sink tightly. Her labored breaths continued for a while and she closed her eyes, trying to drown out all of the rambling thoughts, as well as the dark ones. It was the latter that she tried to force herself out of the most, because those thoughts only led her down a dark path that she hadn’t been down in a long time. Just thinking about it made her sweat.

She swallowed and turned the faucet on to splash some cold water in her face, and then she slapped her cheeks. The harshness in her breathing remained, but the ragged sound of it went away.

Things would be all right, she told herself. Everything would pass and, pretty soon, she’d be back to who she was before: closed off, uncaring, and cold. In fact, she’d prove that right now. And if anyone had a problem with it, then that was too damn bad.

After wiping her face with a paper towel, she gave herself one last look.

As long as she kept to her regular formula, things would eventually go back to normal.

Asami rubbed at her eyes once she entered her office again. The building was mostly empty, aside from the crew in the development department working late and some janitorial staff.

She walked over to her desk and sat down her purse before kicking off her heels.

That dinner went on longer than she wanted it to, with two men talking in her ear about partnerships and how they could mutually benefit her. She didn’t even have to talk all that much, which was fine with her. She just sat there and pretended to listen to what they were saying. They’d give her a written version of it in the coming week anyway.

It exhausted her to have to put on a smile and act so put together, but after having everyone’s eyes on her for years, expecting for her to have a mental breakdown, she had to be that way. But there were a few times where she wished she could just shut off from the world and be invisible; ordinary. Like now. She wanted to blame her father for her being in this predicament, but she had the opportunity to walk away and stay out of the limelight for good and didn’t take it. This was her life now.

She sat down in her chair and turned to look out the window. The night looked quiet, but in the city that never slept, there was no telling what was going on out there. If she’d been a normal, struggling woman in her twenties, then maybe she’d be out there as well. She couldn’t say she felt like she was missing out, though.

Instead of going home, she ended up right back at her job, sitting behind a desk as if she were chained to it. But right now, it was better than being at home. There were too many bad memories there. In this one building, she had some stability. Her job was the only thing she was proud of right now, and if she ended up working herself to the point of exhaustion, then so be it. At least then she’d finally get some rest.

She logged onto her computer, prepared to do some work, but just as her computer warmed up, the facetime application popped onto her desktop, telling her there was an incoming call. It was Opal, of course.
As fate would have it, being at her workplace still didn’t keep her personal life outside of it.

She already dodged Bolin’s calls, but this was the first time Opal called her. And could she really ignore her dearest pregnant friend’s attempts at reaching out?

Bolin knew that answer.

Caving, she answered the call.

Opal’s face appeared seconds later.

“Asami!” she said, surprised, but looking delighted at the same time.

“Hi, Opal,” Asami smiled. She hadn’t facetimed her in a while, so it was nice to see her face, which looked a lot fuller than before. She appeared tired, but nonetheless, happy.

“Uhh, this is awkward because I didn’t think you were going to pick up. But still! I’m so happy to see you—Hey!”

Asami watched the screen shift and move from Opal’s face to focus on Bolin’s.

“Aha! I knew you were ignoring me!”

Asami sighed and pulled the clip out of her hair to let it down.

“Hello to you too, Bolin.”

Bolin narrowed his eyes. “So, what’s the deal? You have beef with my bro and suddenly we’re not friends anymore? I’m hurt.”

Asami rolled her eyes. “It’s not even like that.”

The screen shifted again to show Opal’s face.

“For the record, I told him that you probably wanted some space. He’s just being a big baby.”

“I am not!” said Bolin from off-camera. Seconds later, both appeared in the frame. “I just wanted to talk. Mako’s been emo for days and it’s dampening our vacation.”

“So you’re calling me to tell me to make up with him so you guys can have a good time?” Asami asked.

“No.” Bolin appeared offended. “Well... kind of. But anyway, what are you doing tomorrow for lunch? I’ll get Mako and we can—”

“No, Bolin,” Asami said firmly. “I don’t want to see him at all right now and I mean that.”

“Okay, okay.” Bolin put his hands up. “Then how about just us two?”

“What about me?” Opal shouted in outrage, making Bolin cringe.

“Fine. Us three.” He looked at Asami through the screen. “How does that sound?”

Asami sighed.

“Fine.”
Bolin smiled with content at getting his way. “Thank you.”

“Why do you even want to talk to me so much?” Asami asked.

“That’s not a fair question to ask. I miss you. And I really think we should talk about what’s been going on.”

“But it has nothing to do with you,” Asami pointed out.

“I know it doesn’t, but I also know you. You’re probably feeling beside yourself right now and need someone to talk to.”

Asami tapped her finger against her mouse, agitated because of how right he was.

“There’s a lot of things you don’t know, Bolin,” she said.

“Yeah, well…” Bolin looked over at Opal who gave him a questioning look, waiting for him to finish his thought. He turned his attention back to Asami after a few seconds. “We’ll see you tomorrow. Text me about a location.”

“Bo—”

The call ended.

Asami leaned back in her chair and blinked at the computer screen. She had no idea what that was about, but it seemed suspicious.

If Bolin planned on inviting Mako despite her request not to, she would flip. The idea of that happening made her want to call them back and cancel, but she knew Bolin would be smart enough not to answer.

Hopefully that wasn’t the case and she was just being paranoid. Bolin knew better, so she’d just have to trust that.

The chaotic scene in the room would’ve left outsiders feeling overwhelmed by all of the people pushing and shoving as they tried to get a better view inside the ring. If Korra hadn’t been so used to it, she would’ve been annoyed. Instead, she had her arms folded as she stood in the very front, watching Kuvira throw some jabs at her opponent.

There were different people in her ear, all trying to talk to her and get her to join in on their antics, but she couldn’t be bothered. Like with at the bar, she didn’t feel like socializing. But she wasn’t much of a talker to begin with, so no one minded the fact that she wasn’t participating.

The tight-knit, exclusive event was only opened up to Varrick’s highest bidders and people in his inner circle. There were other fight clubs in attendance, as well. On this special occasion, clubs used it to size each other up and find out if there was anyone new to look out for and even poach. Korra remembered Varrick finding her that way.

Most of the times, these events caused nothing but drama, which was why she never came out to any of them when she didn’t have to. Kuvira liked them, though. She always jumped at the chance to “break in” the new recruits and show off. It was an ego boost for her, hence why she looked so smug in the ring right now.

All of her movements were fluid, and her footwork light and artistic. It reminded Korra of a dancer.
She felt embarrassed for the opponent who looked clumsy in comparison, but Kuvira was declared one of the best for a reason. Right now, they were going on round three and Kuvira wasn’t even breaking a sweat. She could’ve had her opponent down and on the ground a long time ago, but Varrick’s guys must’ve gotten in her ear and told her to toy around for a bit. With this round, though, Kuvira looked more serious, and Korra saw the outcome from a thousand miles away.

Like clockwork, Kuvira had her opponent on the ground seconds after the bell rang, forcing their arm into an uncomfortable position, as if she were trying to rip it off. The opponent tapped out five seconds later.

Cheering and clapping could be heard all around. A few people even nudged Korra in the sides, saying ‘that’s your competition!’ which annoyed her more than anything. She was happy for Kuvira, but she wasn’t in the right state of mind to be jumping up and down, clapping for her.

She watched Kuvira walk around the ring, addressing the crowd for a bit. Varrick’s men stood on the apron, watching in bored fashion.

“Overhyped bitch!” someone shouted from the crowd when things quieted down.

Korra’s head snapped to the right, in search of the person. The darkness in the room made it hard for her to locate them, but then she saw a woman with a hat on, a couple of feet away, standing in front of another woman who was laughing.

“Hey!” Korra shouted over the crowd that started booing the woman. “Do you have a problem?”

The woman turned her head and met Korra’s eyes. She was grinning like a cheshire cat, and with the help of what little light there was in the room, Korra recognized her. She also noticed that the other woman standing behind her was Yunko. Both were from the Triple Threats.

“Well, well,” the woman in front, Zelina, said loudly. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it? I haven’t seen that much of you outside of the ring in ages.”

“Judging from your tone, you’ve been standing there for a while, waiting to say something,” Korra responded. “It’s cute you’re that desperate for my attention. You’ve always craved it.”

“You’re the one to talk, given by how much you thrive off of the attention of others.” Zelina started walking toward her, her auburn hair swishing back and forth outside her hat. Yunko followed in tow and the crowd started to back up, whispering as they did.

Korra looked away from Zelina for a second.

“’Sup, Yunko? How are things going since the last time I kicked your ass?”

Yunko stood tall, her dark eyes glaring daggers at Korra, but then her expression turned all too chilled.

“Good actually. I’ve been in several matches since then and won all of them. You probably couldn’t relate since you were benched for a whole month.”

“You mean the several matches you’ve been in that were paid off? I wouldn’t go around gloating about that if I were you.”

“Go to hell.”

The crowd started circling around the three of the them, invested in the conversation and
accusations Korra made.

“Quit it with the self-righteous act,” Zelina said. “You may not be linked with us anymore, but
don’t pretend that Varrick is a saint. You’re just double-dipping.”

Korra’s mouth pulled into a thin line and she glared.

“Varrick’s a lot of things, but he’s not a controlling scumbag like Viper is. I couldn’t have left that
pathetic group at a better time.”

“Speaking of Viper, I’m told he misses you,” Zelina said. “You must’ve really left your mark on
him. I wouldn’t be surprised if that’s what’s happening with Varrick right now since you get
around so much.”

The crowd ‘ooed.’

Korra felt her anger growing and her heart pumping. She could tell that she was being baited and
that the odds were stacked against her, but she didn’t care. Pounding her fists into multiple people
sounded like exactly what she needed right now.

“You’re really going to have to let go of that claim one of these days,” she said calmly, a little too
calm. “How many times are you going to accuse me of sleeping my way to the top before
admitting to yourself that I’m just better than you?”

“Korra, stop!” someone yelled. It was Kuvira. She was still in the ring, without a doubt only just
now realizing what was happening.

Zelina stepped forward, closing the distance between them and getting right into her face.

“Why don’t I prove you wrong right now?”

“I’d like to see you try.”

A second after that, she was shoved, hard, into someone from behind her, but she quickly regained
her footing and shot forward, tackling the woman to the floor. Everything went to hell quickly after
that.

It almost felt like blacking out. Korra couldn’t feel her fists connecting with Zelina’s face, or any of
the punches being thrown back. She had no thoughts in that moment, and only felt anger, and she
knew that none of the anger had anything to do with the current situation. It was just like how none
of her anger had anything to do with Asami. The only person she was angry at was herself.

There was a ton of commotion and lots of shouting around her, but then she felt arms wrap around
her torso, pulling her back. That ended up giving Zelina another chance to punch her in the face,
but Korra was still close enough to give her a kick to the gut before being dragged away for good.
More shouting occurred, but she couldn’t understand most of it. It took her a minute to realize that
Kuvira was the one to pull her away. She struggled violently, wanting to go for another round, but
Kuvira’s strong hold on her kept her captive, as well as her shouts to calm down. Korra eventually
complied and Kuvira let go of her finally, though she continued to shove her forward, through the
disappointed crowd.

They made it out of the room and down a narrow staircase before reaching the bottom near the
exit. A white light flickered above their heads.

“Okay,” Kuvira said once they were alone and out of sight. “What the hell has gotten into you?”
“You’re joking right?” Korra said. “I was defending you. She was the one talking shit.”

“I don’t need you to defend me,” Kuvira said.

“Wow. Okay, noted.” Korra tried to walk by her, but Kuvira reached out and pushed her back against the wall.

“Be real with me. I’ve smelt booze on you since you got here, and now you’re letting people rile you up purposefully so you can beat the shit out of them. It’s typical Korra 101. What I don’t understand is why. Where is all of this regression suddenly coming from? I could’ve sworn we were passed that shit.”

“You don’t know anything.” Korra tried to get by her again, but Kuvira held her there.

“That fight had nothing to do with me and everything to do with you. So why don’t you just tell me what’s really going on?”

“Just leave it alone, Kuvira,” Korra warned, wiping at her mouth. Her head and left eye were throbbing from the blows she received, and she started to feel the soreness in her knuckles.

“Hey! You two!”

They both looked up. Zhu Li walked down the steps, her tiny frame noticeable even in the dark, but once she stepped into the flickering light, Korra saw the exasperation written all over her face.

“Now is really not a good time,” Kuvira said for the both of them.

“You really think I care?” Zhu Li said. She faced Korra directly. “I don’t know what you were trying to pull up there, but it needs to never happen again. You’re representing Blackstone out there, not just yourself. Varrick’s not here tonight, so if things go wrong, it’s my ass on the line. You got that?”

Korra looked away from her and bundled her fists at her sides. She never wanted to scream so loud in her life.

“Loud and clear,” she replied.

Shoving by Kuvira, she opened the door and walked out. She felt so much anger, sadness, and hurt at the same time that walking away was her only option.

At the end of the hallway, a door led outside to an alleyway. Just as she made her way to it, she was grabbed by the arm.

“Hey!” Kuvira said, sounding out of breath. “I wasn’t finished walking to you.”

“There’s nothing to talk about,” Korra said. “Just go back inside and forget I was even here.”

“No. I’m not letting you leave like this.”

The concern in Kuvira’s voice, along with the grip on her arm made Korra squeeze her eyes shut.

“Stop,” she said.

“Stop what?” Kuvira asked, tightening her grip.

“That!” Korra pulled away from her. “I don’t need you to care or try to be my friend. It’s hopeless.”
Kuvira’s face grew more concerned and she stepped closer. “Let me get you home.”

Korra tried to turn away, but Kuvira stopped her again.

“I can get home on my own,” she said.

“You don’t need to be alone right now.”

Korra glared. “I don’t need a babysitter.”

“Why is it so hard for you to accept help?” Kuvira questioned. “I’m not babysitting you. I’m worried about you. And I don’t want you going out and doing something I know you’ll end up regretting.”

“Like what?” Korra challenged her. She wanted Kuvira to say what they were both thinking out loud. But Kuvira didn’t. Instead, she just stared at Korra, her mouth in a firm line, but her eyes told so much.

“Let me take you home,” she said again after a few seconds, this time more pleading. “I won’t ask any questions and we don’t even have to talk on the way, but just let see that you get home all right.”

Korra wanted to say no, and any other time she would have, but right now she was spiraling. If Kuvira hadn’t ran after her, she had no idea where she’d go or get herself into. And that was the scariest part: when she had no idea what she was capable of.

She let out a frustrated noise and raked her hands through hair.

“Let me go and get dressed, and then we can go, okay?” Kuvira said in a quiet tone.

Korra only responded with a nod.

“Come on,” Kuvira said. She stepped away and started walking back down the hall, but when Korra didn’t follow behind her right away, she stopped.

Korra closed her eyes and breathed several times, trying to keep from crumbling right then and there. The never-ending battle with herself continued, and it all of a sudden made her feel so exhausted.

Minutes passed, with only the sound of Korra’s labored breathing to fill the hallway. After a while, she finally pushed herself off the wall and walked by Kuvira.

Her feet felt heavy, but not as heavy as her heart.

The car pulled up to Korra’s apartment building and parked at the curb thirty minutes later. She’d been staring out the window and didn’t realize how much time passed by. Blinking, she looked over at Kuvira, who leaned between the seats and spoke to the driver.

“Just give me a few minutes.”

“Sure thing,” the driver replied.

They both got out of the car, stepping out into the light snow that started to fall.

Kuvira kept her word and didn’t say anything the entire car ride. But that was no surprise since she
became so used to Korra shutting down and closing herself off. However, Korra’s sense of self started to come back, and she began to feel guilt.

“I didn’t mean to ruin your night by losing my cool like that,” she said in remorse.

“It’s definitely not one of the greatest nights we’ve had in a while,” Kuvira agreed. “But it isn’t one of the worst. It would give me some peace of mind to know if you were okay, though.”

Korra swallowed and looked down. Finally, she shook her head.

“I just feel so…” she started but couldn’t find the words. Kuvira stood there and waited. She never pushed Korra to share her feelings, but Korra knew she owed her that. “Pathetic… I feel pathetic, embarrassed, and sad.”

Kuvira gave a slow nod but didn’t speak at first.

“On a scale of one to ten, how much do you feel like using right now?”

Korra subconsciously clenched her fists even though her knuckles throbbed and bleed. The cold wind hitting her equally throbbing face felt good.

“Before the car ride, I was at a five, but now I think I’m at a three.”

“That’s good. Still worrisome, but good.”

Korra folded her arms and looked up.

“Do I look weak to you now?” she asked.

“No. You look human,” Kuvira replied. “We all have our weaknesses. I know I do.”

“Yeah, but you don’t let them define you. I thought that was something I steered away from, but maybe I was wrong.”

She hated admitting it out loud but holding it in did her no favors anymore. Staying quiet did more damage than speaking up. It was an age-old concept, but Korra started to realize how true it actually was.

“I’m gonna give this a guess,” Kuvira said. “Does this have anything to do with Asami? When you came over to get your stuff the day after we all hung out, you seemed really… off. I wanted to say something, but you left so quickly.”

Korra paused.

“No,” she said after a beat. “I mean, not really. It’s just… me. I’m the issue. As always.”

The frown on Kuvira’s face deepened.

“Do you need me to stay with you for a little while?” she asked. “I really don’t mind.”

“You’ve helped me a lot already tonight, and I appreciate that. But I think I just need to be alone right now.”

“Are you sure?” Kuvira asked, appearing uncertain.

Korra nodded. “I’m okay. Really. You don’t have to worry about me going out and doing
“I always worry about that,” Kuvira said.

Korra looked downward.

“Thank you,” she said. “You’re always the one to keep me sane. I don’t know how you’ve put up with me for so long.”

“I’m clearly addicted to people who have more problems than me,” Kuvira said.

Korra snorted. "Good to know I'm not the only addict in this relationship."

Kuvira gave her a tiny smile and put a hand on her shoulder.

“Take care of yourself, okay?” she said, a serious expression on her face now. “And if you need anything, call me.”

Korra nodded. “I will.”

With one final look, Kuvira turned and got back inside the car. It pulled off a few seconds later.

Korra exhaled, creating a visible puff of air around her, before making her way inside the apartment building.

In this one week, everything seemed to culminate. Her anger, her hurt, and her fear got the better of her. All she had to show for it now was a black eye and swollen knuckles. She failed at her attempt to force things to go back to normal and ended up making things worse.

Once she got inside her apartment, she shrugged off her coat and shoes. She shivered at the coldness in the room before going to turn the thermostat up. After that, she walked into the living room and sat down on her couch, staring out the window. She finally allowed herself to think about everything she’d been trying to avoid all night.

If Mako hadn’t shown up that day, would things be as different as they were now? Korra doubted that. Discovering that news article sent her mind in a tizzy, making her remember things she’d kept hidden from Asami this whole time. She was certain that whether Mako showed up or not, she would’ve messed everything up anyway. Her raw emotions worked a lot faster than her brain did, and before her brain could catch up, her emotions already did enough damage.

She always criticized Asami and Mako’s relationship because of how much they fought, but her relationship with Asami was no better. They didn’t fight as often, but there was something about them that always left a horrible feeling in Korra’s gut. In a dramatic sense, it felt like a piece of her soul was being ripped from her body, leaving her hollow. And the bigger the fight was, the bigger the piece that was torn from her. She wondered if it was like that for Asami, as well.

The constant push and pull between them, and the amount of emotion and intensity they had could be too much at times. But in the past, no matter how many times they fucked up with each other, they eventually found their way back and learned something new in the process. Was it possible that this was something similar?

Korra looked down at her hands, acknowledging the swelling she felt in her right.

Whatever the case, it was torture for the both of them. Any sane person would tell them to just stay away from each other for good this time; however, wasn’t that what Korra had been trying to do in
the first place?

She stayed away from Asami out of respect and love, and, up until a week ago, she thought Asami was the better for it. But apparently that was the furthest thing from the truth. Asami’s life sounded like a nightmare.

Chewing on her bottom lip, Korra got to her feet and walked over to the kitchen for a second to grab her laptop from the table. Once she sat back down on the couch, she powered the device on. After a few minutes of waiting for it to boot up, she opened her web browser and paused, her fingers hovering over the keyboard. She wondered if this was the right thing to do. Instead of moving on, she was doing the opposite. She was going down the rabbit hole, and the farther she went in, the more inescapable it all seemed to be.

But could she really go on never fully understanding Asami’s side of things?

Taking a deep breath, she gathered her wits before finding the courage to type. She only searched Hiroshi’s name, and it was enough to come across thousands of news articles about him. It overwhelmed her to see so many, so she narrowed down her search by finding details about his case specifically.

The articles she read revealed a lot more than she saw in the newspaper. There were details about the type of underground work Hiroshi did, along with all of the terrorist organizations he worked with and what their mission was. His involvement with them started all the way back in 2009. He even sent these groups close to one million dollars of donation money for their efforts.

Korra read on for, what felt like, hours, piecing together everything she could find about the case. After doing that, she exited out of the articles and sat back, relaxing her bunched shoulders.

Hiroshi always gave her bad vibes back then, but she never imagined he would be capable of something this horrendous. She only thought of him as one of those elitist parents who thought they were too good for anyone, but it was even more twisted than that. His actions affected the people around him: his colleagues, his innocent friends, and his own daughter.

Korra’s chest tightened at the thought of what Asami’s life had been like back then.

They both suffered and had been alone. What made it more unbearable for Korra to think about was how if she’d just come back and stuck around long enough, neither of those things would’ve happened. She could’ve been there for Asami and they could’ve taken care of each other. Instead, she fell so hard, so fast, and didn’t want to get up from it. And in doing so, she pushed away the one person who needed her the most.

Fighting back her tears, she went back to the search engine and started typing in Asami’s name, but then she stopped.

Technically, she could look up everything about Asami right now and find out all she needed to know. But how fair was that? Asami didn’t have the privilege of sharing things about her life word of mouth because they were all online for millions of people to read. Korra cherished her own privacy, and just thinking about so many strangers knowing about her life and past struggles made her anxious. Asami didn’t have that privilege. People could even make up things and start rumors in order to fit their own narrative. And these news articles—while helpful in painting a picture—could not give her insight into Asami’s feelings. The only one who could do that was Asami.

Sighing, she shut her computer and put it to the side.
Now she was back to square one all over again.

She left with finality that day, never intending to see Asami again. And Asami, more than likely, was over this whole thing. Things couldn’t be the way they were anymore. She told Asami that she didn’t want to keep stringing her along and giving her false hope, but she ended up doing that anyway. Even if she hadn’t meant to, she still ended up hurting Asami more than she did a long time ago. She did this to the both of them. And that was the perfect reason for why she should stay away.

But, however wrong it was, she still knew in her heart what she really wanted. Asami already made it clear that she wanted Korra back in her life, but Korra—being the cynical one and all—didn’t believe that was possible. On Asami’s side, there was Mako, her high-profile lifestyle, along with her personal issues. And with Korra, there was the fight club, her rough past, as well as her deeply rooted issues. Then, on top of that, they had their relationship issues to work out.

What were they to each other now? Korra already admitted to herself that her old feelings were beginning to resurface. Was it even possible to ignore them now? In high school, it was manageable, but it still hurt to not be able to verbalize how she felt.

Asami’s feelings were also something to think about, as well. She told Korra a lot of things in the heat of the moment, and Korra was unsure of whether or not they were real and if she could fully let her walls down and accept them as the truth. But if she never asked about it, then she’d never know for sure.

She pulled her phone out and checked it. It was close to one in the morning.

Chewing on her lip again, she searched through her contacts and found Asami’s number that she still had saved in her phone.

This time, it was her turn to try and be the optimistic one. She never saw herself as being that type of person, but after being around Asami, the hopefulness was starting to rub off.

If she didn’t want fear to be the reason why she couldn’t handle her problems, then now was the perfect time to not let it.

TBC...
Surrender

Chapter Notes

Special shoutout to Emilie for buying me so many coffees and to @hamidou82 for drawing these two wonderful pieces of the last chapter. I still can't believe people are making fan art of this story! It makes me so incredibly happy.

It was only forty degrees and the snow from last night didn’t stop until early that morning. Everyone looked worn out, tired, and over winter already, even though it technically wouldn’t start for another week.

Asami sat at her favorite table in Starbucks, doing some work while on her lunch break. Her tired eyes read along some paperwork, but she found herself rereading the same lines over again and finally gave up, taking off her reading glasses and putting them aside. She only got a total of ten hours of sleep in the past four days. Time was ticking before she finally crashed and burned, but through willpower alone she would make it to the end of the week.

“Is this seat taken?”

She looked up at that voice.

Bolin stood there in a black coat with a green hat on his head that matched his eyes. He had that goofy grin on his face that never failed to make Asami smile, even on her worst days. It was only upon seeing him in person that she realized just how much she missed him since he moved away.

“It is now,” she said.

Bolin took off his coat and put his hat inside one of the pockets. He looked tan and buff, but that was what working on a farm and doing tons of heavy lifting did to a person.

Before he sat down, he walked over to Asami and leaned down to give her a hug. Asami welcomed it, even though he was cold. After a long week of feeling drained, being in the presence of someone with so much infectious energy actually felt nice.

“Where’s Opal?” she asked, pulling away and looking behind him. Mako was nowhere in sight either, thankfully.

“She wasn’t feeling well this morning, so she decided to stay back.”

“You left her alone?” Asami asked, slapping him on the shoulder. “Are you crazy?”

“Relax.” Bolin sat down and Asami cleared the table from all of the mess of papers and electronics. “Grandma came over before I left and said she’d stay with her until I came back. She seemed to be doing a little better, though. Before I left, she went back to sleep. Besides, she wanted me to come.”

Asami gave him a sympathetic look. “I’ll have to text her later. Pregnancy sounds like no joke.”

"It really isn't. I'm more freaked out about it than Opal is! Although, I do think she puts on a brave
face a lot of the times because she doesn't want to worry me."

"It's typical for a lot of men to be that way, and you are prone to freaking out about things, so I can see why she wouldn't want to vocalize her pain."

"Gee, thanks," Bolin gave her a sarcastic eye roll.

"I wish there was something I could do for her."

"You could stop by the place sometime...” Bolin said, although he sounded hesitant. “She’d love to see you.”

"Yeah, well,” Asami looked down at the table. “If you’re staying at Mako’s, I don’t think I’d be that welcome over there right now.”

Bolin didn’t speak at first, but she could feel his eyes on her.

“That’s kind of why I wanted Opal to stay home anyway,” he admitted. "All of this drama wouldn't be good for her, even if she does enjoy gossip more than anyone."

Asami sighed. “Look, Bolin, I already know that Mako's probably told you his side of the story, but that’s all it is: his side.”

“You think I don’t know that already?” Bolin raised a dark, bushy brow. “I’m his brother, after all. I lived with him for eighteen years of my life and I know how he is. He’s stubborn, bossy, defensive, and thinks his way is the best way. How many times have I had to be the mediator between the two of you because of those reasons?”

“Too many. And that’s why he didn’t need to involve you in this. Whenever he wants to sort things out and actually give me the chance to speak, he can come to me himself. We’re not in high school anymore.”

“He’s not getting me involved at all. I wanted to see you. This situation only made me want to even more. I agree that the two of you need some space from each other, though. I haven’t seen Mako this upset in a while, and I think that once he simmers down, he’ll finally think about things in a rational way. You know how much you mean to him.”

“I don’t know what to think anymore,” Asami said. “You said it yourself. He’s stubborn, bossy, defensive, and not to mention, overprotective.”

“Yes…” Bolin started. “But…”

“‘But what?’” Asami gave him an irritated look.

“Despite what I just said about him, all he wants is for the people in his life to be happy. He’s the same guy who didn’t go to college because only one of us could afford to. And he’s also the same guy who took a six-hour bus ride up to Cornell every weekend he could when the stuff with your dad was going on…”

“I know that, Bolin,” Asami said, though her tone deflated a little. “There’s no question about how much he cares. The problem is that he cares too much. He doesn’t get to decide whether I’m happy or not. And caring too much doesn’t give him the excuse to be an asshole. I’ve been through this so many times with him and I can’t do it anymore. I love him, but I’m not going to let him try and control my life or censure the people I choose to have in my life.”
“I can understand that,” Bolin nodded in agreement. Pausing, he picked up a napkin and started folding it. In all the years Asami had known him, she knew he was nervous about something.

“What?” she asked, sounding annoyed.

Bolin looked up, appearing super serious, which was rare for him.

“I’m going to be honest with you, if that’s okay?” he asked.

Asami nodded slowly. “I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

Bolin relaxed his shoulders and let out a deep breath.

“We’ve known each other for a long time—since I was that twelve-year-old kid who would always run and tell Grandma whenever you and Mako would shut the door on me for bothering you.”

Asami smiled at the memory.

“We were still going through it back then, dealing with our parents’ death in our own way,” Bolin continued, his voice growing solemn. “I was the sad one, while Mako got to be the angry teenager who went on a rebellious streak for a few years. But as we grew up, he started to mellow out, and I think a lot of that has to do with you. You pushed him to clean up his act and open up more to the people in his life, and that’s something I’ll always be grateful to you for. There’s no telling where Mako might have ended up.”

“Thanks—”

“Hold on. I’m not finished,” Bolin said. From that tone alone, Asami knew that there was a ‘but’ coming.

“For a little while, up until high school, I really thought the two of you were going to get married one day. I was the first person to have ever thought that. You two worked so well together that it felt like a no brainer. But as we got older, there were a lot more emotions and the typical teenage drama that went on. I saw how many times you guys fought, or when Mako came storming into the house angry or upset about something involving you. And I always had to be the one to hear about it.”

Asami looked down in shame. “I’m sorry we put you through that.”

“It’s okay,” Bolin said. “I’m not saying all of this because I’m looking for sympathy or whatever. It’s just that… sometimes, being the little brother and looking into my older brother’s relationship with you made me see a lot of the things that he never caught. You guys had a lot of people fooled because of how much you kept your fights private, but for someone like me, who got a closer look into it, it was pretty obvious how dysfunctional that relationship was. You guys outgrew each other long before you ever realized it. And as much as I love you and think of you as a sister, I have to admit that when you two finally broke it off for good, I felt so… relieved.”

Asami pulled back a little, stunned. However, after a few minutes of thinking about it, she realized how much sense it made.

If there was anyone else outside of her and Mako to know the truth behind their crazy relationship, Bolin was that person. He’d seen it all and knew the most about what really happened with them and why they needed to end things when they did. Both her and Mako were so selfish back then to not realize how much it affected the people around them. It wasn’t fair to Bolin, just like it hadn’t been fair to Korra. Asami expected her to try and be a part of her life again, but she exposed Korra
to all of the things that went wrong in the first place. Korra was right to have walked away.

“You remember Korra, don’t you?” she asked, realizing they hadn’t touched on any of the stuff regarding her, and it was obvious that Bolin knew about it, or at least some of it.

Bolin chuckled. “Oh yeah. I definitely remember Korra. She was the girl of sixteen-year-old Bolin’s dreams. Does she remember me?”

Asami smiled. “Yeah, she does.”

Bolin grinned and scratched his cheek, appearing embarrassed. “God, I was such an idiot back then. She probably thought I was such a dork.”

“She did, but she also thought you were one of the nicest people she met,” Asami said.

“That’s sweet. How is she?”

Asami’s smile faltered and she looked down for a minute.

“She’s, uh, doing well,” she said. She didn’t want to lie to Bolin, but telling him about everything that went on with Korra would only lead to her spending hours that she didn’t have complaining and sulking over things she couldn’t change. Besides, after what they just talked about, she didn’t want to involve Bolin with her problems. He already had Mako to deal with, and that was enough.

However, while they were walking down memory lane, there was a question that popped into her head that she never thought about asking until now.

“Can I ask you something?” she said, giving him a thoughtful look.

“Of course,” Bolin replied.

“You had a really big crush on her at the time...”

Bolin’s cheeks turned red. “That’s not a question, but geez. Was it that obvious?”

“I think the only one who didn’t know about it was Korra.”

“Ah. Well that makes sense.”

Asami gave him a curious look. “Why do you say that?”

Bolin waved her off. “No reason. Anyway, what was your question?”

“Oh. Well, I was just thinking that for someone with a really big crush on her, you seemed to get over her quickly. I mean, you moved on to some other girl and started dating her for a few months before the school year ended.”

Bolin averted his gaze and, to Asami’s interest, started playing with the napkin in his hands even more.

“That’s just what teenage boys do,” he said. “You crush on someone for a little while, and then you move on to someone else.”

“But you said she was the girl of your dreams.”

“Yeah. My teenage dreams. Now I’m really glad Opal isn’t here. She’d ring my neck for talking
about another woman like this.”

Asami sighed. “All I want to know is if Mako was responsible for you moving on like that?”

Bolin tilted his head to the side, giving her a whimsical look.

“You guys must’ve had a really bad fight if you’re asking me this question,” he said. “Mako… he definitely didn’t like the fact that I liked her so much. He always told me that she wasn’t my type and that I could do better.”

Asami’s hands bunched into fists under the table and she let her breath out through her nose. She opened her mouth to go off.

“I never listened to him, though,” Bolin said quickly. “I knew how much he didn’t like your friendship with her, and he really didn’t like the group of people she hung out with, which, I agree with now, was a good reason to be concerned. They weren’t a good group. I think that was the main part of why he didn’t want me to hang around her.”

“So then why?” Asami asked.

Bolin looked down again.

“Because she was never into me.”

Asami stared, unsure of if she was reading his tone correctly.

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m not sure if I should say this or not,” Bolin said. “It’s not like I ever knew for sure, and it was all just speculation.”

“Just say it,” Asami said, her heart beating fast.

Bolin sighed and looked up at her again.

“I don’t really remember much about her. I just remember thinking that she seemed really cool and not like a lot of the other snobby girls at our school. She just minded her own business and didn’t care what anyone had to say about her. And I think that’s why so many people liked to spread rumors about her so much.”

“What kind of rumors?”

Bolin finally let go of the napkin and folded his hands together. He looked uncomfortable.

“That she came from a delinquent center, or that she almost killed someone at her old school after fighting them. And that she liked…”

He trailed off and glanced away awkwardly.

“Liked girls?” Asami finished for him.

Bolin looked at her in confusion before nodding.

“Did you know about that this whole time?”

“No… I just found out about everything.”
“Oh. Well, that makes me feel slightly more comfortable.”

Asami was stupefied. Revelation after revelation kept coming, like a large gust of wind constantly knocking her over.

“So, wait,” she said, trying to put things together. “You stopped liking her because you heard she liked girls?”

“Nooo. Not in the way you make it sound.” Bolin waved his hands. “You know me. I never cared for rumors, especially rumors like that. I only go by what I see.”

“And what did you see?” Asami asked, trying to keep the anxiety and anticipation from showing.

“Well, after hearing those rumors from a few buddies of mine, I waved them off, obviously,” Bolin said. “I still thought I had a chance with her or whatever. But there’s this one significant moment I remember... I went up to talk to her one time while periods were changing, and she looked really down for some reason. I could tell she wasn’t in the mood, but I think all I wanted was to get her to smile, even just a little. But I failed. And then…”

He paused and smiled, as if he was seeing the memory play out in front of him. “You suddenly showed up. I think you were complaining about a teacher giving you a B on an assignment, and that randomly led into you asking her if she wanted to sleep over at your house. I watched her the whole time, and everything about her became so much calmer. It was subtle, but I could see her eyes lighting up more and more every second you spoke. And what sealed the deal for me was that she finally cracked a smile... I couldn't believe it. All that time I spent waiting for her to look at me with adoration and she was already giving you that look.”

Asami’s breath caught and she looked away, trying to imagine that scene for herself, but then she realized that she didn’t need to imagine it at all. She remembered the looks they shared, and the subtle but meaningful touches, or how Korra would just sit there and let Asami hold her hand while she cried about her father or Mako. How could she have missed something that’d been staring her in the face for so long?

“You never said anything,” she said, clearing her throat.

“Yeah, because I knew how much drama it would cause,” Bolin said. “And also because it wasn’t my business to tell. I could’ve been wrong for all I knew.”

“You weren’t,” Asami said, looking up at him. “Wrong, that is.”

“Ahh.” Bolin frowned. “I can only imagine what she might’ve been going through. You being with Mako and all…”

“I just don’t understand how everyone knew besides me,” she said.

“I’m not surprised,” Bolin said. “Mako did a good job with threatening people to shut up about it or else.”

Asami’s eyes grew rounder and her mouth opened in shock.

“Mako knew?” she said, her voice raising inside of the Starbucks. A few people glanced their way. Bolin’s eyes widened as well. He looked guilty and full of regret.

“I thought you said you knew everything!” he said. “I shouldn’t have said that. Just forget it.”
“No,” she said, letting the anger spill out in her voice. “I’m tired of being the only one out of the loop. If you know something, tell me now.”

Bolin rubbed at his eyes, appearing frustrated with himself.

“Mako knew about the rumors, yes, but like me, he didn’t believe them. At least, I don’t think. It just made him mad that people were disrespecting your guys relationship by implying that Korra had a thing for you. So he put a stop to the rumors. That’s all I know about it, I swear.”

Asami felt a headache coming on and rubbed at her temples.

Mako heard the rumors about Korra before she did and made sure she never heard about them. But despite Bolin saying that Mako didn’t believe them, was it possible that he actually did? And could that have been the cause to some of his animosity toward Korra back then? All of the answers she received only produced more questions for her.

“It feels like the more I find out about this, the more confusing things get,” she mused.

“What are you going to do?” Bolin asked.

“I don’t think there’s anything I can do,” Asami said. “There’s a lot more going on than you know… and I don’t know if it’s repairable.”

“I’m sorry,” Bolin said, reaching over the table and grabbing her hand. “But can I just say that I’m so glad I removed myself from that love triangle-square thing?”

A breathy laugh escaped Asami’s lips.

"Leave it to you to make a joke during my emotional crisis."

Bolin squeezed her hand and went back to looking serious. "I really am sorry, Asami."

Asami lowered her gaze. "Yeah... me, too."

She thought her brain would combust from everything, and she wasn’t sure what learning all of this new information meant. It definitely made her rethink her outlook on things with Mako and how much Korra impacted their relationship, but did any of it matter when things were already so messed up?

“Do you think it’s still possible for things to change now?” she asked, looking up.

Bolin’s eyes held hers.

“It depends on if you’re the only one who wants things to,” he told her.

Asami felt her lip wobbling and turned her head. He confirmed what she already knew.

“I guess you’re right,” she said.

“I’m sure things will work out the way they’re meant to,” Bolin said. “And… I hope you know that no matter what happens between you and Mako, I still see you as a member of the family.”

Asami smiled. “You better. I plan on spoiling my nephew or niece rotten.”

Bolin laughed and finally pulled his hand away.
“How about we take a break from the heavy stuff, grab some coffee, and talk more about how cute my baby is going to be?”

Asami laughed again. “Anything sounds better than talking about my relationship issues.”

They got up and went over to the counter. Bolin wrapped his arm around her shoulder as they stood in line, talking about future fatherhood and anything else unrelated to Asami’s situation. It was comforting, but Asami couldn’t keep her mind off of everything she just learned.

There was nothing more she could do, and it was as Bolin said. She couldn’t be the only one who wanted to fix things. So right now, no matter how much it killed her. She’d just have to sit back and wait. And if nothing came from it, then at least she didn’t have any hope for it in the first place.

For the first time that week, she made it home at a decent hour. It was only going on seven by the time she got to her apartment. She sat her bag down on the counter and released a deep breath.

After having lunch with Bolin, she had to go right back to work for a couple of meetings that lasted well throughout the rest of the day. She realized afterward that she should’ve just cancelled them all since she wasn’t in a good place to be making important business decisions.

By the time that was all done, she felt her energy running low and decided she needed a good night rest to get through the rest of the week.

She went into the kitchen and opened the fridge, trying to find something to eat, but there was nothing inside because she hadn’t gone grocery shopping in the past two weeks.

Frustrated, she shut the fridge and put her forehead against it. Nothing in her life seemed easy anymore. Not even something as simple as finding and making a quick, frozen dinner. Whatever. Who needed food anyway?

Just as she was about to head upstairs and call it a night, she heard ringing from inside her purse. She went over to the bag and searched through it for a few seconds before finally finding her phone.

“Hello,” she answered.

There was a long pause.

“Hey…”

Asami froze, unable to let words fall out of her mouth. She just stood there in silence, wondering if she was lucid dreaming.

“Are you there?” Korra spoke again, her voice sounding low but calm.

It took another three seconds for Asami to answer.

“Yeah… I’m here.”

“Oh, okay…”

She clutched her phone as she held it to her ear. Hearing Korra’s voice again after everything that happened prompted her to remember all of her pain and sadness from the way they parted. She hadn’t expected to hear from Korra so soon—if at all.
“Why are you calling me?” she couldn’t help but ask.

Korra didn’t answer at first. Asami almost thought she hung up, but then she heard her breathe.

“I’ve been wanting to call you since last night,” Korra said.

“Really?”

“Yeah, really. I’d… like for us to talk.”

“What happened to you not wanting to talk anymore?” Asami asked. She wasn’t trying to come off as bitter. She was just surprised about this actually happening. And it was happening so fast, too. This week was full of so many twists and turns that she felt like there was no point in trying to keep up.

“You’re right to feel apprehensive,” Korra said. “I wouldn’t blame you if you were done with all of this after what I said. But… if there’s even a small part of you that isn’t done, just give me a chance to make this right.”

“How?” Asami replied, and she noticed the lack of confidence in her voice.

“I just want to talk,” Korra said again.

Asami brushed her hair back. Oddly enough, she felt apprehensive about this despite her feelings earlier about needing it to happen this way. She wanted to trust that things would be different this time around since Korra was the one to reach out, but she wasn’t sure if she could. There was so much pain, heartbreak, and heavy emotions between the two of them that it made her think that it was all there would ever be. She didn’t think she could take another steep drop on this rollercoaster.

But call her stupid, a fool even... She couldn’t find it in herself to say no to Korra. Every rollercoaster reached its end at some point, right?

“Okay,” she said. “But I don’t think we should do this over the phone.”

“Agreed,” Korra said. “Are you busy right now?”

“No. I just got home. Did you… want to come over?”

“Actually... I was wondering if you’d come over to my place?”

Surprised, Asami almost pulled the phone away from her face to stare at it. She couldn’t believe Korra was the one suggesting this after hiding where she lived this whole time. It was a step forward, but Asami knew by now that, for them, one step forward could mean a thousand steps backward. She had to go into this being skeptical, or else she’d run the risk of being disappointed.

“Where?” she asked, gathering whatever bit of energy she had left.

She rapped three times on the door before stepping back and looking around.

The apartment building was located in Greenwich Village, only a block away from the Washington Square Park. It looked just as nice on the inside as it did on the outside. It also looked more expensive compared to the other apartments around, but there was no telling how much money Korra made from her fights.
She had no idea what she was about to walk into right now. What she expected was a bunch of awkward silences and tension that neither of them would be able to break. The fight was still fresh in both of their minds, so what if seeing each other so soon after only made things worse?

The sound of the door unlocking in several different places made her hold her breath.

Korra opened the door.

“Oh my god!” Asami exclaimed. She stepped forward, reaching out with her hand before remembering herself and stopping. “Are you okay? What happened?”

She was referring to the reddish-purple bruise circling Korra’s left eye. It looked fresh and more painful than the bruise she received on Saturday. Clearly, she’d been in another fight.

“Long story,” Korra said and opened the door wider, signaling for Asami to come in, which she did. After the door shut, Asami turned and faced Korra again.

“Have you put anything on that?” she asked. “It still looks swollen.”

“It’ll be fine in a couple of days,” Korra said, not sounding the least bit concerned.

Asami rolled her eyes at the indirect answer. She looked Korra up and down for a minute, pausing at the sight of her bruised knuckles and frowning. She decided to take some initiative right then and walked over to the narrow kitchen. There was a kettle on top of the stove with some water boiling and two tea cups sat on the counter along next to it. She ignored that in favor of going to the fridge and opening it. Looking around, she found some frozen broccoli in a bag and took it out.

“Here,” she offered it to Korra. “Put this on your face.”

“Asami, it’s really no big deal.”

“Korra, just take the damn broccoli.”

Sighing, Korra walked over to Asami and accepted the bag from her hands. She lightly placed it against her eye in a slow manner, wincing a little, before fully pressing it against her face.

“Happy now?”

“Ecstatic,” Asami deadpanned.

Korra leaned back against the counter behind her and closed her eyes.

“This already isn’t going the way I wanted it to,” she said.

Asami wanted to nod in agreement. Had she not been so concerned over Korra’s well-being, the two of them would’ve still been standing at the door looking stiff and trying to act cordial. That was the last thing Asami wanted. If they were going to do this, then it needed to be real. They broke each other down too much already to go back to not speaking their minds.

“How did you want this to go?” she asked quietly, after a minute.

Korra eventually opened her good eye and met Asami’s. There was something different with her. Asami could tell. Her face looked relaxed, as well as her body language.

“Look, I didn’t want you to come here just to see me like this,” Korra told her. “I wanted you to come over here because I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you and what happened. I…”
regret the way I acted toward you.”

Asami inhaled deeply and looked down.

“Wow. We’re jumping right into this, aren’t we?” she said.

“I figured I already wasted enough of your time,” Korra replied.

Finally, Asami’s eyes rose to meet hers.

“You said it yourself. I pushed you into talking about things you obviously weren’t ready to talk about. I should be the one to apologize.”

Korra sat the bag down on the counter.

“You don’t deserve misplaced anger,” she said. “What happened was the result of me holding in too many things for so long. I shouldn’t have done that. Especially after you…”

Korra trailed off, looking down at her socks and rubbing her hand over her elbow through her sweater.

“There was a lot of anger on both our parts,” Asami said. “After you told me about staying here for a year, I just… Everything that I felt back then and even when I first saw you again—the anger, the resentment, and the hurt—came back full force. I never got the chance to express that before because I thought that only one of us could be angry at a time. But maybe I should’ve just told you how I really felt in the beginning.”

Korra folded her arms and looked up.

“I didn’t give you the chance to be angry,” she said. “I didn’t take your feelings into consideration because I was only thinking about myself and how I felt. I was selfish.”

“And you think I wasn’t?” Asami asked. “All I wanted was answers and to find out if you left because of me. Maybe all this time I was just trying to clear my guilty conscience.”

Korra’s eyes peered into hers, searching.

“Was that really all it was?” she asked in a quieter voice.

Asami glanced away.

“No,” she said. Even though she was still confused about certain things, she needed to be honest with Korra and with herself. “It may have started that way at first, but the more we talked, and the more open you were, I didn’t want it to stop. I wanted your friendship, your trust, and… I don’t know. I just wanted more.”

Korra stared, her expression turning into an understanding one, but Asami noticed the longing there, as well.

“And what do you want now?” Korra asked, the bass in her tone getting lower.

Asami mimicked Korra’s posture and folded her arms.

“I meant what I said about wanting you to still be a part of my life. But it can’t just be me who wants that. I get that you don’t think it will work, and I can’t say that I haven’t had my own doubts this past week, but I’m still willing to try.”
“Even after everything that’s happened?” Korra questioned, looking skeptical.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Asami took a deep breath and released it.

“Because I still care about you, Korra. I’ve always cared. And I don’t think that will ever stop.”

Korra seemed surprised by that statement, although Asami had no idea why. She already blurted out a lot of things during their heated and emotional exchange, so this shouldn’t have come as a shock.

Or was Korra just not that used to people telling her these kinds of things?

Just as Korra opened her mouth to speak, the kettle started whistling loudly, startling them both.

“You can go sit in the living room. I’ll be right there.” Korra walked over to the stove and removed the kettle from the burner.

Asami waited a few seconds, unable to take her eyes off of Korra, before eventually walking out of the kitchen. She removed her shoes and placed them by the door, then took off her coat and put it on a hook installed in the wall. Afterward, she did as Korra suggested and went into the living room to sit down.

She took a minute to look around at the place. The living room had a decent amount of space, but it was sort of… empty. There were no personal photos, or anything to make the apartment feel like it was lived in. There were also a few boxes sitting near a wall, open but not unpacked. It could’ve been that Korra just moved there, but she got the feeling that wasn’t the case.

She wondered what Korra was going to say just before they’d been interrupted. Would she have rejected Asami’s offer again and said that they should just part ways peacefully? That wasn’t a bad idea, but Asami didn’t want things to end that way. She wanted Korra to fight to be a part of her life, just as much as Asami had been fighting.

Korra walked over a minute later and handed over a cup of tea.

“Thanks,” Asami mumbled, taking it but not drinking from it right away.

Korra sat hers down on the table in front of them, along with the bag of broccoli, but Asami reached for it just as Korra sat it down and handed it back over with an insistent look in her eyes. Korra didn’t argue and took the bag, placing it on the left side of her face again. Neither of them said anything about it.

“Did you just move here?” Asami asked.

“No. I’ve been living here for almost two years now.”

“So the boxes are just a decorative thing?”

“No,” Korra said again, a faint smile appearing on her lips. “I’ve just moved around a lot, so I don’t make it an act to get too comfortable anywhere.”

Asami wanted to ask if she was planning on moving somewhere else soon but stopped herself. Right now wasn’t the appropriate time to be asking those questions. Instead, her eyes settled on
Korra’s hand that iced her face. Her knuckles were so bruised that Asami wondered if her hand was fractured, or worse, broken.

“It’s really not that bad,” Korra said. She must’ve saw the look of concern on Asami’s face.

“I’m guessing this wasn’t a typical boxing fight you were in,” Asami said, putting her tea on the table beside Korra’s.

Korra removed the bag from her face and used it on her hand. She didn’t respond at first and stared down at her lap, deep in thought.

“When I first started fighting, I had a lot of anger about so many different things,” she said. “But mainly, I was angry with myself, so I took all of what I was feeling and channeled it into fighting. It felt good for a while, but I knew it wasn’t a cure for my problems. Kuvira taught me that.”

Korra stopped talking and pursed her lips together. Her gaze was still lowered, and she wouldn’t meet Asami’s eyes directly.

“But last night, I forgot about everything that I learned. I started slipping back into my old ways and getting into trouble. All because I didn’t know how to deal with what was really bothering me. I didn’t want to.”

“This is my fault,” Asami said. “If I just minded my own business—”

“No,” Korra shook her head vehemently. “Don’t blame yourself. I’ve been keeping everything bottled in for years. If anything, you helped me realize that it isn’t healthy for myself or the people around me. I’ve been a coward.”

“You are not a coward,” Asami interjected. “You’ve had to deal with so much, and it’s understandable why you wouldn’t want to think about it anymore.”

“But that’s the problem,” Korra stressed. “Not wanting to think about it or reflect on it hasn’t let me get over it. I’ve just been at a stand-still, shutting people out and never allowing myself to grow as a person. It’s my fault and no one else’s. You were right to say that I was scared the other day. It’s all I’ve ever been, and I was just too proud to admit it.”

Korra bowed her head, her hair falling into her face and shielding one side of it away from Asami. The pain in her voice pierced through Asami chest, but it also gave her a sudden urge—like, if she could, she’d absorb all of that sadness and hurt Korra was feeling and take it all in for herself.

Without thinking, she reached over and touched Korra’s hand, covering it. Finally, Korra looked up.

“You’re a lot braver than you think,” Asami spoke in a soft tone.

Korra gave her a doubtful look, as if she didn’t believe those words for herself, but that just made Asami want to say them again and again until she did.

“You’re more forgiving than you should be,” Korra told her.

“I forgive people who I know are worth it.”

At that, Korra’s mouth twitched a little and she lowered her head again.

“I don’t understand how you could say that about me after everything. I’ve hurt you so much, even
unintentionally."

Asami looked at their hands and she used her thumb to lightly rub over Korra’s bruised knuckles.

“We’ve both hurt each other,” Asami reminded her. “But that doesn’t have to happen anymore. I think we’ve aired a lot of our grievances out already.”

“So then… what now?” Korra asked. “Where do you want to go from here?”

Asami went quiet, thinking about everything they already discussed from present day, all the way back to last week.

“I’ve already told you what my intentions were and that hasn’t changed,” she answered.

“You want to be friends,” Korra said. Her hair fell into her face again.

Asami felt something tug at her heart just then, and without hesitation, she let go of Korra’s hand and then used it to brush the hair out of Korra’s eyes, tucking it behind her ear. When Korra looked up, she had a harboring expression on her face, but at the same time her eyes held so much vulnerability. Asami didn’t know what to make of it.

“I…” she started but didn’t know what to say. Was the disappointment she heard in Korra’s voice because she didn’t like the idea, or for another reason? “What do you want?”

Korra blinked and glanced down at the hand Asami used to touch her before meeting her gaze again.

“I don’t want to hurt you anymore.”

Asami licked her lips and pressed forward in earnest.

“So then don’t,” she said.

“It’s not that easy,” Korra said. “Asami, I’m a mess. And the last thing you’d want in your life is another person’s mess to clean up. Don’t say you won’t try because I know you will.”

“I wasn’t going to say that,” Asami said. “But I do want to help you, Korra. I want to be here for you. Let me have that choice.”

Korra pursed her lips together and turned her head to the side.

“What is it?” Asami asked, knowing she had something on her mind. She watched Korra close her eyes and sigh deeply.

“What if that isn’t enough for me?” she said in a hushed tone.

Asami stared at her with a look of confusion. “What do you mean?”

Korra locked eyes with her again, although she was hesitant.

“It means that I’m not sure if I can let you get close to me again when I… you know,” she said, gesturing with her hands.

“Don’t tell me this is about the whole fight club thing,” Asami said. “Neither of us is guiltier than the other for getting involved in things we shouldn’t be a part of.”
“God you are so oblivious,” Korra chuckled. She turned her body and faced Asami completely. “What I’m trying to say is that I don’t know if I can be just friends with you.”

Asami’s eyes widened. “So, you mean you still…”

“Have feelings for you—yes,” Korra finished for her.

Asami swallowed and nervously bit at her lip. She watched Korra’s eyes go to it before glancing upward again.

“Are you sure?” she said after a minute of being speechless.

“You don’t believe me?”

“No—I mean, I don’t know. I guess I’m just confused? For the past few days, all I’ve been wondering is if you hate me or not. But now you’re telling me this.”

Now Korra looked confused.

“What in the world made you think that I hated you?”

“Because I opened up a can of worms for you,” Asami said. “I wouldn’t have liked it if someone did that to me, so I would’ve understood if you felt that way.”

“I’ve never hated you, Asami,” Korra told her. “I guess it’s easy to see why you’d think that. I haven’t exactly welcomed you with open arms since our little reunion. However, I thought my actions before leaving on Sunday contradicted all of that.”

“You mean… the kiss?”

Korra nodded in confirmation and Asami felt a blush creeping up on her cheeks.

“So that wasn’t just your way of saying goodbye?”

Korra gave her a deciding look.

“I’ll give you that one,” she said. “I didn’t think I’d see you again after all of that.”

“And yet here we are,” Asami whispered.

“Yeah. Here we are. And now you know how I feel, so I guess the bigger question is how you feel about it?”

They both went quiet. Korra continued to ice her hand while Asami fell deep into thought.

If there was one thing this entire situation taught her, it was that by searching for the answers she wanted to know, there could be more answers under the surface to questions she never asked before. She didn’t even fully have the chance to process all of what Bolin told her; however, all of this overwhelming information challenged her to think more. She thought about her feelings—both past and present—and what it meant for her and the scope of her relationship with Korra.

“I think we can agree that a lot of things we said were in the heat of the moment,” she said. When Korra nodded, she continued. “But just because they were said in the heat of the moment, that doesn’t mean neither of us wasn’t speaking the truth. For me, at least, I’ve discovered things about myself.”
“As in?” Korra prompted her. She looked anxious and eager at the same time.

“The way I felt about you then,” she said. “And how I think that what we had was more than just a friendship.”

Korra considered her for a moment.

“You think, or you know?” she asked.

“I know,” Asami confirmed.

“How can you be so sure that this isn’t you just getting mixed up with your emotions?” Korra asked. "You have to admit that this all sounds pretty crazy."

Asami thought about it.

“I’m someone who’s always sure about everything,” she started. “I was never sure about you, though. You’re an anomaly to me, and I think that’s why, for so long, I’ve kept you separated from everything else in my life. I never knew how things would go with you, but what I did know was that I wanted you around in my life. More than anyone. And when you told me about how you stayed here for a year, I felt so… gutted, you know? It reopened a lot of old wounds, but it also made me realize that they never healed in the first place because I didn't understand how much you truly meant to me. But now... It all makes sense to me how I felt about you.”

“And how do you feel now?” Korra asked, her eyes peering into Asami’s to the point where Asami felt like she could see into her inner depths.

“I’m a straight woman, Korra,” she said.

A small, sad smile appeared at the corner of Korra’s mouth.

“I know.”

Asami sighed, releasing all of the tension in her shoulders.

“But there’s been these moments between us recently that have been so... intense. I didn’t know what to make out of them before, but now that I know how I felt back then, it makes it easier for me to think that I’ve been missing out on something in the present...”

“So, you’re curious?” Korra said.

“No… Well, yes—I don’t know. Is there a right answer to this?”

A huff of laughter came from Korra’s mouth and she shook her head.

“No. There isn’t. If you know, you know. And if you don’t, then don’t force yourself into reaching the ‘right’ answer.”

“Yeah,” Asami looked down at her lap. “I just don’t want you to think that I’m being cruel. The last thing I want to do is confuse you or make this hard for either of us again.”

“If anything, I’ll end up confusing and making things hard for myself.”

Korra said it as a joke, but Asami could only offer a strained smile.

“So then… where does this leave us now?” she finally asked. “I mean, you already said that you
“I don’t want to be friends.”

“I said I didn’t think I could just be friends with you,” Korra corrected.

“And you also don’t want to hurt me.”

Korra paused for a second and then shook her head.

“No. I don’t.”

Asami turned toward Korra more.

“I’m only comfortable with this if you are,” she said. “You have feelings, and I’m…”

“Intrigued about your own,” Korra said when she struggled to find the words.

“That makes it sound like I’m some college girl looking to experiment.”

“So then... what is it?”

Asami breathed out.

"I do have feelings for you Korra," she admitted and watched Korra's face soften. "It's just that this is new territory for me and, like you, I don't want either of us to get hurt because of my curiosity, or whatever it is."

Korra leaned her head against the couch.

“All I know is that, for me, I’m just now starting to learn about dealing with all of my issues, and making things right with you is one of my priorities.”

“You don’t have to worry about me,” Asami said. “You should focus on yourself and doing things for you.”

“I am doing this for me,” Korra said. “There’s a ton of regrets I have, and most of them have to do with you.”

Asami felt birds in her stomach at Korra’s honest words and inhaled sharply.

“Okay,” she said.

“There are some things that we should talk about, though,” Korra said. “I dumped a lot of heavy stuff on you, and I’m sure you have questions.”

“I do.” Asami nodded. “There’s also stuff on my side that I need to explain, as well.”

Korra nodded and closed her eyes.

“But I… I don’t think I’m ready to talk about it all tonight.”

“There’s no rush,” Asami said, and she found herself delighted at saying that. They had time together now. Korra wanted this.

“I just feel so tired,” Korra professed, her voice sounding weak and full of surrender.

Asami leaned her head against the couch, as well, but continued to look at her.
“Me, too.”

They stayed that way for a while, silent but contemplative. The air felt fresher than ever between them, and Asami knew she made the right decision to come over. They worked through so many things already than she could’ve ever done alone. Their situation still had some complications, and there were certain areas that needed repaired, but they were finally on stable footing again. And from now on, they’d work on keeping it that way.

A lot of time seemed to pass by, and when Asami looked down at her watch, she noticed how late it was getting.

“I should probably go,” she announced, looking over at both of their untouched teas for a second.

Korra finally opened her eyes and looked at her. She didn’t say anything and remained silent even when Asami stood up from the couch. Asami could feel her eyes on her, though.

“When can I see you again?” Korra asked.

“Whenever you want,” Asami said. “Just text or call.”

“Okay…”

Asami shifted on her feet, suddenly feeling awkward.

“Okay then. I guess I’ll see you soon.”

She turned to leave, but Korra’s hand reached out and caught hers, halting her in place. Looking down, she saw Korra’s underlying look. There was uncertainty and indecision in her eyes, but underneath that, there was that vulnerability again. So much vulnerability that Asami got chills.

“Will you stay tonight?” Korra asked in, what sounded like, a pleading tone.

Asami’s pulse quickened. She felt Korra’s cold palm in her warm one and the jolt of electricity that shot through her. It startled her to the point where she almost pulled away, but she stayed in place. Korra’s grip wasn’t tight at all, giving Asami the chance to say no and pull back. She stared at their hands for a few seconds before carefully closing hers around Korra’s.

“Okay.”

Neither of them moved just yet, but eventually Asami sat back down, still holding on to Korra’s hand. They were close together now with their legs and arms almost touching, emitting body heat from each other. And then, to Asami’s great surprise, she felt Korra’s head rest against her shoulder.

“Thank you,” Korra breathed out. It reminded Asami of someone praying.

“For what?” she whispered back.

Korra didn’t reply and began to play with their hands. She ran hers down Asami’s, stopping at her wrist before going back up again and then circling the back of her hand. Then she turned Asami’s hand over and slid their palms together, splaying their fingers, and then slowly lacing hers through Asami’s.

Asami watched this in awe, feeling the weight of Korra’s head on her shoulder and the softness of her palm. With that one gesture, it was enough to assure her that everything would be okay.
Deciding that she didn’t need a real answer for once, she leaned her head against Korra’s and closed her eyes. She let herself be free from all of the hostility and high-strung emotions she’d been going through for the past few months. And in doing that, she became enraptured by all of these new and intense feelings she had for a woman who broke her heart but could now be on the path to healing it.

PART 3 (END)
Loud footsteps trudged through the house as people went in and out, carrying boxes and crates to the moving truck. The objects inside of them ranged from expensive to invaluable.

Asami stood with her arms folded and back against a naked wall as she watched in hopelessness. She held her mother’s photo album close to her chest, not wanting it out of sight for the time being. She looked around at all of the boxes in the living room that still had yet to be moved out to the truck. Seeing all of it packed away and stacked on top of each other like a bunch of junk made her sick to her core. And what made it worse was that the people around her couldn’t have cared any less. They were just doing their jobs, not knowing the indirect pain they caused by clearing out the house.

They didn’t see the significance of her father’s desk that he spent hours sitting at to the point where Asami had to wonder if he even knew she existed anymore, or cared. They didn’t know that in the box one of them lifted so easily and placed over their shoulder held all of her mother’s favorite sonnets and books she used to read to Asami before bed. They didn’t realize that all of the trophies Asami received at science fairs were won in an effort to get closer to her father after her mother died.

Pretty soon, all of it would be stashed away, never to see the light of day again.

She sat down on the cold floor and made herself small behind some boxes, wrapping her arms around her knees and resting her head against them.

How could this happen? For a while, she’d just been going through the motions and keeping it together, but slowly things began to change. She found herself reaching a point of normalcy and satisfaction again. Her GPA had never been better, she was set to study abroad during her sophomore year, and she was really starting to appreciate the ins and outs of business. At one point, she actually saw herself following after her father’s footsteps in the future and taking on the pressure of owning the business.

But then last January happened... and now her father was somewhere behind bars.

In a way, it was kind of poetic that her father—who pushed her in this direction to begin with—ended up being the one to stomp all over her acceptance of that journey.

All this time she’d just been living in denial about him. She wanted to believe he was innocent so much that she missed all of the signs or simply overlooked them. If she only looked deeper into things and wasn’t so scared of digging up more of the truth, then maybe she wouldn’t feel as blindsided, hurt, and devastated.
At the end of the day, the only person her father cared about was himself. If he really cared about her, he would’ve chosen her over getting involved with those people. If he loved her, then he wouldn’t have made her feel so alone for most of her entire life.

She shivered and rubbed at her arms through her sleeves. It was only March and the cold air drifted through the house, giving it an even chillier atmosphere.

Asami didn’t know what to do now. She was being forced out of the only house she ever lived in. After holding off on it for as long as she could, there was no other choice but to give it up. She lived at school for the time being, but what would happen after she graduated? Where could she go now when her father left her with bankruptcy and a corrupt company to deal with?

She rocked herself back and forth as she heard movers continue to walk in and out of the house, passing through the room, not noticing her behind the boxes, which was fine. It made her feel isolated enough to have this mental breakdown.

She was all alone now. With her father out of her life for good, she had no one else to rely on. Her life was out of order and she was sure there was no getting it back on track. It made her feel jaded and bitter about everything that went wrong in her life. She couldn’t help but entertain the idea that she was cursed.

And what made things even worse for her mentally was that still, in the back of her mind, she wished that person was here. It was a thought she’d been trying so hard to push down, but the shittier her life became, the harder it was to suppress.

She knew it didn’t make sense for her to feel that way, though. Why was she even thinking about someone who obviously didn’t care about what was going on in her life? She hadn’t heard from them in three years and yet she still found herself thinking about them. How fair was that? It made her so angry at herself for feeling this way and even angrier at the person who caused it. And how fucked up was it that behind all of the bitterness, disappointment, and rage, she knew that if that person walked through the door at any minute, she’d probably run straight into their arms?

Maybe she was going insane.

“Asami? You here?” a voice called out.

She lifted her head and stood up quickly, stepping from behind the boxes. Just as she did, Mako walked into the room, wearing his police uniform.

“What are you doing here?” she asked. “I told you not to come until four.”

“It is four.”

Asami looked down at her watch to check the time, and indeed, it was five after.

She sighed out loud and brushed the loose strands that fell from her ponytail out of her face.

“They’re running behind schedule.”

“Oh. Well, that’s okay.”

“Not really since they showed up late and I’m paying them by the hour. It’s almost like they hate doing work for the daughter who had no idea about her terrorist supporting father.”

She said the words loudly enough for the two workers who passed by the room to hear. Neither of
them reacted.

“Asami, come on,” Mako said looking at the workers as well in awkwardness.

“It’s not like they weren’t thinking it,” Asami said nonchalantly and bent down to pick up the photo album.

Mako sighed and looked around at the emptying living room.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

Asami shrugged. “You were the one who kept telling me that I needed to prepare myself. And I’m sure that’s because you saw this coming from a mile away.”

“I didn’t know anything,” Mako said, stepping toward her. “Are you forgetting that I knew your father for a long time? I was in as much denial at first about it as you were. But all of the evidence just kept piling up and I couldn’t be oblivious to it anymore.”

Asami leaned against the wall and closed her eyes. She didn’t want to talk about this with Mako right now. Drowning in her own sorrows was enough for her at the moment.

“What are you going to do with all of this stuff?” she heard Mako say after a minute.

Lifting one of her shoulders, she shrugged. “Sell it, I guess.”

“You’re not serious, are you?” Mako asked, sounding in disbelief. “You can’t just sell off all of your belongings.”

Her eyes snapped open.

“Yeah, well. I don’t really have a choice now, do I? I either sell everything or live on the street corner. Or are you saying that it wouldn’t be so bad so long as I have the one-hundred-dollar cashmere fucking sweater I bought at the mall one time on a whim?”

She noticed the rise in her voice as she spoke, along with the way it vibrated against the walls and echoed in the room. Mako’s eyes widened at her outburst and he walked over, placing his hands on her shoulders.

“Hey. I’m sorry, okay? I didn’t mean to get you so worked up.”

“Mako…” she sighed. “Why are you even here?”

“What are you talking about? I’m giving you a ride back to Grandma’s.”

“No.” Asami shook her head and stepped out of his hold. “I mean why are you still here? I’m sure you have better things to do than entertain your ex-girlfriend whose life is going to shit.”

Mako looked taken aback.

“You have to know by now that you’re more than just an ex-girlfriend to me. I love you, Asami.”

Asami closed her eyes and shook her head again. She didn’t need to hear this right now.
“You should leave while you have the chance,” she told him. “Being involved with me will only get you branded as a corrupt cop who’s friends with the daughter of a terrorist supporter.”

Mako grabbed her by the arm and kept her there in place.

“Stop pushing away the people left in your life who care about you,” he said. “You still have me, Bolin, Opal, and the rest of my family. We’re not going anywhere. I promise you that.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep,” she said.

“I promise,” he said. “I’m not giving up on you, Asami. And I know you’ll find a way to get through this.”

Asami looked down, not wanting to meet his gaze. She let him pull her into his chest, which made it easy for her to hide the tears in her eyes. Nothing made sense anymore. Not even her feelings. Because even though she was in the arms of someone who cared about her, the lone, empty feeling still resided in her chest to the point where it hurt to even breathe.

She didn’t think anyone else could ever know this kind of feeling.

Korra woke up gasping for air and gripping the pillow underneath her for dear life. She opened her eyes and squinted in the darkness, trying to make out her surroundings.

Turning her head, she saw a woman’s back facing her and she appeared sound asleep. Korra barely knew who she was, but she envied her. She envied anyone who wasn’t plagued with dark thoughts that affected their ability to have a decent amount of sleep for a few hours.

All she had were nightmares these days but, luckily, the one she just had began to slip out of her mind. All she could remember from it was having a tight knot in her chest and feeling like she was suffocating. It almost felt too real.

After calming down, she rested her face into the pillow for a few minutes and then sat up. Her head pounded and she put her hand to it, as if that would keep it from feeling like it was splitting in two. She ran her hand through the length of her long hair and looked around the room again, trying to recall the events that happened the night before. She remembered being at work, then going to a party, and then getting friendly with a DJ (the woman beside her?). After that, things became a little fuzzy. She couldn’t say that she didn’t remember it at all, though. And seeing as it was now dark out again and she felt like she slept for ten years, a whole day must’ve passed by since then.

The room they were in was small with posters of old, British, rock bands covering the walls. Incense burned on top of a dresser, filling the room with the smell of maple and wood. Nothing about this scenario seemed abnormal, which was enough to not raise any alarms for Korra. This happened so many times that she couldn’t be surprised by herself anymore. Sometimes, she thought of herself as only a spectator to her own body.

She pulled the covers off, exposing her nakedness to the cold, and then carefully swung her legs off the bed and placed them on the floor. Her panties and jeans were easy enough to find since they were right beside the bed. She stood up and put them on, then sat back down on the bed and searched around for her bra and t-shirt.

The bed suddenly shifted and a light turned on, making her close her eyes at the brightness. Arms wrapped around her stomach a second later and she felt a pair of lips kiss at her shoulder.

“Don’t tell me you’re leaving?” a soft, accented, voice murmured in her ear.
Korra rolled her eyes. She hated it when she couldn’t just leave quietly. It only led to boring, awkward, and stiff conversations that she didn’t want to have. That was why she much preferred the silent types who didn’t care when she came or went.

“I have to be at work in a few hours,” she said, still looking around for her shirt and pretending she didn’t feel the warm pair of breasts brushing up against her back.

“So then why the rush?” the woman asked. She took Korra’s chin under her hand and forced Korra to meet her eyes. “I know we got pretty hammered the night before, but I had a lot of fun with you today. And I’m pretty sure I kept you entertained.”

Korra eyed her. She was an attractive woman, no doubt. Long braids cascaded down behind her smooth, brown shoulders. Her body filled out nicely and Korra could see a couple of the marks she left on her skin by accident. But it was those doughy, brown eyes of hers that looked so soft and open that made Korra want to flinch.

“You’re wasting your time,” she said, turning away from her hand. “I don’t even remember most of it, or your name.”

“Ouch. That was pretty cold,” the woman said. “Is that your thing? To give mind blowing sex only to leave your victims in the dust afterward? Oh, and my name is Zoë.”

“Well, Zoë, it’s good to know you think my sex is mind blowing. Do you know where my bra and shirt are?”

Zoë sighed and untangled her arms from Korra’s waist before getting off the bed. Her hips swayed as she walked out of the room for a minute. When she came back, she had the rest of Korra’s clothes, but Korra only concentrated on her naked form. Once she met Zoë’s eyes again, she saw a smirk on her lips.

“Wanna have a smoke before you go?” she asked and showed Korra a bag of weed she brought back with her, as well.

“No thanks,” Korra said and reached for her clothes but they were pulled out of reach at last minute.

“Why not?” Zoë asked with a playful smile. “Too much for you to handle?”

“Or maybe because that stuff does nothing for me?”

“So then what does?”

“Stuff that makes me forget pointless conversations. Like this one.”

Zoë frowned as she finally understood. “Oh… You didn’t seem like the type to dab into that kind of stuff.”

“Does that disappoint you?” Korra asked sarcastically.

“I don’t know anything about you, so I’m not going to judge. Besides, I’m a DJ so I’ve seen a lot of things, and I’ll even admit that I’ve dabbled in some stuff here and there. I don’t try to do it too often, though. I’m a part-time nursing student, and I’ve studied a lot about different types of drugs. That stuff will get you hooked before you know it if you’re not careful.”

“Thank you for the information, future nurse.” Korra took the shirt and bra out of her hands.
“You’re going to school, aren’t you? I’m pretty sure I’ve seen you around campus.”

“I guess you’ll find that out eventually if you see me around or not.”

Korra thought the conversation ended after that, but then she saw Zoë’s feet move closer to her.

“You know, I may still have some Vicodin around from when I got my wisdom teeth removed… If you want it, that is.”

Korra paused in her movements. She looked up at Zoë and saw the mischievous look in her eyes.

“Shouldn’t a person who’s trying to become a nurse not want to hand drugs out so easily to people?”

“It’s only a few tablets,” Zoë said. “It’s not like I’m giving you a full bottle of it. Just don’t take them all at the same time and you should be fine.”

She walked out of the room again, and Korra saw the light (from where she guessed the bathroom was) turn on. There was the sound of rummaging going on for several minutes, and then the light finally turned off. Zoë walked back into the room with a pill bottle in hand.

“Ah. See? There’s only four.”

She came over to Korra and handed over the bottle. But, like with Korra’s clothes, once Korra reached out for it, she pulled back.

Korra sighed and wiped a hand over her face.

“What do you want?” she asked. She should’ve known this was coming.

Zoë tapped at her chin, pretending to look up in deep thought. Her eyes finally settled on Korra again and she walked closer. She took the clothes from Korra’s hands and dropped them to the floor, along with the pill bottle. In a smooth manner, she climbed in Korra’s lap and closed the distance between them, pressing their naked chests together. Leaning forward, she got right in Korra’s ear.

“Fuck me again,” she whispered. “One last time for the road?”

Pulling away, her brown, lust-filled eyes held Korra’s, then she reached down between them to unbutton Korra’s jeans.

Korra’s jaw clenched and then she abruptly snatched Zoë wrists away. She turned them over and shoved the other woman down on the bed and pinned her to it. Laughter sounded from Zoë’s mouth as she looked up at Korra with desire. It was a look Korra had seen one too many times before. Ignoring it, she kissed the woman, shoving her tongue down her throat and a knee between her legs. Moans filled the room, and Korra let her mind go blank. She checked out of her own body, once again leaving her as a spectator, watching herself succumb into the darkness that surrounded her.

Asami was restless. She tossed and turned on top of the unfamiliar bed, trying to find some way to get comfortable, but she couldn’t.

Mako’s grandmother, Yin, was nice enough to let her sleep over for the night before she made the trip back up to school the next day. Her stuff managed to get packed away and sent over to a
After the last few boxes were taken out of the house, she stood in place for a long time, letting it sink in that her home was now gone. The emptiness and silence of the house matched the feelings she had inside of her. It stayed with her even now as she lie in bed.

All of the loneliness she drowned in filled her lungs, making her feel like she was in some bottomless, pit. And all she wanted was to escape from it.

She slid out of bed and quietly padded across the room. Opening the door, she looked out into the hallway. The house was dark, but she didn’t need to go very far anyway. She slipped out of the room and walked a couple of feet down the hall and stopped at Mako’s door. After knocking three times, she waited a few seconds before entering.

The lights were out in the room, but she saw Mako shift in bed and sit up.

“Asami?” he said groggily.

“Hey,” she replied in a quiet voice.

“What’s wrong? Can’t sleep?”

Asami nodded in response.

“Do you want me to make you some tea?” Mako asked as he pulled the sheets off of him. “We could watch a movie or something in the living room—”

His voice faltered when Asami walked over to the bed and climbed on top of him. She wasted no time and held his face in her hands before leaning down to kiss him. At first, Mako didn’t respond, but once she opened her mouth wider and stuck her tongue inside, he slowly wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer.

It felt good. The warmth of his body against hers made her less cold on the outside, and to just be held gave her so much comfort. She needed this.

Mako broke the kiss.

“Asami, what are you—”


Leaning forward, she tried to kiss him again, but Mako turned his head at the last second.

“Yeah, but why?” he asked. “You’ve been so distant for the past three years.”

Asami ran her hand up and down his chest.

“I miss this. I miss us. Everything’s so messed up right now, and I just want to have one normal thing.”

Mako’s face changed, and he looked hurt by her words.

“This won’t make all of your problems go away, Asami,” he said.

“I know that,” Asami said in a defensive tone, though she still continued to rub a hand up and down
his shoulder. “But I want you.”

“I think you want someone.”

Asami stopped all movement and looked up at him.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Mako sighed and rubbed at his eyes, looking frustrated.

“Look, I get it. You’re going through so much right now with your father and the house. I told you earlier that I wasn’t going anywhere, and I meant that. But you don’t need to do this because you think it will keep me around longer. I’m not going to abandon you like Hiroshi, or even Korra—”

Asami got off of him in an abrupt manner.

“You have no idea what you’re talking about,” she spat. “Don’t assume that you know what I’m feeling. I came in here because I wanted to be with you. So don’t turn it around and make it about something else when it’s clear you just don’t want me back.”

“Asami, you’re the one who ended things. Not me. And I know that if I gave into what you wanted, it would only make you hate me more than rejecting you would. Either way, it’s a losing situation for me.”

Asami backed away from the bed and Mako. She stopped hearing him after the word “reject” left his lips. That’s all she ever felt these days: rejected, disappointed, and damaged.

She turned on her heel and walked out of the room, ignoring Mako’s calls after her. Once she made it back to her room, she closed the door and locked it. Her body slid down to the ground and she put a hand over her mouth to silence her sobs.

She wanted to scream so loud that the earth shook under her feet, vibrating at a frequency that let everyone know exactly what she felt.

Closing her eyes, she dreamt of another life, far away from this nightmare she was living. She dreamt of happiness and never feeling abandoned by the people she cared about again.

It was such a little thing to ask for, but apparently too much to have.

The streets of London were quiet at this time of night. It was close to three in the morning and Korra just got done working her night shift at the bar. It had been packed as always and she had no breaks in between, but she didn’t feel tired at all thanks to sleeping the entire day away. Most of her days went like that and she’d grown used to it.

Aimlessly, she wandered around, trying to become accustomed to her surroundings. She arrived in Europe five months ago and moved from place to place a total of four times already. But this time she actually lived on her own after finally making enough money to get her own place to stay. She liked the area she lived in, as well. Every place she visited, there was always something to see. The architecture was nice, as well as the amazing art, and things didn’t feel as fast paced like she was used to. What Korra liked most about it, though, was how everyone kept to themselves. No one gave her a second glance and minded their own business.

Since she signed a two year lease, she imagined sticking around for a little longer than she normally did. Permanently wasn’t an option, though. She enjoyed traveling around from place to
place and gained a bunch of resources that she could rely on if she were ever desperate. But being independent was something she wanted for so long. There were no rules or limits placed on her. She had no one to tell her what she could or could not do.

For a long time, this was the kind of life she always wanted; though, she never imagined it turning out this way: directionless and without some form of guidance. It still puzzled her because she never thought that in order to gain the freedom and liberation she desperately craved, she would have to dislodge and separate herself from her own family. Her father hadn’t talked to her since that fateful day they spoke on the phone. And while it hurt her at first to know that he wanted nothing to do with her anymore, she realized it was for the best. He wouldn’t have to worry anymore about her being a disappointment in his life if she was no longer a part of it.

As she walked down the regular street she took to get home, she approached an old payphone on the street and stopped to stare at it. On rare occasions, she did this and asked herself the same questions.

She wondered if her parents even thought about her anymore. Did it at least cross their minds once in a while about what was going on in her life and how messy it became? And if she called right now, would they have sympathy and beg her to come home? Or would they tell her this was what she deserved?

Without thinking, she walked into the booth and closed the door behind her. She wiped off the phone and reached into her pocket to pull out her wallet and dig for some coins. Currently, she was without a phone, which made things a little inconvenient, but it wasn't something she couldn't absolutely live without.

After finding some change, she inserted them into the slot and picked up the phone. Shakily, she dialed the number she still knew by heart and put the phone to her ear. There was a long pause and then the phone started ringing. It would only be around ten o'clock in Canada if she remembered the time zone correctly.

Her heart hammered in her chest, and her eyes went hazy as she stared off into the distance, wondering if this was another out of body experience she was having today.

“Hello?”

Korra froze at the gruff sound of her father’s voice. She opened her mouth to speak, but only air came out. Tears filled her eyes when she heard him speak again.

“Hello? Who is this?”

Again, Korra tried to speak, but she couldn’t find the words. She hadn’t heard his voice in so long and it horrified her. In the back of her head she still remembered those words he spoke to her all that time ago.

“You’re just… not who I hoped you would be.”

She hung up, slamming the phone hard against the receiver. But that wasn’t enough for her. It wasn't even the beginning of enough to express her confusion, anger, and heartbreak.

She picked the phone up and slammed it again, then again, and again, and one more time after that. It made the glass doors surrounding her shake and tremble from her force, but she wanted them all to shatter.

Something inside of her snapped. The phone booth started to feel smaller, as if it were closing in on
her, reminding her of the dream she had earlier. The pain and heartache grew to be too much for her, and she wanted it to disappear. She needed for it to disappear.

Shoving a hand in her back pocket, she reached inside it for the pill bottle. Unclasping the cap, she took out two, thick, white pills and popped them into her mouth, swallowing them down dry. Afterward, she leaned forward and placed her hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath. Her body shook and simultaneously crumbled.

All she wanted was to fall into an endless abyss, unable to know where she was or how she got there. None of the pain would exist either. All of it would disappear and take her along with it. She wanted that more than anything, and from the way her life was going, maybe she’d get that wish sooner rather than later.

One year later…

Unprotected fists met with a bare face, causing blood to splatter onto the gravel.

Korra stood along the group of other people (mostly men) and watched this spectacle. Two bodies struggled to keep standing until either one of them dropped. However, it looked like by the end this, both fighters would be on the ground.

These street fights (though they were really under a bridge) appealed to her more than anything else had in the past couple of months. As she predicted, she grew bored with London and was ready to move on. The only problem was that her lease wasn’t up yet and she’d need to stick around for another few months. But at least she found something that would keep her entertained for the little while.

She liked watching all of the fights unfold and seeing a bunch of amateurs go at it until they could barely move. She liked watching the blood drip out of their noses and seeing new scars appear over old ones. It was a sick thing to be so intrigued by, but Korra blamed it on how fucked up her mind had gotten.

All she could think as she watched was that it must’ve been incredible to be in so much physical pain that you couldn’t think about anything else.

The two men eventually ended their fight in a stalemate and limped away from each other. Korra eyed the people who slipped money into each other’s hands afterward. She never bet on anyone because that part of it didn’t interest her. All she cared about was seeing people put their bodies on the line for something so crazy and spontaneous.

A great silence passed as everyone waited for someone new to step into the circle and initiate a challenge. As more seconds passed, the anticipation grew, until a young, dirty blond-haired woman stepped inside. She wore a hard expression and stood tall as she waited for someone to accept her challenge.

There were only three other women (apart from Korra) in attendance, and none of them looked like they planned on volunteering any time soon. It wasn’t a rule that you could only fight the same sex, but none of the men ever stepped forward and would shift around uncomfortably as a woman waited to be challenged or stepped back in disappointment. Korra only saw this happen a few times, but every single time it happened, she had to hold herself back from jumping at the chance.

This time, she didn’t.
She walked through the circle of people and made her way to the middle.

“No hair pulling, ladies!” a guy yelled out in a drunken manner. The men laughed along with him.

Korra paid them no mind and kept her eyes trained on the woman. The intensity in her icy, blue eyes never left. From Korra’s guess, she thought she had something to prove in front of these men.

The only real fist fight Korra had ever been in was when she was sixteen, and it only lasted for forty-five seconds before a teacher got involved. But after a few months of watching and being so intrigued by it all, she wanted to try it. It drew her in and she wanted to feel the pain, rush, or whatever you called it.

They stood there for a few seconds, but then the woman moved toward Korra and got right in her face. Korra only continued to stare, feeling a little dumbfounded.

A fist crashing into her jaw sent her falling to the ground in a heap.

Stunned, she covered her cheek with her hand. The sound of laughter surrounded her and she looked up. A group of men stood above her, amused by her attempt.

Not wanting to be mocked, she struggled to get to her feet again, but before she could properly stand, a knee plunged into her gut, along with a fist slamming into the back of her head. She crumbled to the ground again, her face hitting the dirt and rocks with a smack. She coughed a little and tried to catch her breath.

“Can I get a real opponent here?” the woman said from above, her deep, Scottish accent apparent. Korra rolled onto her side and watched her opponent walk around the circle. The arrogance and boastfulness graced her face as she stared down at Korra with a pitiful look. “This twat isn’t worth my time of day.”

The men laughed again in agreement and Korra raised herself off the ground, working at her jaw. She thought the pain was enough for her, but she realized, more than anything, she wanted to give it, too.

She got to her feet again and found the woman with her back turned as she said something to someone—a man—challenging him next.

Korra walked over and grabbed her by the shoulder, spinning her back around. She didn’t think twice about it and closed her hand into a fist, then she cocked her arm back and released it, aiming for the woman’s right eye. The hit landed successfully, and her opponent stumbled back into the crowd. When she raised her head, she appeared stunned that Korra was still on her feet, and then the look changed into a sneer.

She rushed back into the circle and shoved Korra before sending another punch to her mouth. Korra didn’t allow herself to fall to the ground this time, though. She felt the blood forming in her mouth and the stinging in her jaw, but she didn’t allow the pain to show on her face. She intensely stared back at her opponent.

“Is that all you got?” she asked.

Growling, the woman came forward, fists raised, and swung at Korra again, but Korra dodged. She used every bit of strength she had to grab at the woman’s arm and force her to the ground. No thoughts entered her mind, and she only found herself reacting to what she felt. They rolled around in the dirt for a while, punching and slapping at one another until Korra ended up on top. Again and again, she hit her opponent continuously until she could feel the skin of her knuckles splitting
and her right hand cramping. Once she couldn't punch any more, she looked down at the woman’s face. Blood poured out of her mouth and nose, and her eyes looked like they could barely open as she stared up at Korra in delirium.

Korra blinked several times and then stood up. The dead silence from the crowd told her all she needed to know. They were just as surprised as her.

She backed away, her footsteps loud in her ears as they crunched against the grovel. When she got to the edge of the circle, she turned and pushed through the crowd to get away.

She was in shock by her own actions.

That woman wouldn’t be able to get to her feet by herself. And she’d need to see some sort of doctor, wouldn’t she? What if the police got involved?

A hand touched her shoulder.

She spun around on her heel in defense, thinking that the woman magically got to her feet again and was ready to go for another round.

“Whoa! Take it easy.”

The man let go of her shoulder and held his hands up to show no harmful intent. He was wearing a long, brown coat and a black fedora on his head. His blue eyes held amusement in them, but he also looked impressed.

“What do you want?” Korra asked, stepping away. She noticed how panicked her voice sounded.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“None of your business.”

The man removed his hat, revealing his short hair.

“You were very impressive just now,” he said. “Everyone was betting against you, but I didn’t. That look in your eyes the minute you walked into that circle gave me chills. I’m glad I wasn’t wrong.”

“What do you want?” Korra said again through her teeth. She thought she was on the verge of passing out from the blows she received to the head. Blood trickled out of her mouth and she wiped it away.

“You.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m looking for people to hire,” the guy explained. “I’m trying to start my own underground boxing club.”

“Who are you?” Korra asked.

The man smiled, or at least she thought it was what he was attempting to do.

“My name’s Viper. I run a gang known as the Triple Threats—Don’t make that face.”

Korra stepped farther away and glowered at him.
“Stay the fuck away from me. I don’t want any part of that.”

“Well, technically, you wouldn’t be,” Viper said. “All I need for you to do is get in the ring and fight a couple of people. What kind of job do you have now? I’d have you making triple of what you earn there.”

Korra sputtered at him. She was still in shock by what she just did, and this wasn’t helping her get her sanity back.

“I’m not even professionally trained. That was my first time doing anything like that.”

“That’s no problem. I’ll get you trained. I have a feeling you’ll pick up on it fast.”

“And where is this supposed fight club going to be taking place?” she asked, though she had no idea why she was entertaining this guy to begin with.

“I’m just traveling for right now, scoping out people and trying to find the best. London doesn’t have that many fight clubs present, but there are plenty back in New York—”

“No,” Korra said abruptly and started walking away, only to be grabbed by the arm. She turned around and shoved the guy away. “Don’t touch me.”

“Just hear me out,” he said. “I saw your face while you beat the shit out of that woman. You loved it. And I’m telling you that you could have more of that if you wanted. You have so much potential, and if you work with me, I guarantee I’ll make you the most threatening woman no one could ever beat.”

Korra looked at him in astonishment. This was the last thing she’d been expecting. She already got shady, manipulative vibes from the guy, and she could tell there was some hidden agenda in it for him. But she couldn’t deny the slight interest she felt by his words.

Finally getting to experience the fighting scene put her on an absolute high. She never knew how something like that could feel, and although she freaked out in the aftermath of it, she found herself imagining doing it again. And now this guy wanted to give her that opportunity.

“I’m not going to New York,” she said eventually.

Viper’s shoulders dropped and he sighed in annoyance. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a card.

“I’m going to give you a few nights to think this over. Here’s my number and my cell if you change your mind.”

Korra didn’t take it at first, but then Viper reached out and grabbed her hand, placing the card in it for her.

“Think it over,” he told her and then walked back over to the circle of people.

Korra stared after him for a while but finally turned and walked away from the scene.

He was barking up the wrong tree if he really thought he could get her to go back to one of the places she wanted to get away from the minute she got there. Even the thought of setting foot back there burned her insides. After all the bridges she burned, there was no way in hell she’d go back.

But even as she thought that, she still slipped the card into her back pocket...
(INTERLUDE III: END)

Chapter End Notes

Trigger Warning: drug use
PART 4: Healing

Asami opened her eyes and blinked a couple of times as everything came into focus. She studied the ceiling and followed the light that bounced against it from the window nearby. It was warm beneath the sheets, and the mattress was soft enough to think you could sink into it. It wasn’t as big as the one she had, but it felt so much more comfortable.

She turned over on her side and noticed that the other half of the bed was empty. Her hand moved over the spot where Korra should’ve been to feel any lingering warmth that could’ve been there. Throughout the night she could feel Korra’s presence surrounding her, and even though Korra wasn’t physically in the room right now, the smell of the pillows and sheets gave Asami comfort in her absence.

Sitting up, she looked at the door and saw that it was left ajar. The smell of coffee lingered into the room, filling her nose and making her salivate. She could also hear the sound of pots and pans moving around.

She got out of bed and rolled up the sleeves to the shirt Korra let her borrow last night. Her clothes from yesterday were sitting on top of a box, along with her phone, which she turned off last night. Picking it up, she turned it on and checked the time. It was just now going on eleven. She also noticed a slew of text messages and missed calls she had; all of them being work related. She already texted Rita last night to inform her that she wouldn’t be coming in until the afternoon, but she forgot to ask her to send out a memo to her other employees.

Deciding to ignore the messages for now, she went to the bathroom to use the toilet and brush her teeth. Afterward, she made her way out of the bedroom.

Korra’s “apartment” was really a studio, Asami noticed. An enormous amount of light came into the front room and she looked outside. It snowed overnight, leaving the sky in an off white, grey tone. The frost and fog that covered the windows indicated just how cold it was.

Asami turned attention to the kitchen and her eyes immediately settled on Korra, who had her back turned as she stood by the stove.

They didn’t talk much after Asami decided to stay the night, mainly because they already said everything they needed to say, but also because they’d both been exhausted from all of the recent events that occurred. However, even though they didn’t talk, it seemed apparent that the words they already spoke lingered in the air, circling around them to keep them from distancing once more.
They were moving forward and letting go of the things that held them back. It didn’t mean they were forgotten about or didn’t matter anymore, but the most important thing right now was making sure they were on the same page and being honest with each other about their feelings. Asami felt good knowing they cleared the air finally.

When they quietly made their way to Korra’s room to get ready for bed, Korra was so… attentive. It was all of the little things she did, like letting Asami use the bathroom first, or making sure the clothes she wore were comfortable, and even offering to let her sleep on the side of the bed she preferred. And once they were settled in bed, face to face and in complete darkness, one of Korra’s hands slipped into Asami’s again and stayed like that until Asami drifted off to sleep.

Knots forming in her belly at the memory. She had no reason to be so nervous about talking to Korra, but now that she was fully awake and thinking about what happened between them last night, she felt timid. There was a level of uncertainty now about what exactly they were to each other. Because on one hand, they were definitely taking steps to rekindle their friendship, but on the other, there was a level of intimacy they shared that went beyond the layers of just “friendship.”

Asami would’ve been a fool to deny her attraction to Korra. Every single one of their conversations since their reunion were layered with thick, unrecognizable tension that she either didn’t understand or ignored because of how angry she’d been in the moment. But looking back on those interactions, Asami could almost laugh now at how oblivious she’d been. What made it funnier was that even other people could tell there’d been something going on between them. She could only imagine seeing Ginger and Jargala’s faces if they found out that her and Korra were… whatever they were doing.

She was in all new territory after discovering her old feelings, as well as her new ones. Korra told her not to worry so much about defining what it all meant, but Asami felt like it would be a problem otherwise. What if—and she wasn’t thinking it would—she suddenly backtracked and only thought of her feelings as just really strong feelings for a best friend? It would crush her if she hurt Korra like that. And also… what if them having these feelings for each other and deciding to act on them ruined what they were trying to build? What they had right now was confusing, but it was also delicate, fresh, and new. Asami didn’t want to wreck that. However, the intensity of how drawn she felt to Korra continued to grow stronger. So did that mean she would have to just ignore that? And was that even possible?

Ugh! This was driving her crazy!

“Do you plan on coming over here anytime soon?”

Asami blinked at the sound of Korra’s voice. She’d been so distracted by her own thoughts that she didn’t notice Korra had turned around. (probably feeling her presence the entire time). Her hair was pulled out of her face with a purple bandana and the sleeves of her t-shirt were rolled up above her shoulders, which only showed off her muscular biceps even more. Asami lost her train of thought as she continued to stare. She also noticed that the swelling had gone down in Korra’s eye and started to turn more purple than red.

“Yeah… sorry,” she said and finally walked into the kitchen. “Good morning.”

"Morning," Korra replied with a soft smile that only caused more knots to form in Asami’s belly.

"You cooked," she said lamely.

There were two plates on the counter. Both of them had pancakes, but one plate had fruit layered
on top of them while the other had the fruit put in a small bowl on the side. Asami figured the latter was hers.

“I did.” Korra turned off the stove. “Are you not hungry?”

“I’m… actually pretty starved,” Asami admitted, remembering she hadn’t eaten anything last night.

“I hope you don’t regret those words after eating my food.”

That pulled a smile out of Asami and she looked over at Korra. “If it tastes as good as it smells, I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“There’s a fresh pot of coffee over there if you want some. Creamer’s in the fridge.”

“Okay,” Asami said, biting her lip as she brushed by Korra. She still felt a little nervous, but all of the overwhelming thoughts and fears she had a minute ago melted away. Now all she felt was immense gratitude and affection for the other person in the room.

She grabbed the creamer out of the fridge and a mug from the cabinet to pour some in. At the same time, Korra moved to the table and put their plates on either side of it, along with some protein shake looking thing. When she saw Asami making her way over, she went to the coffee pot and removed it from the machine before handing it over. Asami reached for it and their hands overlapped.

“Thanks,” she spoke in a quiet tone.

They didn’t immediately part afterward and kept their hands there. When Asami looked up, warmth spread through her chest as she held Korra’s gaze. She pulled away after a few seconds and cleared her throat before sitting down.

“You really didn’t have to go through the trouble,” she said, attempting to start a normal conversation as she poured her coffee and stirred.

“I don’t mind,” Korra told her as she took the pot back and sat it on a counter before coming to sit down as well. “How’d you sleep?”

“Good.” Asami smiled. “Really good, actually.”

“I’m glad. My place is kind of a mess.”

“It’s not even half as bad as mine. If there wasn’t someone hired to come and clean my apartment, I doubt you’d ever see my floor.”

“Your apartment building has cleaning people?” Korra asked.

“Yeah.” Asami scratched her cheek in embarrassment. “It’s kind of ridiculous.”

“That sounds like a good deal to me. I’d kill to have someone take care of this place. Maybe then I’d be forced to take a couple of things out of these boxes.”

“I could… help you unpack sometime,” Asami offered. “I mean, only if you wanted me to.”

Korra, who’d been busy cutting into her pancakes, stopped and looked up at Asami. She seemed surprised at first, but it quickly turned into a look of contemplation.

“Yeah,” she said after a minute. “I’d like that.”
Asami responded back with a smile and looked down at her food. They ate for a couple of minutes in comfortable silence. Asami wanted to talk more about their situation, but she didn’t know how to bring it up so casually. And Korra was putting in so much effort right now that Asami didn’t want to kill the vibe and make things awkward.

“You okay?” Korra asked.

“Huh?” Asami realized she’d been playing with her food rather than eating it. “Yeah, I am. This is really nice. I guess I’m just feeling a little… shy?”


“Me neither.”

“What do you have to feel shy about?”

“Just… I don’t know. We didn’t really talk much before going to bed, and I’ve been thinking a lot this morning.”

The humor in Korra’s eyes disappeared.

“Are you already beginning to have doubts?” she asked.

“No!” Asami said immediately and reached out to touch Korra’s hand. “No. I just don’t think we fully addressed what we are to each other now and where we go from here. We both kind of gave roundabout answers to it.”

Korra’s brow smoothened out and she nodded in understanding.

“To be honest… thinking of you as a ‘friend’ would be the understatement of the century,” she said.

Asami sighed in relief. “Right? I was thinking that, too.”

“Really?” Korra asked.

“Mhm.” Asami sipped at her coffee. “It doesn’t feel like an accurate description of our kind of relationship.”

“Because we haven’t been friends up until now, or because you think it’s more than that?”

Asami met her eyes.

“Both,” she said. “We’ve been out of each other’s lives longer than we’ve been in them, and there’s still a lot we need to learn about each other. But… I also have all of these feelings that I’m still trying to understand and get a better grasp on. I feel like I’m already starting to, but I want to be fair and not…”

“Lead me on?” Korra finished for her.

Asami nodded slowly. “Yeah. Right.”

Korra lowered her gaze and stared at her food for a few seconds.

“I can only speak for myself when I say that this has always been more than anything I’ve ever had with anyone,” she said. “Whatever you decide, I’ll respect that decision. If you want me to be your
friend, I can do that, and I’ll try not to let my feelings get in the way. As for anything more than that… I think it all depends on you.”

“Why just me?”

“Because you’re not sure about what you want right now, and I can’t push you in one direction or another about it. I already feel like I’ve forced my feelings on you somehow, and giving ultimatums would be unfair of me, don’t you think?”

“You didn’t force anything on me,” Asami said. “I’m glad you were honest about the way you felt. There doesn’t need to be any secrets between us anymore. I don’t want there to be.”

“Me neither,” Korra agreed.

Asami brought a hand under her chin and sighed.

“So, to sum it all up, our relationship status is ‘it’s complicated?’”

Korra laughed a little and leaned her cheek against her fist.

“If we’re being totally honest with each other, we’ve been in a complicated relationship for a while now.”

“True.”

“I don’t want it to be that way, though. Yeah, the situation is complicated, but things between us don’t have to be. As long as we’re being real with each other, I think we’ll be fine.”

“Wise words.” Asami picked up a grape and rolled it between her thumb and index finger. “Maybe I’m thinking about it too much.”

“You overthink more than me, and that’s a pretty amazing accomplishment.”

Smiling again, Asami dropped the grape back into the bowl.

“Could you handle someone like me then?” she asked, her tone playful.

“I’ve been told that I like women who give me a challenge, so I think I could.”

“I can see that.”

“You can?” Korra smirked.

“Yeah. I mean, you’re very competitive and confident, so a woman who gives you a challenge would be an excitement.”

“Wow. That’s the most perceptive anyone has ever been about me.”

“Well, you didn’t make it easy for me at first.”

The subtle shift from the serious conversation they’d been having into this jocular flirtation surprised Asami. It happened so naturally; before she could even think about it. Korra made it so easy with how relaxed she was being, and in doing that, she made it easier for Asami to understand her feelings. She felt herself being drawn further in by this captivity and didn’t want to pull away from it.
They finished the rest of their breakfast, then they went back to the kitchen to wash their dishes and clean up. After, they made their way to Korra’s room where Asami heard the sound of her phone spazzing from the amount of notifications she was receiving.

“Is the company on fire or something?” Korra asked.

“You would think.” Asami grabbed her phone and put it on silent, then she walked over to the bed and sat on top of it, crossing her legs. Korra came and sat down, as well.

“You have to leave, don’t you?”

Asami nodded with a frown. “I still need to get home, shower, and change. I wish I didn’t have to go in, but I’m going out of town for a few days to this stupid conference convention thing in Connecticut. There’s work to be done beforehand.”

“Oh…” Korra looked disappointed, and Asami understood how she felt. But at the same time, it made her heart swell at the thought of Korra wanting her to stay.

“I’ll be back on Wednesday,” she said in a reassuring tone.

Korra played with the bed spread. “That’s still a lot of time between now and then.”

Asami watched her hand for a while and then looked up.

“Are you worried I’m going to change my mind about this?”

Korra met her eyes, and for the first time, Asami could read her face perfectly.

“I wouldn’t blame you if you did,” Korra said.

“I’m not going to change my mind, Korra,” Asami told her. “I want to see where this goes. And telling by the way my feelings are about you and this entire situation right now... I highly doubt that I could just turn them off so quickly.”

Korra nodded. “I understand.”

“I promise I’ll be upfront with you about everything. And when I come back, maybe we can finally talk about everything else?”

“I’m fine with that. I actually think I could use this time to get things right in my head.”

“You’re not going to change your mind, are you.” Asami asked, slightly teasing, but she couldn’t deny that she was having the same kind of worries Korra was having about her. She wanted to trust that neither of them would do anything like that, but a part of her was still in denial that things were turning out in her favor.

A soft smile appeared on Korra’s face. “No, I won’t. I want this to work out as much as you do and I’m not going to run away again.”

Hearing the sincerity in Korra’s tone spread enough relief through Asami that she felt a little bit calmer. She smiled back. “Okay.”

They held each other’s gaze as the silent but mutual agreement passed between them. Neither of them would run away from this anymore.

She stood up and walked over to grab her clothes from yesterday. Korra watched her as she walked
to the bathroom and closed the door halfway. Letting out a deep breath, Asami changed out of Korra’s clothes and put on hers, feeling a little dirty as she did. A shower sounded like heaven right now.

After getting dressed, she walked out of the bathroom.

“Ready?” Korra asked as she stood up from the bed.

“Not really.”

“Me neither.”

They exited the bedroom and, side by side, walked to the front door. Their arms brushed and Asami's fingers began to twitch. Something was missing, she thought. She couldn’t put her finger on it, but she just knew that there was something she needed before walking out the door.

As she put on her coat and shoes, Korra watched with her arms folded. Those eyes Asami felt on her intensified her yearning.

“What are you going to do for the next few days?” she asked, wanting to make conversation so that it would help with her uneasiness.

“I still need to talk to Varrick about this whole situation.” Korra pointed to her face. “He might not be too happy with me right now.”

“He’s not going to hurt you, is he?” Asami asked, stepping toward her.

“Nah. Varrick’s an unpredictable guy, but he’s not the violent type.”

“Despite the fact that he owns a club for people to fight each other?”

"I'll rephrase: Varrick's not the type of guy to get in a physical altercation by himself. He uses his bodyguards for that."

"That... doesn't even sound the slightest bit better."

Korra placed her hand on Asami’s shoulder. “You don’t have to worry.”

Asami froze. The sudden realization about what was missing and what she wanted hit her like a fast moving truck. It took the wind out of her and lifted her high in the air to the point where she wondered if she'd ever come back down again.

“...Right.”

Korra dropped her hand and Asami suddenly felt lost without it. She’d give anything to have it back, or just any kind of touch from Korra.

“You okay?” Korra asked for the second time that morning.

Asami swallowed and nodded.

“Yeah. I should, uh, just... get going.”

“Oh. All right then.”

Asami stood right by the door, but she made no move to open it. It was only when Korra reached
forward, leaning closer to Asami’s face in the process, and put her hand on the knob to turn it that
Asami realized what was happening. Her body reacted on its own accord and she put her hand on
the door to keep it from opening.

Korra reacted to the sudden movement with a confused expression but didn’t speak. Instead, she
watched Asami, keeping their faces close.

"You know how we're being totally honest with each other now?" Asami asked.

"Yeah..." Korra said, looking a little concerned.

"And how I said I'd be upfront with you about my thoughts, what I feel, and what I want?"

"Yeah."

"Well... There's something that I want."

"What is it, Asami?"

Hearing Korra say her name in such a soft, warm tone made Asami bite at her lip. She watched
Korra's eyes glance down at it before meeting hers again.

“Will you...” she started, but her voice sounded hoarse, so she cleared it and tried again. “Will you
kiss me again?”

Her heart sped up as she watched Korra's eyes widen in surprise. She couldn't blame her for being
shocked, though, since the request came as a surprise to herself even. But the minute she felt Korra
touch her shoulder, she knew that if she didn't say or do anything before leaving, she would've
regretted it. She gave reassurance to Korra, and now she wanted reassurance as well. She wanted to
know that none of this was crazy and that things would pick up just the way she left them once she
returned.

Korra's face relaxed once the shock wore off and her mouth quirked upward.

“Why?” she asked in a whisper, though she leaned in a bit closer.

“Because I want you to,” Asami replied.

At first, Korra didn’t do anything else besides hold Asami’s stare, but then she brought her hand up
and brushed the back of it against Asami’s cheek.

“This will probably make our situation more confusing for you,” she said, her voice growing
softer.

From that simple touch alone, Asami's eyes partially closed and she had to fight the shudder
threatening to run through her body. When she opened her eyes, she saw that Korra's stare grew
more intense.

“I'm not sure it will,” she whispered back.

“No?”

“No.”

Korra’s hand moved through Asami’s hair, tucking a piece behind her ear. In a slow motion, she
leaned forward, seemingly going for the corner of Asami’s mouth like the first time, but Asami
turned her head, causing their noses to brush. Korra paused and gave Asami one last look that offered her a chance to change her mind, but Asami just stared back, waiting patiently as their breaths mingled.

With that silent confirmation, Korra leaned up and closed the single bit of distance left between them.

Soft lips brushed against Asami’s and she closed her eyes, drowning out any and everything except for what she was feeling.

She felt Korra’s gentle hand in her hair, keeping them both anchored while the other hand cupped the side of her neck, sending chills down Asami’s spine. She could taste the maple syrup on Korra’s lips as they moved against hers, still gentle, but also confident.

As she got used to it (and being the taller one), Asami responded back, raising her hands to rest at Korra’s sides and tilting her head into the kiss.

Doing this with another woman was different, but in a good kind of way. There was no unnecessary rush, or the feeling of someone trying to prove themselves in one kiss alone. And this wasn't happening with just any woman, either. It was with Korra. The Korra she'd known since high school who she connected and resonated with on so many levels. The lips, the hands, and the warmth all belonged to the person who still claimed a part of her heart after so long. And that made all the difference.

With Korra, it felt like they were equally matched. She didn’t try to overpower Asami or push her any further. In fact, it seemed like she was still being considerate of Asami’s sureness and wanted to keep the kiss at a tamed level.

When she pulled away (much to Asami’s dismay), they both opened their eyes at the same time, keeping their faces close.

“Okay now?” Korra asked after a minute, licking her lips.

Asami glanced down at the motion and nodded, unsure if she could speak because of how breathless she felt.

Korra kept the eye contact, but she dropped one of her hands from Asami’s face to open the door.

“I’ll see you in a few days. Call me?”

Asami nodded again.

Korra pulled away for good, but not before sliding her hand down Asami’s arm, reaching for her hand, and squeezing her fingers.

Asami found mobility again and made her way out the door. Once she stepped outside of it, she gave one final look over her shoulder.

“Bye, Korra,” she said, finding her voice.

“Bye, Asami.”

Korra’s eyes were warm and bright as she closed the door. Asami blinked and then turned away, walking down the hall in a dreamlike state. Once she turned the corner, she stopped and leaned against the wall near the elevator. Her heart pounded against her ribcage, and she could feel the
blood rushing to her cheeks.

“Holy shit,” she said out loud.

Those were the only words she could come up with that summed up the entirety of the past few months.

Korra took a deep breath as she walked into the building of the club. It was closed during the daytime, but there were people inside moving tables around and setting up for the night. Looking around for a minute, she ended up finding the people she was looking for.

The whole weekend passed and she hadn’t heard a word from Varrick or Zhu Li, nor did she receive an email about the upcoming fight schedules. Her anxiety levels raised through the roof and left her with a bad feeling in her gut. She didn’t want to worry Asami, but she did have some concerns about what kind of punishment Varrick might give her. It could’ve been something as simple as being suspended for a few weeks, but she didn’t know for sure.

That brief moment she thought of Asami inadvertently caused her to flash back to just a few days ago and what happened between them. Her mind was still reeling from it, but she gave herself a mental slap. Those weren’t the kind of thoughts she needed to have right now. She had to be focused and prepared.

When she received a call this morning, asking her to attend a private meeting with Varrick, she held her breath. There was no telling what he had in store for her.

She stopped in front of them and waited as Varrick barked out orders to people left and right about how things should be set up, all while rubbing at Zhu Li’s shoulders as she sat down in a chair. When Zhu Li tapped his hand, he looked Korra’s way. Achingly long seconds passed with him just staring at her.

“How ya feeling, kid?” he asked.

Korra had to bite her tongue to keep from telling him not to refer to her as a ‘kid.’

“Good,” she said and looked down at her hands. They were still bruised, but it didn’t hurt to clench her fists anymore.

“All anyone’s been able to talk about lately is your brawl with that Triple Threat last week,” he said. “Poor Zhu Li almost had a panic attack. It was her first time running that event without me and she thought she messed everything up.”

Korra looked down at Zhu Li, whose arms were folded. She looked annoyed and embarrassed by Varrick’s honest admission.

“I’m sorry,” Korra said. “Really. I didn’t mean for things to get out of hand like that. I should’ve known better.”

“I accept your apology,” Zhu Li said with a nod, then she patted Varrick’s hands away from her shoulders before standing up. “I’ll leave you two alone for a minute.”

She wondered off after that and Varrick sat down in the abandoned chair.

“We have some things to discuss,” he said.
“We do,” Korra agreed. “But first, I want you to tell me why you’re so fixated on Asami Sato.”

Varrick laughed.

“Fixated? Hardly. She’s just a strong resource to have in order to further my own agenda, which has nothing to do with you, might I add.”

“It does if you’re threatening her about me.”

“She’s just being paranoid.” Varrick waved off the conversation. “Anyway, that’s not what I brought you here for.”

Korra folded her arms and glared. She didn’t trust his words one bit. Asami looked paranoid beyond belief that night she told her about whatever deal they had going on.

“What is it you wanted to discuss?” she asked, deciding to shelf that conversation for later.

Varrick crossed his legs and folded his hands in his lap as he continued to scrutinize her.

“Do you remember what I said to you the night I poached you from Viper, Korra?” he asked.

Korra thought about it, trying to recall the memory.

“You said that I was great, but I’d never reach my full potential if I didn’t learn to have some self-control.”

“Yup. And I think you’ve taken my advice pretty well for the most part, right?”

“Sure.”

Varrick leaned forward in his chair and formed a triangle with his hands as he put them to his mouth.

“I’m starting to think I was wrong.”

Korra lifted a brow.

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t get me wrong, you’re phenomenal in the ring, but I think that part of you that loses control is something that excites people even more. You’re a fan favorite among so many people, and I didn’t think it was possible for you to get even more popular. Hell, I think you’re more popular than Kuvira is at this point.”

“Where are you getting at here?”

Varrick dropped his hands back down to his lap.

“I want you to main event in a fight this Saturday with Zelina,” he said.

“Okay…” Korra said, waiting for the catch.

“You seem surprised.”

“I am. I had a feeling you were going to suspend me.”

“Hah!” Varrick slapped his knee. "As if! I have a lot of people placing bets on you to win that fight
already.”

Korra responded back with a smug smile.

“Like hell I’d lose a fight against her.”

Varrick smirked.

“Yup. And that’s exactly why I need you to lose it.”

Asami sat with her hands in her lap as she listened to another speaker on the panel answer a question from the audience member. The room was packed with people of different age groups, all looking to become CEO’s one day. Their eyes shined as they absorbed every bit of advice they heard from the panelists.

Asami remembered coming to a few of these conventions when she was still trying to determine whether or not to take on her father’s company. She didn’t get that much of helpful advice, though, considering the situation she’d been in. Running a business was a lot more than having passion or drive. It was risky on so many levels, and one of the things she told herself she’d never do was give lighthearted advice or fluff it up for the sake of giving everyone hope. The truth of the matter was that the chances of anyone in that crowd making a successful business were slim to none.

“We have room for one last question,” the moderator spoke into the microphone.

Asami reached into her pocket and pulled out her phone to check if she had any messages. Her and Korra had been texting on and off for the past few days, although she hadn’t heard from her since yesterday morning. They spoke on the phone two nights ago and asked how each other were doing and what they were up to, but it didn’t go much further than that. And they definitely hadn’t touched the subject of what happened just before Asami left her apartment. Asami didn’t mind it, though. She wanted to talk about it face to face rather than in such a formal manner. However, that moment was the one thing she hadn’t been able to stop thinking about since it happened. She just hoped it was something memorable to Korra, as well.

“My question is for Miss Sato.”

She slid her phone into her pocket and looked up at the audience again. Her eyes searched to find the person who spoke.

When her eyes landed on him, she froze.

The man stood, straightening his jacket as he did. He looked at Asami with a cold expression.

“You’ve owned Future Industries for two years now, and I’d just like to know how important you think it is to keep the integrity of the company that it didn’t have before?”

Asami sat there, continuing to stare at the man as if he had a third eye.

“Excuse me, sir?” said the moderator. “Could you state your name and the kind of company you’re trying to build?”

“I already own a company, madam,” the man spoke, unwilling to take his eyes off Asami. “I’m President Raiko from Redefine Tech.”

Asami swallowed and clasped her hands together under the table.
“Oh. Very well then,” said the moderator. “Miss Sato, would you like to answer the question for this gentleman?”

Hearing her name snapped her out of her trance and she looked around the hall of people eager to hear her answer. She turned her attention back to Raiko, who had no readable expression on his face. Everything in her mind slowed down.

Was this really happening?

“Miss Sato?”

She swallowed and cleared her throat, attempting to expel the sudden panic she felt, assuming that was what Raiko wanted in the first place.

“It’s always important to keep the integrity of a company,” she spoke into the microphone. “I think the integrity was always there with mine—”

“Even while your father, who’s currently in prison, was running it?”

Murmurs started in the hall as people looked between the two of them.

“Sir, please don’t interrupt,” the moderator said.

“Just because my father wasn’t an honest person, that doesn’t mean it was the same for everyone else. The people in my company not involved with his antics deserve respect as opposed to the people who were.” She gave him a noticeable once over.

“So what about you then, Miss Sato? Would you say you’re as honest as the people you claim in your company are?”

“Only one question is allowed, sir.”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll answer,” Asami said. She leaned forward and spoke into the mic. “I’ve been honest and upfront with the way I run my company. I had to rebuild it from the ground up with everyone’s eyes on me, waiting for me to fail. And I did it with as much integrity as any person can have.”

Her hands shook under the table and she breathed in and out slowly. Raiko’s face finally changed and he gave her a nasty smirk before sitting down.

The moderator gave her closing statements, and afterward, everyone clapped for all of the panelists who attended. Once that was over, Asami stood up and grabbed her things off the table. She wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. As luck would have it, though, people began to walk up to her, trying to start a conversation. She forced a smile and made light chit chat as she folded some papers and stuffed them in her bag.

Rita appeared by her side a minute later.

“Sorry, guys. We have a long car ride ahead of us,” she told the small crowd that gathered.

They waved at the people and Asami shook a few hands before making her way out of the group.

“I’m giving you a raise,” she told Rita as they approached a side door only meant for panelists and staff members to go through.

“I could tell you were feeling smothered and annoyed. What was up with that jerk at the end,
anyway?"

“I don’t know,” Asami said as they walked through the door and turned to their right. She stopped in place.

“What?” Rita asked, then she looked over at where Asami was staring.

Raiko stood there waiting with his arms folded as people walked by him.

“Why don’t we have a small chat, Miss Sato?” he said.

Rita leaned close to her ear. “Do you think I should go and get security?”

“No,” Asami said and licked her drying lips. “Why don’t you go on ahead and start the car? I’ll catch up,” she said.

“Are you sure?”

Asami only nodded. When she glanced over at Rita, she saw the unpleasant look on her face. “Really, it’s okay. Go on.”

Although she still looked hesitant, Rita didn’t ask any other questions and gave a firm nod. She walked down the hallway, passing by Raiko and giving him a once over as she did.

It took a minute for the hallway to clear, but once it did Asami glared and walked up to the man.

“I didn’t realize antagonizing others was a special trait of yours,” she said.

“And I didn’t realize being a conniving snake was hereditary, but here we are.”

“I did nothing conniving of the sort.”

“You stole from right underneath me,” Raiko hissed through his teeth.

“I can’t steal something from you that was never yours in the first place.”

“Bull! Your father shared those designs with me and we had a contract. Because of you I’ve lost a lot of money and time that I can’t get back. I should sue you for every penny you’re worth.”

“You and my father had a contract while he was running the company, but that was it. He signed over all of the rights of his designs to me, therefore, making that contract you and he had void.”

“I know all about your business with Varrick,” he said in a quieter tone. “I wonder how all of those people out there would take it if I exposed you for the deceitful human being you are.”

“Don’t threaten me.” Asami stepped closer to his face.

Raiko leaned down to her ear. “You have no idea who you’re dealing with, sweetheart,” he said.

“I think I’m dealing with someone who knew a lot more about my father than he lets on and likes to showcase his power by undermining those who he considers less than him. But make no mistake, I’m not the one to be underestimated.”

Smirking, Raiko backed away.

"That's a bold claim of you to make, Asami. Where's your proof?"
“You've been in my dad's circle since I was old enough to remember. That's all the proof I need.”

"I'd like to see you plead your case with that. I'm an innocent man who was fooled by your father just as much as you were. But that's not important anymore now, is it? You have other things to worry about, such as your career. So how about you and I strike something up? You give me something I want, and I’ll keep your little secret about working with a criminal.”

“No,” Asami said, her voice firm. Even if she lost all credibility, she would never get involved with another person like Varrick again.

“I highly suggest you reconsider that answer,” Raiko said. “I’ll be in New York for New Year festivities. Hopefully by then you’ll make the right decision not to screw over your company like Hiroshi did.”

He walked by her, brushing against her shoulder as he passed.

Asami turned and watched him go, her shoulders rising up and down as she breathed. She never felt more cornered in her life. Just when things were starting to go right, another mess was made. But this mess was one of her own creation, and she needed to find some way to make it right before everything blew up in her face again.

Fucked. She was so…

“Fuck!”

TBC…
Ties That Bind

Korra pulled the door open with a smile on her face only to frown when she saw Kuvira standing there looking pissed off.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, completely taken off guard.

“Selling girl scout cookies,” Kuvira replied and stormed into the apartment.

“Please, by all means, come in.” Korra shut the door and turned to her friend.

"You really thought you could text me something like that and I wouldn't come barging over here? I need to know exactly what Varrick said to you."

"I already told you," she sighed. "He wants me to lose on Saturday to Zelina and says that if I do it I'm guaranteed at least fifty G's of the pot."

Kuvira started pacing back and forth through the hallway.

"That motherfucker! The minute I see his scrawny ass, I'll beat his face in. He's not getting away with this."

Korra pushed her hair out of her face in annoyance. She hadn't planned on telling Kuvira about her little predicament at first, but she’d been stressing out about it since the end of her conversation with Varrick. And the one person who knew what it was like to be in this type of situation was Kuvira, so it made sense to tell her about it. It surprised her, though, to see her former coach so impassioned about Varrick's request. Korra had a similar reaction at first, as well, but now it only left her in confusion and uncertainty. She didn't know what to feel.

“Kuvira,” she said, walking over and reaching out to stop her friend’s pacing. “It’s okay.”

“No, it isn’t.” Kuvira turned to her with an incredulous look. “He had no right to ask that of you.”

“I know, but it's not like he's forcing me to do it, either. He told me to think about it and give him an answer by no later than tomorrow.”

“Yeah, but it's pretty clear what he wants, isn't it? And if he's scheduled this match for Saturday, that means he's already gone around advertising it."

Korra rubbed her hands over her face. "I know."

"Wait." Kuvira took a step closer and gave her a suspicious look. "Don't tell me you were seriously considering doing it in the first place?"

"You already know how I feel about that kind of stuff,” Korra said with a sigh.

“So then why aren't you more pissed off about it and ready to raise hell like I am?”
Folding her arms, Korra leaned her shoulder against the wall behind her.

“I’ve already told you that part of the reason why I left the Triple Threats was because they wanted me to do the same thing, right?” she asked.

“Yes…” Kuvira drawled out.

Korra took a deep breath.

“But did you know that I almost came close to doing it?”

She watched Kuvira's brows raise in surprise.

“No…”

“Yup. I had a moment of weakness and Viper tried to take advantage. He said that if I just threw the fight I’d be drowning in more cash than I ever could’ve needed for what I needed.”

“But you ended up saying no?”

Korra nodded. “That was the last straw for me. Luckily, by that time, Varrick already approached me about switching over to Blackstone. He told me he’d never make me do anything like that for him if I didn't want to.”

“And he lied,” Kuvira said, glowering.

“Not really. He’s not making me do it. He only wants me to.”

“It’s still fucked up.”

Korra started drawing patterns on the wall with her finger.

“Do you think people are getting bored of me?” she asked.

“Huh? No. Why do you ask?”

“I don’t know. Varrick said something about people being more excited when I’m out of control, like how I was last week and in the beginning of my career. I guess it started to make me think.”

“You shouldn’t listen to him. He has no idea what he’s talking about. People like you because of how resilient and strong you are. Besides, I thought you didn’t care about shit like that.”

“I don’t. It just surprised me to hear Varrick of all people say that. After all, he’s the one who pushed you into training me and making me get in control of my emotions.”

“Varrick’s the kind of guy who changes his mind about everything in the span of a week,” Kuvira reminded her. “And you can’t really trust what he has to say about your fighting skills because the man’s never fought a day in his life. The only thing he knows better than any of us is how to lie, cheat, smuggle, and not get caught.”

“Those are some pretty handy traits to have for the kind of work he’s involved in.” Korra unfolded her arms and turned so that her back was on the wall now. “You know, it’s so easy to get caught up in all of the fighting that you forget that underneath it all is a bunch of drug trafficking and people placing bets on who will bust the other person up first.”

“You’re not supposed to worry about everything else in the background. You’re only meant to
think about fighting and getting paid at the end of it.”

“Or, in my case, forgetting about everything I've ever avoided.”

“Korra,” Kuvira said sternly. “Don't let him get into your head like this. You shouldn't have to lower yourself.”

“You’ve done this multiple times.”

“Yeah, but not for the first match I ever lost. Don’t be rash.”

“I’m not being rash at all. I’m just thinking out loud.”

A gentle knock came to the door and they both looked over.

“Were you expecting someone?” Kuvira asked.

“Kind of.” Korra rubbed the back of her neck.

“Oh… I killed the vibe, didn’t I?”

“Yup.”

Korra walked over to the door and opened it.

Asami stood there, fiddling with her scarf. She looked professional as ever in her red coat with a bag strapped around her shoulder, along with some dress pants and heels. Her hair was pinned back out of her face like when Korra saw her that first night of their reunion, but instead of feeling like she saw the ghost of Christmas past, Korra got a fluttery feeling inside her chest.

“Hey,” she said, unable to keep from smiling.

Brushing a piece of hair behind her right ear, Asami gave a tiny smile back. “Hey.”

“Come in.”

The highlight of Korra's morning was receiving a text from Asami saying that she was back and wanted to see her. The pure amount of excitement that spread throughout her body elevated her in a way she never felt before. There were moments over the past few days where everything dragged on so slow that she thought they'd never end. She worried a lot at first about them losing momentum and Asami changing her mind while away, but every time Korra heard her voice over the phone, or got a text asking her how she was, those thoughts immediately dissipated.

Even with all that she had going on now, she still kept her relationship with Asami at the forefront of everything. They made leaps and bounds in just one week, and Korra wondered what would happen once they saw each other again. They hadn’t gotten a chance to speak to each other over the phone since Monday, which sucked, but Korra had enough time to herself to think about everything that happened in the past two months and where she wanted to go from here. The kiss was also something she vividly recalled. If she closed her eyes, she could remember the way Asami's lips felt on hers, her taste, and the softness of her hair as Korra ran her fingers through it...

“Oh,” Asami said once she noticed they weren’t alone. “I wasn’t interrupting anything, was I?”

Snapping out of it, Korra looked over at Kuvira and rolled her eyes when she saw a smirk on her lips. ”You weren't. Kuvira was just leaving.”
“Hello, Asami.” Kuvira nodded her head toward her. “It’s nice to see you again.”

“It’s good to see you, too,” Asami replied. “How are you?”

“Good. I’d be doing even better if this one over here wasn’t giving me grey hairs.”

Korra pursed her lips before turning to Asami, who looked between her and Kuvira as she shrugged off her coat and placed it on a hook.

“What’s she talking about?” she asked.

“Well…” Korra scratched her head.

“Varrick wants her to lose a fight for a big pay day,” Kuvira explained. She didn’t even flinch at the murderous look Korra sent her way.

“What?” Asami whipped her head in Korra’s direction. “He can’t make you do that, can he?”

Korra sighed. She was going to tell Asami about her current issue when she came over, but Kuvira showing up wasn’t in the plan. It also wasn’t in the plan for that topic to be the first thing they discussed the minute Asami walked through the door.

“He can’t make me do anything,” she said. “He just thinks that with the odds against beating me being so low, it would be good to capitalize on it by losing.”

“That’s asinine.” Asami’s brow furrowed. “You’re one of the best, and he shouldn’t take that away from you. And why are you being asked to lose?”

“Underground fighting events are... a lot more than what they seem on the outside,” Korra explained. “There’s a lot of shadiness that goes on beneath it all and sometimes it interferes with us fighters and whether we win or lose.”

“But it sounds so wrong.” Asami made a disgusted expression. “If you’re going to put your body on the line, the least they could let you do is fight on your own terms.”

“It’s really no big deal, Asami. I’m just going to say no and that will be the end of it.”

“But what if Varrick doesn’t accept that?” Asami asked. “What if you say no and he tries to hurt you or something?”

Korra laughed. “I think you’re being a little paranoid.”

Asami didn’t seem to find it funny at all. Her frown deepened until she gave a look of growing concern.

“But what if it’s my fault?”

The humor drained out of Korra’s face and she regarded Asami seriously. She saw how visibly upset she looked and stepped forward, reaching out to touch Asami’s arm.

“What are you talking about? How could it be your fault?”

Asami sighed and closed her eyes.

“When I went to see your fight two weeks ago, Varrick invited me because he wanted to form some kind of partnership. I told him no, and that’s when he threatened me about you. So what if… What
“Hey,” Korra said and rubbed at Asami’s arm when she noticed how much she was clenching her fist. “It’s not because of you. I can promise you that. This is just how this business works. It’s dirty, sleazy, and really fucked up.”

“Yeah, but I… I don’t know. I’m just worried about what he could do and it feels like I’ve somehow caused all of this to happen. I said no to him, and if he really is punishing you because of that I… I couldn’t live with myself.”

Hearing the pain in Asami’s voice made Korra's chest ache. She tightened her grip on her wrist and glanced over at Kuvira, who looked just as concerned.

The tight bind Asami was in mirrored Korra’s own. They were both placed in difficult positions that were interwoven now; the common denominator being Varrick. He had them both in the palm of his hands.

An idea suddenly came to her, and just as it did, Kuvira’s eyes locked with hers.

“I’m going to lose the fight,” she said.

“What?” both Asami and Kuvira said at the same time.

Korra turned to Asami again.

“Think about it. Varrick actually seems desperate for me to lose. So desperate that I bet he'd do something for me as a favor if I did. So we'll make a deal. If I lose, he leaves you alone for good.”

“Absolutely not,” Asami said. “I’m not going to let you do that for me.”

“That’s not up for you to decide.”

“Like hell it isn’t!” Asami yelled in outrage.

"You can't even be sure that he'll hold up his end of the bargain,” Kuvira intervened. "How do you know he's not just going to go back on his word like he already has?"

"He won't because he needs me and can't afford to do something like that with his ass on the line," Korra said. "Besides. I'm his shiny, new toy. You told me that yourself."

Kuvira folded her arms and looked down.

"I can fight my own battles, Korra," Asami said, gaining her attention again. "I don't need you to save me from something that was my fault to begin with."

"Varrick won't just let things go. He always gets what he wants one way or another and will hold whatever it is you did over your head until you give in. Is that really what you want?"

"If it means you not getting your face kicked in for me, I think I'll take my chances.”

Korra sighed. She knew that this was the only way to get Varrick to back off, but Asami didn’t get it because she wasn’t a part of the life Korra’d been living for several years now. And as much as it frustrated her that the two of them were from such different backgrounds, she also acknowledged why Asami couldn’t understand it.

“Maybe I should go,” Kuvira said, zipping her coat up and pulling out her keys. “You two look like
“You don’t have to leave,” Asami said, her eyes lingering on Korra for a few seconds before she turned her head to acknowledge Kuvira. “I didn’t mean to make things uncomfortable.”

“You didn’t,” Kuvira said, patting Asami’s shoulder as she walked by. She stopped in front of Korra. “I hope you really give this some more thought but, knowing you, your mind is already made up, right?”

Korra nodded, and from the corner of her eye she saw Asami shake her head.

Kuvira looked back at Asami. “Good luck trying to change her mind.”

She opened the door and left.

Once they were alone, Korra turned back to Asami and watched her take off her shoes.

“So… How was your conference?”

“Are you trying to change the subject?” Asami asked and placed her shoes by the door.

“No. It's just that, in spite of everything… I'm really glad to see you,” Korra said honestly.

Asami’s eyes softened, but only by a little. Korra also noticed the dark circles underneath them.

“I’m glad to see you, too.” Asami sighed. “But I’m not going to let this go until you promise me you won’t get involved with the mess I made.”

“I can’t promise that.”

“Korra,” Asami said, her voice as stern as a mother’s.

“You’re already involved with my mess. What makes it any different if I involve myself with yours?”

“Well, for one, I’m not going to get beaten to a bloody pulp over your mess.”

“Two or three punches won’t kill me. All I have to do is lose, and then you won’t have to keep feeling threatened.”

Asami’s shoulders dropped.

“Yeah, well, it’s not like he’s the only person threatening me.”

“What are you talking about?” Korra asked.

Asami ran her fingers through her hair in a frustrated manner.

“Why can’t things just not be so screwed up for once?” she asked and looked over at Korra in desperation, as if she held all the answers.

Korra stepped closer and reached for her arm again, sliding her hand down the length of it before grabbing Asami’s hand.

“Come on. Let’s go sit down.”

She walked them over to the living room and they sat on the couch. Asami’s hand gripped hers
even tighter and Korra watched as she placed them in her lap.

“I don’t know what to do.”

“About what?”

Asami blew out a puff of air.

“I did something,” she said. “I thought that because this guy might have been corrupt anyway that what I was doing wasn't so bad, but I should’ve known that it would come back to bite me.”

Korra tried to follow along, but she didn’t understand what Asami was talking about.

“What guy? Varrick?”

Asami shook her head. “Not him. But he does play a part in it.”

“This is about the deal you made with him,” Korra stated. She saw Asami nod in confirmation.

“What was it?”

Asami let go of her hand and stood up. She paced back and forth a couple of times and bit her thumb. Eventually, she stopped and looked over at Korra.

“My dad was friends with a guy who owns this tech company now that's grown a lot in the three years it's been active,” she said. “They knew each other for a long time and he was the one person my dad confided in the most about his inventions and projects. But…”

Asami stopped and looked down at her feet. She released a sharp breath.

“My dad knew he was going to go to jail, so before that, he secretly put everything under my name. I received all the rights to his ideas and projects so that no one else would use them. But there was one where he gave Raiko, his friend, some leeway over this invention he came up with about dashboards being inside of motorcycle helmets. Raiko was in the stages of finally developing it this summer and I decided not to fight him on it because I didn’t even want any of my dad’s work to begin with. But then… you happened.”

“So…” Korra said as the words sunk in. Asami came and sat back down, folding her legs behind her on the couch. “You’re saying you made a deal with Varrick to give him all of the rights—”

“And designs,” Asami added.

“To give him the rights and designs over this invention another person was already designing in exchange for information about me?”

Asami nodded.

“And you said this guy, Raiko, is threatening you too now?”

“He found out about what I did and cornered me at a panel I attended yesterday.”

"If you're the true owner of the rights to the invention, then what's the problem? You could just threaten to sue him for stealing your idea."

"The problem is that I gave the rights over to a criminal who made a lot of money off of it by selling it to the highest bidder. If it gets out that I had anything to do with that, my company will be ruined for good. So in exchange for keeping everything hush-hush, Raiko wants me to do
something for him."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, but I can't go through this again. Varrick is already holding this whole situation with us over me, and if I let Raiko think he can do the same thing, then I could be blackmailed by the both of them for as long as I live."

Korra rubbed a hand over her mouth.

She knew things were bad, but not this level of bad. If Asami got exposed for working with Varrick, then it would only be a matter of time before everything else would be, as well. Varrick was a wanted man, and no matter how many connections he had inside the law, he still wasn’t untouchable. Everyone would go down with him, including her and the fight club.

“God, this is so fucked,” she said aloud.

“I know,” Asami said and brought her hands to her face. “I’m screwed and it’s my own fault.”

Turning to her, Korra reached up and pulled Asami’s hands away.

“I bear some of the responsibility,” she said quietly.

“No…” Asami shook her head. “No, you don’t. This is all on me.”

Korra squeezed her wrists.

“You never would’ve felt the need to do this if I’d just owned up to my crap and came back to see you.”

“It was my choice, Korra. You didn’t ask for me to come looking for you. I knew what I was doing, and I should’ve known better, but I just… I was so selfish and wanted to see you so bad that I let it get in the way of my better judgement. That’s why I should be the one to fix this.”

“How are you going to do that?” Korra asked, dropping their hands and letting go.

Asami shook her head again. “I don’t know. I've been up all night doing research on Raiko, trying to find something I can use against him.”

"But you do have something. Him and Varrick clearly have some type of connection."

"Yeah, but how do I prove that without ratting myself out?"

A piece of hair fell from behind her ear and Korra tucked it back into place.

"You have to look at things a little darker than you're probably used to," she said. "Varrick wanted you to give him those designs to get a rise out of Raiko, didn't he?"

Asami nodded. "He said it was because Raiko screwed him over."

"So then, if those two are at war, then that means they probably know a lot of interesting secrets about each other." Korra gave her a hinting look.

"So Varrick's my best bet," Asami said in realization.

"Exactly."
"But how can I even get him to give me that information? He'll clearly want me to do something for him in return and put me even more in his debt."

“No he won't. Not if this is effecting his business. And especially not if I lose that fight for him.”

“Korra, no,” Asami pleaded.

“I’m not going to let you go down for this, Asami,” Korra said. “This is your only option to get both of them out of your life for good. Deep down, you already know it, too.”

Asami didn’t argue and shut her eyes as she leaned her head against the couch.

“But fighting is something you’re so passionate about, and you said so yourself that you wanted to lose to someone because they were better. I can’t be the one who takes that away from you.”

“You’re not taking anything away from me,” Korra said. She covered Asami’s hands again and waited for her to raise her head. “I can't just sit back and let this happen to you. So if that means having to lose some stupid match, I'd do it one hundred times over again if it guaranteed your safety.”

The words left her mouth without even a second thought and she watched Asami’s lips part and facial expression turn from shock to amazement. Her stunned silence made Korra hold her breath. The only thing she could do was hope that if Asami couldn’t understand her reasoning, the thoughts, feelings, and motivation behind it would reach her at least.

Her stomach fluttered when Asami wove their fingers together.

“You’re incredibly stubborn. You know that?”

Korra smiled back. “Like you’re the one to talk.”

“I know.” Asami sighed. “There’s really nothing I can say or do to make you change your mind?”

“Nope. I know you think it’s crazy—”

“That’s an understatement.”

“But,” Korra went on. “Once this is over and Varrick fixes this clusterfuck, I think we’ll be able to move on finally and start fresh.”

“Or you could end up resenting me for being the one to make you lose your first fight.”

“So pessimistic,” Korra said with a smile. “I thought that was my job?”

“I’m just worried that this is going to mess up everything with us now… And, you know, possibly going to jail for being linked to a criminal.”

“I doubt you’d do jail time. You’d be facing public scrutiny at best.”

“Not helping,” Asami said.

“Sorry.” Korra squeezed her hand. “This won’t change anything. Besides… Maybe in some twisted way this could be good for me.”

“How in the world could something like this be good for you?”
“Because…” Korra paused to think about it, trying to figure out a way to explain her notion so that Asami would understand. “I’ve had this streak for a long time and I think that, for a while, I subconsciously held onto it because I would feel like I was nothing without it. It’s been a burden that I haven’t even known I’ve been carrying around, and I think I want to finally be free from it. Even if it isn’t exactly on my own terms.”

Asami lowered her eyes.

“I just don’t want you to get hurt.”

“I’ll be fine. The woman I’m facing hits like a punk, anyway. I’ll have to overreact to make it look like she even has a chance of beating me.”

“I know you’re only saying that to make me feel better,” Asami said and rubbed at her eyes.

“Maybe we should leave this topic alone for the time being,” Korra suggested. “You look exhausted.”

“I am,” Asami confessed.

“Do you want to take a nap?”

“That would be great, but I have to go to the office in a little while to get some work done, which seems impossible now with all of this crap on my mind.”

“I’m sure you can get away with not going in for another hour or two. You’re the boss after all.”

“You’re not totally wrong.”

Korra reached behind her and grabbed the folded blanket sitting on the back of the couch. She handed it over to Asami, who took it with an appreciative look.

“You can sleep here and I’ll wake you up whenever you want me to.”

“Thank you…”

“Sure. Is there anything else you need?”

“No. This is good.”

Korra nodded and got up. “Okay. Well, I guess I’ll leave you alone then.”

“You don’t have to go,” Asami said as she unraveled the blanket and spread it out over the couch. Once she was settled, she looked up at Korra and placed her hands in her lap, fidgeting with her thumbs.

“Should I just stand here and watch you sleep like some sort of stalker then?” Korra asked.

Asami smiled at the joke, but a serious expression overtook her face as she continued to stare.

“Can you, uh,” she started but lowered her head and shook it.

“What?”

“Nothing. It’s silly.”
Korra lifted a brow and then stepped closer. She watched that same piece of hair from earlier slip from behind Asami’s ear and fall in front of her face. Reaching forward, she brushed it back into position, but just as she was about to pull away, Asami grabbed her hand and looked up. Korra noticed the hint of a blush in her cheeks and it reminded her of the same expression Asami made right before asking for a kiss.

“You look like you want me to do something,” she mused.

“I… kind of do.”

She felt her pulse race under Asami’s strong hold on her wrist.

“What do you want?”

Asami held her gaze.

“To lie on top of you.”

Korra blinked in surprise.

“I… was not expecting that,” she said after a beat.

“I can’t even believe I just said that out loud.” Asami covered her face with a hand in embarrassment. It was the cutest thing Korra had ever seen.

“And with such seriousness, too,” she joked.

Asami used her other hand to swat at Korra blindly. “Shut up.”

Korra laughed, but her giddiness continued to grow from Asami’s words. She hadn’t given much thought to the terms of their relationship because she wasn’t used to something like this. After Asami, she never went after straight women again because she knew from experience that it would cause nothing but trouble. But now she was back to where it all started and—although confusing and not without drama—at least she knew now that her feelings were reciprocated to an extent. She figured that Asami would need some time to figure out what she wanted but, to her surprise, Asami asked to be kissed, and now she wanted to share close proximity.

“Well, scoot over a little,” she said.

Asami looked up at Korra as if she hadn’t heard her speak, but Korra ignored it in favor of tugging the blanket back, indicating her intention. Asami finally turned on her side, giving Korra enough space to get under the blanket, as well. She lowered herself until her head rested on the pillow on the arm of the couch. Her legs pressed against Asami’s as she waited, and when she looked over, Asami’s face wasn’t far from hers. Neither of them said anything, but after a few seconds, Asami slowly lowered her head to rest on Korra’s shoulder and her arm snaked across Korra’s waist. Meanwhile, Korra wrapped an arm around Asami’s back in return and used her other hand to pull Asami closer on top of her. Inhaling deeply, her nose filled with Asami’s scent. Fresh, exotic, and delightful were the first words that came to her mind.

“You’re not making it easy to just be friends with you,” she admitted after a while.

“I’m sorry,” Asami replied, sounding remorseful. “It’s just been a stressful 48 hours. I’m really not trying to give you mixed signals if that’s what you think.”

Korra smiled into Asami’s hair. “No, it’s not. I just figured that I’m one hell of a good kisser.”
Asami laughed tiredly and Korra felt the vibration go against her until it sank into her body and she could feel it in her bones.

“You are a good kisser,” Asami agreed. “I wasn’t expecting for it to be that good.”

“I guess I’ll take that as a compliment,” Korra said. “Are you going to explain what that was about, though? Don't tell me it was just your curiosity getting the better of you?”

“No.” Asami lifted her head to look at Korra with a serious expression. “It’s not that. I promise.”

“Okay.”

“I just… I know I said I was confused, but I don’t think I meant about my feelings. I think it has more to do about what it means for someone like me who’s…”

“Supposedly straight?” Korra guessed.

Asami nodded and then lowered her head on Korra’s shoulder again. “Yeah. I mean, call me crazy, but I’ve never felt this way about any other person. Even when you were my best friend, I knew we had something different from anybody else I had in my life. And you felt that too, didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” Korra whispered.

“The only difference is that you kind of already knew how deep it went. I just wish I would’ve figured out what it really meant sooner. Then maybe we wouldn’t be in all of this crap.”

Korra heard the deep regret in Asami’s voice and rubbed a soothing hand up and down her arm.

“It doesn’t matter anymore,” she said truthfully. Because it really didn’t. They were given this chance to reconnect and make things right with each other. And Korra almost let that go. She tried to push Asami out of her life for good and caused them both so much unwanted and excruciating pain. For someone as agnostic as she was, she entertained the idea that there was something out there that drew the two of them back together no matter how hard she wanted to fight it. And if it did exist, it would be the same thing to get them through their current situations.

“Asami?” she asked suddenly, breaking the peaceful silence.

“Hm?” Asami asked. It felt like she was beginning to nod off on Korra’s shoulder.

“Will you go out on a date with me?”

She felt Asami’s body still, which caused her breathing to go uneasy and her palms to sweat a little. But just as she was beginning to think Asami would reject her, Asami lifted her head.

“Okay.”

Korra released all of the tension building in her body with a breath. “Really?”

“Yeah.” Asami smiled, causing that small dimple in her right cheek to show. “I’d like that.”

Korra smiled back. “Okay then… That was easy.”

"Like I would've actually said no?" Asami said.

"You're taking a lot of chances being with me like this, so it would make sense if maybe—"
"Korra," Asami stopped her before she could finish. "If I didn't already know what I was getting myself into, I wouldn't have asked you to kiss me. We're both taking risks right now, but I'm not going to let them stop me based on 'maybe's' and hypotheticals."

The tone in her voice left no room for argument, but Korra didn't want to anyway. She raised her hand and brushed her thumb against Asami's cheek, watching as Asami's eyes closed partially and how she blew out a shaky breath. It took her a moment to realize she was holding hers, too.

"I just want you to be absolutely sure," she said.

"I am." Asami stared down at her with a tender look and took Korra's hand in hers. "Promise."

Korra nodded. "I guess it's a date then?"

Asami smiled and lowered her head again to rest on Korra’s shoulder. "Yeah. It's a date."

Several minutes of silence passed, and eventually Asami was sound asleep. Korra held her closer, listening to her soft snores as they lie there cramped together on the couch. But if she could never move again, she didn’t think that would be such a bad thing.

TBC...
“That movie was kind of eh, don’t you think?” Opal asked as they exited the movie theatre, following behind the crowd of people.

“You’re the one who picked it,” Asami said, laughing. “I would’ve been fine watching one out of the millions I have back at my place.”

“Well, your place doesn’t have the new Star Wars.” Opal sighed. “I mean, there were some really good parts and it was good to see Carrie Fisher one last time, but I don’t know. It’s just not the same as it used to be and I don’t know why.”

“There’s a simple explanation for that. It’s a little thing I’d like to call a return of margins.”

“Blech. Don’t talk to me about economics. I might throw up.”

Asami laughed again. “Well, we wouldn’t want that now, would we?”

It was good to catch up with Opal. Even though she and Bolin lived all the way in Nebraska now, whenever Asami got together with her it was like time never passed at all. Opal was funny and sarcastic, but also very kind. She was a year older than Bolin and they met during their first week as freshmen in college. Soon after, they started dating and became inseparable. Asami didn’t think much of her at first (much like all of Bolin’s previous girlfriends), but after Hiroshi’s sentencing happened, Opal reached out to her and offered a listening ear. Ever since then, their friendship blossomed. She even got to be a bridesmaid at their wedding.

They left the AMC and started walking down the streets of Manhattan. It was midday on a Friday, but Christmas was just three days away and a lot of people scheduled off work, making it a chaotic sight all around. However, there was no better day to shop than today because of how nice it looked outside. The sun beamed down on them from the clear, blue sky, melting the last bit of snow left on the ground.

Opal looped her arm through Asami’s as they walked to a corner and stopped. “Sooo. How is everything going at Future Industries?”

“As good as it can go,” Asami said, distracted once she saw a taxi coming. She waved her hand out and, to her relief, the taxi drove up to the curb. She put her gloves on before opening the door and letting Opal climb in first. After telling the driver the address, the taxi pulled off a minute later.

“That sounded a little depressing by the way you said it,” Opal spoke after putting on her seatbelt.
“You’re not having any trouble, are you?”

“When you own a business there’s always trouble.” Asami sighed. “It’ll all be sorted out eventually.”

“If you say so,” Opal said.

Asami bit the inside of her cheek. She wished she could talk to Opal about what was really going on, but she knew that was impossible. Before leaving Korra’s place the other day, she told her not to worry about anything and that she’d “fix this,” but it wasn’t in Asami’s nature not to be worried. She didn’t want Korra to stick her neck out like that for her, but she had no idea what she could do to stop it from happening. Korra wasn’t budging on it either.

She sighed out loud again.

For someone who was so used to figuring out the solutions for problems, she came at a standstill with this one. And now someone she really cared about could be hurt because of her.

“Asami?”

“Huh?” She looked over and found Opal staring at her.

“Are you all right?”

“Yeah. I’m fine. I was just thinking.”

Opal nodded but still appeared concerned. Asami wanted to steer her away from pressing on the topic any further.

“I have a date tonight.”

“What?” Opal sprung up from her slouched position against the seat. “Really?”

“Mhm.”

Asami watched a large grin plaster across her friend’s face.

“That’s so great, Asami! I’m glad you’re dating again. I was starting to get worried.”

“You were worried about my dating life?”

“Of course! You are so young. I know work means a lot to you, but you should be out here having fun instead of being cooped up in that office of yours all day.”

“Those are wise words coming from the married and pregnant 24-year-old.”

“Shush!” Opal slapped her arm. “So tell me, who is he? And is this the real reason why Mako’s been walking around like the Grinch who stole Christmas?”

“Not really, but kind of.” Asami’s shoulders slumped and she breathed out. “He doesn’t know about the date, but I doubt he’d be thrilled if he knew about who it was with.”

“I’m going to kill Bolin,” Opal said. “He knows about this, doesn’t he?”

“Bo just doesn’t want you getting involved with any drama. He’s afraid it’ll put stress on you and the baby.”
“As if! My pumpkin and I love our daily fix of gossip. Don’t we, little one?”

Opal looked down at her barely showing stomach and started rubbing as she cooed at it.

“You’ve done that three times today and it’s still so weird.”

“You’ll understand when you have your own bun in the oven. Anyway, we’re getting off topic here! Who is this guy? Another detective in the same department as Mako maybe? Or is he older? That would be juicy.”

“She,” Asami blurted out.

“What?” Opal said, still smiling.

“I’m going on a date with a woman.”

The taxi went quiet. Opal stared at her with wide eyes and her mouth dropped open in shock.

“I can’t tell if you’re being serious right now,” she said after the pregnant pause.

“As a heart attack.” Asami held up her uncrossed fingers.

“Hold on a second.” Opal put her hands to her head. “You’re into women now? Since when?”

“I wouldn’t say I’m into women. It’s just her, who happens to be a woman, that I’m into.”

“I am so confused right now. I think I need a minute.”

Asami shut up and played with her hands in her lap. After going back and forth all morning on whether or not she’d tell Opal about her date with Korra, she realized that Opal was the only one she could afford to tell right now. Mako was definitely off the table for the time being, and by that logic, Bolin was too. Opal, however, was someone Asami knew she could tell in the utmost confidence.

She continued to wait patiently as her friend consumed the information and then watched her head tilt up in thought.

“Is this woman that friend of yours from high school that Bolin was telling me about?” she asked.

“So he did tell you about everything?”

“He didn’t tell me that! All he said was that you had a friend from high school that Mako didn’t like so much and that you met up with her or something recently? But after you said you were going out on a date, I figured that was what the real issue was.”

“Mako doesn’t get jealous about that kind of stuff anymore. We’re just friends.”

“And you’re sure, without a shadow of a doubt, that it’s not possible he may still have some feelings for you?”

“Why? Did he say something to you?”

“No, no!” Opal waved her hands. “It’s just that from your guys history and how deeply he still cares about you, it kind of gave me the impression that maybe he still likes you. I don’t know. Just ignore me.”
Asami shifted uncomfortably in her seat. She didn’t think the conversation would go this way, but it gave her something to think about.

“I’m not saying it isn’t possible,” she finally said, “but him and I have talked about this a million times already. We don’t work in a relationship. And after the recent fight we had, I’m starting to wonder if we can even be friends.”

“Whoa. Hold on. You aren’t serious, right?”

Asami shrugged. “Mako’s done some questionable things in the past, and for some reason he’s still holding on to this grudge against Korra that I can’t even begin to wrap my head around.”

“Korra…” Opal mouthed slowly. “That’s her name?”

“Yeah.” Asami looked down at her lap.

“Why don’t we back up and you start from the very beginning with all of this?”

“It’s a pretty long story.”

“We’re in New York traffic. We’ve got time.”

Asami ran her fingers through her hair and sighed. This was a lot harder to talk about than she imagined it would be, but that was because it didn’t sound real in her own head. However, she realized earlier that talking to Opal—one of the most non-judgmental people in her life—would help her. She trusted Opal and knew she would understand (or at least try to).

So for ten whole minutes, she explained the situation, only omitting a few things. Opal listened with intent and engagement, nodding her head along as Asami spoke, but she kept a passive face.

When Asami finished the story, the taxi remained silent for another minute.

“So let me just make sure I’m following you here,” Opal said. “You got back in touch with your former best friend, found out she was in love with you, then found out you were in love with her, too. And you both realized you still have feelings for each other and are now testing the waters to see if you can actually be together?”

Asami nodded. “Right. Basically.”

“And Mako’s been a huge douche about the whole situation and feels threatened by this woman?”

“You think it’s because he feels threatened?”

“Obviously. If Bolin’s right and Mako knew about her liking you, it could be the reason why he felt or feels so territorial. Seeing you two together again must’ve sent him in a blinding rage. Good on you for slapping his ass.”

Asami thought about it. She wanted to believe that there was still something underneath all of Mako’s jealous behavior, but it didn’t seem to be the case. And even if it wasn’t just jealousy, he had no right to talk to her or Korra the way that he did.

Opal breathed out and rested against the seat.

“Jesus,” she said. “This is way better than TV. Don’t you think so, ma’am?”

The taxi driver, who Asami forgot about, met her eyes through the rearview mirror and Asami
could tell she was smiling.

“That’s some crazy shit,” she said.

“Right?” Opal nodded in agreement and turned back to Asami. “What are you going to do about Mako?”

“I think we’re good to walk the rest of the way,” Asami said when she realized they were close to her street. She pulled out her wallet and offered the driver cash. “Keep the change.”

She got out of the car and Opal followed right after.

“Right now, this isn’t about Mako,” she said as they got onto the sidewalk and started walking. “I’m just trying to focus on figuring things out with Korra before anything else.”

“Well apparently you guys have worked a few things out already since you’re going on a date with her.” Opal sighed. “It is romantic, though. Like something you read out of Nicholas Sparks novel, only gayer.”

Asami couldn’t help but smile. “We’re taking things slow for now. She wants me to be sure of what I feel, even though I…”

“What?” Opal prodded her.

They turned the corner and Asami could see her apartment just up ahead.

“I think I already am,” she said.

Opal smiled and linked their arms again.

“Tell me. What’s this Korra woman like? She must be very special for you to suddenly want to bat for the other team.”

Asami looked up at the sky.

“Korra’s… intense,” she said. “I’ve never met anyone else like her. It’s what drew me to her in the first place because all I saw was a girl who wasn’t afraid to be herself despite what people thought. She made me want to be fearless. I admired her and I still do because she’s been through a lot and had to be strong for her own sake. But at the same time, she built this wall up around herself and hasn’t ever trusted anyone to fully let in, but I’m partially the one to blame for that.”

“Sounds like the emotionally unavailable type to me,” Opal commented.

“Yeah, at first. I still don’t know much about her now, but she’s been opening up a lot more to me lately. She can come across as cold and closed off when you first meet her, but under the surface is this… really deep, thoughtful, and vulnerable person. I could sit and listen to her talk for hours about anything and never get bored because she’s so interesting, and also because I just like talking to her. She listens and doesn’t judge, and it makes me feel so seen…”

Realizing she was rambling, she stopped and looked over at Opal who appeared stunned.

“And you’re saying she’s the only woman you’ve ever been attracted to like this?”

“I don’t know if it’s even just that. She’s just been the only one. Period.”

“Wow.” Opal whistled. “If that’s really how you feel, then Mako never stood a chance.”
Asami sighed. “I know it might sound weird—”

“It doesn’t,” Opal said. “Being attracted to someone you grew a close bond and connected emotionally with isn’t weird. Forget the conventional bullshit. She obviously means a lot to you, and from the way you just spoke about her, I can tell those feelings run really deep—Ah. Let’s stop really quick.”

Asami halted them both and she watched Opal close her eyes and breathe in and out.

“Are you okay?” she asked, running a hand up and down her shoulder. “Maybe I should’ve had the driver drop us off at the front.”

“No. I’m fine,” Opal said. “I’ve just been getting this fluttersy feeling lately for the past few days.”

“Should you go see a doctor?”

Opal opened her eyes and looked over at Asami. Everything about her appeared bright and animated just then.

“No. It’s just the baby kicking.”

A full smile broke across Asami’s face and she wrapped her arms around Opal’s shoulders. “I’m so happy for you, Opal. I can’t say that enough.”

“Thank you,” Opal said, hugging her back. “And I’m happy for you, too. I’d like to meet this Korra sometime. She sounds like a very intriguing person.”

“Opal,” Asami said, pulling away, but keeping her hands on her friend’s shoulders. “Please do me a favor and just keep this between us right now. You can’t tell anyone. Not even Bolin.”

(Of course. As much as I love that man, he has a big mouth. But why don’t you want to tell them? You think they’ll be weird about it?)

“No. I do want to tell them,” Asami said as they started walking again. “But this thing I have with Korra is really new and I want to respect her privacy, as well. We’re not even in an official relationship, so going around telling a bunch of people about something we’re not even sure about ourselves isn’t a good idea. Also, Mako and I aren’t on the best of terms right now and I don’t need any more drama with him.”

“But you do plan on speaking with him soon, don’t you? Are you even coming over for Christmas?”

Asami shrugged. “I don’t know. Everything’s really crazy right now and I don’t want to make things awkward by showing up.”

“You’re family whether Mako likes it or not,” Opal said. “If he tries to give you shit, I’ll have your back.”

“Thanks. I’ll think about it.”

“Why don’t we talk about more exciting things, huh? Like your date,” Opal suggested and nudged Asami in the side playfully. “Where are you guys going? And what are you going to wear?”

“I don’t know.” Asami cracked a grin. “We both agreed with not doing anything too fancy, but other than that Korra’s the one who wanted to make the plans because she knew I’d be too busy.”
“Aw! How thoughtful. I bet if she plays her cards right, you’ll reward her after dinner.” Opal wiggled her eyebrows.

Asami rolled her eyes. “Opal…”

“Oh, come on! Don’t tell me you haven’t thought about it! The first thing I’d ask myself if I were in your position was if I could eat another woman’s box or not.”

“Opal!” Asami shouted in surprise, her voice going three octaves higher than normal. She could feel the blood and heat rushing to her cheeks. A passerby raised their brow as they walked by, but Opal didn’t notice it because she was laughing too hard.

“Just blink once for yes or twice for no if you at least did a little research. From the way you make it sound, the two of you aren’t that far from jumping in the sack together despite how ‘slow’ you’re taking it.”

“You’re crazy. We’ve only really kissed, like, once.”

Opal gasped and grabbed her by the arm in a tightening grip. “You kissed her already? What was it like?”

“You are awfully nosy.”

“You’re the one who offered the information! I’m a pregnant lady who, in a couple of months, will be sitting around in boredom watching talk shows and soap operas for entertainment. I’m just getting a head start on it.”

Asami chuckled as they finally made it to the gate of her apartment building. “Normal people would watch something on Netflix or read a book to cure their boredom.”

“I think you’ve already discovered by now that I’m not a normal person. Just give me a little bone? Pretty please, Asami?”

Asami unlocked the gate and opened it. She stepped through first and held it open for Opal, but Opal only walked halfway through before stopping in front of her and folding her arms.

Asami rolled her eyes again. “Fine. She’s a good kisser.”

Opal grinned. “How good? On a scale from one to ten.”

“Twelve.”

“Damn!” They walked through the gate and headed to the main entrance. “In that case, I need to do you up all nice and pretty for tonight.”

“Duh. That’s why I wanted you to come over here to begin with.”

“Sounds good to me.” Opal slapped Asami on the rear, making her yelp out loud. “Operation date night is now in commence!”

After a shower and several changes—with a lot of heavy input from Opal—Asami found the right outfit. She settled for some dark jeans tucked into her favorite pair of black, knee-high boots. There was a lot of back and forth on what shirt to wear, but Opal insisted on her going with the silk, long-sleeved, purple one that “made her boobs look really good.” They also spent a good fifteen minutes arguing over whether wearing a push up bra was too much.
She ended up listening to Opal and going with the push up bra. After talking to her about almost everything, it relieved a heavy amount of stress from Asami’s shoulders. It wasn’t like she wanted to keep Korra a secret from anyone in the first place, but when two-thirds of the people were related by blood, it made things a little tricky. Even though Bolin knew about Korra’s feelings for her, he didn’t know Asami returned those feelings. She had no doubt that beyond being surprised at first, he’d be as supportive about it as Opal. The only problem was him telling Mako about it. As well as Mako himself.

She didn’t owe him an explanation, but she would’ve liked to explain it for herself rather than Mako finding out from an indirect source. They needed to talk and figure out if they were going to fix things. And if they couldn’t… Well, Asami didn’t want to think about that.

Right now, she wanted to think about Korra only and what was happening between them. It was exciting, but nerve-wrecking as hell. She wasn’t sure if what they were doing was the right idea or if they were moving too fast, but she wanted to try at least. The Varrick and Raiko stuff still remained in the back of her mind, but she didn’t want that to keep them from moving forward with their relationship. Neither did Korra.

She was putting on a fresh coat of lip gloss when she heard a knock on the door. A million flutters started in her stomach and her hands shook a little as she put the cap back on the tube. She hurried out of the downstairs bathroom and headed to the front room. Then—when she got to the door—she fixed her hair one last time and took a deep breath before turning the knob.

When she opened the door, Korra stood there with her hands in her jacket. Her mouth quirked upward as she looked Asami up and down.

“Wow,” she said. “You look really good.”

“Thanks.” Asami smiled and gave her a noticeable once over, as well. “So do you.”

Korra had on a black, leather jacket with a grey scarf wrapped around her neck and a loose, white t-shirt hidden underneath it. Her high-waisted jeans had a single rip in one at the knee and were tucked into her ankle boots. Asami also noticed that, for the first time, she had her hair tied back in a low bun, showing off her striking cheekbones and perfectly shaped brows. Whatever foundation or concealer she was wearing covered up the faded bruising around her eye really well. Asami was staring so much that she almost missed hearing Korra ask if she was ready.

“Yeah. I just need to grab my bag and my coat and then we can go.”

She allowed Korra to come through the door and then walked over to the closet to grab her red, button up coat, a scarf and a hat. The heels of her boots clacked against the floor as she went to the kitchen to get her purse.

“So are you going to tell me where we’re going yet or leave me in the dark until we get there?” she asked and turned around. Korra’s eyes lifted to meet hers.

“Hm?”

Asami laughed. “Were you checking me out just now?”

Korra smirked. “Would you be offended if I was?”

“Not at all.” Asami walked back over to her. “I appreciate honesty.”
They stared at each other for a lingering moment and then smiled at the same time.

Excitement and anticipation spread through Asami. She loved being near Korra and having nothing but her attention, which was new because she learned to hate having attention after the years of being watched by vultures. But there was something about the way Korra looked at her specifically that raised the hair on her arms and made it just a little bit harder for her to breathe.

After turning out the lights in the apartment, they left and headed to the elevator.

“You never answered my question,” she said, pushing the button and stepping back a little when the doors opened. “Don’t tell me you got us reservations at some high-end, glamorous restaurant.”

“Haha. Clever. That might be your scene, but definitely not mine. Plus, we both agreed on nothing fancy, didn’t we?”

Asami nodded. "We did."

“So I figured we’d go with something simple. I know a guy—”

“Oh, you know a guy, huh?” Asami couldn’t help but interrupt with a laugh. “I love sentences that start off that way.”

Korra rolled her eyes, but the amusement on her face contradicted it. “Yes. I know a guy. He owns a chain of restaurants, including that vegan one over by the High Line. I asked him to reserve us a table.”

“Oh, Blossom? I love that place.”

“I figured.”

Asami’s cheeks were hurting from how much smiling she was doing.

“I’m only a vegetarian, though. I would’ve been fine with any restaurant with those type of options.”

“Yeah, but I’d rather you not get sick on our date from cross contamination.”

That was it. Asami melted right there on that elevator floor. God. Why was Korra being so perfect right now? It made it hard for her to keep her hands to herself, because what she really wanted to do was wrap her arms around Korra and pull her close.

Or maybe just push her up against the elevator and kiss her hard...

The elevator opened and Korra led them out of the building. There was an Uber waiting out by the sidewalk and she opened the door for them both.

An older woman in the driver’s seat greeted Asami with a smile and also complimented her on how nice she looked. Once they were all buckled in, the car drove off.

“Are we doing anything else after dinner?” she asked Korra.

“You’ll see.”

“You’re so secretive. It’s making me nervous that you went out and got an airplane to write my name in the sky.”
“Is that something you always expect when going out on a date?”

“No. But I’ve kind of learned to expect the unexpected.”

“Is that a good or bad thing?”

“Usually bad. For instance, the last date I went on was a year and a half ago. The guy made a hissy fit about us not getting a private room for ourselves.”

“You make that sound like a horror story.”

“Because it was! Everyone stared at us and the staff sent dirty looks the entire time we were there. I wouldn’t be surprised if they spat in our food.”

Korra laughed. “I guess that does sound pretty terrible.”

“What about you? Don’t tell me you’ve never been on a cringeworthy date?”

Korra looked away for a second and scratched at the side of her head.

“This is, uh, actually my first.”

Asami’s eyes widened.

“Really? Not even anything super casual like a coffee date?”

“If you want to count the times we’ve gotten coffee, then sure. I haven’t exactly been the dating type.”

“Wow.” Asami sat back in her seat. “I guess I need to make sure this night goes extra smoothly then.”

“All you have to do is be yourself,” Korra told her. “I’m just glad you wanted to do this in the first place.”

Asami smiled and reached for Korra’s hand in the darkness. Once she found it, she folded their fingers together.

“Me, too. And that’s why I’m about to give you the best date of your entire life.”

“I’ll hold you to that, Sato.”

They arrived at the restaurant thirty minutes later. As Asami already expected, there was a line through the door of people trying to dine there without reservations. Since they had one, they skipped ahead and a host happily led them to their table. A booth wrapped around the entirety of the room for tables seated near the wall, with respectable distance between each one. The lights above were dim, but individual lamps went in the middle of each table to give it a more intimate vibe.

Asami sat on the side with the booth and shrugged off her coat. The host reassured them that their waiter would be with them in a minute and walked off.

“This is really nice,” Asami said, looking around. “I’ve never been here for dinner. It’s surprising you could get those reservations in such a short amount of time.”
“I have my ways.”

“Of course. Because of your guy.” Asami smiled. “You probably always know a guy.”

“Always.”

“Teach me your ways, Yoda.”

“Tch. You and Kuvira would make the best of friends. She quotes *Star Wars* to me all the time.”

“I went out and saw the new one today with a friend of mine.”

“Did you?”

Their waiter came up to them suddenly, interrupting their conversation to ask what they wanted to drink.

“Water,” they both said at the same time and looked at each other.

“Coming right up,” the waiter said and walked away. Once he was gone, the two of them laughed.

“I wish we could’ve been this in sync before,” Asami said.

“But that would’ve been too easy, wouldn’t it have?” Korra said. “But who is this friend you went with? I don’t have anything to worry about, do I?”

“I went with my very pregnant and married friend Opal,” Asami said. “I think you’re in the clear.”

“Bolin’s wife, right?”

“Right,” Asami nodded, pleased that Korra remembered. Then she tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. “She actually helped me with my outfit for tonight.”

Korra’s brows shot up in surprise.

“So, you told her you were going out on a date with me?”

“Yeah. I… hope you don’t mind.”

“Why would I mind? I didn’t even have expectations of you telling anyone about us just yet.”

Asami’s heart skipped a beat at Korra’s reference to them as an ‘us.’

“She’s someone I can easily confide in,” she said.

“So she didn’t freak out?”

“Nah. She’s not that kind of person. It surprised her, no doubt, but after that she said she was happy for me.”

“I’m glad. The last thing I’d want to do is come between another one of your relationships. But I hope you didn’t feel like you were pressured into saying anything about it.”

“Not at all. It felt really good to talk about it with someone else. It gave me a lot of clarity... And it made me realize how much I want this to work.”

Korra leaned her face against her fist and smiled.
“What?” Asami asked, feeling her cheeks growing warm under that gaze.

“What?” Asami asked, feeling her cheeks growing warm under that gaze.

“Nothing.” Korra chuckled and picked up her menu to look through it.

Their water came a few minutes later and the waiter asked them if they were ready to order. Asami decided to get the risotto while Korra opted for a salad. The waiter wrote down their orders and told them it would be a fifteen minute wait.

“So how’s your day been? I don’t think I asked,” Asami said, raising her glass to her lips.

“Okay.” Korra folded her hands in front of her. “I trained all morning, and then I had to take care of some last minute arrangements.”

Asami paused before sitting her glass down.

“You mean with…”

Korra nodded.

“You told him your decision then? What did he say?”

“Maybe we shouldn’t talk about this right now,” Korra said, glancing around the room.

Asami looked around as well before giving a reluctant nod. Tonight was supposed to be drama free, but what Korra agreed to meant that she’d be fighting some woman tomorrow night just to get Asami off the hook. It made her feel gross no matter how many times Korra tried to tell her that she wanted to do it. If Asami cared about her as much she knew she did, how could she just let her step inside a ring and get punched in the face for her? It didn’t feel right.

“I know that face,” Korra said. “You’re thinking way too hard about something again, aren’t you?”

Asami smiled a little. “We’ll talk about it later?”

Korra nodded. “Why don’t you tell me about how your day was? You said you went to the movies. Does that mean you didn’t go to work?”

“I took a half day. I had three meetings early in the morning and spent an hour on the phone talking to an investment broker.”

“How does that not bore you to death or stress you out?”

Asami shrugged. “After a while, you kind of get used to it. But isn’t it like that with everything? Some days you don’t think you have the energy to even get out of bed, and other times you feel like you can do almost anything.”

“Yeah. I’ve felt that way many times.”

“I heard your thirties are a lot easier to manage, though.”

“Cheers to hoping.” Korra raised her glass and Asami clinked hers against it.

Dating became such a non-factor in her life that she almost forgot what it was like and how good they could be. She enjoyed the casual conversations and getting to know the other person. It gave her that bit of normalcy she always wanted and cherished. But being on a date with Korra gave everything an even deeper meaning. They were old friends who once knew each other like the back of their own hands. And now they reached this stage of relearning each other while also
acknowledging the feelings they never got the chance to explore or—in Asami’s case—knew they could explore.

“I still can’t believe it,” she said out loud.

“Can’t believe what?” Korra asked.

“That this is all happening. That I’m on a date with you. It feels so surreal.”

Korra nodded. “I know what you mean. If you told me seven years ago that I’d eventually be on a date with you, I would’ve laughed.

“Did the idea of us sound that implausible to you?”

“Not implausible. But just… unattainable. We were in each other’s orbit, but at times I felt so far away from you that I didn’t think I’d ever measure up. To be honest, I still don’t.”

“Hey now.” Asami reached across the table and placed her hand on Korra’s forearm. “You don’t have anything to measure up to. You’re raw and real, and that’s exactly why I like you so much. Don’t try to meet expectations when there aren’t any.”

Korra looked into her eyes and the hard expression on her face relaxed.

“You’re right.”

Asami smiled and pulled her hand away.

“Of course I am. Besides, we’ve only officially been on this date for ten minutes and I am confident that you’ve already beaten a good majority of any date that I’ve been on in the past couple of years.”

“Wow. You must’ve gone on a lot of bad ones then.”

“Yeah. But I was also never as interested in any of those men like I am with you.”

Korra chuckled. “Smooth.”

“I’m serious!” Asami said with a laugh. She watched as Korra put her cheek against her fist again with a soft, warm smile.

“Well then, I’m flattered. I just hope to keep that interest.”

“Oh, Korra.” She ran her finger around the rim of her glass. “You underestimate just how interesting you really are.”

“Wow,” Asami said after finishing the last bite of her meal. “That was delicious. Even better than the last time I had it.”

“How often do you come here?” Korra asked. She finished her food a few minutes earlier.

“Not often. I’m just predictable and get the same thing at every restaurant I’ve been to more than once.”

“You’re afraid to try new things?” Korra said, giving her a teasing look.
Asami smiled. “Obviously not.”

An hour passed just like that. They talked the entire time, only pausing whenever they took a bite of their food or a sip of their drinks, both sticking with water the entire time. They talked about their interests and hobbies these days. Asami shared her love for science and building things, which she figured Korra would find boring, but instead Korra looked at her with intrigue. In return, she listened while Korra talked about art and how she liked going to museums and festivals in her spare time, which Asami found quite surprising. They also talked about music of various genres and traded a few of their favorite indie artists, some they even shared in common.

It was nice getting to know more things about Korra. Even if they were small things, Asami still appreciated them. With the friction between them diminished, it left a feeling of calm behind in its wake. It was as calm as that morning they woke up next to each other, but this time it would remain that way.

“Ready to go?” Korra asked her.

“Yeah,” she said. Pulling out her wallet, she took out her card.

“Don’t worry about it,” Korra said as she pulled out a twenty and sat it on the table. “I got us a special discount.”

Asami quirked an eyebrow. “From your guy?”

“Yup.”

“He must be very fond of you to let you get away with a free meal.”

Korra gave a nonchalant shrug. “Let's just say he's a big fan of my work.”

“I see,” Asami said. “I’d still like to contribute to the tip, though.”

“Go for it.”

Asami dropped another twenty on the table. Afterward, they both stood up and put on their coats, scarves and gloves. When they left the warm restaurant, they were reintroduced to the cold air that whistled and whirled around them in that area. Christmas music could be heard playing down the sidewalk as people walked around in good spirits.

“What now?” Asami asked as they started walking away from the restaurant. “Don’t tell me the date’s over?”

“How anticlimactic would that be?” Korra said. “But I thought we’d go for a walk through the High Line park, maybe? I mean, if it isn’t too cold for you…”

“That sounds wonderful. It was getting kind of stuffy in there anyway.”

The park only took five minutes to get to. Asami never walked through it before, but she was always interested in the infrastructure and urban design of it. She imagined that it looked even more breathtaking in the spring and summer months with all of the flowers in bloom. But even without all of the gardening, the artwork made up for it. Murals, statues, and beautiful architecture could be found everywhere. Some were big, bold and bright, while others appeared simpler albeit still being eye-catching. Korra would point out something every so often that she really liked and explained why. All Asami could do was listen and be impressed with the way she spoke with so much insight, proving once more how much she appreciated art.
As they walked along the abandoned, elevated train tracks that went through the park, Asami took in all of the new steel and glass buildings. She saw how beautiful the sight lines of lower Manhattan and Midtown looked and it gave her peace. So much peace that she could forget about everything else going on in her life.

“I go running around here all the time,” Korra said, breaking the comfortable silence between them. “This park is the one place where I don’t have to think because there’s too much around to be so worried about myself. I just run and I look. But there’s this one spot in particular that I pass every time and I have to stop and stare out at everything for ten minutes straight.”

“Where is it?” Asami asked.

“It’s coming up.”

Their arms brushed as they headed southward, passing by a wall of art splattered with silhouettes of people dancing in all different colors. Orange lanterns planted into the ground created a path for them to see as they walked. When they went beyond the wall and passed a couple of bush shrubs, they reached an opening and came to a stop.

They were mounted on a hill where, down below, Asami heard the sound of cars driving by, though she couldn’t see them. All she could see was the amazing view of the Hudson River, along with all of New Jersey.

“Wow,” she breathed out and wandered forward, placing her hands against the short fence that barricaded them from going any farther. She needed to take it all in. “This is beautiful.”

Korra came beside her and looked onward as well.

“There have been so many times where I've wanted to pick up and leave here again," she said. "Sometimes, I still do. This is the longest I've settled down in a place in years, so I think there's always going to be those thoughts of whether or not to just run off someplace else. But then I come here, and I tune everything else out except for the wind, the trees, and the cars. And it calms me. All those thoughts I had previously leave my mind and I end up staying here for another day.”

Asami closed her eyes as she listened to Korra speak, trying to build that image in her mind of Korra just standing here, thinking about her place of belonging. When she opened her eyes, she turned her head away from the scenery to look over at Korra. She was staring out at the river in a transfixed state as the wind blew, causing a few tendrils of hair that came loose from her bun to gently move against her face.

“I’m glad you stayed,” Asami whispered.

Korra looked over at her finally. Once their gazes locked, a sudden stillness fell between them. The wind continued to blow and Asami grew more entranced by Korra’s stare. Korra didn’t move, though. She searched Asami’s face, looking like she was waiting for something. It only took Asami a second to realize that she was waiting for her. She wanted Asami to initiate the contact first without asking. She wanted Asami to know that she could.

So, without further ado, Asami turned to her. She reached up and brushed her gloved hand against Korra’s cheek and watched her eyes flutter shut. Leaning down, she captured Korra’s lips in a tender kiss that caused an abundant of sparks to shoot off through her body. Korra responded back by leaning away from the gate and turning toward Asami more. She covered Asami’s hand that stillled against her cheek and held it as their lips moved against each other in a slow, languid manner. It was as if they had all the time in the world.
Asami sighed and opened her mouth wide enough for Korra to slip her tongue inside, which Korra wasted no time doing. She tasted of mint and Asami could tell she was wearing strawberry scented balm. Her lips were the softest that she ever kissed and she loved how it felt like Korra was massaging hers with her own. She let go of Asami’s hand and let it trail down the arm of her coat and to her side, tugging Asami closer. Their tongues continued to slick and slide against each other as they consumed one another, never breaking apart for a single second.

Minutes passed, and they eventually pulled away. Although the wind still hit the side of her face, Asami felt hot. Her heart pounded hard against her ribcage and warm tingles spread in her belly as she watched Korra’s eyes open in a dream-like state. They kept their faces close and breathed together, like one, individual person.

“Me, too,” Korra said.

“Huh?” Asami asked, feeling a little dazed and dizzy.

Korra reached up and fixed the front of her hat. “I’m glad I stayed around, too.”

Asami exhaled and, in an abrupt manner, pulled Korra forward. She wrapped her arms around broad shoulders and shoved her face in between the collar of Korra’s jacket and her neck. Only a second passed before Korra held her back just as tight.

“One of the best views I’ve ever seen,” Asami said after a while.

“One of?” Korra asked. “You know another place?”

“My office,” Asami said, pulling away and then fixing Korra’s ruffled scarf. “It’s so high up that you can see everything.”

“Show me?”

Asami looked up at her. “Really?”

Korra nodded. “If that’s possible?”

“It is. I always keep a set of keys to the building with me.”

“Then can we?”

“You really want to go all the way to my job at night time just to see it?”

“I do,” Korra said with a smile.

“I’d feel bad if we took a cab there just for you to have to take another one all the way back home.”

“And here I thought you’d offer me a chance to spend the night.”

Asami bit her lip. “That’s what you want?”

Korra glanced downward and nodded. “Yeah.”

“Okay.” Asami grinned. “Then I think that can be arranged.”

Since Korra’s place was on the way, they made a pit stop there so she could pack up some stuff for overnight. After that, they headed over to Future Industries. Most of the lights were out, but they
walked through the building freely with no one else in sight. It was closed until next Tuesday and the only one with access to the building was Asami.

“I can’t believe you own this place,” Korra said while they stood in the elevator as it headed all the way up to the thirtieth floor.

“A lot of it’s just a bunch of different office spaces. Every fifth floor is a new department.”

“How many people work here?”

“Close to one thousand.”

Korra whistled. “That’s a lot of people to be in charge of.”

“Having different people in head of each department helps.”

The elevator came to a stop and opened up on her floor. Once they stepped out, the lights automatically turned on. There were only two offices up at the top: hers and Rita’s. When they got to hers, she inserted the keycard into the lock and opened it.

The room was spotless and tidy. Asami always made sure to leave it the way she entered it. She kept her office plain and minimalist at best, with one side of the room having a couple of sofas, along with a glass table, and a television hooked into the nearby wall. After that, the only thing left was her desk.

Korra walked around the room and let her hand run over the back of one of the sofa’s. Asami watched on and waited for her to turn in the direction of what they came to see in the first place.

“Wow,” she heard when Korra turned to the window. Walking over to it, she placed her hand up against the glass. “You really can see everything.”

“I know.” Asami walked over and sat down on top of her desk, continuing to watch Korra. “When I need a minute to just destress and clear my head, all I have to do is turn around.”

“It reminds you of just how small you really are,” Korra said and looked back at her.

“When I was a little girl, during the summers my dad would let me come with him to this office a few times. He wanted to show me what it was like to own a business and how I could become like him some day. What he didn’t know was that the only reason why I liked coming was so I could sit on this floor, look out the window, and dream about being anything I wanted to be.”

She looked over on the desk and saw the single framed photo of her mother and picked it up.

“How did you finally make up your mind about going to Cornell instead of fashion school?”

Asami raised her head.

“Aside from my dad finding out on his own about what I wanted to do, I only told you about getting accepted there. You were the only person in my life who didn’t discourage me about what I was passionate about. Everyone else around me, even Mako, kind of just expected that I’d follow in my dad’s footsteps.”

“You wanted to please them,” Korra commented and walked forward. She carefully took the frame out of Asami’s hands and looked down at the photo of Asami’s mother.

Asami nodded. “As always. But when I got to Cornell I was just… sad. All the time. If I didn’t
have to go to class, I’d be hauled up in my room. My roommates always tried to get me to go out with them, but I’d constantly shut them down to the point where they just gave up hope. I didn’t want to be there at all.”

Korra put the photo back in its original place and then sat down next to her on the desk.

“But you stuck through it,” she pointed out.

“Yeah. When I came back for the second semester, I willed myself to try and be better; to fake it until I made it. It worked for the most part until…”

Asami trailed off and concentrated on the window. She needed to gather her composure before trying to speak again.

“You don’t have to talk about it,” Korra said.

“It’s okay. I just need a minute.”

Korra shifted on the desk and stuffed her hands into her jacket.

“Asami… I probably should’ve mentioned this, but the night before I invited you over to my apartment, I looked up more about your father’s case.”

Asami’s eyes grew and she looked over at Korra. “You did?”

“Yeah. I’m sorry. I know I should’ve waited for you to tell me about it, but it was before I knew all of this would happen.”

“No, it’s fine,” Asami decided in that moment. “It kind of makes this a little bit easier to talk about since you know everything.”

“I don’t know everything,” Korra said. “I don’t know what was going through your mind or how you felt. I don’t know what it was like for you to have all of those cameras in your face and seeing your name put all over the news.”

“Horrible,” Asami replied. “It felt like I was some kind of circus animal. Everywhere I went, everyone knew my name. I’d get harassed daily by a bunch of strangers. Even at school, a group of students tried to start a petition to get me kicked out.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Korra said, anger coloring her words.

“They automatically assumed I was guilty of being some kind of co-conspirer just because the police sent me in for questioning. Even after I was cleared from being involved, people still didn’t trust me. I always had an idea of how cruel the world could be, but never to that much of an extent. Especially after taking over the company.”

"How did you even manage to achieve that?" Korra asked. "It's amazing that, after everything, you own a company and are still so well off."

"Lots of sleepless nights," Asami said. "And also, when I turned 22, I found out that my dad opened a trust fund for me before all of his accounts were frozen."

"You must've received a lot of money."

"Yeah. I had no intentions of even touching it. But then I saw how many people's livelihoods were at stake, so I decided to step up and take over Future Industries before it went completely down
"Were a lot of people against it?"

"Definitely. There were protesters outside the building for weeks because of it."

“Do you still get attacked?” Korra asked.

“Hate mail every now and then but, for the most part, no. I spent a lot of the first two years gaining back the people's trust in the company. And also, I think people’s initial reactions at first were just because of how this country is. After everything calmed down and my father was officially put behind bars, everything else calmed down too. My name slowly went out of the papers, no cameras were following my every move, and I could actually go shopping without everyone staring at me and calling me the ‘terrorist’s daughter.’”

“If I could, I’d drag every single one of those people to your feet and force them to apologize,” Korra said. She looked so furious that Asami believed she actually would do it.

“I know you probably would, but you don’t have to. It’s all over. My dad’s in prison and he’s not going to hurt anyone anymore. I own this company and we’re doing remarkable things that don’t have anything to do with him.”

“The damage is already done, though,” Korra said. “His actions put you in danger as well as other people. You had to pay for the crimes he committed. Don’t tell me you’re okay with that.”

“I’m not,” Asami said. “My life has always been hard because of him. All he wanted was for me to be his puppet and he didn’t care how it would have affected me. He put so much pressure on my shoulders and I never wanted any of that. I just wanted to be a normal girl with my own aspirations in life. And I know that it was the right decision to relaunch the company after what he did, but…”

Asami swallowed a knot beginning to form in her throat.

“You feel like he took away your choice,” Korra finished.

Asami breathed out. She’d been in denial about it up until this point, because despite repeating to herself all the time that she did the right thing by taking accountability for her father’s actions, there’d be times where she imagined what her life would have been like if she hadn’t. She never felt fulfilled after chasing down the dream her father had for her. And no matter how hard she tried to convince herself and other people she was happy, she knew deep down that she wasn’t. Korra saw right through it, too. She always did.

Her eyes watered and she wiped at them, making a noise of disgust as she did.

“Sorry. This is so unattractive and I’m being the worst date ever right now.”

“Hardly.” Korra got up and stood in front of her. She used her thumb to wipe away another tear that slid down Asami’s cheek. “I’m glad you’re comfortable talking to me about it. I know this probably isn’t an easy conversation for you.”

Asami shook her head.

“I went to see him for the first time in years about three weeks ago, you know? He’s been writing me letters constantly for the past several years, but I ignored them. I went there just to look him in the eyes and tell him how much he disgusted me, and I did…” She sank her teeth into her bottom lip and looked down. “But then I let him reel me back in and he told me all of these horrible things.
I never saw how evil he really was up close like that before.”

Korra rubbed a consoling hand up and down her arm.

“He never deserved to have a daughter like you in his life,” she said.

“I thought I was done being angry at him, but after what you told me he said to you… I don’t think I’ll ever stop being angry. He forced you out of my life without even batting an eyelash, and what’s worse is that he knew how much you meant to me. All he’s ever done is manipulate my life and even now I still feel like he has some kind of control over me.”

“He doesn’t,” whispered Korra while squeezing at Asami’s arm. “You’re free from him.”

“Am I really, though? I own his company now and did everything he wanted me to do.”

“You did it because you thought it was the right thing and wanted to help others. Not because he wanted you to.”

Asami sniffed. “I want this company to thrive without him and I try so hard to make that happen. But sometimes I wonder if it’s even worth it because I’ll always be reminded that I’m living in his shadow. And the thought of that and becoming just like him scares the hell out of me.”

Korra’s fingers went under her chin and lifted it. Deep, blue eyes looked into hers with intensity.

“You are nothing like him,” she said.

“Varrick and Raiko seem to think so.”

“Varrick doesn’t even know how to tie his own shoelaces, and this Raiko dude doesn’t sound all that bright either.”

Asami laughed, disrupting the serious moment. She pulled Korra forward by the front of her jacket and leaned her head on her shoulder. A second later, she felt Korra’s arms wrap around her.

“I don’t want you to lose that fight,” she admitted. “I feel so gross knowing I made you do that.”

“I want to do it,” Korra said, pulling away to look at her. “This is my decision and I’m doing it for myself, as well.”

“I want to come then,” Asami said in sudden urgency.

“You can’t.”

“Korra—”

“You don’t need to see that,” Korra told her. “The farther you are away from this situation, the easier my mind will be. I don’t want to have to worry about you while I’m in that ring.”

Asami sighed and fist Korra’s jacket with both hands.

“This is so messed up. I just wish there was another way.”

“I know… but there isn’t.”

They went quiet for a few minutes, with Korra running her fingers through the ends of Asami’s hair and Asami closing her eyes at the feeling. She wished she could stay there in that empty
building with Korra, keeping them safe from all of the outside forces surrounding them.

“Are you ready to go?” Korra asked after a while.

Asami sighed. “Yeah. Sorry. I really promise that I’m a better date than this.”

Korra laughed and backed away, though she reached for Asami’s hand to pull her off the desk.

“No expectations, remember? I’d prefer a date like this any day rather than some sappy thing where we feel like we need to impress each other.”

“So you don’t want to impress me?”

“I do. But I enjoy just talking to you like this.”

Asami smiled. “Same here.”

“And an added bonus would be that I now have this hot fantasy of you being this badass CEO who could teach me a few things.”

A laughed rolled up from Asami’s chest. “Oh really? You’re already having those kinds of fantasies? Is that the real reason you wanted to come here?”

“You’ve caught me red handed,” Korra said with a smirk as she continued to pull Asami toward the door as she walked backward. “Look at how well you know me now.”

They left the office and Asami felt her spirits being lifted again. Right now, this was the only thing that mattered: Korra’s hand in hers, her warm smile, and the growing feeling in Asami’s chest that made her heart swell so much that it ached.

They got back to Asami’s place in little to no time at all. After shivering their way out of their jackets, coats, and other layers, they decided to warm up by the fireplace and drink some hot chocolate. Then Asami got the great idea to play Jenga, which they’d been doing for about twenty minutes now. The television sounded in the background with a Christmas movie that neither of them paid attention to.

“You’re really good at this,” Korra complimented.

Asami only smiled as she concentrated on successfully removing the middle block near the center of the stack and placing it on top to start a new row.

“Comes with years of practice,” she said. “Your turn.”

Korra leaned forward, squinting her eyes as she tried to find the most stable place to move a block. Eventually, she went for one at the very bottom. The entirety of the stack swayed back and forth in slow motion before tumbling over and crashing to the wooden floor.

“Ugh!” Korra groaned. “This game is annoying.”

Asami laughed and started stacking them again. “It’s because you go too fast. You need to be patient. It also wouldn’t hurt if you poked at the ones less firm in place.”

“But it’s less fun that way,” Korra whined.

“Or maybe it’s because it gives you more of a challenge, so on instinct you go for the toughest
blocks in the stack.”

Korra paused in helping pick up the blocks and looked Asami dead in her eyes.

“Are you analyzing me through Jenga?”

Asami laughed so hard that she ended up knocking over a couple of blocks.

“What can I say? It’s a good game for that.”

“Leave it to you to find more creative ways to learn about me.”

They finished stacking the blocks again and started to play, with Korra going first this time.

“Actually,” Asami said once Korra removed a block and put it at the top. “My therapist and I would play this a lot.”

As she removed a block herself, she felt Korra’s eyes on her.

“You go to therapy?”

“Not anymore. But a few months after my dad was sentenced I practically lived there.”

When she looked up and met Korra’s eyes again, Korra snapped out of it and took her turn with the game.

“Why did they make you play this?”

“I had trouble speaking during my sessions. Sometimes I’d just sit there and watch the clock, waiting for the time to pass. Then she—my doctor—brought this game out and suggested we play since she knew I was in school for engineering and liked to build things. After a few games, I just started talking about stuff. Not everything, but enough to feel like I wasn’t going completely insane.”

Korra nodded in response, her brows furrowing. She pushed a block out of place and it fell to the floor.

“Did you learn anything about yourself?”

“Nothing that I didn’t already know. I have abandonment issues and struggle with being alone, and my need to please other people stems from me not wanting to lose them.”

“What made you stop going?”

Asami shrugged. “Things for me got worse before they got better. I thought my mind wasn’t in the right place anymore to keep going to someone and having them make me realize all those things about myself. I should’ve kept going, though, because I ended up burying a lot of my feelings deep down and hurt other people because of it.”

Korra hummed. “That still must’ve taken a lot of guts. Most people don’t want to admit it, but the thing you can be most afraid of is your own mind and letting other people know what’s going on inside of it.”

Asami didn’t take her turn because she was too busy watching Korra. She wore a serious expression and almost seemed reluctant; as if she was struggling internally to speak about what was on her mind.
“You can talk to me about it, you know?” she said. “I know I’m not a therapist or anything, but I do know what it’s like to feel like you need to hold everything in. So whenever, or if you’ll ever be ready, just know that you have a listening ear.”

Korra didn’t reply and took a double turn with the game, but again, she went for a more stubborn block that resulted in bringing the upper part of the stack to collapse.

“I think I’m ready for a shower now,” she said, her voice sounding a lot more somber.

Asami blinked.

“Uh, yeah. Sure. There should be some fresh wash cloths in there already. Soap, too.”

Korra nodded but didn’t look at her. She turned and walked out of the room, leaving Asami sitting there on the ground feeling disappointed, but also guilty.

Figuring that they wouldn’t be continuing the game, she packed everything up, turned off the television, and put out the fireplace. She walked over to the kitchen and placed their two, empty mugs in the sink before washing them.

Was she pushing too hard again?

She didn’t expect for Korra to open up so easily about her past all of a sudden. When she told her all of those heart-wrenching things during their fight, she did it in the heat of the moment and out of anger. If anything, Asami reminding her about it could’ve made her feel embarrassed or regretful she revealed those things in the first place.

From what she learned up until now, Korra needed to be the one in control. She needed to be the one to call the shots and be comfortable enough to let people in when she wanted to. Putting her in a defensive corner only made her back against it even more and Asami understood that. Not everyone could just talk about their trauma as if they were ripping off a band-aid. Korra ran from her past for so long, so it was easy to see why she struggled so much coming to terms with it. The internal struggle would always be there.

After finishing cleaning up, Asami headed upstairs. She could hear the shower running and decided to change into her pajamas. Afterward, she crawled on her bed and turned onto her side. She replayed the nights events over in her head and smiled a little. Despite the minor setback, they progressed so much. She finally got to talk to Korra about her father, and during the moment of consolation, she realized how much she’d been missing that in her life. Having Korra reassure her about herself, her decisions, and giving her validation meant the world to her. To this day, in her mind, Korra’s opinion outshined anyone else’s. And that was exactly why she wouldn’t stop trying with Korra. Even if it took months or years to get Korra to open up about it, Asami wanted to be there. She wanted to be the one Korra could talk to and rely on while she was dealing with her inner demons.

She hadn’t noticed that she’d been dozing off until the bed dipped and a hand touched her shoulder. Turning around, she saw Korra sitting there in her night clothes, her damp hair loose from the bun it was in, and an apologetic look on her face.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I shouldn’t have shut down on you like that. I just panicked—”

“It’s okay.” Asami touched her arm. “I didn’t mean to push anything out of you like that.”

“You didn’t.” Korra grabbed her by the hand and leaned over Asami’s body. “You were lending
me your shoulder and I appreciate that so much. Please believe that.”

“I do.” Asami used her other hand to run through Korra’s hair. She noticed that Korra removed all of her makeup and the faded bruise under her eye could be seen. “You smell good.”

“I smell like you.”

“Even better.”

Korra kissed her. She kept her hand around Asami’s wrist in a gentle hold, caressing the inside of it with her thumb. Asami hummed in response and continued to run her fingers through Korra’s hair.

She found herself quickly becoming addicted to Korra’s kisses. God she loved kissing her. She just wanted to feel this way all the time, with Korra’s hands touching, brushing, and caressing her. Or the softness of her lips moving against hers as the kiss grew deeper. Asami wanted her heart to beat fast and loud for the woman above her, even if she knew that it meant having a medical condition. She wanted it all.

Her tongue poked out, brushing against Korra’s bottom lip, and Korra responded by opening her mouth wider, letting Asami enter it. The kiss grew hotter as they moved faster, lips glued together as they learned each other on a more intimate level.

Asami pulled her wrist out of Korra’s hold and lifted her body. Their mouths broke apart for a minute as they shifted, with Asami pushing Korra down on the bed and onto the pillows. She climbed between her legs and cupped Korra’s face in both of her hands before resuming their heated kiss, shoving her tongue inside once more. Korra let out a low moan that turned Asami’s insides into jelly and sent an electric pulse straight to her groin. She shifted on top of Korra, which led to one of her knees accidentally brushing the inside of Korra’s thigh, making Korra jerk a little.

Before pulling away, she sucked Korra’s bottom lip between hers and they parted with a loud, sucking noise. When she opened her eyes and looked down, her heart practically burst out of her chest.

Korra’s eyes were still closed and her chest rose up and down in a fast rhythm. Her reddened, wet lips looked fuller and her hair fell into a mess against the pillows.

“You’re so pretty,” Asami whispered.

Finally, Korra opened her eyes in a slow manner. The desire in them made Asami bite her lip, but then Korra used her thumb to tug it free from her teeth.

“What the hell are you doing to me?” she murmured and put her hand behind Asami’s neck to pull her down for another kiss. Her hands traveled down Asami’s sides, stopping at her hips, then went upward, causing Asami’s shirt to rise. A guttural moan left Asami’s mouth when she felt Korra’s warm palms slide up her bare back.

Minutes passed with them just touching and kissing as they murmured nonsensical things, as well as an occasional moan in between. When they pulled apart a third time, Asami was left panting and feeling disoriented. She lowered her head and buried it in Korra’s hair, trying to force herself to breathe while Korra rubbed calming circles along her back.

“You okay?” Korra asked, her breath tickling the shell of Asami’s ear.

“Yeah,” Asami responded. “I’m just a little winded. I’m not crushing you, am I?”
Korra let out a breathy laugh. “I bench press at 185. You’re fine.”

Laughing a little herself, Asami kissed her neck.

“I’d like to see that.”

“So then you’re starting to have fantasies about me too?”

“I blame you for being a bad influence.”

“I’m fine with taking the blame,” Korra said. Asami could tell she was smiling. “If that means more of this, then it’s more than fine.”

“Am I living up to those fantasies of yours?”

“You’re exceeding them by far. And if you keep accidentally rubbing your knee against me like that, I think I’ll go crazy.”

“Whoops. Sorry.” Asami removed herself from off of Korra but continued to press against her side. She planted another quick kiss on Korra’s cheek, making her smile, before leaning her head against her shoulder. Korra's hands continued to move lazily on her back, one of them drawing circles. Asami tried her best to keep still and quiet but ended up gasping once one of those hands went a little higher up the middle of her back. She wasn’t wearing a bra.

Korra chuckled. “A little sensitive there?”

“Don’t tease,” Asami said, lifting her head to give Korra a half-hearted glare. She smiled though when she heard Korra laugh again. “I’ve always loved your laugh.”

“Why? Because it’s so rare?”

“Yeah.” Asami put her head down again. “But also because it makes me feel like I achieved something really good.”

Korra hummed but didn’t say anything, however she stopped her movements and eventually removed her hands from inside of Asami’s shirt and pulled it back down.

“I might have gotten a little carried away,” she said.

“No, you didn’t,” Asami said. “I liked it. I would’ve told you otherwise if I didn’t.”

They went quiet, and all Asami could hear was the soft sound of Korra’s breathing. She closed her eyes and tried to imagine every day being like this: waking up next to Korra, going to sleep beside her, sharing kisses throughout the night and it eventually leading to something more. The fact that she could actually picture it excited her in so many ways. Every part of her was attracted to the woman beside her and there was no confusion or curiosity about it.

“What are you thinking about?” Korra asked.

Asami shook herself from her thoughts and lifted her head to look down at Korra.

“How attracted I am to you,” she said. “And how I could get really used to this.”

Korra appeared surprised by her admission and pulled away a little.

“So it doesn’t scare you then? Being with me like this?”
“It scares me, yeah. But probably not in the way you’re thinking.”

“In what way then?”

Asami brushed Korra’s hair back. “In a way that makes me scared to think about not having this.”

Korra smiled and turned her head to look at the ceiling, a thoughtful expression going over her face. When she met Asami’s eyes again, she took a deep breath and released it.

“Ask me something.”

Asami gave her a curious look.

“Like what?”

“Anything you want. About me, my past, where I’ve been. Whatever you’ve wanted to ask that I wouldn’t let you before.”

Sitting up, Asami looked down at Korra in genuine shock. “Are you serious?”

“Yeah,” Korra said with a nod and got up as well. “I think I’m ready.”

“But why now? You really don’t have to do this if it’ll make you uncomfortable.”

“It’s fine.” Korra grabbed her hand. “You told me a lot about yourself tonight that I know was hard for you, and it’s only fair if I do the same. You deserve to know stuff about me if we’re going to continue with this.” She held up their hands to emphasize her point.

Releasing a deep breath of her own, Asami squeezed Korra’s hand back. No other moment felt more important than this one. With this, she knew they came a long way from where they’d been a few months ago.

“After you left, where did you go?” she asked.

Korra’s eyes lowered.

“I was staying in between places, but mainly with Tahno at his apartment.”

Asami sighed. “I knew it. I had a feeling you were with him, but I had no idea where to look.”

“It would’ve been impossible. He never stopped moving and always had places to be. Sometimes he’d disappear for weeks at a time and even I didn’t know where he was.”

“Did you tell your parents where you were at least?”

Korra let go of her hand and put her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around them.

“I spoke to my mom once or twice after I left. She wanted me to come home and threatened to file a missing person’s report, but I… I was still so angry at them. So I told her a bunch of horrible things. Like that I didn’t want to be around her or my dad anymore; that I hated them. I told her I’d rather die in a homeless shelter than go back home. After that, she tried calling a few more times and that’s when I changed my number.”

A look of regret flashed across Korra’s face at her last words.

“But you made up with her since then, right? You said she calls you from time to time.”
“It’s a pretty strained relationship,” Korra said. “The longest I’ve ever spoken to her on the phone was three minutes. It’s rough every time, though. I can always hear the disappointment in her tone, or how careful she is with her words just because she thinks she might accidentally set me off. But it’s still a better relationship than the nonexistent one I have with Tonraq.”

“Your dad?”

Korra nodded. “Sometimes it’s hard from me to think of him as that because of how distant we are from each other, you know?”

“Of course,” Asami said from experience. “You start to wonder if they’re worthy of that title or if you’re worthy of being related to them. I’ve dealt with both.”

“It’s weird,” Korra said. “I grew up wanting nothing more than to be independent and free from my parent’s constant interference in my life. But once I had that, it became the loneliest feeling in the world and I resented them for it. I wanted them to stop pestering me, but I didn’t want them to stop caring altogether or send me away.”

Asami frowned. She wanted to reach out and touch Korra, but she could tell from her body language that she wanted some space between them. She just wished she could do something at least. Seeing the amount of pain this brought Korra to talk about her past wasn’t worth it in her eyes.

“Should we stop?” she suggested.

“No.” Korra shook her head with determination. “I’m okay. Keep going.”

Asami bit her lip and nodded reluctantly.

“You left New York with Tahno?” she asked.

“No. He… I left on my own because I wanted to, and also because I had to.”

“What do you mean?”

Korra ran a hand through her hair.

“At the time, I felt so broken and defeated by everything, and that feeling lasted a while. Tahno saw that I was in a weak state of mind too and took advantage of that. And I let him.”

“Did he… He didn’t hurt you, did he?” Asami asked with uneasiness bubbling in her gut.

“No. Not like that,” Korra said. “I lost my virginity to him and we slept together a few more times after that.”

“Oh…” Asami’s heart sank in her chest. “I see…”

“It ended up being the worst mistake because he seemed to think that I was his property after that,” Korra continued. “He’d brag to all of his friends and even told them they could have a few rounds with me if they wanted.”

“He what?” Asami’s voice raised in outrage. Her vision went red and her hands trembled in anger. She was compelled to get up and hunt that guy down right now. He never should’ve been around Korra to begin with and she shouldn’t have ever let him be.

“When I found out about what he said, I was livid, but I also knew that I couldn’t stay with him
“anymore,” Korra said. “So one night, while he was gone, I trashed his apartment and stole all of the money that I knew he kept stashed away. Then I took the first bus out of New York.”

“Holy shit, Korra!” Asami’s jaw dropped. The story sounded unbelievable to her ears, but from the look of satisfaction on Korra’s face, she knew she was telling the truth. “He must’ve been pissed.”

“Oh yeah. He sent me a buttload of text messages threatening to kill me if he ever saw me again. I don’t even think he was pissed about me stealing the cash, though. He would’ve made it up within the next week from all of the dealing he did. I think it had more to do with the fact that I left and wasn’t ‘his’ anymore.”

“What a fucking bastard! Please tell me you got a restraining order.”

“Didn’t need to. I was long gone and knew he wouldn’t have ever found me.”

“But what about now? You’re back and he could still be around.”

“He’s not.”

“How do you know?”

Korra sucked some air between her teeth.

“Because I found out he OD’d off of heroin a few years later.”

The anger diminished from Asami’s face and her eyes widened.

“I… wow. I didn’t know.”

Korra nodded and crossed her ankles.

“I never thought he would’ve really killed me, but just to be safe I made the decision to leave.”

“Where’d you go?”

“Somewhere in the Midwest, I think? I kind of drifted everywhere until I ran out of money.”

“Then what?”

Korra shrugged. “I found people with money.”

Asami blew out a puff of air and brushed her hair back.

“And these people… They used you, too?”

“For a lack of a better term. They used me as much as I used them.”

“But for what? Sex?”

Korra made a face. “Not quite. It’s not like I was prostituting myself or anything like that. But sure, I did sleep with a few of them to get what I wanted.”

Asami looked away. She didn’t want to imagine Korra with people like that, or anyone else in general. It upset her, angered her, and as hard as she tried not to be, it made her jealous.

“So why then?” she asked. When she heard Korra sigh, she looked up.
“It’s like I told you. I felt broken down by everything and I didn’t like myself all that much, so I went down this path of self-destruction. I let people think they could control me or treat me bad because I thought it was what I deserved. I just went along with everything, not really caring where I ended up.”

“Did you ever… listen to any of the voicemails I left you?” Asami asked.

Korra shook her head. “I couldn’t bring myself to. I wanted to, but all I could think about was how much you were better off.”

Asami opened her mouth to protest, but Korra placed a hand on her knee and gave an earnest look that begged for Asami to hear her out.

“I spiraled hard after I got kicked out of Unalaq’s. And when I tried to see you and your dad stopped me, I took that as a sign. You didn’t need to be around me when I was so… out of it. I would’ve only held you back with all of the issues I was dealing with.”

Asami’s shoulders dropped.

“I wouldn’t have been able to call myself your friend if I didn’t help you in your time of need,” she murmured.

“I know.” Korra rubbed her knee. “I know you would’ve done everything you could have to try and help me, but I didn’t want help at the time. I don’t even think you could’ve helped me.”

Asami covered the lower half of her face with the palm of her hand and looked down at the comforter. She wanted to believe that she could’ve helped Korra get through that rough period of her life. She wanted to think that, no matter what, their friendship and bond would’ve been enough and she could’ve saved Korra from herself. But more and more, she was beginning to realize how idealistic it all sounded.

Korra went through something so traumatizing as a teenager, and that couldn’t have been fixed with the power of love and friendship. Her situation was real, tough shit that poisoned the mind, making you lose confidence in yourself, and Korra’s mind fell deep into that. And while Asami would have definitely been there for her and comforted her, she sadly wouldn’t have been able to fix or take away Korra’s pain.

She hated admitting to herself that she wouldn’t have been able to help. It felt like a betrayal to their friendship or like it lessened how much they influenced each other and helped one another.

“I hate that you felt that way,” she said, her voice sounding caught in her throat. “I never wanted you to feel that way ever. You were always so strong and brave in my eyes and I wish I could’ve made you see what I always saw in you.”

Korra grabbed her wrist and raised it to her lips, placing a soft kiss on the inside of it.

“I’m a hard-headed person,” she said. “You could tell me that the sky is blue, and I could spend years trying to convince you that it’s really pink.”

Asami laughed despite herself. She dropped their hands between them. “I would hope you weren’t that hard-headed.”

Korra smiled, but her eyes still held some seriousness to them. She cupped Asami’s cheek with her hand.
“I’m so sorry, Asami,” she said. “If I’d just been strong enough to deal with everything and not run away like I did, I could’ve been there for you when you needed me.”

“I don’t care about that,” Asami whispered. “I’m just glad you’re here now and you’re okay.”

“Yeah.” Korra dropped her hand and put it back on Asami’s knee.

“So what changed?” Asami asked. “How did you end up back here of all places?”

“Ahh. Here we go.” Korra looked upward. “While I was in the UK—”

“The UK?” Asami cut her off in surprise. “How did you manage that?”

“I hooked up with the lead singer of this indie band. They got really popular and had a big following overseas. She invited me to go on tour with her for a few months.”

“Wonderful. An artist,” Asami said with a frown.

Korra smiled teasingly.

“Are you jealous?”

“Yes.” The word slipped out of Asami’s mouth so fast that her own brows shot up.

Korra laughed. “I’m glad you’re upfront about it.”

“Don’t sound so thrilled,” Asami said in a displeasing tone.

“Hey, I had to spend two torturous years watching you be in a relationship with someone else. I think I’m allowed to find this a little amusing.”

“Hmph.” Asami folded her arms, unable to counter that argument.

Still, Korra smiled. “You don’t have to be jealous. It was just a fling at most.”

“Yeah, but…” Asami sighed and shook her head.

“What?” Korra asked.

“I don’t want to offend you.”

“Don’t worry about it. Just say it.”

Asami took a deep breath.

“It’s just that… I haven’t been involved with a lot of people and you have, right?”

“I wouldn’t say a lot.”

“Would you say you have a lot of experience then? With men and women?”

“I would.”

Asami bit her lip and looked down. God, she felt so stupid for being so weird about this! She knew it was irrational to be so insecure, but she couldn’t help it. Now that she knew a little bit of what it was like to be with Korra intimately, she wanted to be the only one who knew.
“This is so ridiculous,” she said, putting her hands over her face.

“What is?” Korra asked, pulling them back down.

“Me. I feel like I’m in over my head a little.”

When she looked up at Korra, she saw her smile disappear.

“Is this too much?” she asked, emphasizing her hold on Asami’s wrists.

“No.” Asami shook her head. “God no. Okay. Don’t laugh. But it’s just that knowing you’ve been with all of these different people makes me feel like some kind of unqualified straight woman—I said don’t laugh!”

She threw a pillow in Korra’s face, but it didn’t stop Korra’s shoulders from rising up and down as she giggled.

“Okay, I wasn’t expecting that,” she said, grabbing the pillow out of Asami’s hold and then reaching for her arms again to keep her from getting another one.

“See? This is why I didn’t want to say it out loud.”

“I thought it was because you didn’t want to offend me?”

“That too.”

Korra sobered up but she still had an endearing look in her eyes.

“If what you showed me a few minutes ago was your idea of being an unqualified straight woman, I’m interested in what your idea of ‘adequate’ would be if we really did go all the way.”

Asami felt a blush creeping up her cheeks but masked it with a cough.

“This conversation went way off topic.”

“It’s not like I mind.” Korra smirked. “This is a way better conversation.”

Asami shook her head. “I wonder how cocky you are in bed.”

Korra leaned forward and placed both hands on Asami’s knees.

“So then you’re admitting to thinking about what I’m like in bed now?”

“I might be,” Asami said. Her breathing sped up when Korra’s face got closer.

“You could always find out,” Korra said, her voice deepening. She inched toward Asami and slid her hands up her thighs, but just as their lips brushed, she pulled away.

Asami hadn’t realized her eyes were halfway closed, but once she opened them, she gave Korra a disappointed look.

“You really are a tease.”

Korra laughed. “This is the first date, after all.”

“If we’re getting technical here, it’s our third.”
“Oh really?”

“Mhm. If you want to count our coffee date the morning after you slept over as one.”

“You mean before we had that epic blowout?” One of Korra’s eyebrows raised.

“Eh. Semantics. And then there was that time we went out for drinks and afterward you took me to the convenience store and bought me ice cream.”

“So romantic,” Korra said, rolling her eyes, but smiling nonetheless.

“So you agree then?”

“Sure. You’re the better dating expert than I am. But if I didn’t know any better, I’d think you were trying to convince me to sleep with you.”

Asami grinned. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Uhuh. Sure you don’t.”

“You’re free to make of it what you will, though.”

Asami shrieked out loud when Korra tackled her down onto the bed, making it bounce underneath them. After that, strong arms wrapped around her and pulled her in close.

“There,” Korra said. “We’re sleeping together.”

Asami laughed and put her arm around Korra’s waist, then she tangled their legs together.

“How noble of you.”

She loved this. The fooling around in bed, the playful banter, and the serious talks. She hadn’t had anything like this since… Well, since Mako. However, with Korra, everything was so unpredictable, which made it more exciting. The affection between them grew, along with the strengthening of their formerly broken bond. And the only way Asami could describe it was that it felt like she was coming back home for the first time in a long time.

“I forget what we were even talking about before,” Korra admitted after a few minutes of silent cuddling.

“About why you came back here. You were staying in the UK with your singer…”

“Ah. Right.” Korra rubbed a hand up and down Asami’s arm. “I didn’t stay with her long. We parted ways after a month or so because she was offered to be the opening act for some band touring in Germany.”

“She just left you there all by yourself?”

“No. I made some connections while over there and stayed with them. Eventually I got tired of that, though. I’d been moving around constantly, and I wanted to settle down in my own spot for a while. So after getting a job as a bartender, I saved up enough money to get a small flat in London.”

“Is that where you were going to school?” Asami asked.

“Yup. A community college.”
“And you said you went there because you felt like you had something to prove?”

“Yeah.” Korra went quiet. “Things got really, uh, crazy while I was over there.”

“Oh?” Asami’s arm instinctively tightened around Korra’s torso at the sound of hesitation in her voice.

“I don’t want to go into too much detail for your sake, but I just… completely flew off the handle. I’d sleep during the day and then be out until the crack of dawn partying. It was really bad. And the more I did it, the more horrible I felt. I don’t remember much of that time, but I do remember always hearing my dad’s last words to me in the back of my head. That’s why one day, on a whim, I decided I wanted to try and prove him and everyone else wrong about me. So I signed up for a few classes.”

“And you only stayed for a semester?”

“Right. It wasn’t something that I could truly become interested in because my head wasn’t in it. I kept partying at all hours of the night and barely attended any of my classes.”

“Do you regret not finishing?” Asami asked.

“Sometimes,” Korra answered. “But it was hard for me to focus on anything back then. I felt so lost and lonely, and all I wanted to do was feel numb and just forget everything. The only thing that helped me get to that point was…”

Korra broke off her sentence and Asami listened to her breathe deeply. She could feel the tension rising in Korra's body.

“It’s okay,” she whispered in a soothing tone. “It’s just us here.”

She felt Korra nod against her and take another deep breath.

“At one point in time, I thought the only thing keeping me alive was drugs. They helped me cope and put me on such a high that I never wanted to come down from it.”

“Did you… do them while we were in high school?” Asami asked.

“I smoked weed a couple of times,” Korra said. “It didn’t do much for me, but I was always too afraid to do anything else. But after getting kicked out, that’s when I started doing cocaine.”

“So that’s what you meant by ’spiraling hard.’”

Korra nodded.

“I didn’t start dabbling into other drugs until a few years later. Even after a few scary incidents, I still thought I needed them. But after a while, I started to wake up a little and realized a part of me was missing or just… gone. And I wanted to find it again. I tried to stop using and searched for something else to make me feel as good as drugs did. Then one day someone brought up street fighting to me. I got curious and went to see a match or two. After that, I started going to every single one I could find out about. They were… addicting. I loved watching people beat each other bloody for no reason other than they could. Then I found myself wanting to get involved.” Korra stopped and sighed, though she continued to caress Asami’s arm. “The first time I fought, it put me on the same kind of high I found in drugs,” she continued. “It gave me a reason to get back up again no matter how many times I fell to the ground. For the first time in a while, I started to fight for myself, and I never felt more rejuvenated. Viper saw that, too.”
“Viper? Who’s that?”

“He’s the leader of a gang known as the Triple Threats.”

Asami lifted her head and stared down at Korra.

“You were in a gang?”

“Sort of. Only for a few months. He was creating his own fight club here and wanted me to join. At first I was against it because I didn’t want to come back here.”

“What changed your mind?”

Korra looked away and bit the corner of her lip.

“A week after I met him, I relapsed after being off drugs for a month or so. When you’re off of them for a longer time than you’re used to and start back up again, you’re really messing with fate. And the stuff I took was way too strong for me and I almost…” Korra started to choke up. Tears welled up in her eyes and a look of fear spread across her face. “I almost died.”

Asami pulled her close again, shushing her and trying to get her to calm down. Korra’s hands clutched at the back of her shirt as she quietly sobbed into Asami’s neck.

Asami, again, found herself wanting to absorb all of Korra’s pain and take it away. She wanted to erase her tragic past and replace those memories with newer, happier ones. It made her hold on to Korra even tighter and never want to let go. Her own tears fell as Korra’s sobs vibrated against her neck.

“God, I’m a mess,” Korra said after a while and wiped at her eyes with the sleeve of her shirt.

“It’s okay,” Asami said, feeling a knot forming in her throat. “I’m so sorry that happened to you, Korra.”

“I had a few close calls before, but I never came that close,” Korra told her. “When I woke up the next day in a hospital and they told me I almost didn’t make it, it fucking broke me. And I knew that if I stayed in London any longer, I probably would’ve ended up dead at some point.”

More tears fell down Asami’s cheeks and she sat up to wipe them away.

“Fuck,” she croaked.

She wanted to be strong so that she could console Korra, and she couldn’t do that if she was crying. But hearing that made it all too real for her that Korra came so close to not being alive. She would’ve died and Asami would’ve never known. To think that them being together like this and never making amends came so close to not happening stabbed at her gut and chest at the same time. It made it hard to even breathe. In fact, she couldn’t breathe.

Her chest rose up and down at an unsteady rhythm and she felt like her heart was being squeezed to death.

Suddenly, Korra was sitting up too, rubbing her hand over her back.


Asami tried to speak, but her throat swelled up.
“I-I…”

“Here.” Korra took one of Asami’s hands and placed it on her chest, right above her heart. “Breathe with me. Try to match yours with mine.”

Asami did as instructed and breathed in and out deeply as Korra’s hand held hers and she whispered comforting words. She breathed into her belly and exhaled through her mouth with her eyes closed the entire time. After several minutes of just doing that, her chest unclenched and the air flowed properly through her lungs again.

“I’m okay now,” she said after more minutes went by. “Sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?” Korra asked as she used the long sleeve of her clean, white shirt to dry Asami’s eyes, dirt, it because of her makeup. It made Asami want to cry even harder.

“Because I should be the one comforting you.”

“You’ve already done that,” Korra said, moving Asami’s hair out of her face. Asami could still see the tear tracks on her cheeks. “More than you could possibly know. You care so much about everyone, and that’s why you’ll always be a good person, Asami. Always.”

Asami sniffed and then leaned forward on her knees to wrap her arms around Korra's shoulders. She put her head in the crook of her neck and continued to match their breaths.

“I don’t ever want to think of you suddenly not being here anymore,” she admitted.

“You won’t have to. I promise.”

“You can’t promise me something like that.”

“Sure I can.” Korra pulled away and looked Asami in the eyes. “I will live a long and healthy life. I’ll live to be so old that I’ll have to wear diapers.”

Asami snorted. “Let’s hope your bladder will withstand until the end of time.”

Korra brushed the back of her hand against her cheek and smiled. “There’s that optimism I love to see.”

After taking a few more breaths, Asami closed her eyes. “I think I’m ready for you to finish the rest of the story.”

“How am I not surprised by that?” Asami lightly joked with a sniff.

“Are you sure?” Korra asked, and when Asami opened her eyes, concerned ones met hers. “I didn’t even mean to go that deep with it.”

“Yeah. I just got a little overwhelmed. It’s only if you want to finish it, though.”

With a nod, Korra pulled her hand away.

“I came back to New York and started training. I thought I’d just walk in, prepared to fight whoever I wanted whenever I wanted. Everyone thought I was cocky.”

“How am I not surprised by that?” Asami lightly joked with a sniff.

Korra chuckled a little and looked down. “I knew I was out of my league, but I couldn’t show it or else everyone there would’ve eaten me alive. Viper telling me that my attitude would get me far didn’t help things either. But anyway, the training was hell because at the same time I was
detoxing. I struggled with my weight for a long time because of it.”

“Is that why you’re such a health nut now?”

“Kind of. But I like working out and being in shape. It’s my one commitment that keeps me from falling off. I read somewhere that it was good to pick up a hobby and dedicate yourself to it so that you don’t fall off the wagon.”

“You got clean all by yourself?” Asami asked, brows creasing.

“For the most part. But while I was with the Triple Threats, it was a lot easier to have slip ups. It seemed like everywhere I turned, there’d be temptation. I’d have nights where I thought I’d go crazy because I was so desperate to go and get high. The few times I did, I’d always feel so ashamed afterward for being so weak.”


Korra nodded and glanced downward for a second.

“There’d be a lot of encouragement from others, too,” she said. “It became such a toxic environment to be in after a while and I wanted to get away from it, along with the shadiness.”

“Is that where Blackstone comes in?”

A small smile appeared on Korra’s face and she nodded.

“I fought in this underground tournament where a bunch of fight clubs all appear in the same room. It was like an introduction ceremony, but just a little more on the violent side. I had an impressive fight and got a lot of attention, but Varrick was the only one to approach me by the end of it and say that he wanted me. After that, the rest is history.”

“What makes Varrick different from this Viper guy?” Asami asked. “I mean, isn’t he a known drug smuggler?”

“He is, but unlike Viper, he prohibits fighters from doing any for the sake of making us the ‘cleaner’ group.”

“That’s… oddly thoughtful of him?”

“It’s mainly for image purposes. He wants Blackstone to have the cleanest image out of all the other clubs so that we’re seen as the more superior group from fighting alone.”

“Because he wants the club to have the most hype surrounding it without being accused of doping,” Asami guessed.

“Exactly. And if I was going to use fighting as my escape route, it had to be through Blackstone.”

“It’s really impressive how you climbed your way out of that situation all by yourself.”

“I didn’t,” Korra said. “I mean, I did for the most part, but Kuvira helped me a lot. She literally and figuratively whipped my ass into shape. Varrick chose her as my coach because he knew she wouldn’t put up with my crap, and he was right. I wouldn’t be two years clean from drugs if it weren’t for her help.”

“So she knew about your situation?” Asami asked.
“Only about my drug addiction. I haven’t told her about my history to the extent I’m telling you. She’s been around for a couple of my darkest moments, though, so she knows that I’ve been through stuff. I owe her a lot for sticking around through all of that. In fact, I don’t think I would be as sane as I am right now without her.”

Asami nodded. She remembered seeing how close those two were the first night she saw them together. They shared something special and had a deep understanding with each other. And even though she envied that at first, she knew now how much of an impact Kuvira had in Korra’s life.

“I guess I owe her now, too.”

Korra leaned forward and placed a kiss on top of her forehead.

“What was that for?” she asked, smiling.

“For not letting me push you away the first night,” Korra said and kissed her temple. “And for finding me again.”

Asami reached up and stroked Korra’s cheek.

“Thank you for coming back.”

They held each other’s gaze, and as the silence filled the room, Asami tried to store all of the day’s memories in a small box so that she could never forget them. All of the happiness, sadness, and pain they shared with each other deserved to be put away together, living as its own entity inside of her heart. She’d throw away the key so that nothing or no one could take the box away from her. And if they dared to try, she’d fight with every fiber of her being to keep it protected.

They both finished getting ready for bed and Asami turned the lights out. When she got back in bed, Korra lie there looking at her. She pulled Asami toward her until they were close enough to share a kiss. It was a slow and chaste one, but it held so much meaning to them both. Asami could tell.

When Korra pulled away, she turned with her back facing Asami but grabbed Asami’s hand to wrap around her. Asami answered her demand by pressing against her back and then placing a kiss on her shoulder.

“That was the best, most emotional date I’ve ever had,” she said into the darkness.

Korra’s back shook from laughing.

“Then I promise to make every single one of our dates better than the last.”

"I'm looking forward to it."

"Asami?" Korra asked after a minute passed.

"Hm?"

"There's one more thing you should know."

"Oh no," Asami said half-jokingly. "What is it now?"

Korra turned a little in her arms to look back at her with a serious expression.

"That night I saw you again for the first time, I lied."
"What do you mean?" Asami asked with a curious, but anxious look.

Korra licked her lips.

"I told you I never thought about you once after I left. That was a lie. I thought about you all the time."

Asami's heart clenched and she released a shaky breath. She tightened her hold on Korra's waist and brought her forehead to her temple.

"I know. I never stopped thinking about you either."

Korra's hand overlapped hers and she laced them together before turning back around.

"Don't let me go," she whispered.

Asami gave her one final kiss on the back of her neck.

"I wouldn't dream of it," she murmured back.

TBC...
Soft puffs of air blew against the back of Korra’s neck, making her stir. She’d been awake for a while now, but she couldn’t let herself move from her spot, even if she needed to use the bathroom.

Asami kept her arm nestled around her throughout the night, her grip never loosening, which Korra found impressive. She never experienced anything like this before but found herself enjoying every second of it. For most of the night she stayed awake because she didn’t trust herself enough to fall asleep.

The past 24 hours felt like a fantasy of hers she concocted while in her teenage years and knew would never see the light of day. Asami whispering in her ear, holding her, kissing her, touching her, wanting her... It sent her mind in a tizzy.

For the first time in a long time, she opened up to someone and let them see a side of her that she’d been keeping suppressed from the entire world. Reflecting on her past and the struggles she overcame hadn’t been easy, but when would it ever be? She realized last night that not talking about those things only held her back from Asami. By withholding certain details, she wasn’t being honest about what Asami might’ve been getting herself into, which would potentially cause problems later on down the line. Asami needed to know about it before she made her decision on if she could handle being with someone like her. And to Korra’s surprise, she took it pretty well for the most part. The way she listened and let Korra take her time with it made it all the easier for her to open up as the night went on.

She placed her hand over Asami’s and kept it there.

After pinching herself enough times, she finally accepted that she was awake. It overwhelmed her to have so much intensity and emotion for one person. The feelings had always been there, but they grew more enormous at an abnormally fast rate.

Hearing Asami share her story gave Korra the courage that she didn’t have before. It made her want to try harder not to shut people out and open up more. That never would’ve been possible without Asami’s presence, her understanding, and her unwillingness to give up on Korra despite
the push and pull. Korra still heard that nagging voice in the back of her head telling her that she
didn’t deserve this and that she’d find some way to mess everything up, but she told that voice to
fuck right off.

From the nightstand beside her, she heard her phone buzz. She grabbed it to keep it from vibrating
against the flat surface and then carefully removed Asami’s arm from around her body. Asami
mumbled something, but otherwise stayed asleep. After giving her wrist a light kiss, Korra got up
from the bed and tip-toed her way outside the door and into the hall.

She looked down at her phone and saw that the person calling was from a blocked number.

“Hello?” she answered quietly.

“This Korra?” a deep voice said through the phone.

“It might be. Who is this?”

“Varrick has the information you need. Meet us at West End Avenue, Unit 4D in an hour.”

“What—”

The caller hung up.

“Asshole,” Korra muttered and sighed.

She walked back up to the bedroom door and leaned against the frame. Asami was still sound
asleep, looking peaceful as she dreamt of something that Korra hoped to be good. Seeing that
image one last time gave her all the resolve she needed.

After tonight, nothing would come between them again. Not Varrick, not that Raiko guy, not even
erself. She’d make sure of it.

Asami sighed as she started to wake up. Stretching her hand out, she expected for it to bump
against the other body beside her, but it only plopped down onto the mattress.

Opening her eyes, she looked at the empty space next to her. Her confusion grew when she only
saw a piece of paper sitting on top of the pillows.

“Korra?” she called out in a groggy voice while sitting up and rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.
When she didn’t receive an answer and looked around to find that she really was alone, she
grabbed the note off the pillow to read it.

_Last night was wonderful. I’m sorry I couldn’t be there to see you wake up. I’m taking care of some
things for good today. See you soon. -K_

Asami dropped the paper with a sigh and brushed her hair back.

She felt so helpless in a situation that she caused. Korra was putting herself at risk for her sake and
all she could do was sit back and wait for it to happen.

Grabbing a pillow, she stuffed her face into it. She could smell Korra’s scent, which provided her
some comfort, but also sadness.

She hated this!
Why couldn’t Korra still be here right now? She could’ve at least woken Asami up and said goodbye, but it made sense why she didn’t. She must’ve known that Asami would’ve tried to stop her again.

Lifting her head from the pillow, she looked over at the clock. It was still early, but she’d never be able to go back to sleep. A big part of her wanted to call Korra and beg her to come back, but she knew her words would be wasted. Korra made up her mind and there was no changing it. She had her own reasons for wanting to do it, and Asami couldn’t sway her from them either.

One thing was for sure though—as much as she hated to admit it—and that was how much she respected the hell out of Korra’s resolve. Her strength, determination, and will to make things right made Asami want to be strong, too. From everything they talked about last night, she came to the realization that the two of them both—in their own way—struggled to move on from the past. Korra couldn’t move on because she avoided talking about it, and Asami couldn’t because she hadn’t been given the chance to have a proper resolution to anything in her life. Not with her mother, her father, or Korra.

She and Korra already got over their past issues and grievances and were starting to move on from them. With her mother, she never got a proper resolution because she had to say goodbye to her when she hadn’t been prepared to in the slightest. And with her father… He wasn’t willing to listen and would be moving in less than two weeks to another state where she’d never have to see him again.

She remembered her and Korra’s conversation about him last night in her office and felt conflicted. All her life, she’d been too afraid to speak up for herself to Hiroshi. Most of the heartbreak she experienced revolved around him. He influenced a good majority of her life in the worst way and made it clear that he felt no remorse about it at all.

But even if he didn’t care and her words would just fall on deaf ears, Asami knew that she still had so much to get off her chest that she hadn’t before. She didn’t want her rage at her father to be something that constantly stayed with her because she never gathered the courage to go back and give him a piece of her mind. Maybe even someday while he sat in his prison cell looking old, grey, and alone, he’d remember her words and eventually understand. It was a long shot, but she wanted to give herself the opportunity one more time.

If Korra could learn to face the things that happened to her and begin to grow and heal from them, then Asami wanted to as well.

“You’re sure about this?”

“Youp.”

“But, like, how sure?”

Korra rolled her eyes as she and Kuvira walked down the hall of the apartment building they first came to a few weeks ago. “I’m one hundred percent sure.”

“Asami must be one hell of a woman for you to be risking your reputation like this.”

“Then I guess it’s a good thing I’ve never cared about what people think. And I’m not doing it just for her.”

“Yeah, yeah. Breaking the streak is your idea of finding some type of enlightenment. I get it. I was
“I do. Which is why I know that you’ll understand the pressure of having all eyes on you waiting for your downfall. The only difference is I get to control the narrative.”

They stopped at the door, but just as she was about to knock, Kuvira stopped her.

“I just hope you don’t regret what you’re about to do in the long run.”

Korra smiled. “I have a ton of regrets, but this isn’t one of them. I have no doubt that Varrick would’ve eventually persuaded me somewhere down the line to do this if I never lost on my own, but at least I get some benefits out of it. And I’ll be in good conscience knowing that Asami’s away from this stuff for good.”

“I take it you two are getting pretty serious then, huh?” Kuvira said with a smile and nudged her.

“Maybe. At least that’s what I’m hoping.”

“Well then, I guess we should get on with this so that things can continue to get serious. But can you at least tell me why you had to drag me out here too?”

“You’re my witness to make sure that Varrick doesn’t do anything shady. Plus, I needed more muscle power and you have a more intimidating face than I do.”

“That’s probably the sweetest thing you’ve ever said to me,” Kuvira said, sounding genuinely touched.

Korra chuckled and knocked on the door, putting her serious face on a second later. The door opened and one of Varrick’s bodyguards appeared. He ushered them inside in a hurried manner and closed it immediately after. The room was littered with Christmas decorations and lights, with the lingering smell of fresh cookies baking in the oven. *Jingle Bell Rock* played loudly from somewhere in the room.

“What the fuck?” Kuvira mouthed over to her, but Korra only gave her a confused shrug in response.

“Well, well. If it isn’t my two, favorite people!” Varrick said from the couch in the open space of the front room. He rubbed his hands together and stood up in his blue robe. “Ready for tonight? I know I am! I can’t stop shaking because I’m so excited. You’re doing me one hell of a solid, kid. By the end of the night you and I will be making money out of our ears! And you wanna know the best part about it? Zhu Li did some statistics and there’s only a small percentage of people who actually think you’ll lose! And none of them were confident enough to make a bet that big. It’s all working out according to plan.”

He spoke so fast that Korra struggled to understand what he was saying.

“The only thing I care about is you making good on your side of the bargain,” she said, folding her arms. “Do you have it?”

“You’re no fun at all.” Varrick pouted and then looked behind him. “Hey, Zhu Li! We’ve got company. Mind coming in here for a second and bringing those things on the bed with you, too?”

To Korra’s surprise, as Varrick spoke his tone grew softer and more innocent-like. Seconds of awkward silence passed and shuffling could be heard from somewhere throughout the apartment. Zhu Li walked into the room moments later, dressed in a robe similar to Varrick’s. She dried her
hair with a towel in one hand, while carrying a grey duffle bag and a large, vanilla envelope in the other. After giving them a brief hello, she walked over to Varrick, glaring, and practically threw the things at him.

Varrick stumbled back as he caught everything with an oof!

"Thank you, sweetheart," he said, still keeping that gentle tone with her. "I appreciate it."

Zhu Li ignored him and walked out of the room.

"Trouble in paradise?" Kuvira commented in a teasing manner.

"Yeah. She's not too happy with me right now." He glanced over at Korra, and then back to where Zhu Li disappeared. "Ah, well."

He grabbed the duffle bag by the handles and handed it over, along with the envelope. "There's the first half of your compensation. You'll get the rest after the job is done. And in the envelope is everything you need for our little situation with Raiko. I've been sitting on it for years just waiting for the perfect moment to use it. I would have if your pal hadn't come along, but I guess things were destined to turn out this way. I'd kill to see the look on that bastard's face once he gets it. He's got some nerve threatening to take me down."

"And you're sure this will work?" Korra asked as she opened the envelope and looked inside. There were a couple of documents and a few photos from what she could tell.

"Positive. He won't even utter Asami Sato's name if she threatens him with this."

"But what if it doesn't work?" Kuvira asked before Korra could.

Varrick shrugged. "I'll have to kill him, I guess."

Korra's eyes widened and she looked over at Kuvira, who wore a similar bewildered expression.

"Oh, I'm kidding!" Varrick said with a hardy laugh, patting Korra on the shoulder. "You guys take things way too seriously."

Korra glared at him.

"What about you then? Do I have your word that after this you'll leave Asami alone for good?"

"I don't backtrack, kid... for the most part. Although Sato would be a wonderful asset, she doesn't have anything I couldn't get from someone else. Your precious CEO friend will be left to spread peace and joy throughout the world again."

"Good."

"Now is that all you wanted?"

"No," Korra said abruptly when a light bulb came on in her head.

Varrick cocked an eyebrow. "That's bold of you to ask for three things from me."

"Well, I'm doing a pretty big favor for you, so I expect a little extra in return."

Varrick appeared amused and rubbed at his chin. "Okay. The magical genie is listening. What do you want?"
Korra pointed her thumb over at Kuvira. “I want her by my ringside. Not your little goons. Just her.”

“Korra…” Kuvira said, sounding surprised.

“Will it be a one time only thing?” Varrick asked.

Korra nodded. “Just for tonight.”

“Fine. Done.” They shook on it, but when Korra went to pull away, Varrick kept the grip on her hand. His expression turned serious and calculating. “Just so we’re clear, I expect you to make this fight look as believable as possible. If a single person outside the people in this room doesn’t believe you lost fair and square, I’ll expose Miss Sato myself.”

"I got it," Korra said, ripping her hand away.

“Good.” Varrick fixed his robe. "Now. Would either of you two care for some cookies?” he asked, his tone brightening as he picked up a plate of chocolate chip and snickerdoodle cookies from the table. “They’re homemade and fresh.”

A minute later, Korra and Kuvira left the apartment.

“That dude is fucking crazy,” Kuvira said once they were far away from the door.

“Yet you still decided to take a cookie anyway.”

“I never say no to food.” For emphasis, Kuvira took a big bite out of her chocolate chip cookie.

Korra clutched the envelope in her hand like a lifeline.

“Do you think he was telling the truth?” she asked.

“It’s hard to tell with him,” Kuvira said just as they reached the elevator. “Everyone calls him the devil behind his back for a reason. But you handled that situation really well. Varrick’s a tough guy to negotiate with, but you made him your bitch. I think somewhere in his twisted mind he respects you even more now.”

“I didn’t make him my anything. In the end, I’m the only one who’s got something to lose, not him.”

“You won’t lose anything if I have a say about it.” Kuvira patted her on the back. “So what now? We won’t have to be at the warehouse until later tonight.”

“You’ve fought Zelina before, haven’t you?”

“Yeah. Two times, I think?”

“So then we’ll train,” Korra said as the elevator doors opened. “You’re going to teach me everything you know about her moveset, and I’m going to try to become an Oscar winning actress within twelve hours.”

“Shit. I guess we better get started then.”

Because it was the Christmas weekend, visitation hours were allowed for every inmate. When Asami got there, she expected it to be packed with little to no room for her to sit down, but it was
the exact opposite. It seemed like even less people came than the last time she was there. Probably
because those people had good enough sense not to ruin their own holiday joy by visiting someone
in prison.

She didn’t spare a glance when Hiroshi sat down across from her. Instead, she looked on, watching
the faces of the other few people in the room.

“I wasn’t expecting another visit so soon after you claimed you didn’t want to hear from me
again,” Hiroshi spoke. “But I assumed you would come around eventually after that little outburst
of yours.”

Asami didn’t respond at first, nor did she take his words to heart. She kept her calm and folded her
arms on the table—something her father always told her not to do—and finally looked his way.

“There’s nothing to come around about,” she told him. “I meant everything I said the last time.”

“So then why are you here?”

Asami relaxed her shoulders and looked him dead in the eyes.

“Because you don’t get to go off to another prison in a different state without knowing how much
you ruined my life,” she said.

Hiroshi’s brown eyes searched hers and, unlike last time, Asami didn’t feel the urge to look away.
She stared right back at him with determination to see this through.

“What’s the point?” Hiroshi asked after a while, folding his arms. “You’ve already told me how
much of a rotten father you think I am. Did you really come all the way out here just to reiterate
that point?”

“No,” Asami said. “But the last time I was here, I was so mad that I couldn’t see straight. I let you
take control of the conversation and spew a bunch of nonsensical garbage at me because you could
see how weak I was. You were always good at that.”

Hiroshi pushed up his glasses. “I’m good at it because you’ve always let yourself be weak. You
never had a backbone and cared too much about other people’s opinions to speak up for yourself.
You can’t blame me for your own weakened state of mind.”

“Maybe not. But I can blame you for everything else.” Asami looked down at her hands and
breathed out through her nose. “I haven’t even begun to tell you how much I’ve always resented
you. Ever since Mom died, I always felt like I needed to live up to who you wanted me to be. But
there were those few times I knew I didn’t want what you wanted, and you knew it too. You knew,
but you continued to push for it anyway because you hated the thought of me having my own mind
and being successful by myself. You wanted me to rely on you.”

“You act as if I had a gun pointed at your head,” Hiroshi said. “If you really didn’t want to follow
after my footsteps, you should’ve fought harder to pursue your own dreams.”

“It would’ve been nice if you would’ve actually supported them. But instead you made it about
you and how I would’ve been disappointing you. I was made out to be the horrible one for not
wanting to follow after you and I actually believed that.”

“You know what I think?” Hiroshi leaned forward. “I think you use me as an excuse for not
following your own path because you knew you would have failed otherwise.”
“You were all I had left,” Asami said, trying to keep her voice leveled. “You would’ve disowned me and I would’ve been on my own. And you certainly did a good job making me believe I was on my own without you, huh?”

“What are you talking about?”

Finally, Asami allowed her anger to show.

“I’m talking about you manipulating people out of my life because they didn’t meet your expectations.”

Hiroshi stared at her with a blank expression, but his face became more concentrated before reaching a look of realization.

“And by people, are you talking about someone in particular?”

“You know exactly who I’m talking about.”

Hiroshi pushed up his glasses again and made a sigh of annoyance.

“I’m guessing you’ve gotten back in touch with that woman then?”

“That doesn’t matter,” Asami said through gritted teeth.

Hiroshi hummed and uncrossed his arms, putting them under the table.

“You never knew how to pick good people in your life. First it was those two, poor, little orphan boys; one of them you even decided to have a pointless relationship with—”

“Mako and Bolin,” Asami said with a growl. “Their names are Mako and Bolin.”

“Right,” Hiroshi said with a wave of his hand. “I never knew what you saw in that boy, but he didn’t concern me as much since he clearly saw how important your image was and attempted to look like he was made of a million bucks. I can’t say the same for that girl, though. She caused you nothing but trouble and I saved you from making the biggest mistake of your life by pulling the plug on that friendship. So if you came all this way for an apology, I’m sorry to say that you won’t be getting one.”

Asami bunched her hands into fists and breathed through her nose. The fact that he spoke of the people she cared about with such little regard infuriated her. But she knew this time that unleashing her rage wouldn’t do anything but make people stare.

“You have no right to pass judgement on people when you’re the one behind bars. And trust me when I say I don’t need an apology from you, or anything for that matter. You were the only disappointment in my life, and the fact that I wasted my time caring about what you thought of me makes me feel like an idiot.”

“I’m so sorry you feel that way,” Hiroshi said, lacking any and all sincerity.

“I’m not. Because it finally opened my eyes. I’ve never needed you or your approval. There are people in my life who love me the way I am, and that’s all I can ask for. I’m going to go on and have an amazing, happy life, and you won’t have anything to do with that. So good luck in Pennsylvania, Dad. I hope that with the rest of your days spent in prison you’ll grow more remorseful, but I can’t see that ever happening. Goodbye. For good this time.”
She got up from her chair and gave her father one final look. His eyes were downcast, but there were shadows underneath them and his grey hair looked brittle to touch. From where she stood, she could see his hands shaking in his lap from clutching them together so hard. This image of him, she realized, would be the last one she’d ever have.

Blinking a few times, she walked away from the table, leaving behind a chapter of her life that she could officially say came to a close.

Korra drew in a breath and closed her eyes, trying to drown out the sound of the crowd in the room she stood down the hall from. She wrung her arms and cracked her neck as she tried to shake her nerves, which she found odd. Nerves weren’t a thing for her because all she ever felt was excitement and adrenaline.

The sound of footsteps coming toward her made her open her eyes and look over. It was only Kuvira. She had a pair of open finger boxing gloves in her hands.

“Are you ready?” she asked.

“As ready as I can be,” Korra said and held out her hands.

Kuvira put the gloves on and gave them a pat.

“I hope you didn’t tire yourself out after today. That was a lot of training in a short amount of time.”

“I’d be making Zelina’s job a lot easier if I actually was tired. But I’m fine. I just wanna get this over with.”

“You and me both.”

Korra smiled. “Worried about me?”

Kuvira rolled her eyes. “Do you really have to ask that?”

There were more footsteps and the sound of whispered voices talking. Korra ignored them and concentrated on tuning everything else out again. But just as the people were about to walk by, her eyes caught sight of a man in a fedora. He walked in the middle of the two other men, leading them to the room with all of the commotion. When his eyes caught hers, he stopped, and a smirk formed on his lips.

“My, my. It’s been a while, hasn’t it, Korra? And good evening, Kuvira.”

Korra’s entire body went rigid at the sound of his voice.

“Why are you here?”

Viper stepped out of his pack and walked closer to her.

“You think I’d really wanna miss this? When Varrick told me you’d do it, I knew I had to come and see it for myself. And to think you were so against it before. I guess all it took was a larger sum to buy you out and make you no better than the rest. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to go find a good place to watch. I’d say good luck, but well… It’s not like that’s gonna help you.”

Viper guffawed at his own joke and walked away, the other two men following behind him.
“What a fucking cocksucker,” Kuvira said, her eyes following him until he was out of sight. “At least you have street cred and don’t need to have someone pay for you to win. We should have one of Varrick’s men kick him out.”

“I can’t worry about him right now,” Korra said. “I need to focus.”

“You’re right.” Kuvira turned back to her. “Do you have a plan?”

“Not really. I’m just hoping that if she does all of the moves you told me she does, it’ll be easier for me to decide what to do on the spot.”

“That sounds very spontaneous, but it’s so you that I can’t be surprised.”

From down the hall, the sound of the crowd applauding could be heard as the announcer shouted something through the microphone.

“I guess it’s time then,” Korra said and pushed herself off the wall. They walked down the hall and approached the doorway.

“Not to be all mushy or whatever,” Kuvira started, “but I want you to know that I’m proud of you. And even if you’re going to lose out there, you’ll always be undefeated in my book.”

“That was totally meant to sound mushy,” Korra said with a smile. They stopped by the doorway just as Zelina was announced to the ring. She came in wearing a black sports bra and matching shorts; her hair in two braids.

“I’d kill to slap that smirk off her face,” Kuvira said.

“Me, too.”

The crowd cheered even louder as the announcer began to introduce Korra.

“Any last minute concerns you have?”

“No. But…”

Korra turned to Kuvira suddenly and Kuvira gave her a curious look.

“What is it?”

Korra hugged her.

“Thanks for everything,” she said into her ear.

“...GIVE IT UP FOR THE UNDEFEATED KORRRAAAAA!”

She pulled away from Kuvira and didn’t look back when she walked through the door and into the hyperactive crowd. They cleared a path for her, but she felt people’s hands patting her on the back as she passed. Her eyes remained focused on the ring and her opponent as always, but this time she welcomed the encouragement from the crowd.

She climbed up the steps and through the ropes with ease. Across from her, Zelina stood in her corner with her arms rested on the top ropes. The men in her corner massaging her shoulders and hyping her up were the same ones Viper walked in with. All the while, Zelina kept that smirk on her face as she stared Korra down.
Once the announcer did his typical spiel, he got out of the ring. The referee ushered them both to step forward into the center.

“Okay, ladies, you know the rules. Let’s have a nice, clean, and fair fight. At this time you can choose to touch gloves or not, and then go back to your respective corners until the first bell rings.”

Zelina snorted and backed away first, grinning with her mouthpiece as she looked Korra up and down.

Korra walked back to her corner, where Kuvira was now standing on the apron with a mouthpiece in hand to give her. She made quick to put it in and, afterward, Kuvira pulled her forward so she could whisper something in her ear.

“Even if you are supposed to let her win, make her fight for it,” she said.

Korra nodded and turned away. She bounced from side to side and moved her arms too, trying to get the blood flowing in her feet. The referee remained in the middle, looking between them both to see if they were ready. With the wave of his hand, the first bell went off.

Zelina charged forward a second later with no hesitation, aiming right for Korra’s head, but Korra ducked and maneuvered her body away. Several more punches were thrown, all with deadly intent, but Korra continued to dodge and evade.

Kuvira told her earlier that Zelina would have wanted to end this quickly rather than have it be a long, drawn out match. She liked being the center of attention, so what better way to do that than to beat Korra quickly? But Korra wouldn’t have that. She’d only go down on her own terms.

So as Zelina began to charge at her again, Korra charged back, hitting her square in the jaw, chest and abdomen. In return, she received a few hits to the face and head that would no doubt leave her dizzy once the adrenaline wore off.

The first round ended sooner than she thought it would and she walked back over to her corner, accepting the bottle of water from Kuvira as she took out her mouthpiece.

“This is good,” Kuvira said. “Do you think you can go all five rounds?”

“Most definitely.”

“Okay. Then keep going at the same pace you’re at. She’ll try even harder to end this quick because she starts to get lazy and sloppy after the third round. Don’t start slowing down until then.”

“Got it.”

The second bell went off and Zelina continued her assault. She appeared agitated and, at the very least, annoyed. She or the men in the corner must have caught on that Korra wasn’t giving in so easily and that she needed to try harder.

They traded blow after blow, and Korra found herself having to let Zelina punch her a few times when it looked like she was overpowering her. She knew without a doubt that she could’ve ended this fight a long time ago, but that didn’t matter. All she could hear was Varrick’s words in the back of her mind. She needed to give this her all and make it as believable as possible.

The next three rounds went by fast, and just as Kuvira said, Zelina started to get a little sluggish and tired after round three. In round four, Korra pretended to show a little bit of fatigue as well,
missing a couple of hits with her fierce strikes. After that round, she went back to her corner and Kuvira helped her out by wiping her face with a towel.

“Crowd’s starting to panic a little, which means they’re buying into it,” Kuvira said in her ear, pretending like she was talking strategy by getting super close. “Give them the show of your life, rookie.”

She pulled away and gave Korra a reassuring glance before hopping off the apron.

The fifth and final bell rang.

Zelina’s face was covered in sweat, and blood trickled down from her lip, but she still looked determined and Korra had to give her credit for that. They stalked one another for a few seconds before starting with a headlock. Korra kept her feet planted on the ground, pushing back against Zelina’s force. After a few seconds, she allowed herself to be pushed back until she ended up on the ropes. The referee separated them, telling Zelina to keep off the ropes, but Zelina didn’t seem to be paying him any attention. She shoved Korra in the chest, causing Korra to stumble back a bit. Pissed off by that illegal move, Korra shoved her back just as hard. Things turned scrappy between them as they tackled one another, punching, kneeing, and using elbows every now and then.

It ended when Zelina struck Korra in the face once and then sent another to her chin. Korra stumbled away but stayed on her feet. For a split second, her eyes went over to the crowd. She saw a lot of shouting coming out of their mouths but didn’t understand their words. Some looked angry while others sported worried and anxious expressions.

Another punch to the abdomen sent her tumbling to the ground. She tried to get up, but just as she got to her feet, Zelina’s arms wrapped around her neck from behind and Korra felt herself falling backward onto the mat and the body behind her. Zelina’s legs locked around her torso and she wrapped one arm around Korra’s neck, squeezing it for dear life while the other kept her head secured in place.

“Tap,” she hissed into Korra’s ear. “Tap right now.”

It was getting harder for Korra to breathe and she let out a choking sound. She knew how to reverse out of this move. Kuvira taught her earlier and it seemed so simple and easy.

Right now, however, she knew that this was the moment where she had a choice.

Her arm stretched out and she bundled her hand into a fist, trying to fight the feeling of losing consciousness, but it slowly loosened as her vision began to fade. The referee kneeled in front of her, shouting something that she couldn’t comprehend because her ears were starting to close. The shouts from the crowd lessened and her vision became blurry until it went completely black.

Voices. They were all around her and above her.

When she finally came to, she opened her eyes and found the referee and Kuvira staring down at her with concerned expressions.

They were still in the ring, the crowd going wild around them. She heard voices of frustration, anger, and disappointment.

"THERE YOU HAVE IT, FOLKS! THE STREAK IS OVEEEEEER!"

The boos grew louder at the announcement.
“Korra, are you okay?” Kuvira asked, wiping at her eyes. “Here. Follow my finger.”

Korra nodded and watched the finger move back and forth in front of her eyes, which were still trying to get in focus. She attempted to sit up next but Kuvira quickly stopped her.

“What? Don’t move just yet. You were unconscious for several seconds.”

Korra ignored her and sat up as best she could. Zelina was still in the ring, smiling proudly as her hands were raised in the air by Viper’s men in victory.

The crowd continued to boo, and as Korra’s eyesight finally cleared, she caught a few looks of sympathy.

“I’m fine,” she said and then moved to stand. Kuvira was by her side in an instant and held onto her.

“You idiot,” she said. “Why didn’t you just tap?”

Korra closed her eyes and inhaled a bunch of air through her mouth and nostrils, relieved by the fact that she could breathe again.

“You know why,” she eventually told Kuvira, looking at her.

Kuvira looked back with a knowing expression and then brought her head against the side of Korra’s.

“Idiot,” she said again.

“Can we get out of here now?” she asked.

“You need to be evaluated first,” the referee reminded her.

Korra nodded. "That's fine."

They all slowly made their way out of the ring, the referee and Kuvira helping her along the way. Once she felt like she could walk on her own, she pulled herself out of their arms. The crowd parted again for her to get to the exit. Some of them booed or yelled at her in outrage, but those were few and far between. A large amount of them patted her on the back and clapped for her as she passed by.

“You're still the best, Korra!” someone shouted, and the people around all made noises of approval and agreement.

Korra smiled a little. She didn’t think about what the crowd’s reaction might have been like after her first loss, but she was touched. Although she never cared how they received her, the fact that they still respected the work she did before made her think that losing wasn't so bad after all. She had no regrets and never would. The only thing she could feel was relief.

And as the burden she placed on herself officially lifted, all she could wonder now was why she kept it on herself in the first place.

An hour and a half later, Kuvira pulled up to the curb in front of Korra's apartment and parked the car.

“You're really okay, right?” she asked. “No dizziness or nausea?”
“I’m fine,” Korra said with a tired laugh. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you freak out this much over me before.”

“Yeah, well I didn’t think you were going to let yourself get choked out the way you did. It looked terrible.”

“It felt terrible.” Korra rubbed at her throat. “But do you think Varrick bought it from wherever he was?”

“He’ll be singing your praises tomorrow morning because he’s too busy collecting everyone’s money and drowning in it right now.”

“Good.” Korra closed her eyes and leaned her head back against the passenger seat. “That’s good.”

“Your pride is going to get you in trouble one of these days, you know?” Kuvira said.

“It already has.”

“Well, did you find that enlightenment you were looking for at least?”

Korra opened her eyes and looked over at Kuvira.

“I think so.”

“And what did you find?”

She looked up in thought.

“That some things are more important than fighting and being the best. Like caring about other people and letting those people care for you.”

“That’s… better late than never, I guess. Just promise you won’t have to do anything crazy like that again to reach an epiphany.”

Korra smiled. “I promise. But it really does make you think.”

“Hm?”

“You know. About what really matters. Remember when you said you could tell that my heart wasn’t in fighting? I think you were kind of right. I mean, I love it, don’t get me wrong. But it’s kind of been my way to cope with everything that’s happened to me without really coping.”

“What are you saying then?”

Korra shrugged and then opened the car door. “I don’t know. It was just a thought.”

After getting out, she grabbed her things from the backseat.

“Got everything?” Kuvira asked.

“Yeah.” Korra slung the strap of the bag she received from Varrick over her body and then stuffed her hands in the pockets of her coat. “Thanks again for helping me out today.”

“Anytime… And I mean that.”

Korra gave her one last smile and wave before shutting the door. She watched the car drive away.
and then walked to her apartment building.

Aside from some sore muscles and a few bruises, she felt all right. Kya made a big fuss and told her how lucky she was for not being in worse condition, but Korra was still pretty out of it at the time and only gave her head nods and grunts in response.

She didn’t expect losing for the first time to be so calming. Oddly enough, it gave her all the clarity she needed.

After holding onto that streak for two years, she thought it would hurt a lot more. She spent so much time thinking she needed to prove herself, not knowing that the only validation she was looking for was from herself. She thought that by never losing, she would find it eventually, but it turned out that she never needed fighting to uncover that to begin with.

She clawed and fought her way to be at the top with the likes of Kuvira and other talented fighters. And when she finally got that, she thought she reached a level of accomplishment that nothing else could ever beat. She successfully managed to run away from her problems in a way that gave her so much power. After a long time of feeling like she didn’t have a place where she belonged, she got to be the superior one at something for once in her life. And while she’d been satisfied up until now, she realized that having that kind of power wasn’t what she needed. She became strong physically but continued to suffer mentally. However, with this loss, she felt stronger than ever. Strong enough to allow herself to fall and not feel the world crumble under her feet. Strong enough not to run away from everything. Because for the first time, she didn’t have any regrets. Everything seemed right in the world, and the only thing missing right now was—

She stopped as she turned the corner onto her floor.

Asami sat right beside her door, knees up and her arms wrapped around them. Her head was tilted back against the wall and her eyes were shut. She wasn’t asleep because she kept fiddling with her phone in her hands, however she did appear deep in thought.

Korra walked up to her, and she must’ve heard her footsteps because she opened her eyes and looked over.

“How long have you been sitting there?” Korra asked.

Asami looked up in contemplation. “Forty-five minutes... Maybe an hour.”

“Wow.” Korra offered her hand and Asami took it, pulling herself up and then dusting her pants off. "I bet you received some strange looks."

"Only a few, but I'm far beyond the point of caring."

“What would you have done if I hadn’t come back here? I could've went back to your place for all you knew.”

“I don’t know... I just kind of had a feeling.” Asami’s earnest gaze met hers. “You did it?”

“I did.” Korra nodded. “It’s over, Asami.”

Asami looked down and shook her head.

“I never wanted you to do that for me,” she spoke in a quiet voice.

“I know.”
“You’re so hard-headed.”

“I know.”

Finally, Asami rose her head. There were tears in her eyes, but instead of wiping them away, she used her hand to cup the side of Korra’s face.

“I don’t want you to ever hurt because of me again,” she said.

Korra covered her hand and then turned her face to kiss at Asami’s palm.

“Likewise.”

Asami’s arms wrapped around Korra’s shoulders and she pulled her into a tight hug.

Even though Korra’s body ached, she wouldn’t dare push Asami away. She hugged her back just as fiercely, accepting the warmth of Asami’s embrace. Closing her eyes, she buried her face into long, dark hair. They were right in front of her door, but Korra realized just then that nothing felt more home than being in Asami’s arms.

They pulled apart for a moment and Korra looked into soft, teary, green eyes. She reached up and wiped at them.

“What did I say about crying over me?” she whispered.

Asami’s lips were on hers in seconds, and the moment they met, Korra felt the earth shift under her feet. She brought her hands up and cupped both sides of Asami’s face. Their mouths moved against each other in a rough and frantic manner. It was nothing like any of the kisses they shared before. This one was more heated, as if the two months of uncertain tension that built between them finally snapped. Only, in a good way.

She turned Asami, pushing her back against the door, and continued to kiss and move her hands all over her.

Asami’s hands came between them and unzipped Korra’s coat. When she tried to remove it, Korra remembered where they were, what they were doing, and pulled away (much to Asami’s objection). She reached into the back pocket of her pants and pulled out her keys.

“Korra…” Asami said her name. It sounded so desperate and alluring that Korra’s hands shook as she tried to insert the key. Once she unlocked the door, she pushed Asami inside and they stumbled through the entrance together. At the sound of the door shutting behind them, she grabbed Asami by the shoulders and pressed her up against it again.

The lights weren’t on and she could barely see Asami’s face, but she could feel her breath against her mouth. Asami’s hands came up again and removed Korra’s bag from her shoulders, letting it fall to the floor with a loud thud. After, she put her hands inside Korra’s coat and slid them down to touch at her bare shoulders that were exposed by the tank top she wore underneath. In the darkness, their eyes met.

“Asami, what are we doing?” Korra asked. A chill ran through her body as Asami slowly pushed the coat off her shoulders. “What is this?”

Asami didn’t respond at first, however she did stop her movements.

“I want you, Korra,” she whispered.
Korra inhaled sharply at those words.

“You don’t have to do this because of what I did—”

“I’m not,” Asami’s voice cut in and she bit her lip. “I just… I want to be with you. I’m not guilty, confused, or curious about anything. I know what I want and it’s you. It’s always been you, Korra. So please… Please tell me you want the same thing.”

Korra’s breath came out as a shudder. She felt Asami’s hands run down her shoulders, successfully removing her coat in the process and letting it slip to the ground around their feet. She then took Korra’s hands in hers and raised them to the top button of her own coat to give Korra permission to unbutton it. Eventually, she looked up and met Korra’s eyes. She gave her a look of utmost certainty and it almost brought Korra to her knees, but the hands on top of hers kept her steady. Everything became nonexistent in her eyes, except for the woman in front of her.

Her hands continued to shake as she started to undo the first button, but then Asami kissed her again and all of her nervous, unsure thoughts ceased. All she felt between them was need and want.

The heartbreak, the fighting, the misunderstandings, and the forgiveness… All of those things led to this moment. She couldn’t imagine it being with anyone else and she didn’t want to. If these past few months and all those years ago taught her anything, it was that the one person she wanted to share everything with—her thoughts, her insecurities, her emotions, and her heart—was with this person; this woman. Asami Sato.

So without looking back, she took a giant step forward and let go.

For several minutes, Asami thought the room was spinning.

She couldn’t tell up from down or right to left. All she could do was trust in what she felt and Korra to guide her through. When she came over, the only thing she wanted was to see Korra and know that she was okay. But once their eyes met, the only thing she wanted was to see Korra and know that she was okay. But once their eyes met, something inside of her came apart and pieced itself back together again. The strong, wavering emotions exploded inside of her heart, and instead of not understanding what it meant, things became a lot clearer. She didn’t need to go through some journey of figuring out what her feelings meant, because deep down she already knew. She probably always knew. And the only thing she had to do now was act on those feelings.

They shed their coats, bags, scarves and shoes throughout Korra’s apartment as Korra led them to her bedroom. Their lips were still firmly attached, and their hands roamed all over each other as the need grew stronger. Korra’s fingers tangled in Asami’s hair as she sucked her bottom lip between her teeth and teased it.

Asami hadn’t realized they made it to her bedroom until the back of her knees hit Korra’s bed.

They broke the kiss and Korra pulled away to look at her. She brought her hands away from Asami’s face and moved them downward until they reached the hem of Asami’s shirt, and then she paused. Asami noticed the slight hesitation and decided to help her by lifting her arms. The shirt slowly came up and over her head, landing somewhere on the ground a second later and leaving Asami in only her bra and jeans.

Korra’s room was just as dark as the living room, but there was a little bit of light coming in from her window so they could at least see what they were doing. Asami noticed the way Korra’s eyes lowered and came up again.

“You’re sure about this?” she whispered.
Asami brought her hand to Korra’s cheek, rubbing over the faded bruise there with a light touch. She could only feel gratitude and admiration swelling inside of her heart. Before answering, she wrapped her arms around Korra’s neck and leaned down into her ear.

“Touch me, Korra.”

She heard Korra’s breath hitch and felt her body shudder against hers. Seconds passed before Korra’s hands came up and touched her back, her palms pressing against Asami’s skin in a delicate manner. Asami hugged her closer until those hands became more confident and held her back just as tight. Then she felt lips at her neck, sucking and licking at the skin there, making her tilt her head back to give more access.

Her heart pounded like a jack hammer the more Korra’s hands roamed over her body, and her breath caught as one hand ran up the middle of her back, briefly going underneath her bra before pulling away.

Having sex with another woman wasn’t something that ever crossed her mind before, and now that it was happening, it still didn’t. All she saw and felt was Korra: her former best friend, the one person in the world who ever really understood her, and someone she could never let go of or forget about no matter how hard she tried. Korra brought out feelings inside of her that she never thought she could experience again. The intensity and passion between them were indescribable, and the only thing that mattered to Asami was making sure she got those feelings across to Korra as well.

She lowered her hands until they came to the bottom of Korra's shirt and lifted it. Korra paused with her wandering in order to lift her arms and allow Asami to raise the shirt off her head. Afterward, Asami dropped it to the floor next to hers. She looked and saw that Korra was wearing a sports bra, but she didn't have time to process because Korra kissed her again, wrapping her arms around Asami's back and pulling her close. For a while after that, Asami's mind went blank and she couldn't focus on anything else. All she wanted was this and making sure it went on for as long as it could.

The rest of their clothes came off until they were only down to their bras and panties. Korra put her hands on Asami’s shoulders to sit her down on the bed. Asami did so, but her eyes remained locked on Korra’s. She ended up looking away after a minute, only so that her eyes could wander over Korra’s body. Her abs looked rock hard, as if they’d been carved and made from stone. But as she continued to stare, she saw a couple of bruises beginning to form over old ones.

She brought her hand up to rest against Korra’s hip and hold her still, then she used her other hand to touch at the bruises. Her fingers went against a particular one on Korra’s right side, and she felt Korra twitch.

“Does it hurt?” she asked, the first words she spoke in a couple of minutes.

“Not really,” Korra said. Asami looked up to see her give a lopsided grin. “But I’m kind of a masochist.”

Asami smiled back. “I kind of figured that already.”

She concentrated on Korra’s abdomen and ran her fingers over the bruise again. Using both hands, she brought Korra’s body closer and pressed her lips to the skin right above her belly button.

“Asami,” Korra gasped and her hand flew up to the back of Asami’s head. Taking that as a good sign, Asami continued to kiss at her stomach and everywhere her lips could find. Her hands
explored as well, mimicking the same thing Korra did earlier by traveling up Korra’s spine and under her bra. She even went a step further by pushing it up a little.

When she looked up to see Korra’s reaction, she saw that Korra’s eyes were closed and her head tilted back, though she continued to run her fingers through Asami’s hair.

Seeing that expression on Korra’s face sent a whirl of emotions to Asami’s gut and the beginnings of arousal between her thighs. In that moment, she decided that she wanted to be the only one who could bring that type of bliss to Korra’s face in this way. Korra deserved the world and Asami wanted to give her that and more. She wanted to make sure that for as long as she lived, Korra would never feel alone in this cold, cruel world again.

When Korra finally opened her eyes and looked down. Her hands remained on Asami’s shoulders as their gazes lingered on each other, reading one another’s thoughts. And from that stare alone, Asami knew their thoughts aligned and Korra wanted the same for her too.

Korra pushed her to lie down on the bed and climbed on top of her. Afterward, she leaned down and kissed Asami again, easily slipping her tongue inside this time. Asami moaned and moved her hands over Korra’s smooth, muscular back and across her shoulder blades. She could hear the sound of their lips smacking and sucking. It was loud, hot, and addicting. Asami could never be sick of the way Korra kissed her. It felt different each time, and all the more pleasing.

After their lips parted, Korra continued to nibble her way down Asami’s chin, to her neck, and all to the top of her chest. She pulled away and raised herself on her hands and knees between Asami’s legs to stare down at her. Somewhere between all of the kissing, Asami’s hands pushed Korra’s bra upward even more and her breasts partially came free from underneath it. Asami stared down at them as she was given another reminder about what she was doing. The only problem was that it was too dark.

She pulled at the bra and lifted it off Korra’s shoulders and above her head, which Korra complied with. After it came off, Korra pulled back and placed one hand beside Asami’s head while using the other to run up and down Asami’s stomach.

“I wanna see you,” Asami whispered, then she shuddered when Korra’s hand went lower, stopping just above her panty line.

Korra silently pulled away and got off the bed, leaving Asami to lie there and catch her breath as she stared up at the ceiling. Without Korra’s body over her, she grew cold. And as crazy as it sounded, even though they were still in the same room, she missed Korra. It made her almost wish she hadn’t opened her mouth and suggested more lighting in the room.

The sound of a dresser opening caught her attention and she looked over to see Korra rustling around in it. After a minute or so, she closed it.

Asami sat up finally to get a better look at what Korra was doing. She stood near the nightstand by her bed with a lighter and candle in hand, then she lit it and put it down. The flame grew tall and large, bathing the room in orange light.

When Korra turned around to face her again, Asami drew in a shaky breath. She could see Korra’s body perfectly now. Her shape, the broadness of her shoulders, how muscular her arms were, and her round, soft-looking breasts. The latter she stared at for a long minute. From Korra’s body alone, she developed a special kind of love for the female anatomy.

Korra walked over and sat down on the bed. Reaching for Asami’s hand, she entwined their
fingers.

“If at any point you change your mind or start to have doubts, just tell me and we’ll stop,” she said.

Asami nodded, though she was positive that there wouldn’t be any doubts or changing her mind about this. She was in it for the long haul.

Korra pulled her forward and Asami followed her lead. She ended up straddling Korra’s lap and sighed when Korra’s lips touched her chest, kissing there and then all the way up Asami’s neck. She felt hands move up her back and, a second later, her bra unsnapped. Korra brought her face away and looked up. Her fingers went under the straps of Asami’s bra and began to slide them down her arms.

Asami’s heart sped up as the purple bra fell from her shoulders and slowly came off. Once she slipped her hands out of it, Korra threw it to the end of the bed. Their eyes remained on each other, but Asami could feel heat rising in her cheeks. She couldn’t tell if it was from embarrassment or arousal. Because on one hand, she was sitting there half naked on top of her best friend, but on the other hand, Korra’s eyes on her made her insides turn to jelly.

Maybe it was both.

Korra’s eyes lowered onto her chest and her hand came between their bodies to cup one of Asami’s breasts. Using her thumb, she brushed it against Asami’s nipple, then she leaned down and wrapped her mouth around it.

“Korra!” Asami gasped and her hands went to Korra’s shoulders. Her head fell back as she felt Korra’s warm tongue lick around and above her nipple. She moaned when Korra used the other hand to tweak and pinch at the breast her mouth wasn’t occupying.

Her breathing picked up and she squeezed her thighs around Korra’s from the heat continuing to grow between them. God it felt so good. Korra knew what she was doing and Asami knew she was enjoying it. She’d alternatively switch breasts every so often to give equal pleasure, and when she finished her fondling, her hands lowered to grab a handful of Asami’s ass and squeezed.

A louder moan fell from her lips and she brought her hands to Korra’s face to pull her into a sloppy, wet kiss, using nothing but tongue and teeth. With Korra’s hands still gripping at her, Asami moved her hips in a slow manner, rocking into Korra and letting their groins brush against each other. Korra groaned in her mouth, but she helped guide Asami’s hips, changing the direction into a circular movement. Asami gasped again and opened her mouth, which allowed Korra to bite her bottom lip and tug on it. Her hands left Asami’s ass in favor of touching her breasts again, this time a bit rougher as Asami continued to grind down faster on her.

In a sudden move, Korra stood up, keeping Asami’s legs secured around her waist and then lowered them down on top of the bed with Asami beneath her and on top of the pillows. They broke apart from the kiss.

Asami opened her eyes to find Korra looking down at her. She let go of Korra’s hair and cupped the side of her face, rubbing her thumb against her cheek. Leaning up, she kissed at the healing bruise under Korra’s left eye, then she kissed the other eye, along with Korra’s forehead, her nose, her cheeks, and under her chin. When she pulled away, she saw the look on Korra’s face. Blue eyes glistened under the candle light and she looked so impassioned, but also so afraid.

“Asami, I…” she started but her voice wavered and she stopped, looking away and shutting her eyes.
Asami turned Korra’s face in her direction once more. A single tear slid down Korra’s cheek and she wiped it away.

“It’s okay. I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere.”

Korra’s bottom lip quivered, but she nodded and leaned down, burying her face in Asami’s neck. Asami wrapped her arms around her shoulders and they stayed there for a minute. She felt Korra’s body shaking against hers and rubbed her hands along her back. She understood exactly what Korra was feeling, because she felt it too. How the emotions ran so high between them that at times it could be hard to find the right words to say. She wondered if that aspect of their relationship would ever change. But then again, did she really want it to? They were two, emotional people, who spent a lot of time getting through their issues in whatever way they could on their own. But now they had this. They had each other.

Korra started kissing at her neck again while moving her hands over Asami’s body, roaming down her curves until her fingers hooked in either side of Asami’s panties. Her kisses trailed downward as well until she reached the top of one of Asami’s breasts and licked at her erect nipple.

Asami arched into her mouth and opened her own to let another moan escape. When Korra pulled away, she continued her journey south, kissing at Asami’s stomach, below her navel, and then just on the edge of her panty line. She lifted her head, her eyes looking for confirmation as her fingers tugged at the undergarments.

Asami bit her lip and nodded, then she lifted her hips. Korra pulled her panties off one leg at a time and threw them to the side. Afterward, she sat back and looked over Asami’s naked body as if she were mesmerized. Her hands went to Asami’s thighs and spread them before rubbing in a soothing manner.

“Are you nervous?” she asked, raising her eyes to meet Asami’s again.

Asami nodded and whispered a hoarse sounding “yeah.”

Korra continued to rub but leaned down so their bodies made contact again, but not so much that they were crushed together. One of her knees came right between Asami’s thighs, causing her to noticeably shiver.

“Do you still want this?”

Korra looked like she was trying to find even the slightest bit of hesitation or uncertainty in Asami’s face. Though her eyes still held desire, she showed restraint and put Asami’s comfortability above anything else. It gave Asami all the courage she needed.

Leaning up, she kissed at Korra’s neck, down her left shoulder and then up again. When she reached the shell of Korra’s ear, she blew against it and felt Korra shudder against her.

“Positive,” she said and, pulling away, looked Korra in the eyes and held her gaze.

With that confirmation, Korra brought their foreheads together and started to move her hands again. She trailed one hand up Asami’s left side and fondled her left breast, pinching and twisting the nipple between her thumb and index finger. When Asami opened her mouth to moan out loud, it was all but silenced by Korra’s kiss. The hand not playing with her breast trailed up and down Asami’s left thigh before going in between her legs and stopping just as she reached the heat radiating from there. She paused but didn’t stop kissing her or rubbing at her nipple. When she broke away, she panted against Asami’s lips.
“Asami,” she said, her eyes still closed.

Asami whimpered at the sound of her name and the feeling of Korra’s fingers being just a few centimeters away from touching the most sensitive part of herself. She dragged her hands up and down Korra’s shoulder blades, her blunt nails barely leaving any scratch marks.

“Touch me, Korra,” she said again, not at all ashamed by how desperate or needy she sounded. “Touch me, please.”

Korra kissed her again, and for a second, it was all she did, but two fingers finally came in contact with her entrance and Asami gasped.

Korra’s touch was light at first, but she continued to add more pressure as the wetness between Asami’s folds became more apparent. She swallowed Asami’s moans in her mouth and began to gyrate on top of her, moving her hips in slow motions and causing their bodies to slide against each other.

Asami grew hot from the inside out. Her body reacted to Korra’s touch so easily that she was scared she’d come before Korra even entered her. Her core tingled, and she could feel her clit throbbing with the need for more.

“Aah … Korra, inside,” she said, unable to keep quiet any longer.

“Shit,” Korra said, sounding breathless. She slipped a finger inside slowly and started rubbing in small circles.

“Ah!” Asami’s body jerked and her hands gripped at Korra’s shoulders.

Korra continued to move slow, letting her finger slip all the way out at times before inserting it once more. It was maddening and Asami thought she would go crazy, but Korra showed mercy and added a second finger. Asami’s eyes long since closed, but she could feel Korra’s face above hers; the way their lips would occasionally brush when her head raised from the pillow, or how, every so often, she’d hear her name leave Korra’s lips like she was saying a prayer.

Korra’s fingers sped up and wet sounds filled the room, but they weren’t as loud as Asami’s yells. Warmth spread through her abdomen and down between her thighs as Korra’s fingers brushed against her clit, circling and rubbing at it with more ruthless aggression. All Asami needed was just a little bit more…

She thrust her hips down and met Korra’s fingers as the fast pace continued.

“Yeah. That’s it,” Korra spoke lustfully against her lips. “Ride my fingers.”

“Fuck!”

Asami’s eyes closed, her knees lifted, and her toes curled as something inside her belly snapped. She cried out as her body jerked against Korra and around her fingers as she rode out her orgasm like a wave. By the time it was over, her chest rose up and down as she tried to force air into her lungs. She was sweaty and a little spent, but she also felt amazing.

Little moans left her mouth as Korra continued to rub. She kissed Asami’s lips, cheeks, and chin. After that, she continued downward, leaving a wet trail behind her as she kissed along Asami’s chest and stomach.

“W-what are you doing?” Asami asked between breaths when it felt like Korra had no intentions of
stopping.

Korra didn’t answer and wrapped her arms under Asami’s thighs. She kissed at the left thigh, then moved to the inner right. Her head moved upward and Asami’s breath sped up again. Korra used her tongue and licked all the way up until her nose and mouth hovered above Asami’s pussy. The feeling of her breath going against it caused a shudder to wreck through Asami’s body. And when she felt Korra’s tongue go against her crease, she groaned so loud she thought Korra’s neighbors might hear.

Korra didn’t let up. Once that sound left Asami’s lips, she used her hands to pull Asami’s wet folds apart and flattened her tongue against Asami’s vulva. Then she proceeded to suck.

Asami wanted to cry from the pleasure alone. How could this be so good? It felt like she was being broken down only to be put back together again. It caused her heart to ache and breath to hitch.

Why was it only Korra who brought this out of her? No one could ever make her feel so good, yet so emotional at the same time. She knew it was a scary power to let someone have over her, but as terrifying as it might be, she wouldn’t want that feeling with anybody else. Her and Korra… they had something so special that no simple word could ever be able to define. It was passion, emotion, heartache, and fulfillment all in one. It brought tears to Asami’s eyes because she continued to want all of that and more.

Between her shouts of “yes!” and “more!” she reached for Korra’s hand. Korra held it and folded their fingers together as her tongue and mouth continued to do amazing things to her. After a while, she used her other hand and inserted two fingers inside again, not going very deep, but enough to cause loud, squishing noises. She removed her mouth for a moment to look up at Asami. Keeping their eyes locked, she took Asami’s clit into her mouth again and made quick, loud, sucking motions.

Asami’s head sunk into the pillows, her mouth opening into the shape of an ‘O’ as another orgasm erupted from her, causing her eyes to roll back and her vision to go white. Little sound left her mouth as her back bowed, but Korra kept her thighs in place as she continued to sink her mouth and nose into Asami’s clit.

Asami’s body fell against the bed again and she went completely limp. When Korra was finally done, she kissed up Asami’s body one last time, leaving love bites and sucking on patches of skin. When she reached Asami’s eye level, she brushed a few sweaty strands from Asami’s face.

“How was it?” she asked.

Asami was still panting and trying to keep her eyes open.

“Is—” she started but had to stop to collect more air and also get her brain to properly function again. “Is that really what I’ve been missing out on all these years?”

Korra blinked, and then a big, lopsided smile spread across her face. She threw her head back and laughed.

“You can laugh all you want, but I’m serious,” Asami said. “I’ve never had a back to back orgasm like that before.”

Korra looked down at her again, her eyes shining and playful.

“It’s just one of the perks of being with someone who knows what they’re doing, I guess.”
Asami’s eyes raked over Korra’s face. She looked the happiest Asami had ever seen her, and she mentally snapped a photo of it.

She took Korra’s face into her hands and stared at her, memorizing every last detail of her face. From the tiny scar she had on her chin, to the faded bruise under her eye. She wanted to remember it all.

“You know how you said it would be your mission to make every one of our dates better than the last? Well, it’s going to be my mission to make sure you smile like this every single day.”

There was a flicker in Korra’s eyes just then. She gave Asami a look of complete and utter sincerity.

“You won’t have to try very hard.”

Asami pulled her down and kissed her. She could taste herself in Korra’s mouth, but she didn’t care. All she wanted right now was to make Korra feel as good as she made her feel.

Wrapping one leg around Korra’s waist, she flipped them so that she was now the one on top. Their hands were still interwoven and she decided to grab Korra’s other one and pin it to the bed. She kissed everywhere her lips could find and heard Korra sigh with content. Lowering herself, she kissed at Korra’s neck and collar bone for a while, certain she’d leave marks in the morning. She continued downward and finally got to explore Korra’s body the way she wanted to.

When she came to Korra’s breasts, she paused and stared down at them. Her dark, erect nipples looked like a prize to be claimed, and so Asami did. She licked at Korra’s right and released one of Korra’s hands to fondle the left. They were soft and filled her hands so well. If she were to be honest with herself, she always admired Korra’s cup size. They were perfect. Not too big, but definitely not small either.

She continued to tease them and would switch off every now and then. It was when she lightly bit at one that Korra let out a loud sounding moan. Her body reacted by arching off the bed and into Asami’s mouth. Asami pulled away with a smirk on her lips.

“You really are a masochist, aren’t you?”

Korra, who had her eyes closed, opened them and looked down at her from where she was.

“I’ve had them pierced before and they’ve been super sensitive since then.”

“Ouch.” Asami said, though she continued to play with a nipple between her fingers. “I’m guessing the person who gave you the piercing was that tattoo lady friend of yours?”

“You really want me to answer that right now?” Korra asked.

“Nope. I think that counts as an answer already.”

Asami leaned down and bit at Korra’s nipple again, this time even tugging on it a little. Korra’s lower back rose off the bed and a low moan that almost sounded like a growl left her mouth.

Asami moved on after that, sliding down Korra’s body. She spent an extra amount of time kissing at the bruises Korra had on her abs. She couldn’t get over how lean and fit Korra’s body was.

“I need to go running with you,” she said offhandedly as she reached the end of her trail.
“That can be arranged,” Korra said from above her, though she sounded slightly out of breath.

Asami squeezed the hand she was still holding and let go. She took a deep breath and reached for Korra’s panties to take them off. When they were removed, she sat back.

Seeing another woman’s vagina up close like this was a little intimidating. Korra’s looked well-groomed and soft, glistening from her arousal. Asami wondered if she would like what she liked? Or did Korra enjoy other things? For a split second, she worried that she wouldn’t be able to meet Korra’s needs the way another woman (or man) could, which made her want to try that much harder. After all, she was used to being a perfectionist.

“Hey,” Korra said, pulling Asami away from her train of thought. She must’ve had an unreadable expression on her face because Korra appeared concerned. “You don’t have to force yourself if you’re not ready. I don’t want you to think you owe me anything just because of what I did.”

“It’s not that,” Asami told her. “I wanna do this. I just need a minute, so pipe down up there.”

Korra’s expression changed, her mouth pulling into a smirk, and she leaned back against the pillows again.

“You’re really bossy, you know?”

“Well, I am a boss,” Asami reminded her.

She concentrated on the task at hand and grabbed Korra’s hip to hold her in place. Then she used her other hand to place over Korra’s mound. Her fingers ran over the patch of hair and then they went lower, dragging down Korra’s slit. From the wetness distributed on her fingers and by the way Korra’s breath hitched, Asami could tell it wouldn’t take much to bring her over the edge.

But Asami wanted this to last, so she decided to move slow, only exploring. She used her index and middle finger to pull Korra’s folds apart, exposing her reddened clit. Under the candle light it looked even wetter, and Asami watched in fascination as more secretion spilled out onto her fingers and down Korra’s thighs.

Releasing a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding, Asami inserted one of her fingers.

“Ah!” Korra’s body jerked and she immediately reached for Asami’s arm. Asami froze but kept her finger inside. It felt so warm and slippery and she wanted to push in deeper, but instead, she waited for Korra’s blessing.

They stayed in that position for about thirty seconds. Once Korra calmed down, she opened her eyes and nodded at Asami.

“Go on,” she said.

Asami nodded back and then began to rub. She imagined that it was just like doing it to herself and went with that, starting at a slow pace. The entire time, she watched Korra’s face for a reaction to see if she was doing it right, and from what she could tell, Korra was enjoying it. Her eyes were closed and mouth slightly open as quiet moans fell out of it. Her lips were so reddened from all of the kissing they did, and her cheeks showed some flush on them. Bits of sweat covered her body as she squirmed under Asami’s touch. It was such an erotic sight that Asami could feel herself becoming aroused for the third time that night.

She inserted a second finger and watched Korra arch once more, sticking out her chest. This time, she leaned down and wrapped her mouth around Korra’s left nipple. She sucked, bit, and
teased, and the more Korra’s voice rose, the more encouraged she felt.

Her fingers sped up and she moaned at how aroused Korra was because of her doing. She had Korra at her mercy, unguarded, and in her most vulnerable state. And all it did was make her feel so humbled. She somehow knew it in her heart that only she could bring Korra to this level of pleasure where she could give herself over completely to another person without the need to be in control.

Asami recognized the significance. She realized that Korra was officially giving back something Asami lost all those years ago, and what Korra failed to have ever since then: her trust in people. It may not have been spoken aloud, but it didn’t need to be. Asami just knew. And she’d be damned if she ever let that slip out of her fingers—literally or figuratively—again.

She pulled her hand away and Korra let out a broken sob, covering her arm with her face.

Biting her lip, Asami reached for Korra’s arm and pulled it away, then she grabbed the other. “Come here,” she said and helped Korra sit up. Once Korra complied, Asami scooted to the edge of the bed and planted her feet on the ground, then she brought Korra over to straddle her lap. She put Korra’s arms around her shoulders and waited until Korra secured them around her neck. They looked at one another, with Korra hovering above her, a hazy look in her eyes, and Asami staring back in pure amazement.

She let her hands slide down Korra’s body until they reached her thighs and rubbed at them. Eventually, she gained enough confidence to go around to Korra’s backside and squeeze both of her asscheeks.

“I want you like this,” she spoke quietly.

Korra seemed hesitant, but she nodded anyway and spread her knees a bit more. She didn’t look like she was used to being in this position with another woman, but she wasn’t complaining either, so Asami took that to mean she wasn’t uncomfortable with it.

She maintained eye-contact as she brought one of her hands between them and her fingers re-entered Korra. It started slow again, building back up to that intensity and passion they had going before. It didn’t take long before Korra started rolling her hips and meeting Asami’s pumps. “Oh God,” Korra said with a gasp. She attempted to silence her moans by biting her lip, but Asami sped her hand up, effectively making her stop.

Don’t hold back,” she said, her voice sounding deeper than normal. "Never hold back from me."

Korra whimpered and tightened her hold around Asami’s neck.

“Add another,” she said between pants. “A-another finger.”

Asami did as suggested and spread Korra’s thighs even more by widening her own. She rubbed her hand against Korra’s slick pleasure spot in a way that had Korra clutching onto her shoulders for dear life, head thrown back, and yelling up at the ceiling. Loud fap! fap! fap! sounds filtered into the room, making the scene all the more titillating.

“Asami! Fuck! I can’t! I’m gonna—”

Korra didn’t finish the latter sentence because her words caught. Asami felt her entire body judder around her fingers and watched in awe as Korra came undone. She felt a cramp in her hand but still
didn’t let up, wanting Korra to ride out her orgasm until she couldn’t anymore.

Korra’s head remained tilted up, her jaw slack, and eyes squeezed shut. When she stopped moving her hips, Asami removed her fingers. They were sticky and wet (as were her knees) and she flexed them a couple of times to get the feeling back before wiping them against her thigh.

Korra’s grip on her shoulders lessened and she looked down at Asami finally, appearing completely debauched.

Asami pulled her down by the hair and kissed her, wrapping her arms around Korra’s waist. A sound came from the back of Korra’s throat and she widened her mouth, allowing Asami’s tongue to enter, tease, and flick at her tongue. It lasted for several minutes, and once they parted, Asami hugged her. Their naked bodies fit together perfectly and she buried her face into Korra’s hair.

“That was…” Korra said but didn’t finish. She still sounded pretty winded.

“Yeah,” Asami nodded in agreement.

“You’ve… really never been with another woman before?”

Grinning, she pulled away to look up at Korra. “Was I that good?”

“Way better than good. I don't think I’ve never come that hard before.”

“I guess I’m just a fast learner who was taught by a good teacher.”

“Uhuh. You totally watched porn, didn’t you?”

“Maybe one or two videos, but they were a little too theatrical, so then I went and looked at some lesbian message forums.”

Korra started cracking up and rested her head on Asami’s shoulder.

“I should’ve expected that from a nerd like you.”

“Hey!” Asami pinched her on the side and Korra yelped. “It worked didn’t it? I just gave you the best orgasm of your life.”

Korra pulled away and smiled down at her. “Fuck yeah you did.”

Asami rolled them over to lie down on the bed once more. She ended up between Korra’s legs and relaxed against her, mindful of Korra’s bruises. Using her clean hand, she brushed it along Korra’s cheek and tucked a piece of brown hair behind her right ear.

“Thank you,” she said. “That was amazing, mind-blowing, and just… perfect.”

Korra returned the gesture and let Asami’s hair run through her fingers.

“It was almost too perfect. Now I keep thinking that at any second I’ll wake up and realize this was all a dream and never happened.”

Asami grabbed Korra’s hand and placed it over her chest, right over her heart.

“It’s real. I’m real. This is real.”

Korra used her other hand to cup Asami cheek.
“And I almost fucked it all up.”

“Shh. That’s all behind us now,” Asami said. “There are no hard feelings… clearly.”

Korra chuckled. “I have to admit, it kind of sucks that I won’t be able to call you ‘pillow princess.’”

“A pillow what now?”

This time Korra really laughed.

“Looks like there are still a couple of things you have left to learn after all, Sato.”

“Will you teach me then, Yoda?”

“You and your Star Wars analogies.” Korra rolled her eyes. “But sure. Though, how about a shower first?”

“Look at us getting all domestic now.” Asami smiled and then gave Korra one last kiss before moving off her. “I’m game. This just gives me more of a chance to even the odds.”

“What do you mean—Oh.”

They entered the shower a few minutes later and Asami made sure Korra knew what she was talking about. She had Korra up against the shower wall with her fingers inside her once again. And as they stood under the shower spray and Asami watched Korra come again, her moan bouncing off the walls, she found herself thinking that she could spend the rest of her life watching this.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone for all of the birthday wishes, the fanarts, and the coffees. Your support means the world to me.
Asami stirred awake when she felt a pair of warm lips kissing at her bare shoulder. She hummed and opened her eyes to the now brighter room and the smell of the candle still burning from last night.

“Good morning to you, too,” she said in a sleepy voice.

Korra’s arm wrapped around her midsection and she moved in closer so that their bodies touched. She placed more kisses on Asami’s shoulder and Asami sighed, closing her eyes again when Korra’s lips went up her neck. She saw flashes of the night before and moaned, bringing her hand behind her to run through the back of Korra’s head, feeling at soft hair.

Everything they did last night was still fresh. All of the feelings they shared, the intensity, the passion… Asami never had anything like that before. The heightened, uncontrollable emotions between them finally reached their peak. That emotional connection they had would always be the most important aspect of their relationship in her eyes; however, that didn’t mean connecting in other ways were unimportant.

She already felt closer to Korra the night before the last where they bared their souls to one another and let each other see sides of themselves they never got the chance to show anyone. But last night was something else… Not only did it reaffirm the emotional connection they shared, but it also brought out their carnal desires for each other, which raised their physical relationship to the same level as their emotional one. Those two things were now intertwined. At least, that’s what Asami believed they were. She couldn’t speak for Korra, but since they were so open and on the same wavelength now, it made it that much easier for her to guess what she was thinking.

Korra’s hand moved from off her waist for a second to push more of Asami’s hair out of the way and expose her neck. She sucked and kissed at the juncture between her neck and shoulder.

“How are you feeling?” she eventually asked between kisses.

“Still a little tired, but otherwise, pretty fantastic. Mm. Especially when you do that.”

She heard a breathy chuckle as Korra kissed her neck a few more times before finally pulling back. Asami moved her hand out of Korra’s hair to grab at her hand and wrap it around her torso again. She was still getting used to feeling a pair of breasts against her back, but it did nothing to distract from Korra’s warmth or closeness.

“What time is it?” she asked.

“A little around nine.” Korra put her face into her neck. “And it’s Christmas Eve just in case you needed a reminder.”

“Right. With so much going on right now, it’s easy to forget about.”
“So does that mean I’m not getting a gift?”

Asami laughed. “Does last night not count as one?”

“Mm. Fair point. It’s the gesture that’s always more important than the physicality of the gift, and that definitely applies here.”

“Can you write a book of inspiring quotes or something? Your way with words sometimes is truly astounding.”

Korra chuckled. “You think I’m inspirational?”

“Mhm. I get the feeling you were an influencer of sorts in one of your past lives.”

“You believe in that stuff?”

“Yeah. I don’t think it’s all that far fetched.”

Korra put her chin on Asami’s shoulder and spoke into her ear.

“And you think I could’ve influenced people?”

“For sure,” Asami said, using her hand to run over Korra’s tattooed arm. ”Like you just went around inspiring people with hope, and then beating up others for doing dumb things.”

“I can definitely picture the latter, but I’m not so sure about the first part. That’s kind of hard for me to believe.”

“It shouldn’t be. You inspire me.”

She felt Korra smile against her.

“I’ll take your word for it then…” she said.

Asami hummed again and closed her eyes.

“Can we just stay here like this for a while?” she spoke in a softer tone.

“You’re not hungry for breakfast?”

“Not particularly. I just know that I don’t want either of us to move right now.”

“Okay.” Korra kissed her shoulder. “Then we’ll stay here.”

Asami smiled. “Okay.”

The sounds of cars roaming by and construction from down the street could be heard from outside Korra’s window. Asami wondered if she was ever bothered by it or just let the sounds sink and mix with everything else around her. Because that was exactly what she did. She let it all float in the background, leaving only them in that moment, where Korra held her so close that she felt protected from everything.

She thought about what happened yesterday that led up to them being together now and sighed.

“I saw my dad yesterday,” she said after several minutes passed.

Korra shifted behind her and her hold loosened.
“You did?”

“Yeah. One last time before he gets transferred to this prison over in Pennsylvania.”

“What made you want to go see him again?”

Asami looked over her shoulder for the first time to see Korra. Her hair was slightly messy, but Asami disregarded it after being drawn in by her eyes, which looked as blue as the sea on even the coldest of days.

“You,” she said.

“Me?” Korra gave her a curious look.

“I saw how courageous you were being and I wanted to be, too. I didn’t want my last memory of him to be when I felt so terrified. He needed to know what I really thought about him, and I needed to realize how much the two of us couldn’t be any more different. He probably won’t ever change, but at least I know that I don’t have to keep holding onto his idea of me.”

Korra brushed Asami’s cheek with the back of her hand.

“I’m so proud of you,” she said.

Asami’s heart surged. She turned over more.

“Forgive me for the morning breath,” she prefaced and then leaned forward to place a couple of closed mouthed kisses on Korra’s lips. Korra’s hand flattened on her face and she returned them with equal enthusiasm.

After several seconds, Asami pulled back. When she opened her eyes, she was met with a smile.

“Forgiven.”

Asami smiled back, but then she gave Korra a thoughtful look.

“Did you know this is the first time I’ve woken up in bed with you?”

“Really?” Korra looked up as if she were trying to recall their previous times in bed together.

“Yeah. All the other times I’ve woken up, you’ve just been gone.”

“Does that bother you?” Korra asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

“No. I mean, not really. I guess I kind of get like you where, for a split second, I worry if this was all real to begin with, or if you suddenly just left again.”

Korra’s mouth pulled into a line as she contemplated Asami’s words, then she placed her hand against the side of Asami’s neck.

“I can’t expect you to forgive me for that so soon.”

“But I do forgive you,” Asami insisted. “It’s just that sometimes… I don’t know. Maybe it’s the abandonment issues in me talking.”

“I get it. Believe me, I get it,” Korra told her. “I did a lot of damage to our friendship by leaving the first time, so I’m not surprised that you’d have thoughts about me suddenly just up and leaving you
again without another word. I guess that’s just something I’ll have to work on getting out of both our heads so long as we’re in this relationship.”

Asami grinned. “We’re in a relationship?”

A blush crept up Korra’s cheeks and she looked away.

“I mean… I didn’t mean to assume anything, I just thought—”

Asami turned Korra’s head back to face her.

“It’ll take a minute to get used to saying, but I like the idea of getting to call you my girlfriend.”

The way Korra’s eyes slowly lit up and the genuine, delighted smile grew on her face made Asami’s heart lurch.

“I’ve never had a girlfriend before,” Korra whispered.

Asami used her thumb to rub across Korra’s bottom lip. “I guess it’ll be something new for the both of us then.”

Korra moved on top of her, making the sheets rustle as she got between Asami’s legs. Just as their naked bodies came into full, frontal contact, Korra leaned down and kissed her, plunging deep inside by prying Asami’s mouth open with her tongue. Asami sighed and wrapped her arms around Korra’s neck.

“You totally got out of bed to brush your teeth, didn’t you?” she said, giggling when Korra pulled back to place kisses all over her face.

“I’m minty for the both of us,” she said.

Asami pulled her in and let Korra’s head rest against her shoulder. They stayed that way for a while, placing a few lazy kisses against each other’s skin. Eventually, Korra removed herself and sat up, straddling Asami’s lap and pushing the sheets off them along the way. She stared at Asami’s naked form up and down unabashedly, and Asami did just the same to her.

Seeing Korra’s body in broad daylight took Asami’s breath away. Aside from the bruises and few faded scars, everything about her seemed perfect. Her skin, the curve of her breasts, the definition in her abs that showed with little to no cause.

“God, you’re so….” Korra started and Asami looked up to meet her gaze. She looked stuck on her words and a little frustrated. Shaking her head, she started running one of her hands up and down Asami’s stomach lightly, making Asami shiver from her touch.

“I could say the same about you,” she whispered.

“You don’t even know what I was going to say,” Korra replied.

Asami grabbed her hand and folded their fingers together, continuing to look up at her.

“No, but I’d like to think that the two of us share the same feelings about each other,” she said. “Like, we don’t really have to say out loud what we’re thinking all the time now because we both just know. Does that sound crazy?”

“Oh, the wonderful power of orgasms,” Korra said.
Laughing, Asami sat up. She looked at their hands and continued to play with them.

“I really mean it, though,” she said. “Somehow I feel even closer to you now than I did before. And not even just because of the sex, but, like, with everything that led up to it, you know? I feel so different now.”

As she spoke, she looked down, too embarrassed to look into Korra’s eyes as she revealed those deep, intimate thoughts. But when she peered upward again, she saw that Korra’s eyes never left her face. They wavered, and a smile played at the corner of her lips.

“I guess this is the part where you or I start singing about how I made you feel all shiny and new,” she said.

Again, Asami laughed and turned her head.

“You are so not allowed to turn my disgustingly cute feelings into a punchline based off a cheesy song.”

Korra squeezed her hand, gaining her attention again.

“They’re not a joke at all,” she said seriously. “What we did last night… I’ve never had anything like that before with anyone. It was amazing. You were amazing. And now that I know what it’s like to be with you after I wanted it for so long and thought I couldn't have it… I don’t even wanna think about what it would be like to suddenly have to give it all up.”

Asami nodded and looked down again, afraid she might do something stupid, like cry. But hearing Korra say that moved her in more ways than one. She said it with so much earnest devotion that Asami couldn’t be in denial about it being true. However, it made the thought of it happening that much scarier to have in the process. To one day just be without Korra again after everything they shared… It would’ve torn her apart all over again.

It was then that she realized her feelings for Korra never lessened for a minute after she left. They’d just been forcefully shoved into the back of her mind as she let herself become more occupied by other things. But once those feelings came back to the forefront, they became so prominent to the point of overtaking her, like an oncoming tsunami.

Korra’s hand came under her chin and lifted it. Without even a second thought, Asami closed her eyes when her lips found hers again. Their hands were still firmly held in each other’s and Asami felt warmth spread up her arm and through her chest. Whatever feeling this was filled her so much to the point of being overwhelming, and she wanted Korra to have that same feeling, too.

She wrapped her arms around Korra and let herself fall back onto the bed. The kiss continued to grow as they sucked, nipped, and ravished each other’s mouths; the sounds of their lips coming together and drawing apart producing loud, wet, smacking noises.

Asami rolled them over so that she was on top and in between Korra’s legs. The sheets were tangled between them now, but she didn’t care. She kissed Korra one last time before going lower and once again getting familiar with her body. Now that it was daylight, she figured she’d be less confident, but it was the opposite. She grew even bolder with her touches and kisses, taking her sweet time and opening her ears to listen to Korra’s breaths become shallower.

“Asami…” she heard from above while kissing down Korra’s stomach and feeling at her breasts. Korra’s legs wrapped around her waist for a while, but the slickness forming between her thighs kept Asami from being trapped. She continued to move down until she reached Korra’s lower half,
untangling the sheets from them and then finally sitting back.

“Spread your legs more,” she said in a low, demanding voice. Even to her ears, it didn’t sound like her, but she noticed a flash in Korra’s eyes at her tone. Tugging her bottom lip between her teeth, she gave Asami a questioning look before widening her legs.

Asami dragged her hands down the rest of Korra’s body, between her thighs, and then hooked her arms under Korra’s knees. She kissed at the left thigh, moving all the way up, and then switched to the right to do the same thing. Looking up, she noticed that Korra closed her eyes and relaxed against the pillows.

She shifted her attention on Korra’s vagina. When she saw it last night, she felt so much intimidation, unsure of if she could satisfy Korra in the way she deserved. But now, in the early morning, all she felt was the need to please; to send Korra so far off the edge that she forgot her own name. She wanted to be the one to control that: every movement, every breath she took, every moan…

She could smell Korra’s arousal from where she hovered and it made her bite her lip. Seeing Korra excited created that feeling inside her, too. What she was doing was spontaneous and daring, but at the same time she felt empowered. To know that she could make another woman feel this way, and that another woman could make her feel this way, made her see herself differently. She felt sexy, powerful, and dominating all at the same time. It was a little nerve-racking to realize that she had this responsibility over someone else’s body now, but she wouldn’t hold back or be afraid of those feelings. She’d only embrace them.

Leaning down, she stuck her tongue out and let it run up Korra’s slit until it neared the top, reaching the patch of hair there. She felt Korra jerk the minute her mouth came into contact, as well as her name being called out in surprise.

Unhooking one arm from Korra’s leg, she ran her hand over Korra lightly and then gently pushed two of her fingers inside to knead and create more wetness between Korra’s folds.

“Fuck, Asami,” Korra panted.

Asami continued her actions, making slow circles as she rubbed Korra thoroughly and felt her get even slicker. Her breath hitched at how warm Korra felt and it stopped all together at hearing a small whimper when her fingers brushed up against her clit.

Once she felt Korra was lubricated enough, she removed her fingers, though she used her thumb to keep one of Korra’s folds pulled to the side. She became entranced by the pool of moisture that dripped onto her thumb, down Korra’s thighs, and onto the bed. Her clit looked puffy, wet, and aroused. Nervously, Asami licked at her lips and looked up at Korra.

“How do you like it?” she asked.

Korra’s chest rose up and down as she stared at Asami. She looked shocked by what Asami was asking her at first, but then her eyes went hazy again and she shuddered when Asami inserted her fingers and teasingly dragged upward until they came out again. It looked like it took everything inside of her to keep their eyes locked because of how much pleasure she was receiving. It created a warm feeling in Asami’s gut.

“Go in circles at first,” Korra instructed. “And if you grow more comfortable. Start to suck in fast motions. Kind of like what I did to you last—Oh!”
Asami used the point of her tongue to lick around Korra’s walls, going from small circles to larger ones. She didn’t know what the taste of another woman’s essence might be like, but she could also say that about a lot of other things. It didn’t taste bad. It just tasted plain, and even the slightest bit sour, but overall it wasn’t unpleasant. In fact, Asami grew more enthused by the act itself as she continued to lick and grow used to the taste. Her tongue flattened more as her circles grew and she added her lips to the process.

Meanwhile, Korra squealed and moaned so loud that her voice bounced off the walls. Her hand found Asami’s head and tugged the back of it, making Asami wince, but she didn’t complain. Any sound or movement Korra made gave her more encouragement, and knowing that she was doing it right so far made her grow more comfortable.

She spread Korra wider to taste as much of her as she could. As the wetness from her tongue mixed with Korra’s essence increased, so did the sounds of their union. That, along with the growing smell of Korra’s arousal, turned Asami on so much that she started to slurp.

“Oh-oh God,” Korra cried out as her hand tightened in Asami’s hair. “Asami, mm, I-I’m getting close.”

Asami unhooked her other arm from Korra’s leg and used her thumb to join the other in spreading Korra open. She took Korra’s clit into her mouth and made those quick sucking noises Korra told her to do before. When she heard Korra’s loud yells and screeches for more, she moaned out loud too, letting her mouth vibrate against Korra to bring more stimulation. She sucked and licked as more secretion gushed out, not even stopping as Korra’s body rose uncontrollably off the bed and her knees closed around Asami’s head.

“Fuck!” Korra shouted as she came into Asami’s mouth.

Asami continued another minute of her actions, lapping at every last bit of Korra’s cum, before eventually pulling back. She kissed at Korra’s thighs again and drew her body up the scale of hers, kissing her stomach, licking between her breasts, and nibbling at her neck. She was about to sit back on her heels, but Korra wrapped her arms around her neck and pulled her down into a lengthy, open-mouthed kiss. Korra kissed with so much vigor and purpose that it had Asami’s head spinning and her heart fluttering as if it sprouted wings and was prepared to fly out of her chest.

When they finally broke apart, they looked at each other. Korra’s cheeks were flushed as she came down from the high and entered post-orgasmic bliss.

“I can’t believe you just did that,” she said in a breathy tone.

“Me neither,” Asami said, wiping at her face and mouth. “But I’m glad I did.”

Korra cupped her jaw and her eyes changed. She looked so amazed.

“I don’t think there will ever be a day where you won’t surprise me with something. You’re wild.”

“As wild as you?” Asami asked.

“Hm. Not yet.” Korra kept her hold around Asami’s neck. “But this is definitely a start.”

“A start? Please. I’ve already made it to the big leagues.”

Korra laughed. “Oh? So you’re that confident then, huh?”

“Yeah.” Asami brushed a piece of brown hair behind Korra’s left ear. “I’m that confident about
Korra’s eyes softened.

“Me, too.”

An hour and a half later, they were both cleaned up, dressed and sitting down in the kitchen with their breakfast. This time, Korra made them waffles and french toast. As they ate, she told Asami about her fight from the night before.

“She choked you out?” Asami said in part disbelief, but also anger.

“Correction: I let her choke me out,” Korra said as she got up to put her now empty dish and cup into the sink to wash them. “I could’ve easily gotten out of it if I wanted to.”

“You should have,” Asami said and got up with her own dishes. When Korra finished washing hers, she took Asami’s out of her hands and washed them, as well.

“It was the only believable way for me to lose. And I guess it was sort of a pride thing, too. I didn’t want to tap out to the likes of someone like her. And anyway, I was only passed out for a few seconds.”

“You passed out?” Asami said, her voice raising in alarm. She grabbed Korra by the chin and forced their gazes to meet, then she tilted Korra’s head back to get a good look at her neck. “Are you feeling okay? You’re not dizzy or anything?”

Korra pulled her face away.

“The only marks you’re going to find there are the ones you left. And, speaking of, that answer to your question is pretty obvious considering what we did last night and this morning, don’t you think?”

Asami tried to keep an unamused expression on her face, but she could feel the blood rushing to her cheeks.

“That’s not the point. And don’t use that voice when we’re having a serious conversation.”

Korra laughed. “What voice?”

“That deep, dark voice of yours that’s meant to sound seductive and is seductive.” Asami folded her arms. “It’s distracting.”

“You know what’s really distracting? You wearing my clothes.”

Korra reached for the bottom of the large, flannel nightshirt she let Asami borrow and lifted it, almost revealing what Asami didn’t have underneath it.

Asami swatted her hand away. “I’m beginning to think you’re doing this on purpose.”

“Only a tiny bit,” Korra said and then sighed. “But seriously, I’m fine. You had nothing to worry about, like I already told you.”

“Do you remember what was going through your mind while you were fighting?”

“Nothing really. I try not to think anything unless it’s about what move to do next or how to defeat us.”
“And what about afterward?” Asami asked. “How did you feel mentally?”

“Hm. Good question.” Korra folded her arms. “When Kuvira dropped me off last night, I told her
about how I knew now that fighting was my only comfort zone that kept me from thinking about
stuff I didn’t want to. But when I stepped into that ring last night, I forgot about any of that and
what I thought I needed. The only thing I wanted was to make sure you were safe and that I pulled
it all off. For once, I wasn’t using fighting as the escape route for my problems. I didn’t want to.
And I think a large part of how and why I was able to do that was because of the conversation we
had the night before.”

Asami reached for her hand and held it.

“You didn’t feel the need to retreat back into your comfort zone,” she said. “You thought you
didn’t need it.”

Korra nodded. “I can’t say this means that I want to go around telling everyone my life story, but I
do feel strong enough to at least reflect on it and not let it be something that’s constantly looming
in the back of my head because I’m too scared.”

“Still… that’s a pretty big step,” Asami complimented. “The kind of stuff you’ve been through
isn’t something you just forget, but finally being at peace with it and yourself will make a huge
difference.”

A smile formed on Korra’s lips and she gazed back at Asami with bright eyes.

“What’s that face for?” Asami asked, smiling back.

“I can’t tell you. It’s too sappy.”

“We’ve said plenty of sappy things to each other already.”

“Yeah, but not this level of sappy.”

Laughing, Asami looked down at their joined hands. As she thought about their conversation, she
remembered something else she wanted to ask and raised her head.

“So then what does this mean for you and Blackstone?” she questioned.

Korra shrugged. “I’m not undefeated anymore, and I still love fighting as a whole, but maybe it’s
about time I hung up the gloves while the momentum on me dies a little.”

“Really?” Asami’s eyebrows raised. “You’re just going to quit?”

“I’d like to call it an early retirement.”

“But what about Varrick? Won’t he be mad?”

“Oh, definitely. But he doesn’t control me or what I do. The door is open for people to come and
go as they please.”

“Yeah, but I’ve seen the crowds there and how much they love you. You’re probably his biggest
draw and a lot of people wouldn’t be too happy about you leaving.”

“You raise a good point.”
“So then what?”

“So then I still do what I want. Yes, people will be mad, but they’ll get over it. I wasn’t the first person to bring in a lot of money for Varrick, and I definitely won’t be the last.”

Asami bit her lip. “I don’t know, Korra…”

Korra squeezed her hand and used the other to brush Asami’s hair behind her ear.

“I doubt you’d want our very new relationship to be plagued by me continuing to be involved with illegal and dangerous activities that got you into your mess to begin with.”

“You’re not wrong, but then… What will you do after?”

“I haven’t figured that part out yet, but I can’t worry about it right now. First and foremost, we need to make sure that the both of us make it out of the woods safely.”

Korra let go of Asami and walked out of the kitchen. She went to the front door where both of their bags (and some of their clothes) still sat. Asami watched her kneel down and grab the grey duffle bag sitting there.

“What’s that?” she asked as she walked up behind Korra and looked into the bag. “Holy shit! How much money is in that bag?”

“Twenty-five thousand,” Korra said nonchalantly as she pulled out a yellow envelope. “I’m supposed to get the other half tomorrow.”

“And what’s in the envelope? Keys to a new Tesla?”

“If only.” Korra stood up and turned around. She handed over the envelope. “This is the real payment.”

Asami hesitated before she took it. She undid the envelope and looked down inside to find several documents. Pulling out some pages, she scanned over the first one, reading every single word until her eyes grew.

“Oh my god.”

“What?” Korra asked, walking up beside her and looking down at the document as well.

Asami started flipping through them in haste and the shock continued to grow as she looked between all of the different but related information.

“Fuck. I need to sit down,” she said after a minute.

Korra guided them over to the living room and sat them down on the couch. Asami clutched the documents in her hand as she continued to stare down at them in awe and disbelief.

“That bastard…”

“What is it?”

Asami handed over the documents and Korra took them.

“What are these? Emails?” she asked, shuffling through the pages.
“Yeah. And coded invoices. Ones Raiko sent to my father about smuggling drugs and weapons overseas.”

Korra looked up at her in astonishment.

“But how do you know these invoices were to your father? All it says is some random person’s initials: I.G.N."

“They’re not initials. It’s an acronym for ‘ignition.’ It was my dad’s codename while he was working with those terrorist groups. I remember when we were cleaning out Future Industries, I found some deep, hidden files on his computer using that name. That private email belongs to him, too.”

“Do you still have those files?”

“No. I gave them over to the FBI.”

“So if Raiko was sending out these coded invoices to Hiroshi, that means he was creating weapons for him?”

“Right.” Asami’s hands bundled into fists. “I’ve had my suspicions about him, but I never had any proof. Throughout the entirety of my father’s case, he lied low. They’ve been friends for a long time, so it makes sense that he’s in on it, too. I should've just gone with my gut.”

“But what doesn’t make sense is why he wasn’t thought of by the FBI as a co-conspirer in the first place,” Korra pointed out. “How has he not been found out? And why isn’t he behind bars either?”

Asami blinked in realization.

“Because Raiko was never a real, known associate of my dad's. They brainstormed together, but he kept himself out of the limelight a lot of the times. My dad took the fall for everything because all of the evidence led straight back to him, so he willingly took all the blame and kept Raiko’s name out of it.”

“I guess that means he was loyal to one person,” Korra said sarcastically.

“No.” Asami shook her head. “The only thing a terrorist is loyal to is their organization. I think it just means that by him taking the fall for everything, it’s left Raiko to slide on through and continue on with the rest of the work.”

Korra’s mouth dropped open. “So you mean Raiko might still be working with those groups?”

“Yeah. It makes sense. With that new startup company he practically built overnight, along with how low key he is, it was easy for him to slip under everyone’s radar.”

Asami took the papers back. She searched through them again and went through each one until she found what she was looking for.

“Here,” she pointed at the paper. “This is the most recent invoice in the stack, but it’s from 2016. It couldn’t be to my dad since he’s been in prison since 2012. Plus, it’s under a different codename.”

“This is fucking crazy,” Korra said, rubbing at her mouth. She took the envelope out of Asami’s lap and turned it upside down. A bunch of photos fell out from it.

Asami picked up a few. Most of them were far away shots of people loading boxes into trucks at
night and the driver's being paid afterward. The most incriminating ones though were the two showing loads of drugs packed into several boxes, and another showing what looked to be an explosive prototype.

Shaking her head, she picked up another photo. It was a picture of Raiko and her father looking like they were discussing something at length in some shabby looking parking garage. Both of their faces looked cold and unfeeling. It sent an unpleasant chill down her spine.

“Wait,” she heard Korra say and looked up. Korra showed her a different photo of Raiko all by himself and pointed at it. “This is him?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“He looks familiar,” Korra said, continuing to stare at the photo. A look of sudden awareness came across her face and she looked back at Asami. “That day I went to see you and your father was there instead, I saw him there, too.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

Korra nodded. “It was only briefly, but I’m positive it was him.”

“What were they doing?”

“Just talking, but it seemed like a pretty serious conversation. Neither of them looked very happy with each other.”

“When I talked to Raiko last week, he spoke about my father with so much bitterness. Maybe they had a falling out?”

“Aren’t some of those invoices repeated?” Korra asked.

Asami looked through them, flipping through page after page until she found two that matched. “These ones.”

Korra took them in her hands.

“He sent the first one in May of 2010 and then a replica in July… and I saw them together in August.”

Asami released a breath. “My father wasn’t paying him on time.”

“Yeah… Looks like.”

“God…” Asami shook her head. “I can’t believe Varrick had all of this in his possession.”

“I can. The man loves having the upper hand on people. He would’ve used this information against him at some point.”

“And now he thinks I’m going to do that in order to shut him up,” Asami whispered with a sigh. She collected all of the photos and papers before putting them back in the envelope and sitting it on the table.

“It would be the thing you need to make sure he never utters your name out loud again,” Korra pointed out.

“Yeah, but threatening someone else with another threat? Especially of this magnitude? It’s just
wrong. And…” she paused and looked down.

“And what?” Korra asked, placing her hand on Asami’s knee.

Asami looked up again.

“It sounds like something my dad would do.”

Korra gave her an understanding and sympathetic look.

“Do you have any ideas then?” she asked.

“Yeah…” Asami worried her lip. “The only morally correct one.”

Korra only paused for a second.

“You wanna turn him in,” she said.

Asami nodded. “But the only issue with that is I’d have to explain where I got this information, which means putting myself, you, Varrick, and the fight club at risk. And I don’t want to do that.”

“That’s certainly a dilemma,” Korra said, looking off in thought.

Asami ran her fingers through her hair nervously.

The situation got more complicated as she thought it out. There were so many things that could go wrong with coming forward with the information, but she knew in her head and in her heart that it was the right thing to do. This was about something way more important than her, Korra, or the fight club.

“Unless…”

Asami looked over at Korra, who looked like she just reached an epiphany.

“What?” she asked.

Korra turned to her.

“There is someone already on your side who you could bring the information to.”

Asami’s shoulders rose and she drew in a breath.

“You think I should tell Mako about this?” she asked.

“He’s your safest bet if you don’t want everything else to be exposed.”

Asami looked down at the couch. Mako never even crossed her mind, but now that Korra mentioned him, he did seem like the obvious gateway.

“I haven’t even spoken to him since we got into that fight the day we were all together,” she said.

“I think he can put aside his pride and attitude to help you out with something like this,” Korra said.

“Yeah, but what if he thinks I’m just using him?”

“Then you should use that time to talk to him about everything. Your fight with him couldn’t have
gone that bad.”

“I slapped him.”

Korra cringed and sucked air between her teeth. “Okay, well maybe apologize for that first, then talk out your issues, and then tell him about everything that’s been going on.”

Asami sighed.

“He’ll hate me after this,” she said.

“No, he won’t,” Korra said and rubbed her knee again.

“He will,” Asami urged. “He’ll be so disappointed and feel like I betrayed him.”

“Then don’t tell him the whole story. The only thing he really needs to know is about this Raiko guy. Varrick and the fight club are irrelevant. Besides, you telling him about that stuff could potentially put him in danger. Varrick might seem cool, calm, and collected on the outside, but if there’s even the slightest possibility of someone fucking things up for him, he’ll have them taken out. Take this situation with Raiko for instance…”

Asami rubbed her hands over her face. This was all beginning to get frustrating. She wanted to be honest and forthcoming with Mako about what was going on, but she couldn’t trust that he wouldn’t try to go after Varrick or even Korra for that matter. But at the same time, he was her closest friend, and lying to him for the rest of her life would kill her. It tore at her heart, however, she knew what her decision would be, regardless of the consequences she’d have to face.

“The most important things to me right now are putting Raiko behind bars and keeping you safe,” she said.

“You need to think about yourself, too,” Korra said. “If you bring this stuff to light, it could also bring the spotlight back onto Hiroshi and, essentially, you.”

“I know…” Asami said. “But it’s the only right thing to do. I’ll keep us both safe, I promise.”

“Asami, I don’t want you to have to lie for me if you know that it’s going to eat you alive,” Korra said.

“You got yourself choked out just to get me all of this.” Asami leaned over and touched the envelope. “It’s the least I can do. I’ll keep you and the fight club situation out of it, but I’ll give Mako the rest of the information. I just hope that one day he’ll be able to forgive me for this.”

Korra reach up and stroked her cheek. “You’re so quick to assume that he won’t understand. Maybe he’ll end up surprising you.”

“He’s very serious and dedicated about his job,” Asami said. “I don’t know if I’m that important enough anymore for him to risk that.”

“You are,” Korra said. “I know it.”

“I can’t even believe that you’re the one suggesting this idea. I mean, you didn’t even think there was a possibility of us with him in the way.”

“He still poses a threat, but as you already pointed out, what’s happening with Raiko is much more important.”
“And what about what happens after that? You guys still won’t see eye to eye, and he said all of those horrible things about you and treated you terribly. I would’ve thought you’d be the first to suggest I cut him out of my life for good.”

“I may not like the guy, but I can see how much he loves you and doesn’t want to see you get hurt by me again, which I can’t blame him for,” Korra said and then paused, looking down. “And then there’s the fact that he was there for you all those years while I wasn’t.”

Asami lifted her chin.

“He has no right to hold anything against you. He doesn’t know anything about you or what you’ve been through because he never gave you a chance.”

“I don’t need his validation, Asami.”

“I know that.” Asami dropped her hand. “But if him and I are going to try and work this out, he’ll have to get used to you being around a lot more often in my life and the fact that we’re dating.”

Korra smiled and ran her fingers through Asami’s hair. “I’m still not even used to hearing you say that. So imagine what his reaction will be.”

“And never in my life would I have imagined that you’d actually be defending him, yet here we are.”

“I’m not defending him,” Korra clarified. “It’s just that… I know what it feels like to be kept away from you by someone, so I’m not going to do that to someone else. Even if it’s someone I dislike. So if you make up with him, then fine. If you don’t, that’s fine, too. Do whatever you need to do and say whatever you need to say. But whatever happens next… I trust you, Asami.”

“Korra…”

Tears filled Asami’s eyes. She’d been okay with not hearing those words spoken out loud, but Korra saying them anyway gave her so much overwhelming consolation. There were no amount of ‘sorry’s’ she could say to make up for betraying Korra’s trust back then, but knowing she officially had that back soothed her soul and made it whole again. It made her feel strong enough to get through what she was about to do, no matter the outcome.

TBC…
Asami took a deep breath as she stepped onto the front porch of the house, a bag of Christmas gifts in hand, and knocked on the door. She heard people inside already but didn't feel comfortable just walking right in, even if the house always felt like a second home to her.

Instead of having that normal, jittery feeling that most people got when they woke up on Christmas morning, all she felt was unpleasant knots in her stomach. She tried calling and texting Mako a few times yesterday to ask if he could meet up with her privately, but he never responded or called back. It immediately gave her doubts about going through with this, but staying with Korra again last night soothed her uneasiness. Korra continued to reassure her about everything up until early this morning when they woke up in each other's arms.

Thinking of their moments in bed (and there were a lot of them) lessened Asami's nerves. Korra's apartment made her feel so safe, and being away from it (as well as Korra in general) made her anxious. She wished that Korra could've come with her, but she had her own matters to handle this morning. Also, keeping her far away from Mako for the time being was for the best considering everything Asami was about to tell him.

She already imagined all of the horrible ways her and Mako’s conversation could go, which sort of minimized the inevitable heartbreak, but she still didn’t feel prepared at all for it. For as long as she'd known Mako, she knew how unyielding and inflexible he could be. There were so many times their personalities clashed because of how headstrong they both were. She could only hope that things would be different this time around because they were older.

The door opened and Bolin greeted her.

“Hey! You’re here!” he said and pulled her in for a hug. “You don’t usually come until dinner time.”

“I figured I’d switch it up this year,” she said, hugging him back.

“For a second there, I thought you wouldn’t come at all,” Bolin whispered in her ear.

Asami pulled away and gave him a sad smile. “Same here.”

Bolin put a hand on her shoulder and invited her inside. “Hey, everyone! Look who showed up. And with gifts, too!”

Asami stepped into the warm house and saw people sitting down on the floor by the Christmas tree. They all looked up at Bolin’s announcement and grinned once they saw Asami standing there. Her name fell from different people’s lips in surprise and excitement. A second later, she got swarmed with hugs and kisses at the door.

“It feels like it’s been forever, squirt!” said Tu, one of Mako and Bolin’s older cousins. He came over and wrapped his arm around Asami’s neck while using the other one to mess with her hair. “I thought all of the fame got to your head and you forget about us.”

“I’m hardly famous,” Asami said, pushing his hand out the way and fixing her hair. “And none of you would let me hear the end of it if that were the case.”

“You’re damn right we wouldn’t,” said Chow Jr., Tu’s brother. He squeezed through to hug her.
“Language, Junior!” someone said from behind him. It was Meng-Meng, the younger sister of the three siblings. She pushed them both out of the way to get to Asami.

“Yeah, whatever, Mom,” Chow Jr. said sarcastically and waved his hand at her.

Asami smiled, feeling a little better about deciding to come. She really did adore Mako’s family. They were so welcoming and always made her feel at home. She didn’t see them as often as she used to, but being in their presence for just a few hours would always spark so much laughter out of her. She loved hearing all of their family stories and watching their silly antics. It made her happy yet sad at the same time because she always wished she could have grown up in a household similar to this. Everything was warm, friendly, and full of love; the exact opposite of what she grew up dealing with.

Tu nicely took the gifts out of her hands to go and put them under the tree. She took off her shoes and placed them by the door, then she walked into the front room. Chow Sr. and his wife LiLing were still seated on the couches with their grandkids and other in-laws, but they waved at her when she entered. The smell of breakfast coming from the kitchen filled her nose and instantly gave her so much nostalgia. She remembered all the times she’d come over before school to have breakfast.

“I guess I know where Grandma Yin is,” she said and started walking in that direction.

“Hey, Asami,” Bolin called out as he made his way over to her, putting an arm over her shoulders and leaning close to her ear. “Everything’s okay, right? Have you and Mako talked at all?”

Asami looked over at him.

“That’s why I’m here. I wanted to talk to him.”

“Gotcha.” Bolin winked at her and let go. “He’s in there with Grandma. Good luck.”

Asami walked through the rest of the living room, admiring the large tree set up in the corner and the presents underneath. "A Christmas Story" played from the tv as background noise, and a plate of cookies were set on the table where all of the children lingered. She looked at the photos hung up everywhere on the walls, both new and old. One or two had her in them.

Eventually she made it into the kitchen.

“Asami!” she heard and made a startled noise when Opal appeared from out of nowhere to hug her. “I’m so happy you’re here!”

“Me, too,” she said, smiling, but it faltered when she noticed the other people in the room.

Yin stood by the stove with a pleasant smile on her face as she wiped off her hands with a towel. Her grey hair was pushed back into a sleek bun and she wore a red apron over her clothes.

“Asami, darling! It’s so wonderful to see you,” she said. Throwing the towel to the side, she came over and pulled Asami into another hug. “It’s been so long, my dear. How are you?”

“I’m doing okay,” Asami said, closing her eyes as Yin hugged her tighter. As usual, she smelled of peppermint.

“Mako, I thought you said she wasn’t coming,” Yin said in annoyance and pulled away to look back at her grandson, who’d also been standing by the stove when Asami entered.

The minute their eyes locked, it took everything to keep her body from stiffening. He looked… so
tired. His hair was more messy than usual, and there were bruises under his eyes from a lack of sleep.

“I said I didn’t know for sure,” he said.

“Well, whatever the matter, it’s always good to see her beautiful face, isn’t it?” Yin grabbed Asami’s hand and then reached for Opal’s. “This is what the holidays are all about: bringing us all together under this warm, beautiful house and basking in each other’s presence. You’ve all grown so much. I get so teary-eyed seeing you all together like this.”

The awkward silence that followed after Yin’s words made Asami shift uncomfortably. Mako didn’t say anything and turned back to the stove to stir at something. When Asami looked at Opal, she saw that her friend’s teeth were clenched together like a grimace being played off as a smile.

“Right. That’s exactly right, Grandma,” she said.

Yin patted them both on the shoulders.

“All right. I’m gonna go freshen up a bit and then we can all have breakfast. Everything’s just about done. Plus, Mako has to go to work soon. Don’t you, Mako?”

Mako grunted in response and flipped a piece of bacon.

“You’re not staying?” Asami asked before she could stop herself.

“I got called in to discuss a case. I’ll only be gone for a few hours.”

Asami found his tone distant, but he didn’t sound irritated or annoyed either, which she found to be a good sign.

“I told him that if he’s gone for more than three, I wouldn’t be afraid to go up to the station myself and drag him back here,” Yin said. She gave Asami one final smile and a kiss on the cheek before walking out of the room, humming a Christmas song as she did.

The only sounds in the room came from food sizzling in pans and a pot of water boiling. Asami worried her lip as she turned to Opal. She only received a shrug and encouraging look in response.

“Opal,” Mako finally said, making Opal break their eye conversation to look over at him. “Can you finish these last few pieces of bacon? I need to go and get changed.”

“Uh, yeah… Sure.”

Mako put the spatula down and turned. His eyes met Asami’s for a second before he glanced away and tried to make his way by them.

“Mako, wait,” she said, stopping him by the arm. “I need to talk to you.”

Mako’s shoulders bunched but he didn’t recoil from her touch.

“Now?” he asked.

“Preferably. It’s important and it can’t wait.”

Mako still didn’t look her way, but she could feel him begin to relax under her hold.

“Okay. Just let me go and get changed first.”
Asami nodded and let him go. His amber eyes lingered on hers for a few seconds, and then he finally left the kitchen.

“Wow,” Opal said. “Next time remind me to wear an oxygen mask, because all the tension in this room completely sucks the air out of it. But smart idea to hash things out today of all days where you’re obligated to be nice to people.”

“He didn’t answer my calls yesterday,” Asami said. “But I have to know where we’ll stand after this.”

“After what?”

Blinking, she looked over and saw the confused expression on Opal’s face.

“Nothing,” she said, shaking her head.

“Okay… Well, since we’re alone right now…” Opal slapped her on the arm.

“Ow! What was that for?” Asami asked, rubbing at the spot.

“I texted you several times yesterday morning! You never filled me in on what happened with your date! I’ve been dying to know.”

Asami smiled. “It went really well.”

Opal frowned and then put her hands on Asami’s arms to shake her back and forth.

“Come oooooon. Give me details! You looked so good before I left. I can’t imagine that her hands weren’t all over you.”

“You’re talking too loud,” Asami said, looking over her shoulder.

“Is that a blush? Are you blushing, Asami?” Opal poked at Asami’s sides as she grinned from ear to ear. “Let me guess, a heavy make out session? Maybe even a removed shirt or two? And I see you’re wearing a scarf.”

“Quit it,” Asami said, swatting at Opal’s hands.

Opal stopped teasing and pulled her hands away, still smiling deviously.

“You’ll tell me eventually.”

“Tell her what?” Bolin asked as he walked into the room. He went over to the stove and flipped the sizzling pieces of bacon. “Did you know those were starting to burn?”

Opal rolled her eyes. “Well, I’m no cook, so relying on me to know what I’m doing in the kitchen like your brother just did was a horrible mistake.”

“That’s for sure. You even burn toast. But anyway, what were you guys just talking about?”

“None of your business, nosy pants.”

“Well don’t you guys make the perfect pot and kettle?” Asami said.

Bolin reached for Opal and she took his hand, letting him pull her to his chest and into a bear hug.
“How’d it go?” he asked Asami. “That conversation didn’t seem to last long.”

“We haven’t talked yet. He’s getting dressed and then we will.”

“He’s been working a lot for the past few weeks, just so you know. Lots of late hours, barely remembers to eat or sleep. And you know that when he buries himself in his work—”

“He’s avoiding what’s really going on,” Asami said. “Yeah. We share that in common.”

“I think he’s just feeling guilty,” Opal said as she turned in Bolin’s arms to face Asami, though Bolin kept his arms wrapped around her and splayed his hands over her growing belly. “He knows he’s in the wrong and rather than reach out to you like he should’ve done, he’s been going on this self-pitying route.”

“Hey, hey, easy now. It’s Christmas, so let’s not trash talk my brother while he’s not in the room to defend himself.”

Opal rolled her eyes. “He totally agrees with me,” she whispered to Asami.

“I heard you and that’s not the point.”

“No, you’re right, Bo,” Asami said. “I don’t want there to be tension, or for you guys to feel like you need to pick sides. Whatever’s going on with Mako and I should just stay between us.”

“Do you know what you’re going to say to him?” Bolin asked.

“I can’t know what I’m going to say if I have no idea why he’s so mad in the first place.”

"If it has anything to do with what we talked about, then that would certainly be an interesting conversation," Opal said.

"Wait a second." Bolin looked over Opal's shoulder to stare down at her. "What did you guys talk about?"

"Oh crap." Opal gave Asami a guilty look. "Sorry."

Asami sighed. "It's okay. I shouldn't have asked you to keep things from your husband."

"It didn't matter to me since he was keeping stuff from me, too," Opal said, sending Bolin a glare.

"Okay. I'm so confused right now. What's happening?"

"Oh, honey." Opal gave him a pat on the cheek. "Another time."

A minute later, Mako entered the kitchen dressed in slacks and a white button up shirt with a tie. He shrugged his coat on.

“Ready?” he asked.

Asami nodded and looked at Bolin and Opal one final time before exiting the kitchen with him. She put her shoes back on and waved at everyone in the living room before walking out the door that Mako held open for her.

Once the cold air hit her, she buttoned her coat all the way up and put her hands in her pockets. The bag dangling off her shoulder felt heavier than ever now that she was alone with Mako.
Neither of them talked as they walked over to the porch swing and sat down. They were far away from the door and windows, so they had enough privacy to talk. The neighborhood looked colorful with everyone’s Christmas lights still on. Few cars drove by, as it was still pretty early, and Asami imagined everyone inside their homes having a pleasant morning with their loved ones.

She looked over at Mako.

He stared down at the ground with a concentrated look on his face. It was odd for her to feel so distant from him after they went so long being free from all of the drama. Mako slipped into the roll of being her best friend easily once she was ready to accept him fully back into her life. He had her back so many times in the past couple of years that she couldn’t imagine having gotten through them without his encouragement and protection.

That’s why it made everything twice as hard. All of those moments they shared and his comforting words were something she learned to cherish and not take for granted. He made her believe in herself again and kept her spirits high on those rough days where she thought about just giving up.

“Mako—”

“I’m sorry,” Mako said, interrupting her. “I should’ve called you back last night, but I got swamped with work.”

“Oh,” Asami said. “That’s okay…”

“But I should’ve called way before that. The way things ended with us that day was really rough.”

Asami nodded. “We both needed some time apart after what happened... I’m sorry for hitting you.”

“I deserved it after those things I said.” Mako turned to her with a sorrowful look in his eyes. “I didn’t mean any of it.”

Asami sighed and folded her arms, looking down at her lap.

“But the thing is: You did mean it. At least, part of you did. And I can tell they were things you’ve probably wanted to say to me for a long time.”

When she looked up again, she saw Mako’s eyes close and squeeze tightly before he opened them again.

“I never intended to say any of that the way I did, or at all even.”

“I know…”

“It’s just that when I saw you with her again and how you were easily taking her side, it made me so angry.”

“I wasn’t taking anyone’s side,” Asami said. “But the way you spoke to me and Korra was out of line. You didn’t even give me the chance to explain. You just automatically accused Korra of being some type of poor, needy person who just appeared into my life again for money. You even insulted my intelligence by thinking I’d be too gullible to see something like that.”

“And that was wrong of me,” Mako admitted. “But can you really not see where I was coming from? She left without even a goodbye and you were so distraught afterward. And despite what you said about her not knowing about Hiroshi, I know how much it hurt you to think that she didn’t even care enough to call and check in on you. And now she’s back all of a sudden, probably getting
herself into more trouble than before, and I wanted to protect you from that. I don’t want her to hurt you the way she did ever again.”

Asami considered his words.

“You wanna know something funny? Korra told me the exact same thing. She understands why you did what you did and said what you said while I… I just couldn’t. I couldn’t wrap my head around why someone who’s supposed to be my best friend would completely disregard everything I had to say just because he needed to be right.”

“I’m sorry,” Mako said again, bowing his head. “I guess seeing you with her made me remember the way I always felt in high school whenever she was around.”

“How did it make you feel?”

Mako sighed and stuffed his hands inside his coat pockets. He kicked his foot off the ground and the swing rocked back and forth.

“Like a third wheel,” he said. “Whenever it came to her, you completely drifted away from me. It felt like every single fight, disagreement, or conversation we had revolved around her somehow. You’d constantly take her side and make me out to be the bad guy. And I admit that I’m not proud of the way I acted in the past, but I’m not going to say I’m sorry for being concerned about you hanging around someone with other terrible influences surrounding her.”

“She needed help,” Asami argued. “She needed me.”

“You can’t save everyone, Asami,” Mako said. “There are some people who are so far gone and they’ll only end up hurting you. My case and point being with her.”

“Mako,” Asami spoke slowly, trying not to let her temper flare. “You don’t know anything, so these assumptions you keep making really have to stop.”

“Tell me I’m wrong then,” Mako said. “When I saw her that day, she looked the same to me. I don’t know what she’s managed to get herself tangled up in, but I know that you getting yourself involved will only lead to you being disappointed again.”

“You know what’s so mind boggling to me?” Asami said. “It’s that you could’ve helped her too if you wanted. But instead, you decided to make her an outcast like the rest of that dumb school. You even made her believe that she was dragging me down. And what’s worse is that you came so close to going down the same path as her.”

“Exactly! And I didn’t!” Mako raised his voice and stood up from the swing, surprising Asami. “I was so close to giving up and going down the same road as her, but then I realized I had too much to lose. I had Bolin, the rest of my family, and you. Remember our sophomore year? You told me once that you wouldn’t have been with me if I hadn’t gotten my act together, but then fast-forward to junior year and some random girl comes along, getting herself into so much more trouble than I’d ever been in, and you suddenly had every excuse in the book for her. It was bullshit.”

Asami inhaled sharply as those words punctured something inside her chest. She realized just then the real reason behind all of Mako’s anger and bitterness toward Korra. It wasn’t petty jealousy at all. It wasn’t even because he thought Korra was a bad influence. He didn’t like Korra because (in his mind) despite her flaws, imperfections, and mistakes, Asami looked past that and saw her for who she was instead of pushing for her to change. Unlike with him.

It was misplaced anger.
“I understand now,” she said. “And you have a point. I did treat you and her differently. I wanted you to do better not just for me, but for everyone else around you. There were so many people who were scared to death about what would happen to you if you didn’t come out of that rebellious phase you were going through. And you wanted to change too but had no idea how, so I helped you. But with Korra... You have to understand that she didn’t have any of that. She never had that same support system like you did and let herself believe she wasn't good enough and couldn't change—”

“Ah, here we go,” Mako said. “I already know where this conversation is going. You’re going to say that because of how different our situations were, she had the better excuse to act the way she did.”

“Can you not do that?” Asami asked, offended by his interruption. “Don’t automatically assume what I’m going to say when you have no idea.”

Mako crossed his arms but didn't speak again.

Asami sighed and folded her hands together in her lap. “I made the mistake all the way back then about comparing the both of your situations when I shouldn’t have, and I don't want to do that again. Your reasons for behaving the way you did after your parents died were valid, and I'm sorry if I ever made it seem like they weren't or that you needed to change just for us to be together. However, Korra's reasons are just as valid. I wanted the best for the both of you. And you have to admit that you never attempted to see eye-to-eye with her in the first place. I tried to force you guys together because of my own selfishness, but just because you guys had nothing in common, it didn’t mean you had to bring her down and constantly remind her of her mistakes.”

Mako remained silent, looking contemplative.

“You’re wrong,” he said after a while. “We did have one thing in common.”

Asami paused long and hard to stare at him. His eyes shifted downward before raising to meet hers again.

“So you did know,” she said quietly. “You knew how she felt about me.”

Mako sighed and came over to sit down again. “I had my suspicions, but it became pretty obvious to me after a while, especially with the rumors that went around,” he said, his voice going softer. "You talked about how there was this different side of her that no one else saw, and there had to be a reason why it was only you who saw it. What took me longer to figure out was how you really felt about her.”

Asami’s eyebrows shot up and her heartbeat quickened as she stared at him in awe. Mako's eyes held hers and he had a calm expression on his face.

“Wha—How?” she said in complete bafflement.

“I am a detective,” he said and then looked away in thought. "I think the reason why it took me so long to figure out was because I didn’t want to believe it. But a year or so after she left, it kind of just made sense with the way you behaved and how shut off you became. All those times we fought and I thought I broke your heart... I finally saw from the outside looking in what breaking your heart really looked like.”

Asami expelled a visible breath. She couldn’t find anything to say, but she knew her silence was a dead giveaway.
“Mako…”

“Just tell me something,” Mako said. “All those times when we were broken up, did the two of you ever… you know?”

“No, of course not,” Asami said, vehemently shaking her head. “What gave you that idea?”

Mako shrugged. "You guys would go through these weird periods of not speaking to each other, and you'd get so upset about it. I came to the conclusion a few years ago that you two hooked up at least once."

“I wouldn’t do something like that without telling you. I didn’t even know I had those feelings for her back then. It was only recently that I figured it out.”

“So then you had feelings for her while we were together?” Mako said, the hurt in his voice clear.

“Mako, you were my boyfriend,” Asami said. “Any underlying feelings I had for her never surfaced, and if they did, I wouldn’t have hurt you intentionally like that. Korra knew she had feelings for me, but she never told me about it. We never became intimate or anything like that while the two of us were broken up.”

“But what if you had known?” Mako asked and looked over at her. “What would you have done?”

Asami closed and opened her mouth in hesitation.

“I don’t know,” she said. “I was just a teenager, and with everything else going on in my life, I don’t think I would’ve been equipped enough to handle something like that. There’s no use trying to figure out what could’ve happened or would’ve been.”

Mako nodded but didn’t meet her eyes anymore.

“I’m not your boyfriend anymore now, though,” he said.

“Yeah…”

“And I’m just going to take a wild guess and say that you two are working things out?”

“We’ve, uh, actually done that already…” Asami said, awkwardly tucking a piece of hair behind her ear. She took in a deep breath and let it out. “Look, Mako, I don’t want to lie to you about this or make it some big secret anymore, but if we’re ever going to be okay again after everything, you’re going to have to be okay with the fact that Korra will to be a big part of my life now.”

“And when you say ‘big part,’ do you mean you guys are…”

“Yeah.” Asami nodded. “Korra and I are in a relationship.”

Saying that out loud to someone else quickened her pulse. It was like a breath she’d been holding in for far too long and could finally release into the air, putting her chest and mind at ease.

Mako’s face didn’t change immediately, but when it did it became expressionless.

“I guess that didn’t take long once I was out of the picture, huh?” he finally said, his tone bitter; like he was stating a fact.

“It’s not like that,” Asami told him.
“I think that’s exactly what it is. You kept her a secret for two months because you didn’t want me to step in and ruin things for you.”

She looked off to the side as some wind blew a few pieces of hair into her face. She couldn’t deny any of what Mako was saying. If he hadn’t come barging in on them that day, she had no idea when she would’ve ended up telling him about her and Korra’s reunion. And she knew that when she did, he would’ve tried to convince her that she was making a mistake.

“Can you blame me for that?” she finally said.

“Not really. You already know what I would’ve said.”

“Yeah… I do.”

They sat there watching the cars pass.

“So what now?” Mako said. “Is this the part where you ask if I'll approve?”

“Mako, I don't need your approval to be with someone,” Asami said.

"Yeah, I know." Mako looked down. "You're free to be with whoever you want regardless of what I feel. I just hope for your sake it doesn't end badly."

Asami exhaled. Their discussion on this topic needed to be put on hold for the time being since they were clearly at a stalemate.

“But there is something else that I came over here for. I need your help.”

Reaching into her bag, she pulled out the yellow envelope.

“What is that?” Mako asked.

“Information.” Asami handed it over to him and watched him take it. His brow furrowed as he opened it up and saw all of the documents inside.

“About what?”

“Stuff about my father and a guy he was friends with. I’m not sure you ever met him, but his name is Raiko.”

“It doesn’t ring a bell,” Mako said. “But what about him?”

“He’s been carrying out my dad’s mission these past few years and selling weapons and drugs overseas.”

Mako’s eyes widened and his head snapped toward her.

“Are you serious?” he asked in a whisper, looking around to make sure no one was there eavesdropping on them. Then he reached down into the folder to pull out the papers and photos.

“It’s true, Mako. That’s all of the proof I have and I need you to turn it in for me.”

Mako’s eyes scanned through the papers, growing wider as he consumed the information.

“How did you even get all of this?” he asked.
Asami worried her lip. Here came the hard part…

“I can’t tell you,” she said. “And… you can’t tell anyone you got this information from me, either.”

Finally, Mako looked over at her. The middle of his forehead creased in confusion.

“Why not? Asami, what’s going on?”

“I… I did something that I really shouldn’t have,” Asami said. “I’ve made some terrible choices and there’s no way I can take them back, but at least with this, I can put one bad guy away.”

“You’re not making any sense right now,” Mako said and then gave her a suspicious look. “You need to tell me who you got this from, Asami.”

Asami closed her eyes and breathed out again. When she opened them, she couldn’t meet Mako’s eyes.

“This guy who works in the black market.”

Mako leaned away from her with a look of horror on his face.

“You mean you got this information from a criminal?” he said in a whispered hiss, standing up from the swing again.

“Let me explain,” Asami started.

“How do you even have those type of connections?” Mako asked. “How long have you had them?”

“Not long.” Asami stood up and stepped toward him. “Just a few months.”

“And you actually think this information is legit?”

“It is. If you turn it into the FBI, they’ll be able to connect all of the dots.”

Mako rubbed a hand over his face in agitation.

“Who is the guy who gave you this information?” he asked.

“I can’t tell you.”

“Why not?” Mako said, his tone thickening with anger.

Asami looked down and shook her head. “I just can’t.”

“Is he threatening you? Are you in trouble?”

“No. The only one putting me in danger right now is Raiko.”

“Why did this other guy give you this information?”

“Because I asked for it.”

“Why?”

Asami raised her head.

“Raiko knew I was in contact with the other guy and threatened to tell everyone about it.”
Mako scoffed.

“So, what? You’re turning this information in with the hopes of him being arrested to cover up your own tracks?”

“No.” Asami said. She looked at him with disgust at his accusation. “I’m doing this because it’s the right thing. I don’t want him to hurt anyone. This is so much bigger than me right now. If you let me explain this to you, I could help you put him away.”

“I think you’ve done enough already,” Mako said coldly, shuffling through the papers, but then he stopped and looked up at her in realization.

“What?” Asami asked.

“You said you’ve only been in contact with that guy for a few months… And the same goes for Korra, right?” he said, and then gave her an accusatory look. “She’s involved with this somehow, isn’t she?”

Asami’s voice locked in her throat briefly before sound escaped.

“She’s not the issue. Raiko is.”

“Jesus fuck, Asami.” Mako threw his hands in the air and started to walk away, but Asami grabbed him by the arm. “Things really haven’t changed, have they? Or maybe they’ve just gotten worse.”

“Please don’t leave again without letting me speak,” she pleaded. “Korra’s not involved with what I did. This was a mistake I chose to make.”

“You chose to compromise your entire career?” he said with a disbelieving look. “How do you expect me to buy that?”

“Because I’m not perfect, Mako!” Asami yelled in frustration. “I make mistakes and do stupid things sometimes. And I’m not some kid who’s easily influenced by other people’s actions. I make my own decisions and I always have. I don’t know why it’s such a hard thing for you to believe, but it’s true. There’s no one else to blame for my mistakes but me.”

“Forgetting to set your alarm in the morning is a mistake,” Mako said. “But this… This is something you knowingly did. And now you’ve jeopardized your career—my career. And for what?”

Asami looked down at the ground in regret. Getting this reaction from him hurt in a lot of ways, but she couldn’t blame him for it. He knew her for so long, and hearing this must’ve thrown him. She should’ve never asked for his help.

Snatching the envelope and papers out of his hands, she started to walk away.

“Where are you going?” she heard Mako call after her, his footsteps loud behind her.

“To the police station. I’ll hand this over myself,” she said, walking down the porch steps.

“And then what? You’re just going to tell them you got this information from a criminal?”

“I’ll face the consequences if that means getting a guilty man behind bars.”

Mako grabbed her by the shoulder and made her stop before coming in front of her.
“Just… stop for a minute,” he said.

Asami shrugged him off.

“You know, I’m fine with other people jumping to conclusions and judging me… but you of all people? I never would’ve expected that.”

“Don’t make me out to be the bad guy when you’re working with a real one.”

“I’m not working with him!” Asami hissed and looked around. “We made one deal, and after that I broke it off.”

“Is that supposed to make this sound any better?” Mako asked. “Asami, I work for the law and I took an oath. And what you’re asking me to do not only goes against that, but it also makes me a hypocrite.”

“Then forget I ever told you. If I end up in jail with my father, there will be no hard feelings because in the end you stuck to what you believed in and so did I.”

She tried to walk away again, but Mako reached out and held her by the arm. Just as she turned to yell at him to let go, she froze when she saw the conflicted look on his face. The unconfident grip on her arm told her that he was struggling internally.

“Give me the papers,” he said.

Asami stared at him for a long time. When she saw no ill intent, she handed everything over.

Mako shoved the papers back inside the envelope and sealed it.

“I’ll have to go over the information again to see if it’s really viable. After that, I’ll just tell my partner it’s one of the cases I was working on independently and got an anonymous tip. If it all holds up, we’ll get the FBI involved.”

He walked by her, attempting to go back inside the house.

“Mako,” she called after him. He stopped but didn’t turn around.

“What is it now?” he asked, his tone cold and masking.

Seeing the rigidness in his shoulders and how closed off he became put a dagger to Asami’s heart.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “If there’s any way I can fix things between us after this—”

Mako held his hand up and cut her off before finally turning to face her again.

“I can’t even discuss the future with you right now,” he said. “It’s taking everything for me to even look at you. And after I do this, I don’t see that changing for a while. So please… Just leave.”

Tears filled Asami’s eyes and she wiped them away.

“Okay,” she said, her voice breaking.

Mako turned away and went back inside the house.

Putting a hand over her face, Asami let out a quiet sob.
For doing something that she knew was the right thing, it caused her so much pain. Even though she already had expectations of how that would’ve gone, none of them prepared her for the real thing.

As far as she knew, she just ruined a friendship of twelve years. Mako had no reason to ever want to speak to her again and she would’ve been selfish to even imagine that happening. There was no way she could’ve gotten out of this mess completely unscathed, so now she was paying the cost, which also happened to be her worst fear.

The house she once called her second home caved in on itself. And if there was any chance of salvaging what was left, the best thing to do would be to stay away. And if Mako never ended up forgiving her, it would be the small price she had to pay for the really big thing he was doing for her.

Korra looked around the area. She stood between two buildings that led into an alley that shortcut to the other side. It was only a couple of blocks from her neighborhood, but everything put her on high alert.

She checked the time on her phone and saw that it was just going on 10:15; the designated time she agreed to meet with Varrick. Sighing, she looked around again.

There were no people around, but with the bag she carried, it made her anxious.

A black SUV suddenly pulled up to the curb by where she was standing and she stared at it. A brief moment passed, but then the window on the passenger side rolled down halfway and Zhu Li’s face appeared. She made a signal with her hand to get in the car and then promptly rolled the window back up.

Korra walked up to the car and got inside the back, shutting the door quickly behind her. She was surprised to find Varrick sitting across from her with a satisfied smirk on his face.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“You actually care?”

“Of course! I know I’m not your favorite guy in the world right now for what I had you do, but I think we mutually benefited from it. I made lots of money, and you got the information you needed to get your girl in the clear, not to mention your own fat sum of money.”

He reached into the back of the car and grabbed a duffel bag. Then he dropped it into her lap.

“There you go, another twenty-five thousand, with an added bonus.” He winked. “I’ll tell ya, you really had me fooled into thinking you didn’t lose on purpose. Lots of people suck at that when I tell them to throw a fight.”

“I don’t want the money,” Korra said in a sudden manner.

Varrick faltered and made a staggering noise.

“What do you mean you don’t want it? How can you not want it?”

“I just don’t think I should have it.”

Sighing, Varrick scratched the side of his head. “Look, if this is some silly thing where you don’t
feel like you deserve it because you didn’t ‘properly’ earn it, please spare me that logic. This was part of our deal, so just take it.”

“It’s not what I want.”

“Then what do you want?”

Korra paused and looked around. She saw the bodyguard in the front seat, staring ahead of him and ignoring their conversation, and then she saw Zhu Li, looking back at them with intrigue and confusion.

She turned back to Varrick.

“I wanna leave Blackstone,” she said.

Varrick started laughing. He laughed so hard that he began to turn red in the face.

“You’re not serious, are you?” he said. When Korra continued to stare back at him with a solemn expression, his laughter became minimal until it stopped completely. He looked over at Zhu Li.

“She’s not being serious, is she?”

“I’m afraid she is,” Zhu Li said, though she seemed just as stunned by Korra’s announcement.

Varrick’s eyes popped out of his head and he stared at Korra for several seconds, looking speechless.

Korra lost a bit of confidence just then. The atmosphere changed drastically as she watched Varrick’s former comical expression turn into outrage and anger.

“So let me get this straight,” he said, putting a hand to his temple and rubbing at it. “You’re quitting?”

“I just think it’s time for me to move on,” Korra said. “I can’t do this anymore.”

“It’s Christmas, kid. You’re giving me the worst news ever on Christmas.”

“I know. It’s poor timing on my part, but I didn’t want you to schedule me in another match before I could tell you what my plans are.”

“Forget about that!” Varrick yelled. “Do you know how much money I could lose if you quit? You’re the hottest act I have right now and losing you would be a tremendous blow. You’ve only had two matches on the main card for Christ’s sake!”

“Varrick!” Zhu Li hissed up front. It was the first time Korra ever heard her speak with such force. “Calm down.”

Varrick eased back in his seat after that and took a deep breath. Korra watched him closely and saw the red tint in his face lessen.

“What is it? Are you really that furious with me for asking you to lose? Was the payment not enough?”

“No, it’s none of that,” Korra said. “I never cared about the money or the popularity. I just wanted to fight, and I’ve loved every single moment of fighting at Blackstone. I had an amazing run with this club and it helped me overcome a lot of the struggles I was dealing with; some of which I’m sure you already know of.”
“So then what the hell is the issue?” Varrick asked. “I’m not understanding this at all.”

Korra sighed and looked him directly in the eyes.

“I don’t need this anymore,” she said. “I don’t want to need it anymore. What I want is to know that I can be something else without it. For so long, fighting is the only thing I’ve lived and breathed, but now this is my chance to learn other things and actually grow as a person.”

She pushed the bag Varrick gave her off her lap and then took the bookbag she carried in with her off her shoulders to put it between them as well.

“What’s this?” Varrick asked, unzipping the bookbag and opening it.

“The money I won on Saturday,” Korra said. “You can have it back if that means we can part ways amicably.”

Varrick looked up at her.

“You’d really do that? Give up all of your hard-earned money just to get out of fighting for me?”

“If it means no hard feelings, then yeah.”

“You know, a lot of people just fight their last fight, collect their money, and disappear on us. They don’t usually just... announce it all dramatically like this.”

“I don’t need you coming after me one day out of bitterness.”

Varrick actually chuckled. “How fucked up am I to find so much glee in having a dangerous and threatening reputation to you guys?”

“I’d say pretty fucked up, but I guess with the line of work you do, you’d have to be.”

“Very true.” Varrick turned his head over to Zhu Li and they shared a long, meaningful look for several seconds. Korra entertained the idea they were communicating telepathically from how intense and long the stare lasted. Then Varrick looked back at her, giving her an equally intensified stare, before sighing.

"Fine. Whatever."

Korra let out a sigh of relief, but then she gasped when both bags were dropped back into her lap.

“Go on,” Varrick said. “Take it before I change my mind.”

“What?” she said, gapping at him.

“You heard me, consider your fighting career with Blackstone Fighting League terminated.”

“But why are you letting me keep the money?”

“Because it’s yours.” Varrick gave her a ‘no duh’ look. “You earned it and it’s what we agreed on. Isn’t this what you wanted?”

“Yeah, but... I figured you’d be a little more adamant on me not leaving.”

Varrick sighed again and crossed his arms.
“Zhu Li gave me hell for making you lose that fight, you know?” he said. “I had to spend three nights on the couch because she fought me so hard on this. She really likes you.”

Korra looked over at Zhu Li and received a smile and nod of agreement. “I do.”

“And so do I,” Varrick continued. “And maybe a part of me did feel the tiniest bit guilty for making you lose when I knew how much you were against it. You’ve always stood out to me as the rebel among many. I used to be like that, too.”

“Used to?” Zhu Li said with a snort.

“Okay, fine. I still am. But the point is: I see a lot of myself in you, kid, which is why I took a chance and called you up from the undercard so fast. I knew you’d continue to surprise me and, even up until now, you still do. So yeah, while I’m pissed and you’ve left me with a lot of damage control to work through on Christmas, you have my respect. You earned this cash over the past two years and no one can take that away from you.”

The level of surprise Korra had made her feel like this was all just a joke. But as she looked around again in the car and felt the heavy bags sinking into her lap, she realized the authenticity of the moment.

“This isn’t some trick, right?” she asked still. “I’m not going to wake up one day to loud bangs on the door and guns pointed at my head?”

“Please. I may be the mafia, but I don’t screw with people unless they do something that really fucks me over. Like that Raiko guy for instance.”

“Yeah, about him…” Korra scratched her head. “Don’t be surprised if you see his name in the news in the next coming weeks.”

Varrick laughed in mischief.

“So Sato’s turning him in after all, huh?”

“What?” Korra looked at him in surprise. “How did you know?”

“Are you kidding me? Of course I know!” Varrick said, sounding partially offended. “That woman is as green as they come, and quite frankly, she really oughta get herself out of the corporate world because it doesn’t suit her. To be in that world, you need to play with the dirtiest of dirty.”

“She’s doing what’s right,” Korra defended her. “Just because she’s not like these other vicious bastards that doesn’t make her any less capable.”

“Yeah, but let’s hope this all doesn’t come back to bite her in the ass. It would be a shame if she got caught in the same media cesspool she was involved in a few years back.”

“That won’t happen,” Korra said knowingly. “Because if Asami goes down, you’ll go down, along with everything else. And I’m sure you won’t let anything like that happen.”

Varrick smirked.

“Raiko’s not that dumb to try and throw me under the bus. I have guys in prisons who would turn his hair white in seconds. But when he does get locked up, I’ll be sure to send him a little reminder of who really runs things around these streets.”
Korra shivered at Varrick’s chilling tone. Whatever ‘reminder’ he had planned, she didn’t want to know. But it also made her breathe easier, too.

“So that’s it then?” she asked. “It’s done?”

“That’s it.” Varrick unfolded his arms and dropped them into his lap. “There’s no tricks or anything. However, for your sake, I’d lie low from going to any fighting events as a guest for the time being. I just hope you don’t end up regretting it.”

“I don’t think I will,” Korra said.

“Well, if you do, the door’s wide open for you to return. Now get out of my car. There’s Christmas turkey to be had.”

Korra looked over at Zhu Li and received another gentle smile.

“Go on,” she said.

Korra got out of the car, taking the bags with her as she did. She was still in a daze as she stared at Varrick one last time.

“Thanks,” she said.

“Good luck in the future, kid.” Varrick mock saluted her before reaching over and shutting the door himself. The car drove off a minute later.

Korra stood there with a heavy heart.

Even though she wanted to do it, the reality of it still hit her hard. That safety cushion of hers was gone now and there was no turning back. She felt fearful of the next chapter in her life, but she knew that she couldn’t let that fear control her anymore. There’d be a lot of changes in her life to come, some of them unexpected and surprising, but she’d welcome them. The minute she stepped out of Varrick’s car marked the end of something old and the official beginning of something different, new, and fresh. Despite the uncertainty she felt, there was excitement underlying it. So she would rely on that, along with her heart, to lead her in the right direction. Whichever direction that might be.

She felt a buzz in her back pocket and reached into her jeans. Pulling her phone out, she looked down and saw an all too convenient text from Asami.

Are you coming back over?

Smiling, Korra typed back without a second thought.

I’ll see you soon.

She put the phone back into her pocket and started down the sidewalk. The bitter cold swept around her, whistling in her ears as snow fell down and hit her face.

She had to think that if this was what true freedom felt like, she’d get used to it rather quickly.

She arrived at Asami’s place an hour later and knocked on the door. A few seconds passed, and then it opened. Asami stood there with puffy, red eyes and a somber look on her face.

“I’m guessing your talk with Mako didn’t go so well?” Korra spoke softly.
Asami shrugged and wiped at her face. “It went as good as it could go given the circumstances,” she said and opened the door wider for Korra to enter.

“What happened?” she asked, taking off her shoes and shrugging off her coat. Asami took it from her and hung it up in the closet.

“We talked about everything with you and what happened. He told me the real reason why he wasn’t so accepting about our friendship. Also… he’s known how you and I felt about each other for a while now.”

“Really?” Korra’s brows raised.

“Yeah. He knew way before I even did.”

“Wow.” She folded her arms and thought about it. “I never would’ve imagined that. Maybe him being a detective really is his calling.”

“I also told him that we’re together now,” Asami said.

Korra looked at her again. “What did he have to say about that?”

“Nothing really, but it didn’t surprise him at all.”

“And the whole Raiko situation? What about that?”

Asami’s eyes lowered and that somber look returned.

“He said he’d do it,” she said, her voice going quiet.

“Well, that’s good. Isn’t it?”

“It is, but… I think it just cost us our friendship.”

Korra watched Asami fold her arms and hug herself.

“He told you that?” she asked.

Asami shook her head. “He didn’t have to. It was written all over his face. He looked at me like he didn’t even know me anymore. And I can’t fault him for that after all of the secrets I’ve kept.”

“He just needs some time,” Korra said. “It’s not an easy pill to swallow at first, but Mako knows you. He knows you’re not a bad person.”

“I can’t have expectations that he’ll just forgive me for this. His job is so important to him, and he’s going against what he believes in just for me.”

Korra saw the look of hopelessness on Asami’s face and stepped forward, reaching for her.

“Come here,” she spoke in a soft whisper.

Asami walked into her arms immediately and Korra wrapped them around her. She felt Asami’s head rest against her shoulder and heard a couple of sniffling noises.

“It’s what I deserve,” she said in a tearful voice.

Korra shushed her and ran her hands up and down her back. “No, it’s not. You did a really good
thing despite whatever happened that led up to it. Mako will eventually see that, too.”

After a few minutes of silent hugging, Asami sighed and pulled away.

“Sorry,” she said, rubbing her palms against her eyes. “I promise I didn’t call you over here on Christmas to make you listen to me whine about Mako.”

“I’m not mad,” Korra said, smiling. “He’s been your friend for a long time, and it would be really shitty of me to not understand how you’re feeling.”

Again, Asami sighed and pushed her hair out of her face.

“It’s barely even noon and I’m ready for bed,” she said.

Korra brought her arm around Asami’s waist and led them deeper inside the apartment.

“What do you say you and I go watch cheesy Christmas movies and cuddle for the rest of the day?”

“Do they have to be Christmas movies?” Asami asked, putting her head on Korra’s shoulder. “Can’t we watch something stupid or silly that requires little to no thought? Like *Ace Ventura*?”

“We can watch whatever you want,” Korra said.

“Oh wait.” Asami stopped them and turned to her. “What about Varrick? How did he handle the news?”

Korra hummed. “Not well at first, but we ended up parting ways amicably.”

“Really? I’m shocked.”

“I know, right? He caught me off guard. But yeah, I guess that means I’m officially unemployed now.”

A smile finally appeared on Asami’s face. “How does that make you feel?”

“A little terrified, but also pretty damn liberated.”

“So then, what now?”

Korra faced Asami fully, then she reached up and tucked a piece of dark hair behind her ear.

“Now we can officially move forward and start fresh. But… only if that’s what you still want.”

“Of course I do.” Asami put her hand on Korra’s hip. “...I’ll always want you.”

Korra breathed in deeply as those words flew straight to her heart. She wrapped her arms around Asami’s neck and pulled her head down until their foreheads touched.

“Same here.”

Asami closed her eyes and used both arms to hold Korra close. They stayed that way for a while, holding each other and not wanting to let go just yet.

For the first time, Korra could clearly picture her life becoming so much more. It was far brighter and meaningful than just a dog and a nice neighborhood. She saw peace, happiness, and love for
herself… all those things she failed to have up until now. And alongside her with all of those picturesque moments, the woman in her arms was right there too: encouraging her, giving her strength, and reminding her she was good enough to have that kind of life. And instead of finding any of that unattainable, she found it a challenge that she’d willingly accept and fight for until her last breath.

That was a new goal for her to reach for, and she’d do everything in her power to achieve it.

TBC…
Chapter Notes

*I was hopeless and broken
You opened the door for me
Yeah I was hiding and you let the light in
And now I see
That you do for the wounded
What they couldn't seem to
You set them free
Like a butterfly kissing a child with an eye for the minor key* - *Dressed in Black - Sia*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The stillness in the room augmented the suspense Korra felt as she waited, her elbows on her knees and hands folded over her mouth, while staring at her phone on the bed. Her nerves wreaked her body, and for several minutes she went back and forth about whether or not to just turn her phone off for an hour or two. Eventually, though, she gathered her composure to the best of her ability.

Six days passed since Christmas and her decision to leave Blackstone. During that time, she thought about the next stages of what her life would be and what would happen next, but to no avail did she reach a conclusion just yet. However, since it was New Year’s Eve, she thought it was even more important to think about where she was headed, who she was before, and who she was currently. The present and future came easier than the past, but it was a given that the latter would be harder for her. She wanted to come to terms with the things she’d been avoiding while not letting them stop her from fully moving on and recovering from it. She was a work in progress, and learning how to balance those things would take time. Asami told her just as much.

Her phone started ringing and she looked down at it. Seeing the name pop up made her take a few deep breaths in and out.

Although she really was working toward reflecting on her past more, there were still some things that were too sensitive for her right now to deal with.

“Hello?”

“Hey, sweetheart,” said a gentle, honey-like voice through the receiver.

“Hi, Mom,” Korra replied, closing her eyes.

“How are you?” Senna asked.

“Fine since the last time we spoke.”

“Good. That’s good.” The line went quiet briefly. “Sorry I didn’t call on Christmas. We went camping over in Winnipeg and there wasn’t any reception. Then things got pretty hectic at the clinic this week. Too many pets being fed Christmas dinner, I guess.”

Hearing Senna’s nervous laugh over the phone made a corner of Korra’s mouth twitch upward.
She felt a small amount of sadness creep up at how normal it became for her mother to call and not even bother to make a fake attempt at covering up for her father’s obvious absence from the conversation. It was always “I” and never “we.”

“It’s no big deal,” she said.

There was another pause.

“Happy birthday.”

Korra released a breath and pushed a hand through her hair.

“Thank you,” she said.

It was the same thing every year since Korra started speaking to her again. Senna would call around the same time on her birthday, they’d talk for a few minutes, and then they’d hang up. Their conversations were forced, awkward, and layered with tension on Korra's part, but Senna would always keep that gentle voice with her, never impatient and always kind. But hearing her soft voice only made Korra conflicted. She’d feel immense guilt for all of the things she ever said to her and having too much pride to ever bring it up again and apologize, then she’d be angry all over again about everything that happened to cause the rift in their relationship.

“Do you have any plans to celebrate?” Senna asked.

“Some friends of mine are throwing a New Year’s Eve party, so I thought I’d go to that.”

“Oh, that sounds fun. But please be safe. You know how crazy people are on this day.”

“Yeah, I know. And I will… What are you going to do?”

“Oh, probably nothing. I’m still pretty tired from this past week and I need to catch up on some sleep.”

“Sounds cozy,” Korra offered.

“Yeah. My friends have been telling me that I’ve been showing my age as of late. I’ve never been the most outgoing of my generation, and I definitely don’t fit in with this current one.”

A tiny laugh fell from Korra’s lips as she played with her comforter. “Yeah. We’re all pretty nuts.”

They both went quiet for several seconds and Korra listened to her mother’s quiet breathing.

“Okay...” Senna spoke. “I guess I’ll leave you to it, then. I don’t want to hold you up or anything.”

Korra’s bottom lip quivered and she blinked a few times.

“You weren’t,” she said. “Thanks for calling.”

“Of course. Hey, since it’s going to be a new year and all, maybe we can set something up where you come down here for a weekend and visit. I’d... really love to see you.”

Korra sighed. This was another regular thing they’d discuss right before hanging up, and Korra never failed to give her mother the same response, even though she knew it would break her heart.

“I don’t think I’m ready to go back there, Mom.”
“Right…” Senna said in disappointment, her voice becoming noticeably thicker.

“But,” Korra said after a while as her thoughts came together, “maybe if you have a free week in your schedule, you could come down here and visit for a day or two.”

She waited as an even longer silence stretched between them. The offer she made came as a surprise to them both.

“That… would be nice,” Senna said. “But, Korra… Just know that whenever you’re ready, you’re welcome to stay here.”

“Sure.”

“Okay, I guess I’ll let you go now;” Senna said, her voice getting higher as she spoke with emotion. “I love you, sweetheart.”

“Yeah, you too… Bye, Mom.”

Korra hung up after that and looked down at the phone.

The call lasted three minutes and forty-nine seconds, which she was pretty sure was a new record. Their conversation didn’t go as uncomfortably as she thought it would, but she still felt a bit of emptiness inside her heart.

Maybe that would be another thing she’d begin to work on, too: just talking to her mother more often and trying to forge a relationship with her again. Finding the ability to forgive but never forget was hard, and she knew it was something else she needed to work through. But as long as she tried, she wouldn’t ever be able to say that she didn’t, and that was enough for now.

Then there were some things she absolutely couldn’t forgive but would try her best to move on from. And today, on the day she turned 25 years old, and just before the new year rang in, she wanted to put herself up to that challenge. Because what better time could it have been to start off fresh by putting some old, bitter memories to bed?

She banged loud and heavy on the door, not stopping until it was opened in a haste, with the person behind it making grumbling, irate noises.

“Who the hell,” they started, but when they saw her standing there they froze. “…Korra?”

Korra didn’t say anything at first. She only watched Unalaq’s face grow with shock by her sudden and unexpected appearance on his doorstep. He was dressed in day clothes, but he looked like he just woke up from a nap. His now greying hair was plaited back, revealing a few wrinkles under his eyes, but he still looked remarkably the same. In fact, he resembled her father so much that it almost unnerved her.

“What are you doing here?” he finally asked once the shock wore off. He searched her face and seemed to notice the healing bruise under her eye. “What happened to you—”

“Don’t,” Korra stopped him. “I don’t need you to suddenly act like you care.”

Unalaq’s mouth closed and he stared her up and down before folding his arms in an uncomfortable manner.

“I see you’ve grown outwardly,” he said. “Are you still playing dodgeball with Senna and Tonraq?
The last time I spoke to them about you, they still didn’t have a clue where you were."

“That’s none of your concern,” Korra said.

Unalaq sighed and then opened the door wider. “Do you want to come inside?”

“No. I could never step back inside that house after what you did.”

“Look—”

“No, you look,” she stopped him. “It never even crossed my mind since I moved back here to come and see you because I thought I didn't have anything to say. But I'm realizing that it was only because I had no words for it at the time. Now... I came here because I have a lot of things that I never got to let off my chest before. So what you can do for me right now is just stand there and listen. You owe me that.”

“I owe you that, huh?” Unalaq said. “You’re still feeling as entitled as always.”

“That’s just one other point to add on my list of things to say: how much you never bothered to know me while I was living here. But that’s okay, because I really don’t need you to know who I am now.”

Unalaq gave her another once over but didn’t say anything, and Korra took that as his acceptance to let her have her piece. Licking her lips, she crossed her arms and looked at him—for the first time in years. She didn’t want a single word she had to say to sound like it didn’t hold as much strength or confidence that she knew she exuded just then.

“You were supposed to take care of me,” she said. “You were supposed to make sure I’d be okay here, but you never did. You did the bare minimum and never ever pulled me aside to ask if I was okay with what was happening. It was always rules, rules, rules with you, and the only time you cared was if I disobeyed. I was only a kid back then, which doesn’t mean I don’t hold any responsibility over my own actions, but still. You had a responsibility as well and completely disregarded it. Both you and my dad never saw any potential in me and it made me lose a lot of faith in myself that I’m still trying to get back. I’ve seen how the real world works now like you wanted me to and it’s been awful. I’ve had to struggle, fight, and climb my way out of a bad place, and I did that without any help from you guys. So, if that’s what you wanted me to learn—that I’m capable of surviving without the help of my family—then congratulations, because I did that. But I will never say thank you, because I never should’ve had to go through any of the stuff I went through to reach this point in my life where I’m actually able to look myself in the mirror and be happy with who I am. It’s all thanks to me and the people in my life now who’ve made me see a better view of the world and myself. And you have absolutely nothing to do with that.”

She finished and gave her uncle one final look. During her speech, he looked down at the ground, unable to meet her eye level and kept a solid frown on his lips as he stood there silently. Even afterward, he still didn't speak. Korra only scoffed before turning and walking off the porch. It didn’t even matter what he had to say.

“Korra,” Unalaq called out.

She stopped and hesitated before turning around. Unalaq’s face went back to looking as stone cold as she always remembered it being.

“We only wanted what was best for you, but I’m sorry you felt that way,” he said.

A small smile tugged at the corner of Korra's lips.
“And I’m sorry you fail to realize what an actual apology is.”

She walked away after that, refusing to look back, because all she could see now was the clear path ahead of her.

The crowded airport created a stressful environment as people walked in different directions, carrying luggage and talking back and forth in loud voices with their companions. It was hectic because of New Year’s Eve, with people wanting to make it to their destinations on time. A woman over the loudspeaker could be heard calling out flight delays, cancellations, and final call times.

Asami stood to the side in an ungainly manner as she watched Opal and Bolin hug Mako. They were nearby the security check in, where a long line formed, but since they arrived so early, they had plenty of time.

“Be safe, okay?” Opal said to Mako, pointing a finger at him. “I know being curious is part of your job and all, but don’t go getting yourself into a Sherlock situation.”

“I’ll try not to,” Mako said with a laugh, although it sounded forced.

Asami looked down.

If it hadn’t been for Opal and Bolin pleading with her to come and see them off, she wouldn’t have come. She knew Mako didn’t want her there, and he showed his discomfort by the lack of eye-contact and words spoken to her. Opal and Bolin tried to ask her about what happened with them when they met up with her to give her their Christmas gifts, but she kept quiet about it. And it seemed Mako had, too. Asami figured he’d at least drop subtle hints to the others about keeping their distance from her, but he didn’t, much to her surprise. However, she still respected his wishes and would continue to stay away from him for as long as he wanted after this.

Bolin came beside her and put an arm over her shoulder, pulling her away from her thoughts.

“Are you guys going to be okay?” he asked in her ear.

She looked over at him and gave a sad smile. “I don’t know.”

Bolin nodded and tightened his hold on her shoulder. “I’m sure you guys will get through whatever rough patch this is. He loves you too much to go that long holding a grudge.”

Asami sighed. She had no reply to that because whatever she said would’ve raised alarms in Bolin’s head. It made her wonder what would happen if he knew what was really going on. Would his opinion of her change? Would he see her differently the same way Mako did now? Would he not want to be around her either?

All of those questions loomed in the back of her mind and she had no way of knowing. It gave her a stomach ache just thinking about it.

Bolin kissed her on the cheek and then walked over to where Mako and Opal were standing and talking. A second later, Opal turned and looked at her. She made a sad face and her lip trembled as she walked over to her and pulled her in for a hug.

“I’m going to miss you so much,” she said. “I feel like we barely got to spend any time together.”

“I know.” Asami hugged her back and closed her eyes. “I’ll miss you, too. And I’ll try to call a lot more often.”
“You’d better! I’m gonna need to hear your voice at least once a week to keep me sane throughout this pregnancy.” Opal pulled back. “Promise you’ll come and visit once the baby’s born?"

“Promise.”

Mako and Bolin walked closer to where they stood, but Mako continued to keep a noticeable distance from Asami.

Opal looked between them both and her expression turned into one only a scolding mother would have.

“And I hope by that time you guys will be a lot less awkward and tense. No bad vibes allowed around the baby or else.”

“Oookay, honey.” Bolin collected Opal by the shoulders. “I think what she means to say is that we love you both no matter what and we’ll see you guys soon.”

“Of course that, too,” Opal said with the roll of her eyes.

Bolin hugged Mako one last time. They embraced for a long minute, whispering a few things to each other. Mako’s eyes looked sad and Asami knew it was because he hated saying goodbye to his little brother. She would usually comfort him afterward, but she knew the last thing he wanted right now was for her to be the one to do that.

Opal tugged at her arm and then made Asami lean down so she could whisper something in her ear.

“Don’t forget: You owe me more details on the status of ‘you know what.’”

Asami chuckled. “For sure.”

They hugged again and pulled apart just as Mako and Bolin did, then they switched and Asami braced herself for one of Bolin’s tight bear hugs.

“I’ll miss you, sis,” he said, wrapping her up in his arms and spinning around.

Asami ruffled his hair and let out a small laugh. Afterward, he put her down and then went to grab his and Opal’s bags.

“See you guys,” he said, waiting for Opal to come to his side. They gave a final wave before walking off to stand in the security check in line.

Asami watched them go with sadness in her heart. She hated goodbyes no matter what, and watching two of her best friends leave made it even more difficult to bear. She wished there was a way to keep a string attached to every person she cared about in her life just to make sure they’d always be there, but since that was impossible, she’d just have to hold on to her faith that an invisible line kept them together.

She looked over at Mako, who finally met her eyes for the first time since they entered the airport. Eventually he turned and started walking away.

Asami sighed and followed in suit, keeping the distance between them. She stared at his tense back as he walked. His tall figure made him stand out more, and from the way people were looking at him, he must’ve had an even more tense look on his face that made him intimidating to get close to.
It scared Asami that she could no longer see what the future looked like between her and Mako. She already accepted that it wouldn’t be the same after what she did, but that didn’t make it hurt any less. They’d been together for so many years and none of that could just be forgotten. He was her first real friend, her first love, her first relationship, and she’d always keep a special place in her heart for him.

They made it out of the airport where several cars were parked near the front. Asami took her own cab to get there, but she ended up following behind Mako anyway. They walked farther away from the airport where there weren’t a lot of people. Mako’s car was parked at the curb with the emergency brakes on.

Asami knew he was aware of her, but she figured he’d just get in his car and leave without another word. But then he finally stopped and turned to her, not saying anything at first, but that was because he locked his jaw so hard that he probably couldn’t even talk.

Asami sighed and pushed her hair out of her face.

“Look, I know you hate me right now—”

“I don’t hate you, Asami,” Mako said with the shake of his head. “Maybe I should, but I don’t. The only things I feel right now are anger, hurt, and disappointment that you got yourself into that situation to begin with. And the fact that you kept it from me for so long? It just makes me realize that you and I probably weren’t as much of best friends as I thought we were.”

Asami felt a pang in her chest at the brutal but honest words and looked down.

“You are my best friend,” she said. “I just—I couldn’t.”

“There’s a lot of things we can’t do, Asami,” Mako told her. “But we do them anyway because it spares a lot of pain than keeping it hidden would.”

“So what can I do?” she asked.

“Nothing. That situation is being handled quietly so far and no one’s even asking about you.”

“I was talking about us,” Asami said, looking up. “I want to know what happens with us now. Can we fix it? Or is there really no chance at all that we can be friends again somewhere down the line? What do you want?”

Mako stared at her for a long time. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a key, along with the small gift she got him for Christmas that he never unwrapped.

“Here,” he said, handing them over. “I don’t think I should have these.”

"I bought that gift for you."

"Asami, please just take it."

Asami bit the inside of her cheek and took the gift and apartment key back.

“Mako…”

“I can’t be around you right now, Asami,” he said. "I don’t even think I know how to. With this, the promotion, and the whole Raiko investigation, I don’t think I can handle anything else.”

“You got promoted?” Asami asked.
“They thought I did amazing work with all of ‘my findings’ on Raiko. But I don't think I'm going to take it. I don’t want to be known for cracking a case I never really discovered or solved on my own in the first place.”

Asami looked down at the key again and closed her fist around it.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I know that none of this has been easy for you.”

She watched Mako’s feet shift before looking up at him.

“I don’t know how much time I’ll need or what I even want right now, but I think that it’s best if we just go our separate ways for the time being.”

Asami swallowed thickly and nodded. “Okay. If that’s what you think is best.”

Mako’s eyes still held so much sadness in them, but he looked hurt also. After a final look, he walked away and got inside his car, shutting the door loudly behind him.

Asami folded her arms and watched as he pulled away. Afterward, she walked back toward the airport where her taxi was parked and got inside. For a few seconds, she didn't speak and only stared down at the things in her hands. She didn't even acknowledge the driver when he asked for her next destination.

She knew that even though her life was changing, there were a few things she wouldn’t have control over, and this was one of them. Whatever happened with Mako in the future would be left for another time. And although it bothered her, she wouldn’t try to force something that couldn’t be. Mako needed time and she’d be respectful of that.

As the new year slowly began to ring in, she wanted to embrace the new, positive changes in her life. She wanted to move forward, being the best version of herself, and letting go of all her past mistakes and misfortunes.

“Miss?”

Asami blinked and she looked at the taxi driver, who was still waiting for her to tell him where she needed to go.

“Um. That storage place on 143rd Street,” she said.

“Gotcha,” the driver said and turned back around.

Asami leaned her shoulder against the door and looked out the window.

She couldn’t right all wrongs or fix everything in one day, but for the few small things she could do, she’d try her hardest to be successful with them.

Korra warmed her hands as she stood outside of a lavish looking apartment building. It was loud and busier than normal in the streets, but she found the noise comforting. It snowed later on that evening, which gave her second thoughts about going out, but it stopped a few hours ago. Luckily it didn’t snow enough to cause accumulation, so the night still looked lively for many people as they stepped out in their fancy clothes and New Year’s Eve gear.

After visiting Unalaq, she took a long walk for several hours, letting it sink in about all the decisions she made in not only just the past few days, but for the past few months. When she really
thought about it, everything happened so fast. It threw her in for a whirl, put her back down, only to pick her up and send her spinning round and round again. But she eventually found solid ground, and when the dizziness wore off, her mind felt clearer than ever.

Now it was all about continuing to heal and become stronger mentally. She would continue to conquer her inner demons and make sure they never saw the light of day again. The only one who could put stones in her path now was her, and she’d be damned if she fell again to that kind of self-sabotage.

She looked around for a second time, frowning when she saw a bunch of strangers walk by.

She hadn’t heard from Asami the whole day, except for when she asked if they were still on for tonight. In fact they hadn’t seen much of each other since she had to go back to work. Korra knew that the fallout with Mako was eating away at her hard, along with worrying about if the entire Raiko ordeal was really handled or not (which Korra had to tell her time and time again that it was). She had a lot to deal with and Korra wanted to be there for her, but Asami kept insisting that she had to stay late at work for reasons, although the reasons didn’t seem all that important in Korra’s eyes.

She understood that it must’ve caused her a lot of stress, which was why she couldn’t bring herself to be sad that Asami didn’t remember her birthday. Not that she wanted to celebrate it or anything. It just would’ve meant a lot to know that Asami remembered, just like how Korra still remembered hers. However, it wasn’t the end of the world, and thinking about all that Asami was going through made Korra think it was a selfish thought to have in the first place.

Besides, it wasn’t like she went out and told everyone about her birthday to begin with. Even Kuvira didn’t know when it was. She just treated it like a regular day and never needed to receive acknowledgement for it.

The only thing she wanted out of today was something new to testify the change she felt inside of her, and she received that earlier when she went to Unalaq’s place. She took back a piece of herself she lost while staying in that house, and that was the biggest difference she could’ve made for now.

The sound of shoes clacking against concrete made her glance over for a second before she did a double-take.

Asami walked toward her with a leather coat draped over her shoulders. Underneath it she wore a silk, white top that tied around her neck paired with a black, sequined skirt, along with some pantyhose. Her curly hair tied into a loose, low bun at the back of her neck, though a few pieces remained in front. Korra almost forgot to breathe when she noticed that pearly white smile of hers light up her entire face the minute their eyes locked.

“Hey, you,” Asami said, making her way over and reaching for Korra’s hand.

Korra took it. “You know you look like you just stepped off a runway, right?”

“Do I?” Asami asked with a teasing look. “I was only thinking about you when I got dressed.”

“Were you?” Korra asked, smiling herself. “Sounds kinky.”

“Only to someone with their mind in the gutter. And you look just as good, as well.” Asami tugged at the belt loops on Korra’s blue jeans.

Korra pulled her in for a hug, sighing in content as she inhaled the sweet smell of Asami’s perfume. “I feel like I haven’t seen you in days.”
“Yeah, I know. I’ve just been so busy. I’m sorry.”

“Or maybe you just wanted to torture me?”

“I would never,” Asami said, pulling away to smile at her. “But it’s always a good feeling to know that you’re missed.”

Korra grabbed the flaps of Asami’s coat and pulled them to the side to appreciate her outfit.

“You really do look amazing,” she complimented again. “And thank you for wearing flats.”

She looked up at the sound of Asami’s laughter.

“What? Are you afraid of having your tall girlfriend tower over you?”

Korra cracked a huge, lopsided grin. She thought that at any minute her heart would burst.

“Say that again,” she said.

Asami, still smiling as well, grabbed her hands.

“I’m your girlfriend.”

Exhaling deeply, Korra shook her head. “Yeah. That’s probably never going to get old for me.”

“Same,” Asami said, biting her lip.

Korra glanced down at it and had the urge to lean in for a kiss, but she restrained herself.

“Are you ready?” she asked instead.

Asami nodded. “Yup. Let’s go.”

They went into the apartment building, where the lobby was packed with groups of people ready to go out for the night. They headed over to the elevators and stood beside four other people.

As they waited there, Asami’s hand slipped into Korra’s, surprising her. Looking over, she saw a tiny smile on Asami’s lips and smiled back in return. They hadn’t really discussed the measures of their relationship—what with Asami being a public figure and all—but since Asami didn’t get much attention from the media these days unless it was business related, she didn’t think it was a cause of concern. And from how easily Asami took to kissing her in public and holding her hand, she didn’t seem to think it was either.

The elevator eventually came down and they walked inside, standing in the corner at the back.

Korra noticed that Asami started fidgeting and wanted to ask if she was all right, but she decided against it with all of the prying ears present. The elevator continued to go up, stopping a few times to let people off and on. When they eventually got to the top floor, they got out and Korra led them to the left.

Once they were finally alone in the hallway, she squeezed Asami’s hand.

“Everything good with you?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Asami replied. “Just a little bummed about Opal and Bolin leaving. You didn’t even get to see them, and I really wanted you to meet Opal.”
“I’m sure there will be other times,” Korra said. “What about Mako? Did he say anything to you?”

Asami eyes went downcast for a second, but when she looked up, she lifted a shoulder.

“It’s like you told me. He wants some space. For how long? I have no idea.”

Korra stopped them just before they reached their destination.

“We can just go back to my place if you want. I really don’t mind if you’d rather spend the night in.”

“Are you sure it’s not just because you want me all to yourself?” Asami said with a knowing smile.

“Hmm. Maybe a little. And if our clothes came off in the process and we happened to have sex afterward, I definitely wouldn’t mind.”

Asami laughed and swung their hands between them.

“Sounds like a plan. But for later. I wanna be here with you, and I haven’t had a memorable New Year’s Eve in years.”

“Fair enough.”

“But are you sure you’re going to be okay after what we discussed?”

Korra saw the underlying look of concern in Asami’s expression and gave her hand another squeeze.

“I’ll be fine. Trust me.”

Asami smiled warmly. “I do.”

“All right then. Let’s do this.”

They walked up to the door and Korra guided them inside.

She didn’t think it was possible to fit so many people in one apartment before, but she was wrong. There were people *everywhere* in the huge, bright-lit space. Furniture was pushed to different corners of the room to allow people to mingle, and the floors vibrated from how loud the music played as people danced on top of the beat.

“I guess Ginger and Jargala know a lot of people,” Asami said to Korra over the music.

“I don’t even know half of these people,” Korra said back. She kept her grip on Asami’s hand and led her through the living room. There were quite a few people who recognized her and gave a head nod or wave as she passed by. A few of them even gave Asami curious looks.

The crowd thinned out as they got closer to the kitchen, but there were a few people there getting themselves something to drink. Jargala sat on the counter near the sink, scrolling through her phone while sipping at the drink in her cup. She looked up when she heard them approach.

“Well, well!” she said. “Look who finally decided to show their ugly mug around here.”

“And yet I’m still ten times finer than you,” Korra retorted.

“You wish, honey.” Jargala crossed her legs and flipped her ponytail to one side of her shoulder.
When she looked over at Asami, she gave a sly smile. “I wasn’t expecting to see you here. Asami, right?”

“That’s right,” Asami said. “It’s nice to see you again.”

“Nice to see you, too. I commend you for not letting Korra run you off with that mouth of hers.”

“She’s not so bad,” Asami said, bumping Korra in the shoulder.

Korra looked around. “Aren’t you worried about someone calling the cops?”

“Nah. The walls are soundproof. Plus, a lot of the residents decided to be party crashers. It was only supposed to be us, a few members from the club, and some of Ginger’s model friends. But you know her, she has to do the absolute most when it comes to parties.”

“That explains it,” Korra said. “I knew you couldn’t have this many friends.”

Jargala gave her the middle finger.

“Speaking of Ginger, where is she?” Asami asked.

“Probably off dancing somewhere. Hopefully she won’t get drunk off her ass and make me carry her all the way to bed like the last time. She didn’t even make it to the countdown.”

“Did somebody say my name?” a sing-song voice said from behind them. They all turned in the direction of it and saw Ginger walking into the kitchen wearing a short, navy blue dress that showed off every single curve. She had her red hair pinned up like she was from the 40s era, and her dark makeup gave her an even more promiscuous look.

“Oh, Asami, you’re here!” she said, running up in her heels and pulling Asami away from Korra to embrace her with a hug and kisses on her cheeks. Korra watched with amusement as Asami seemed so taken off guard by the oncoming affection.

“I’m happy to see you, too,” Asami said.

“Ease up, Ging,” Jargala said. “Your thousand-dollar tits will kill her.”

“My thousand-dollar tits are soft and warm, and you’ve never complained about them before,” Ginger said and pulled away from Asami to glare at her girlfriend. “And ass off the counter, please. Who raised you?”

Jargala made a face at her but slid off the counter anyway.

“Now I definitely know who really wears the pants in your guys relationship,” Korra said with a smirk.

“Shut your face.” Jargala playfully shoved her.

“Oh, Korra,” Ginger said, walking away from Asami to give her a crushing hug as well. “We heard all about what happened with Zelina. I’m sorry we couldn’t be there to support you.”

“That’s quite all right.” Korra gave her an awkward but gentle pat on the back.

“But is it really true that you’re quitting?” Ginger asked, pulling back. “I don’t want you to quit.”

“After what Varrick made her do, I don’t blame her,” Jargala chimed in.
Korra looked between the both of them in puzzlement. “How did you guys find out?”

“From Kuvira. She told all of us when we met up for Boxing Day—which you totally should’ve come to. We were all prepared to jump down Varrick’s throat.”

“She wasn’t supposed to tell anyone about that,” Korra said in slight annoyance.

“We all would have connected the dots anyway,” Ginger said. “None of us would believe for a second that you’d go all Ronda Rousey on us and quit after a loss. Plus, you went up against a Triple Threat, which everyone in every club around here knows means that there’s a fifty-fifty chance the fight might have been rigged.”

Korra looked over at Asami and saw her making an impressed face. When she looked over at Korra, she gave a simple shrug.

“Besides,” Jargala said. “You’re a part of the Blackstone Family and we look out for our own, even if we hate each other sometimes.”

“Here, here!” Ginger picked up the cup that Jargala drank from and downed the rest of it.

Korra sighed but couldn’t help the tiny smile that crept up the corner of her mouth.

She never appreciated the support and acknowledgement from everyone in the fight club until now. After trying her hardest not to build too many relationships because all she wanted was to be the best, somewhere down the line she ended up liking being in the environment and with like-minded people. They really were, in all sense and purposes, her family for the past two and a half years. And just knowing that she got to belong to something like that made her grateful she stumbled across it the way she did in the first place.

“So then,” Ginger said as she went back over to Asami and bumped her hip against hers. “I guess since Korra decided to bring you around our crazy asses for a second time—which she never does with anyone, mind you—it’s safe to say that you’ll be hanging around a lot more?”

Asami’s eyes met Korra’s and they shared a look.

“Yeah… For as long as she’ll have me,” she said.

“Wonderful! How exciting!” Ginger clapped and looked over at Korra. “It’s good that you’re expanding that small bubble of yours. Especially to someone so attractive. I mean, look at her!” She made Asami spin around to show off her outfit. “She’s quite the catch.”

Korra smiled again when she heard Asami’s laughter. Just the sound of it made her heart do a thousand somersaults.

“You’re right. She is.”

Asami looked at her again, and Korra noticed a blush tinging on her cheeks.

“Wait,” Ginger said, looking between them. “Does this mean you two are, like, dating? As in together-together?”

“That’s exactly what it means,” Korra told her. She watched Asami bite her lip again.

Ginger’s jaw dropped, but her excitement showed when she looked over at Jargala with a wide grin on her face.
“See, Jar! I fucking told you so! You owe me two-hundred dollars.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Jargala rolled her eyes, but under her breath she whispered “dammit.”

“Wait, you guys were placing bets on us?” Asami asked, finally looking away from Korra.

“Of course! It’s in our nature. The minute we walked away from you guys after the club, I said that you guys would hook up by the end of the year, while Jar said it would take longer than that.”

“Yeah, because some straight women are hard to crack! But I should’ve known when it came to Korra, being the womanizer she is.”

When Korra looked over at Asami, she saw her give a fake look of disapproval and shake of her head.

“Maybe so…” Ginger said, walking over to Jargala and placing a kiss on her lips. “But it still doesn’t change the fact that you owe me money.”

“Technically neither of us were right. We didn't predict them becoming a legit couple.”

Ginger folded her arms with a frown. "I suppose you're right. But I still want the money anyway."

"Sure thing, babe." Jargala walked over to Korra and put an arm around her shoulder. “But it’s kind of funny when you think about it. We’re both off the market now after years of playing the field. And who would’ve thought that we’d find people to actually put up with us? But hey, maybe there really is someone out there for everyone. However, I will admit that I’m going to miss watching you hoe it up all over New York.”

“You just had to ruin it with that last sentence, didn’t you?” Korra said, shrugging out of her hold and then walking over to Asami. “I’m sorry they’re so outrageous.”

“That’s all right.” Asami smiled at her. “I already told you before that I like them.”

“Aw, really?” Ginger asked, placing a hand over her heart. “We like you, too! Tell Korra to hang out with us more now that she won’t be a part of the club anymore. You’re welcome any time! You and I would have so much fun together! We’d be the two hardcore femmes of the group.”

“Right…” Asami nodded, still smiling, though she looked over at Korra with confusion in her eyes.

"I'll explain it to you later," Korra whispered.

“Come on, Asami.” Ginger grabbed her by the hand. “Let me introduce you to some friends of mine. You’ll love them. Then we can hit the dance floor.”

Asami didn’t have time to react before being pulled out of the kitchen by Ginger. She looked back at Korra with a nervous expression before following after the overexcited red-head.

“I’m sorry to say that your girlfriend has officially been kidnapped by mine,” Jargala said. She reached for her phone and scrolled through it again before tapping something. Suddenly the music changed to a techno sounding beat.

“She’s relegated you to DJ for the night?” Korra asked.

“Story of my life.”

Korra nodded but turned her attention to where Ginger and Asami were. They now stood with a
group of women who Korra wasn’t familiar with. Asami shook all of their hands and smiled politely as they all introduced themselves. She looked so poised and confident, as opposed to the look of apprehension she had on her face mere seconds ago. But Korra didn’t expect anything less from her. She was so used to parties and meeting different people, so even if she wasn’t super comfortable just yet, she wouldn’t show it.

Asami just had that glowing aura around her where everyone was pleased to be in her company. From her beautiful smile, to her intelligent mind, she carried herself with strength, courage, and everything else that came between. It made Korra’s chest fill with something so overwhelming that she had to take a second to remember how to breathe.

Realizing she’d been staring, she looked away, only to find Kuvira walking up to her.

“IT’s about time you showed up.”

“I said the same thing,” Jargala said, putting her phone to the side. “What happened to that cute blonde you were playing tonsil hockey with?”

“She needed to use the bathroom.”

“Ah. That reminds me that I really need to go. Be right back. And if a shitty song starts playing, just skip it for me.”

She left the two of them alone in the kitchen.

“Since when do you have a thing for blondes?” Korra asked when Kuvira came over and leaned against the counter.

“I figured I’d give it a whirl with the new year approaching. But I can’t say it’s turning out so bad,” she said with a smirk.

“And yet I’m accused of being the womanizer.”

Kuvira laughed. She looked over at where Korra had just been staring. “I see you brought Asami along.”

“Yeah.”

Kuvira smiled. “Congratulations. I’m happy for you.”

Korra rubbed the back of her neck and looked down. “Thank you.”

"But please, for the love of God, don't start with the annoying pet names. I already hear enough of that with Ginger and Jargala.”

Korra made a face. "Definitely not. I can't see us being one of those couples."  

“Stick around those two long enough and you will be. Ginger's gonna insist on doing double dates every other weekend.”

“Oh God. I’d have to kill her.”

Laughing again, Kuvira looked at her. “It won’t be so bad. Plus, you’re going to have a lot of time on your hands now.”

“Yeah, thanks for telling everyone,” Korra said in a sarcastic tone.
“They would’ve been bothering me about it for weeks once you stopped showing up. And did you
really not think people wouldn’t notice you were gone?”

“I thought I’d just happily fade into obscurity.”

“Oh, please. People won’t stop talking about you for at least another year. You’re going to be
known as a legend.”

“Hmm. I like the sound of that.”

She looked over at Asami again and saw that her and Ginger were now dancing amongst the crowd
of people.

“It’s a shame, though,” Kuvira said, making Korra turn to her again. “You and I won’t ever get that
fight of ours.”

“That is a shame. I was looking forward to mopping the floor with you.”

“Ha! You can only dream, rookie.”

“You know you’re going to have to retire that nickname officially for me, right?”

“Meh. I think it still suits you just fine.”

“You’re impossible,” Korra said, laughing. When Kuvira didn't respond, she looked over and saw
her friend staring at her. “What?”

Kuvira shrugged. “You just seem different now. Happier; calmer. Even back when I saw the two of
you guys in your apartment that day I thought the same thing. She’s gone and turned you into a
softie.”

Korra rolled her eyes. “I’ll show you who a softie is the next time we spar.”

“Oh, so you still want to train then?”

“Yeah. I mean, why not? Just because I’m not kicking ass anymore, it doesn’t mean I have to give
up boxing all together. I just need to find a better, healthier outlet to express myself and not use
fighting as a crutch.”

“Do you know what that new outlet will be?”

“Not yet. But I figured I’d take it one day at a time. Kind of like how you taught me in those first
months we trained together. Everything’s not going to change with me overnight, but it all starts
with putting in the effort.”

“Atta girl,” Kuvira said. “That sounds like a good goal to have.”

Korra turned to her.

“That change includes you too, you know?” she said.

Kuvira lifted a brow. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah… I was thinking that maybe sometime next week we could go out and grab some coffee?”

“You’re sounding oddly ominous right now.”
“It’s nothing bad. It’s just that… If you’re still interested, I’d like for you to know a little bit more about me and share some things with you.”

Kuvira’s eyes softened and she smiled before reaching up and flicking Korra in the forehead.

“There’s nothing I wouldn’t love more,” she said.

Korra smiled back.

A few minutes later, Asami and Ginger came back over, with Ginger holding Asami’s hand in a tight grip.

“These shoes have got to go,” she said, kicking the black heels off.

Asami walked over to Korra, a little red from all of the dancing and mingling she just did, but she looked happy.

“Hey again,” she said, coming closer.

“Hi,” Korra replied, wrapping an arm around her waist. “Having fun?”

“Tons.” Asami put her arm around Korra’s shoulders. “I’d be having more fun if you were out there with me.”

“What makes you think I’m the dancing type these days?”

“Even if you weren’t, you’d still do it for me, wouldn’t you?” Asami asked, batting her long lashes.

“Hmm. Debatable.”

“Ugh, you guys are so adorable!” Ginger squealed. “Do you have any plans next weekend? If not, we should totally have a double date.”

Korra’s eyes met Kuvira’s at the same time and they both started laughing.

“What?” Ginger asked. "What's so funny?"

Kuvira reached over and pinched her in the cheek. "You."

“Well, duh. But anyway. We should have a toast! Where’d Jar go?"

“Right here,” Jargala said, walking into the kitchen.

“What do you guys want to drink?” Ginger asked Korra and Asami, holding up two cups for their consideration.

“Just some soda will do,” Korra said.

“Really? That’s it?”

“Yeah… I’ve decided to cut back.”

“Wow. That’s… different,” Jargala said.


“Asami, how about you?” Ginger asked.
“The same.”

Korra turned to Asami finally and saw a proud smile on her face.

A few nights ago, she made the decision to give up her glutenous alcohol consumption. She wanted to leave behind that old version of herself completely, and that required letting go of something that only brought out the worst in her. When she told this to Asami, she was right on board with it, even going as far as to throwing out any leftover alcohol she might’ve had stored away in her pantry with the explanation being that she didn’t drink much of it in the first place. It was that kind of support that made Korra sure that she was doing the right thing for a greater cause.

After Ginger filled all the cups and passed them out, they all raised them for a toast.

“To new friends, relationships, and the eternal love that binds us,” Ginger said.

“You’re so goddamn cheesy,” Kuvira said as they all clinked their cups together and drank.

“Oh! Which reminds me. I have a song that I’d like to dedicate to our new, happy couple. It’s an oldie, but a goodie.” Ginger walked over to the counter and picked up Jargala’s phone. A few seconds passed and eventually the current song stopped. Rihanna’s We Found Love started playing from the speakers.

“Seriously?” Korra scrunched her nose.

“What? I think it's super cute.”

“I like it,” Asami said suddenly.

Korra looked over at her with a raised brow. “Really?”

Asami shrugged and dropped her arm from Korra’s shoulders. “It is cute.”

“Finally. Someone to appreciate my inner romantic,” Ginger said. “I love her already.”

Asami smiled at her and then looked over at Korra again before taking both of their drinks and setting them down on the counter. She held out her hand afterward.

“Dance with me?” she asked.

“You’re only encouraging Ginger to do more things like this,” Korra said, smiling all the while. Taking Asami’s hand, she allowed herself to be pulled out of the kitchen and into the front room with the crowd of people jumping around, as if they were part of a mosh pit.

Asami turned to her, and when they found a decent spot to move around, she put her arms around Korra’s shoulders and started to move against her. Korra placed her hands on Asami’s hips and moved as well, keeping their bodies close as the song began to pick up. She heard the sounds of people’s feet stomping but tuned them out, much like she did with large crowds that would always surround her inside of a ring. Her eyes never left Asami’s and she smiled when she saw her mouthing the words.

“It’s the way I’m feeling I just can’t deny,” she sang. “But I’ve got to let it goo.”

The beat dropped before picking up again, rising and rising until the energy burst inside the room. Everyone started hopping up and down, feeling the rhythm as they shouted the words to the song.

Asami brought her hands to Korra’s shoulders as they joined in on the dancing and jumping. Her
rambunctious laugh as they moved against each other filled Korra’s ears and she held her closer. Eventually Asami turned in her arms and started moving her hips against Korra’s.

Korra pulled Asami’s hair and coat to the side and kissed at her neck, all while Asami’s hands grabbed hers and raised them up in the air as if she wanted them to touch the music. A second later, she spun around again and gave Korra a cheeky smile before dancing around her, still holding on to one of her hands.

“Yellow diamonds in the light, and we’re standing side by side,” she continued to sing. “As your shadow crosses mine…”

The hook repeated, and Korra brought Asami close to her again and hugged her as they danced between all of the people jumping around. Asami repeated the words of the song in her ear.

“We found love in a hopeless place. We found love in a hooooopeless place.”

Korra leaned her head against Asami’s shoulder and closed her eyes. Everything faded into the background and quieted. The only thing loud was her feelings: The feelings she thought faded the more years went by, only to find that they never actually left. The same feelings she tried to keep buried inside her heart and never revealed because she’d been too scared to admit them out loud; kind of like how she still felt. They were the same feelings she thought couldn’t grow any bigger yet continued to manifest inside her heart. She never wanted that to stop. And if she had even greater courage, she would say the word she’d been wanting to tell Asami since they were sixteen years old; the exact same word Asami belted so easily out loud as she sang.

But it might’ve been too soon for that.

The song eventually ended, but they continued to hold each other, dancing to two more songs after that.

Just then, Asami got close to her ear, brushing Korra’s hair behind it as she did.

“Can we go somewhere for a little while?”

Korra practically shivered at the feeling of lips against the shell of her ear.

“Where?” she asked.

“Doesn’t matter. Just somewhere that’s quiet.”

Korra pulled away and looked at Asami. Green eyes stared back with hopefulness, but also… something else. Korra wasn’t quite sure what it was. But instead of questioning it, she just nodded and grabbed Asami’s hand before leading them out of the living room.

They walked through the apartment and headed down the hall where a few people were waiting for the bathroom. Jargala and Ginger’s bedroom was at the end of it.

Korra turned the knob and groaned.

“It’s locked.”

“Is someone in there?”

Jargala and Ginger would have a field day if there was. They probably just locked it so no one would go in.”
“Ah. Well, if that’s the case, move aside.”

Asami stepped toward the door and reached up to pull a bobby pin out of her hair.

“I never took you for a lock picker,” Korra said.

“One of my many hidden talents.” Asami looked at her with a smile before turning her attention back to the door. More seconds passed by and then Korra heard the sound of a click. Asami turned the knob and opened the door.

“Looks like you were right,” she said. “No one’s in here.”

“Wow. Be sure to tell me more about those other hidden talents of yours.”

They walked into the dark room and Korra closed the door, locking it again before turning on the lights. It was messy inside, but Korra didn’t bring them to the room for that. She walked over to the double doors leading out to the patio and opened one of them.

“This kind of reminds me of my place,” Asami commented as she walked outside, shivering from the cold as she did, but it wasn’t freezing to the point of being unbearable. Korra watched her walk over to the balcony and look over it. The music from inside could still be heard, along with the neighbors below them having their own New Year’s Eve gathering.

“Is this quiet enough?” she asked.

Asami turned around, her hair blowing out of her face with the wind.

“It’s perfect,” she said with a smile and reached for Korra’s hand again. Korra took it and walked forward, right into Asami’s arms and they hugged for a while, keeping each other warm.

This was exactly what Korra needed. Not some loud party with a bunch of people she barely knew. Just peace and quiet while holding Asami in her arms.

“Why did we decide to come here again?” she asked out loud.

Asami laughed quietly. “Because it sounded fun, which it is, but…”

“But?”

Asami pulled away finally, but she used her finger to play with a piece of Korra’s hair.

“I think just being here with you, alone like this, is enough for me.”

“You’d crush poor Ginger’s heart if she heard you say that.”

Asami laughed again. “I don’t mean it like that. I like all of your friends, and it makes me happy that they’re so accepting of you and me together like this.”

“It’s not like I’d give them any choice on whether to like it or not,” Korra said and put her hands to Asami’s hips. She gave her a curious look.

“What?” Asami asked.

“Did you really mean what you said back there?”

“About what?”
“That you’ll stay for as long as I’ll have you?”

Asami rubbed her hands over Korra’s shoulders.

“Of course I did,” she said.

“And what if I wanted you around for, say, a really long time?” Korra questioned.

Asami looked up, pretending like she was thinking about it. She met Korra’s gaze with bright eyes.

“Then I’d say good. Because I never planned on leaving anytime soon in the first place.”

Korra pulled her closer and tilted her head up, with Asami meeting her halfway. When their lips met, Korra felt her entire being light up. Her eyes fluttered shut and she let herself be consumed by Asami while giving back twice as much. She felt Asami shiver after she accidentally brushed her hand under Asami’s shirt, lifting it and exposing her flesh to the cold. Instead of pulling back, Asami ran her fingers through the back of Korra’s hair and pressed their mouths firmer together. She grew more confident with every kiss, just as much as Korra became more comfortable with giving herself over to someone completely; trusting them completely.

They broke apart for air finally but kept their foreheads pressed together. Korra could feel her heart pounding extra hard and she took a couple of deep breaths to get herself under control. On the tip of her tongue, those words threatened to leave her mouth again, but she swallowed them down. To her surprise, though, Asami uttered three different words to her.

“Happy birthday, Korra.”

All of her thoughts ceased to matter in that moment and she opened her eyes to look at Asami in surprise.

“You remembered?” she asked.

Asami gave her an endearing look and tenderly brushed her hand against Korra’s cheek.

“I remember everything about you,” she whispered.

Korra inhaled deeply, feeling like the air left her lungs all at once.

She didn’t expect for those words to hold so much power. They made her finally see that all those years ago the feelings she just knew that only she possessed really were reciprocated. They made her realize that she’d been so wrong to think that her and Asami were meant to go down two different roads, destined to never meet again. She went into a tunnel of darkness and loneliness for a while, never thinking she’d come out of it, yet somehow she managed to find the light. And as the brightness dimmed and her eyes came into focus, she saw Asami standing there at the end, simply waiting for her to catch up.

They might have had to travel individually for a while, but they were supposed to end up right back here, synched up on the same road headed to who knew where; together.

Asami reached up to wipe at the tears in Korra’s eyes.

“Why are you crying?” she asked in a comforting voice.

Korra sniffed and looked down with the shake of her head.

“Because I…” she started. “You make me feel so many different things all at once that it gets
Asami lifted her chin and smiled. “I know the feeling. I could say the same about you, too.”

Korra watched her reach inside her jacket and pull out a white envelope. Then she handed it over.

“What’s this?” Korra asked, taking it.

“Open it and you’ll see.”

She did as Asami suggested and carefully ripped open the envelope. There were two slips of paper inside and she took them out. Looking down at them, she tried to make out what they said in the low lighting outside. When she realized what they were, her eyes widened.

“Florence?” she said.

“Yeah. Have you ever been?”

“No.” Korra shook her head.

“I figured you’d want to go visit in the Spring, maybe? The art and architecture are amazing there, and I’m sure you’d love it.”

“There’s another ticket in here,” Korra said, a little dumbfounded, and looked up.

Asami brushed her blowing hair out of her face. “Yeah… I thought I’d join you, if that’s okay?”

Inhaling deeply, Korra rubbed her lips together and nodded.

“Of course it’s okay. But what about Future Industries? These tickets are for three whole weeks.”

“I’ve… decided that I want to take a leave of absence in a few months to figure some stuff out about what I want to do.”

“You’re not giving the company up, are you?” Korra asked, completely stunned.

“Definitely not. I’m not ready for that. I still have a lot of things that I’m eager to do, but I realized that I should start doing some things for myself, too. I’m only 25 years old and I kind of want to start living the life I’ve been deprived of for several years now. I wanna travel and not be in stressful situations every single day, but I also wanna spend time with you; away from this place and somewhere a lot more peaceful…”

Korra looked down at the two tickets again.

“Thank you,” she said. “I don’t even know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything. I’m just happy you like it.”

Korra put the tickets back in the envelope and then reached for Asami, pulling her in for another hug.

“Like it?” she whispered. “I love it.”

“I love you.”

This time, Korra really did feel the air leave her lungs and her heart stop. She was unsure if she
misheard those words or if they were a figment of her imagination. Slowly, she pulled herself out of Asami’s hold to stare at her.

“What?” she asked, sounding out of breath.

Asami’s eyes were wide with shock.

“Oh my God. I-I’m sorry,” she apologized. “That just—It slipped out of my mouth and I wasn’t supposed to say it out loud…”

“Uh… that’s okay,” Korra said, and it surprised her that she could even speak right now. "You can take it back if you want."

Asami continued to stare at her, but her expression turned far less horrified and more nervous.

“No, that's not what I want,” she said. "In fact, now that I said it… I kind of wanna say it again,” she said.

Korra knew she looked like a gaping fish when Asami cupped her cheeks and looked her deeply in the eyes.

“I love you, Korra,” she said.

Korra watched her lips the entire time and heard the words come out of her mouth, yet it still gave her this unreal, out of body experience. But when Asami leaned down and kissed her again, her soft, wonderful lips moving against hers, she allowed herself to really feel it and realize that nothing about this could be imaginary.

A small whimper left her mouth as Asami kissed her with so much passion and heat. It was like she was pouring her heart out through that one kiss alone, and it shook everything inside Korra’s body, including her soul. Her pulse sped up, her knees weakened, and her heart filled with so much happiness that she started crying again.

When they parted and she looked at Asami, she saw that there were a few tears in her eyes, as well. After a moment, she reached back into her coat pocket.

“There’s something else I have,” she said, wiping at her eyes.

“I think you’ve won the award for best birthday gift ever already,” Korra said.

“Don’t worry. It’s something for the both of us.”

She pulled whatever was inside her pocket out and opened her hand.

Again, Korra’s eyes widened.

“You… kept it?” she asked.

Asami nodded. “I stupidly put it into storage with my other belongings when I got rid of the house. It took me forever to find.”

“So… When you said you were busy this week and ‘staying late for work…’ It was really because you were looking for this?”

“Yeah. Sorry. I didn’t mean to shrug you off like that. I just really wanted to find it, and luckily I did. Just in the nick of time, too.”
Korra finally took the bracelet out of Asami’s hands. It still had that smooth, marble feel to it, and
the chain looked like it’d been freshly shined. She went through every single stone, looking at the
symbols and remembering their significance.

“All of it still applies,” she said.

“Can you put it on for me?” Asami asked.

Korra nodded and waited for Asami to raise one of her arms and pull her sleeve back. When her
wrist was exposed, Korra wasted no time securing the bracelet around it. The charms dangled off
her wrist like they always belonged there.

When she looked up, she saw Asami’s eyes shining under the balcony light, reminding her of all
those long years ago when she first put the bracelet on. It gave her so much hope for them to move
forward, and made it a lot less hard to hold back the words she probably should have said a long
time ago.

“I love you, too.”

This time, she watched Asami take in a deep breath and her bottom lip quiver. She grabbed Korra’s
hand and threaded their fingers together.

“I almost thought you wouldn’t say it back,” she spoke softly.

“I have a tendency to take a little too long with admitting my feelings.”

“That's okay. I would've waited... I’ll always wait for you.”

Korra smiled and brushed a tendril of hair away from Asami’s face. “Always?”

Asami nodded. “Just try not to keep me waiting for another seven or eight years.”

Korra laughed. “Deal.”

They shared a long kiss and even longer hug before heading back inside to the party and enjoying
the rest of the night. The entire time, Asami stayed right by Korra’s side, and it gave Korra so
much security. This woman, her best friend, the first person to ever make her believe in herself,
gave her so much more than just feeling grounded. She provided all of those things Korra never
thought she could give or receive in return: support, guidance, trust, and unconditional love. It
might have taken her awhile to realize she could have them, but now that she did, she wouldn’t
take them for granted ever again.

As the final countdown began and the new year rang in, with more hugs and kisses shared, Korra
felt the telling of a new beginning; a new start. And while none of it would be easy and she'd have
to work hard at it every single day, she couldn't have been more prepared for it.

She went so long believing that her life ended before she even had the chance to live it, but she
couldn’t have been more wrong.

This was living. And if she was only now realizing that, then maybe her real life was just getting
started.

Roll with the Punches [END]
Chapter End Notes

Their story continues on in Roll With the Punches (Series)

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