The Whitechapel Avatar

by HumbleCommoner

Summary

Set in Whitechapel, circa 1888. Korra and Bolin are browbeaten detectives working in London's H-division. The east end is swarming with gangsters, pick-pockets, and the world's most notorious serial-killer. Sent to investigate another grizzly crime the pair are left with a body, few clues, and a beautiful if uncooperative witness. With little to work with Korra must try her hardest to catch the killer before he strikes again, while navigating the treachery of people that don't want her help, and keeping her former partner in line.

Not a straight Romance fic. You have to earn your fluff.

Notes

I was compelled to write this after finishing the wonderful Ripper Street by the BBC. It's basically a rewrite with a few twists thrown in to change up the story a little. Please be kind as I'm new to this and just looking to get a few pointers. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
The carriage bumped along the cobble streets. Out the window Korra could see people going about their lives just like every other day. Above the clip-clop of hooves and the rattling of the wheels she could hear the various street dealers plying their wares to anyone who passed. Fruit-sellers, fishmongers, bakers, and paperboys each contended to be the loudest voice in the throng. Everything seemed normal.

Only, nothing was. Everywhere she looked there was an undercurrent of fear running through everything. No children played in the street. The people walked in pairs or more, especially the women, only one of whom she had seen walking without an escort.

Perhaps the most marked change was that the city's beggars appeared to have vanished like a card up a street magician's sleeve. At one point you couldn't go more than half a block without some poor soul begging you for any scrap of coin or food you could spare.

Now though, none could be seen, having all moved on to greener, safer pastures. Everyone knew why. It was on the front page of every paper rag in London: Whitechapel Killer Strikes Again! Somehow the reporters of Fleet Street seemed to learn of crimes faster than the actual Police these days. They also all managed to wrangle all of the fastest cabs.

“What do ya think?” her partner asked from across the small gap as the wheels jolted on a pothole.

“We'll have to wait til we get there, Bo,” she said, turning from the passing street and back to him. His young, boyish face was creased with lines of worry. Neither of them had been getting much sleep lately and his face showed it much more than hers. The bags under his eyes spoke of long sleepless nights combing the streets with no results.

It was so frustrating.

“I know you better than that, Korra,” he pressed. His eyes darted left and right, as though checking for eavesdroppers. “It's him, isn't it?”

Rubbing her eyes, the detective tried to banish her tiredness and maybe relieve some small amount of stress. “I don't know, Bo,” she admitted, starting to rub her cheeks. For a second she allowed her eyes to close. “I hope to the Spirits it's not but….”

“It probably is,” he finished. She nodded and they both let out a weary sigh. With a rustling of cloth Bolin lifted the edge of his jacket and drew out his flask. A quiet clinking as he opened the top and took a deep swig. After he gulped down a couple of mouthfuls of the liquid he offered it to her. Following suit she pressed her lips to the brim and tilted her head back.

The taste of cheap whiskey flooded her mouth and burned her throat as she swallowed. Every policeman Korra had met since she had joined the force had his own way of dealing with the stress and horrors they faced. The most common one, by far, was drink. A long evening in a pub or a quick steal from a flask like this one went a long way in helping make their job bearable. It helped numb the pain of the lives they failed to protect and eased the memories of the criminals that got away.

This man wouldn't be one of them, she swore. He would be her white whale. To be hunted to the
ends of the earth and dragged to the Old Bailey in chains to face the hanging judge.

“We'll catch him,” her partner comforted, taking back his flask and putting it back in his jacket.

“I know we will,” she agreed, turning her head back to the people of Whitechapel.

She wondered how many of them now spent the night with one eye awake while the other rested. How many fathers refused to let their daughters out of the house for fear they would become the next victim? It had to end, soon.

It was only a couple of minutes until the cab started to slow. The crowd outside had begun to thicken and grow more rowdy. Men and women jostled to be the closest one to the scene of the crime. From her relatively high vantage point Korra could see a thin line of black-hatted bobbies desperately trying to hold the baying crowd at bay.

“Get back!” one of them ordered, shoving a man that had tried to duck around him roughly.

“Jeez, these people look like they're about to riot,” Bolin noticed, leaning close to the door so he could see better.

“Can you blame them?” she asked, looping her hand around the handle and twisting. The moment she did so the back couple of ranks turned on them. In an instant they became the new target for abuse.

“Filthy pigs!” one woman cried, shaking her fist at them. Korra gritted her teeth and stepped down from the relative safety of the cab into the throng of Londoners.

“Move aside!” Bolin demanded behind her, back foot still on the step down.

“Fuck you!” a young man hurled back, cocking back his hand to throw a clod of dirt that explode in a shower against the side of the cab as it started to pull away. The driver hadn't even waited for them to pay their fare before pulling away as fast as he could manage to avoid the screaming mob. “You lot spend more time haulin' in people like us than bein' useful, so why should we do anythin' for you?”

“How 'bout I haul you in for assaulting an officer, kid?” Bolin offered taking one step towards the teen. “Then we'll see how useful you are.”

It took less than a second for the kid to turn on his heel and bolt. Frankly, what her friend had done was a favor. Most officers in the city would have dropped everything to haul in someone like him. Rather than waste precious time, however, her fellow Detective preferred to give troublemakers a quick scare and something to think about, instead. Unfortunately, he wasn't the only person with something to say.

“I knew this would 'appen,” an old man with thinning grey hair proclaimed loudly, “I knew that this'd 'appen the minute they let a woman on the force. Back in my day the only job a woman'd 'ave in the station was bringing tea!”

There was a clamor of accent from several of the other men and even a pair of older women. It was the straw that broke Korra's back. Every day since joining the force she'd had to put up with people like him. From street rats, to hardened neck breakers, and even her fellow officers. No one had given her a break in the last seven years. Raava take her before she would let this old fart do the same.

“It ain't your day anymore, you old geezer!” she unleashed, getting right up in his face. “Times
have changed and I'm here to stay, so either move out of my way or I'll move your sorry carcass for you!"

“B-beggin' yer pardon's, Ma'am,” the old man simpered before shuffling off with his tail between his legs.

“Now, every one here who isn't a witness, an officer, or a corpse CLEAR OFF!” she barked over the shouts and jeers of the crowd.

Every head on the block turned to look at her as a stunned silence broke out. Shortly thereafter the throng began to disperse back into the shops and alleys and overcrowded apartments with only moderate amounts of grumbling.

“Phew,” Bolin sighed as the tension in the air started to abate. Looking around he patted his partner on the back. “Good job. Remind me to take you with me next time Opal sends me shopping. I can have you clear the entire market district.”

“Fat chance, Bo,” she tossed back, “You just want me there so I have to help you carry things.”

“What're friends for?” he shrugged as they made their way through a much thinned out crowd. “Besides, I can treat you to that place on the highstreet your always goin' on about.”

“I'll think about it,” she offered, already having decided on a definite no.

“That's all I'm asking,” he promised, coming to a halt at the ring of policemen barring their advance. “Morning gents, Detective Bolin and Inspector Waters here to inspect the scene. If you don't mind?”

“Can I see some identification, please?” the sergeant on the line asked. “Already had one of those vultures from the Times try and pull that earlier.”

After flashing the man their papers he let them through the line and into the area beyond. The building, 13 Miller's Court, looked just the same as all the others in Whitchapels rookeries: old, decrepit, and hopelessly overcrowded. Even from the outside, though, it already held an even darker aura than those around it.

“Have you been inside?” Korra asked the senior officer, hoping to know what to be ready for. The previous killings had been terrible but nothing she couldn't handle. But something, deep in her gut, her very soul warned her of what she was about to see.

“Uh, no, Ma'am,” the man replied sheepishly. His eyes darted to the door and a look of utter dread crossed his face. Perhaps she wasn't the only person whose body was being repelled.

“Is there anyone who has?” Bolin inquired, shuffling nervously in the cold.

“Um, Johnson has, Sir,” the sergeant said nodding to a particularly shell-shocked looking young bobbie slightly farther down the line. “First one here he was, in fact. He can show you up.”

“I ain't going back in there,” the constable refused, turning to look at them blankly.

“Come on now, Johnson,” his superior urged, in as firm a voice as he could manage. Even so, the mere thought of that which laid inside caused his words to shake slightly. “There's work to be done, boy, and you're the one to be doin' it.”

Johnson shook his head so hard it made Korra dizzy to even look at. “I ain't goin' back in their,
sarge. Ain't no power on god's green earth that'll make me cross that threshold again. Not man, nor beast,” the young officer babbled. Then, as though in a trance he fixed his empty, unseeing eyes directly on Korra's. “It ain't natural, Ma'am, I'm telling you. It ain't natural. No way a man can do something like that to a person. Work of the devil, it has to be. That there is Satan's work.”

Everyone shook their heads at the idea and yet no one bothered to argue. After he finished his refusal Johnson turned his face back out towards the street and stared blankly at the building opposite.

“Someone take that man to see a doctor,” Korra ordered, distraught to see someone reduced to such a state just by the sight of something. “He's in shock. After that, take him straight home and make sure he gets some rest and make sure someone stays with him. We'll need him to give a statement.”

“Yes Ma'am,” one of the other officers acknowledged, before gathering the broken man up under his arm and leading him off down the street. “Come along now, Johnson. You'll be fine.”

All Johnson could do in reply was moan and mutter. Just before they got out of earshot the sound of sobs could be heard.

“Lead the way, Sergeant,” Korra prompted once they had moved on. With a grimace the man nodded and started to lead them inside.

Chapter End Notes

So, how was that? I'm looking for tips and advice, so please, feel free to comment whether you liked it or not.
The Sad Case of Miss Mary Kelly

Chapter Summary

Korra and Bolin investigate the fifth of the "Canonical Five" Ripper murders.

Chapter Notes

For those of you with a weak constitution, skipping this chapter may be a good idea. I've tried not to be too vivid in my depiction but this was one of the most vicious killings in history, so reader be warned. Not for the faint of heart. This should be the most graphic thing in this fic so next chapter will be back to regular programming.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even after setting one foot in the front door every nerve in Korra's body was telling her to leave. Run even, right out the door, never to look back. The walls seemed to seep with evil and everything inside was cast with shadow despite the flickering of several gas lamps.

"This place gives me the creeps," Bolin shivered, one step behind her. Slowly he took his hat off and began playing with the brim, a telltale sign of his growing apprehension.

"You and me both," she agreed, trying to block out the hammering of blood in her ears. Every step forwards made her stomach roil more and more. Suddenly the whiskey had become more of a threat than a comfort. Seeking a distraction she chose to dig for any bit of information she could. "Have we got a name for the victim yet?"

"The landlord said the room is rented to a Mary Reed." the sergeant reported, taking a turn and heading for the stairs. "Mid-twenties, pays all her bills on time, seemed like a good girl."

"Was she married?" Korra asked. If she was they might just have a chance this wasn't Jack's work.

"No, Ma'am," he replied taking each step as slowly as he dared. When they reached the landing he turned and looked sheepishly at the detectives. "But, uh, apparently she, well..." he paused to rub the back of his neck. "She had several friends, if you catch my drift. Men-folk she'd, ahem, entertain."

"You mean she was a hooker?" Bolin clarified, tipping his hat back on top of his head.

"Y-yes sir," he mumbled back before continuing up the stairs.

"That fits the profile," her fellow detective whispered in Korra's ear. She nodded just enough for Korra's to see. A familiar hollow feeling was beginning to take hold again. Another life she failed to save, another death to weigh on her conscience.

"Who found the body?" she asked, shaking her head to clear it.

"A visitor called around half an hour ago. She saw that the door was open and went inside, found
Miss Kelly,” the older man informed them. They had reached the floor now. At the far end of the hall two uniformed constables stood watch over the open door. One of them had tear lines stretching down his face and the other held a handkerchief over his nose and mouth. “She ran outside and flagged down Constable Johnson. We have her down in the building manager’s room so you can question her.”

“Thank you, Sergeant,” Korra said as they reached the door. There they paused again. The Detective scanned the doorframe for any mark of forced entry. Rather than finding one she saw a note scribbled in chalk.

*Our people will no longer be ignored*

“Make sure this is erased,” she noted. The last thing she needed was anti-Semitic riots breaking out on top of everything else on H-Division's plate. Whitechapel's status as London's defacto Jewish quarter already had tempers at a simmer, with both sides blaming the other for every act of crime as an attempt to force the other out.

“Yes, Inspector,” the man with the cloth over his face acknowledged in a muffled voice.

“Why don't the two of you take five?” Bolin recommended patting the man with remnants on tears on the shoulder.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Thank you, sir.” they both chorused before moving towards the stairs as fast as they could without breaking into a jog. Both men tossed glances back at the door with the same haunted look Johnson had given her.

With nothing else in their way the trio made that fateful step into the hell beyond.

A single candle flickered faintly on a small table close to the wall providing the only light in the dim, cramped room. The stove was dark and cold, it's door hung open and a small amount of ash and cinder scattered on the floor nearby. Mixing with it was a darkening spattering of red. As she turned her head to the left the infrequent drops became thicker and more dense. The closer to the bed she looked the more other than blood she saw. Clumps of feathers and scraps of bedding stained a dark crimson, until finally they formed a single scarlet puddle. She swallowed as she saw what could only be slivers of flesh laying on the dust covered floor.

“Oh, dear god,” the sergeant breathed. There was the sound of shoes slamming on floorboards as the man bolted out the door. Once he's outside the sound of retching echoes through the abandoned halls and a gut roiling spattering as the contents of the officer's stomach painting the ground.

The body, if you could even call it that, lay on the bed. Tattered remains of a camisole could be seen laying limply on the rended frame. Within it was pure horror.

It looked more like an animal attack than a murder. Kelly's face was barely recognizable as such. Her throat slashed so deeply that it barely attached her head to the rest of the body. Everything below that looked like the girl had ended up on the wrong side of a cannon.

Nothing was where it should be. Her breasts were gone, organs arrayed in a sickening display of psychotic care. Blood and gore stretched from head to toe and yet it lacked the panicked haste of the others. The killer had taken his time to do this, Korra had seen what he could manage in just fifteen minutes and this went far beyond all that. He had taken his time and enjoyed himself.

“Bo, I want you to see if you can find anyone who lives in the building,” she said, tearing her eyes
from the mutilation and fixing them on her partner. “I'm going to see what I can find here.”

His head was shaking in disbelief and a thin grimace replaced his normal cheerful smile. “You won't hear any arguments from me,” he said, turning to exit in a more dignified way than his predecessor. “Don't take too long, Opal is expecting us for lunch at my place.”

“Leave it to you to be thinking about food,” she scolded halfheartedly. Korra couldn't really blame him for trying to be jovial. It kept the screaming at bay.

“A man's gotta eat!” he called down the hall, “Oh, and there's vomit on the floor now. That's great.”

“Time to get to work,” she muttered, taking a few deep breaths and stepping towards the bed. Up close the damage was even worse. The poor woman's belly was laid open like a pig in a slaughterhouse. Even a quick scan with her limited knowledge revealed that several organs, or parts of them were missing. The ghostly bone of her right thigh extended from a gaping hole stretching from her groin almost to the knee. The accompanying muscle was arrayed close to the head.

Stifling her own stomach took effort. The waste of it all was what struck her most. If the owner was right the victim was nearly the same age as herself. All those years ahead of her. Friend's, a family, marriage, children, grandchildren all ripped away by some maniac with a knife and a motive only he or someone equally deranged could even hope to imagine. An entire future lost, for nothing. It didn't take an active imagination for her to imagine her own face replacing that of Mary's.

Eyes stared blankly off into the distance. All Korra could hope was that it had been quick. That there hadn't been time to feel pain, or fear. “I'm so sorry,” she said softly hoping that some part of the victim's spirit could hear her. “I'll find who did this to you, I promise.”

On the small bedside table were another collection of viscera and a small silver locket. Careful not to disturb what looked to be a coil of intestine and part of a liver she lifted the bauble from it's resting place. Flipping it open she studied the inside. A small mirror on one side reflected the old photograph of a family—mother, father, and daughter—dressed up in their Sunday best.

“Not a robbery,” Korra noted flipping the locket closed and gently replacing it.

Not surprising. While most killings in the city tended to be muggings gone wrong, gang scraps, or domestic violence reaching a final conclusion, the man who called himself Jack had always had a different m.o. He enjoyed his work, savored it.

Korra's stomach threatened to rebel once more but she forced it back down again. Focus on the facts, she told herself, repeating the mantra her teacher had drummed into his protégés.

What were the facts? The door wasn't broken and the lock hadn't appeared tampered with. Meaning that Miss Kelly had either left her door unlocked or had allowed in or brought her assailant with her. She was in a state of undress, perhaps prepared to do the deed with a client: either Jack or someone else. The clothes might tell the tale.

She found them folded neatly on a chair not far from the bed. They were mostly clean, she noticed. Lifting the first layer the coat below found only faint seep-through. That meant she had already taken them off when she was killed. But the more she looked the more Korra noticed something was missing. Going farther down, she counted the garments. Shiff, dress, jacket. Where was the rest? “You've got to be here somewhere.”

Standing, the detective surveyed the rest of the room. “Stove,” she exclaimed, seeing the burnt
skeleton of a corset just sticking out of the door. “Now why would you do that, Jack?”

Crossing the room she knelt down next to the heater. Pressing her hand against the iron she felt the heat being sucked out of her body. Stone cold. The fire must have died during the night. “What were you trying to hide?” reaching her hand in Korra began to pull out bits of half burnt clothing. Most of the corset was burned to a cinder apart from the metal ribs. The ash covered remains of a petticoat were next, followed by what looked by a shoe. Some newspapers and half-charred wood and coal. “There has to be something!” she growled, now just pulling ash and debris out onto the floor.

Then, she saw it, fluttering out onto the pile. One single sheet of paper.

Reverently, Korra lifted it with both hands and stared at it. The parchment was singed at the edges but remained mostly intact. Blowing softly she scattered the dust from it’s face.

The Equalist Society of London invites you to join us in ----- will remake th----- world.

“Where's the rest of it?” she demanded, rifling through the mess. But her search was interrupted by the sounds of multiple sets of footsteps heading in her direction. Swiftly, she tucked the piece of paper into her pocket and tossed as much of the ash back in the stove as possible.

“Hey, Korra, the doc's hear,” Bolin said, poking his head around the corner.

“Come on in,” she replied casually, picking at the remains of the corset as though she had just found it. Her partner entered first, followed by the doctor and who she took to be his assistant. “I just found this in here.”

“What d'ya think, giving himself light to work?” the other detective asked, stepping over to examine the garment for himself.

“Maybe, or it might just be more mutilation,” she reasoned, dancing around what else she found inside, “Look, he only burned the underwear.”

“Maybe he just didn't like the style?”

“A fashion conscious serial killer, really?”

“It wouldn't be the weirdest thing we've seen,” he argued, turning over a bit of burnt cloth and rubbing it between his fingers until it crumbled to dust. Turning to look at her, he cracked a smile. “Remember that burglar we caught who thought he was the Duke of Gloucester?”

“No, that was the Duke of Cambridge,” she refuted standing up and stretching her back. “The peeping tom was Gloucester.”

“Oh that's right.” he remembered copying his friend's motions until a puzzled look crossed his face. Scratching his chin he asked, “If the peeping tom was Gloucester, who was the mugger?”

“Abraham Lincoln.”

“Who?”

“That American president that got shot during their Civil War.”

“No wonder I can't remember the guy, he thought he was somebody I never heard of before,” Bolin marveled as the pair of them returned to the body. The doctor was hunched closely over the
remains while his assistant hovered nearby taking note of everything his senior said.

“Excuse me detectives?” the doctor asked suddenly gently picking up one of the coils of guts and turning it over in his hands. “Could you tell me exactly how long this woman has been dead?”

“We were kind of hoping you could tell us that, Doc,” Bolin said rubbing his hands together and doing his best to avoid looking into Mary's lifeless eyes.

“Oh, yes, of course,” he murmured, turning back to his work. Korra noticed that he mostly made vague observations that he rattled off to his young follower. A cut here, color of the blood there. He had no idea what he was doing.

“Excuse me, Doctor…”

“Phillips, young lady,” he introduced turning and extending his hand to shake. One look at it and Korra and Bolin both refused to return the gesture. For his part the doctor realized his mistake and quickly drew out a handkerchief on which to wipe the blood. “My apologies, this is the fourth one of these bodies I've examined so far and my mind is a bit…scattered.”

“You've examined other bodies?” Korra asked turning her head to get another angle of the man's face. Something about it looked vaguely familiar, but she couldn't quite place it.

“Yes, I'm H-Division's surgeon,” he revealed returning to the body. “I preformed the autopsies on the Chapman, Stride, and Eddowes cases but I wanted to examine this girl before she was moved in case something might be lost.”

“How very dedicated of you,” she deadpanned back. She had read those autopsy reports. Each one of them had made wildly different conclusions from nearly identical injuries. Apart from different levels of disembowelment and varying levels of haste all of the killings had been nearly identical. But to this Dr. Phillips the exact placement and depth of the wounds implied either great or no medical expertise, seemingly at random. It had taken all of her, Bolin, and their fellow detective Reid's influence to convince Scotland Yard that the murders were all connected in the first place. Even with all of their effort and the support of Tenzin they still hadn't managed to officially connect a series of dismembered prostitutes that had been fished out of the Thames and one out of the basement of the new police headquarters.

“Well, we can assume that the cause of death was the same as the others,” he concluded finally with only a few seconds more examination. “Throat slashed before the abdominal cavity was opened and the organs removed.”

“Tremendous work, Doctor,” Korra praised sarcastically, giving the man a slow clap for his troubles, “and here we'd all been thinking the reverse.”

Bolin snorted and threw up his hand over his mouth to hide the big smile that crossed his face.

“Now see hear, young lady, I happen to be a highly respected physician,” Phillips protested standing to his full height that only barely reached Korra's. His beard and mustache bristled with indignation and his eyes stared daggers at the detective.

“Oh, yeah? Where'd you get your degree, the lost and found section of The Strand?” she taunted back.

“Young lady-”

“It's Inspector,” she said forcefully, “I earned my star.”
“Very well, Inspector,” he spat straightening his coat and spinning to face the door, “If you are so unimpressed by my work you can find another surgeon to take on these disgusting cases.”

“Fine!” she called after him, shaking her fist. Looking over, she saw the assistant looking at her intently, almost creepily so. “What're you waiting for, get out!”

In a flash the young man run's out after his boss. Raised voices can be heard from down the hall as the old man vents his frustration while his assistant tried to calm him.

“Dumbass,” she grumbled, pinching the bridge of her nose. It was no wonder they couldn't find their man with people like this involved. That man looked like he could bungle tying his shoes in the morning, let alone a medical exam.

“You okay?” Bolin asked as his grin faded with the thumping footsteps. “I haven't seen you like this in years.”

“You think I can look at that and be okay?” Korra said, pointing at the horrid pit of inhumanity on the bed. “That makes at least five women this bastard has carved up in less than a year. We're no closer to catching them now than we were after the first killing. It's so frustrating!”

“I know,” her partner sighs, looking sadly at her. The weariness in his eyes makes him look years older. It seemed like so long ago when he walked down the aisle with the woman of his dreams, flanked by friends and Opal's extended family. “Every time we come do this, I want it to be the last. Every night I go to sleep hoping I'll wake up and all we have to deal with is gambling dens and bartenders watering down the booze.”

“Wouldn't that be the life?” Korra pondered, dreaming of such simple problems.

“Yeah,” he agreed, giving their victim one last solemn look before heading meaningfully for the door. “Let's get out of here. I don't want my wife to see me all depressed.”

Chapter End Notes

It has come to my attention after writing this that poor Miss Kelly lived on the first floor, not the second and that her room opened directly onto the square, not in a hall. Whoops! Sorry for being terrible but I really didn't want to rewrite the entire chapter. Consider it a bit of artistic license to build some additional dread.

P.S. If anyone can give some tips as to formatting the text, I would be grateful. I type this in a word doc and paste it over and I makes a lot of things go weird.
The Testimony of Miss 'Amy Smith'

Chapter Summary

Korra's stressed and finds an outlet interrogating the mystery woman who stumbled upon her crime scene.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The building managers room was barely bigger than the one they had just left. The only additions she could see was a door leading into what appeared to be a small washroom and a standing dresser against the wall. It was cleaner, but then again the fish-market was cleaner than what she just seen.

But the one thing that stood out more than anything was who was sitting in the chair next to the tiny table. She was young, either Korra's age or somewhere thereabout. Her hair was black and glossy, worn loose under a hat the detective would never be caught in but was no doubt at the height of fashion for daily wear. Piercing green eyes gazed at her from beneath long, decadent lashes set in skin so pale and flawless that her very presence in this slum was setting off all the alarm bells in Korra's head. To put it lightly, she was beautiful, gorgeous even.

You don't belong here, Korra though to herself in a brief moment of stunned silence. The dress the woman wore likely cost two month's of her pay, likely more, with the necklace around her throat being worth more than a year's.

“Wow,” Bolin sighed, clearly as taken as his partner.

Giving him a quick elbow to the ribs, she took off her hat and announced herself. “Excuse me, Miss.” The woman looked up from what appeared to be a cup of cold tea to look at them. Those sharp green eyes studied them momentarily before settling on Korra. Clearing her throat the detective continued. “I'm Detective Waters and this is Detective Bolin.”

“You don't belong here,” she greeted in a soft melodic voice that managed to fit her beauty despite how it threatened to shake.

“We'd like you to answer a few questions,” Bolin continued for her as she studied the witness's response. Apart from a slight change in her breathing there was none. She was handling herself better than most of her officers.

“Sit, please,” she offered like this was her own home.

“Thank you,” both of the detectives accepted, taking chairs opposite her. Korra took a little more time to study the woman. Up close she was even more impressive. Pristine makeup enhanced an already stunning face. Violet eyeshadow, pinkened cheeks, and deep red lips. No tear lines tarnished the appearance as the young lady had managed to stay remarkably dry eyed. She looked more like a painting that should be hung in a museum than a Whitechapel native.

“You don't belong here,” she offered like this was her own home.

“Could you tell us your name, please?” she asked, drawing out her pencil and notebook.

“Amy Smith.”
Load of shit. It's gonna be one of those. “Alright, how about an address, please?” she continued, writing down the name before adding a big A with a circle around it.

“None.”

“Ma’am, we're police officers, not reporters,” Korra explained, tapping the end of her pencil on the table. “We just need to know anything relevant that might help us with finding whoever did that to Miss Kelly.”

“And my personal information does that how?” Miss 'Smith' inquired calmly. It was to be expected. Distrust followed you everywhere in this city if you had a badge.

Taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly the senior detective continued her questioning. “Did you know the deceased?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“We worked together,” the finely dressed woman said without batting an eye. Korra could barely keep from rolling her own. The only way these two had worked together was if Kelly had lived a previous life as a domestic servant. Even without looking she could tell this lady had only held something as heavy duty as a pen. “In a garment factory on the river. It burned down last year and I hadn't seen her since. Then she popped up a few weeks ago and invited me over for a drink. This was the first day I've had off to accept.”

Korra left that for a second, waiting to see if she added anything else to her story. An utter falsehood, she decided. Why was it always like this? Was there one person in this fucking city that would just give her a straight answer?

“So, you expect us to believe you came to this neighborhood, dressed like that, at 10:30 in the morning to have a drink with a prostitute?” she asked with subtle, if obvious, disbelief. Dotting her i's and crossing her t's, the blue-eyed woman looked up to stare deeply into that green and check for any hint of a lie.

With a sniff Miss Smith pushed her tea away and looked right back with stern determination. “I don't care if you believe me, Inspector,” she said just as flatly as before. “It's the truth.”

“Did you come here to employ Miss Kelly?” Korra asked with growing hostility leaning in closer and enunciating every word carefully.

“In what way?” the other woman responded with equal venom. Korra just gave her a knowing smile back and 'Smith's' eyes went wide with surprise and fury. “I resent that accusation, Inspector Waters. I expect you to keep them to yourself.”

For a moment they just stared at each other intently in a test of wills. Neither of them lost an inch and neither gained anything either.

“Alright then,” Bolin relented to ease the tension. Both women turned their gaze on him and he shrank away like a withered flower. “So, how did you find the body?”

“The same way you did,” she replied testily, returning her glare to the senior detective. “Or were you going to accuse me of that too?”

“Of course not,” Korra replied with honeyed fire, “You might crack a nail.”
“Why you-”

“Korra, I think you should go check on those neighbors,” Bolin recommended, jumping in between them to stop the escalation from reaching blows. It was his way of telling her to go cool off. To be honest she needed it. She wasn't feeling like herself. “Maybe you can whip the boys into casing the street. See if we can find any other leads.”

“Yeah, I'll do that,” she grumbled, backing down from her staring match. At least her opponent failed to provide the satisfied smirk she expected.

Still, as she gathered her hat and headed for the door she could feel the eyes staring a hole in the back of her head. Everything about that woman drove Korra up the wall. So prim and proper looking, with long seductive eyelashes, full lips, and the face of a china doll. She probably had heels on even though it wasn't a special occasion. Just a pretty little princess.

Slamming the door behind her helped. Cricking her neck helped even more, each pop relieving a day's worth of stress.

The hustle and bustle outside had picked up slightly with uniforms moving up and down, knocking on doors, checking the floor, walls and even ceiling for evidence. A bit pointless, that last one, but at least they were trying. Grabbing one of them, Korra started to dictate orders. “Sergeant, I want men going door-to-door. Check every building for three block in all directions, someone has to have seen her on the way home.”

“Yes, Ma'am.”

“I want people to check every gambling hall, pub, brothel, and shop for ten blocks,” Korra continued, grabbing the man by the arm and leading him outside. The air around her felt rotten and she hoped a little sunshine might help clear her head. “Ask if she's had any arguments, debts, missed appointments, stuff like that.”

“Ma'am-”

“And work over the local loan sharks and pickpockets. If anyone has seen anything, they have,” she concluded. The light stung her eyes after spending so much time stuck in such a dark, depressing building,

“No offense, Inspector,” the young beat-cop interjected in a loud enough voice to get Korra to stop her train of thought for a moment. “But I don't have the men or time to spare for something like that.”

“I don't want excuses, I want results!” she barked back, immediately feeling remorse for snapping. “Sorry, I haven't been getting much sleep.”

“None of us have,” he sympathized before going off to relay the orders to the rest of his squad.

Groaning deeply to let out even more stress, the overworked detective leaned against the wall and close her eyes. Just for a moment she wanted some bit of peace. The sounds of city life soothed her, even if most of the hushed mutterings on the breeze carried a nervous intonation. It was still better than the voices that kept her up at night, the faces that haunted her dreams. Even now those cold, dead eyes stared back at her from the abyss, begging her for help and vengeance. Then, amongst the clamor a familiar voice came through. Pompous, self-absorbed, and all too sure of itself.

“Time to catch a rat,” she breathed, pushing off the wall and turning towards the sound of boasting.
“See, I told you,” her quarry reassured his fellows as they stalked the street. “The fuzz is too busy dealing with the crazies to notice us.”

“Think again, Tahno,” she declared, cocking back her fist.

The man barely had time to mutter a quiet, “Oh no,” before Korra’s fist collided with with his face, sending him tumbling back into the wall. His Wolfbats buddies looked on in shock as their leader clutched his possibly broken nose, watching blood ooze from between his fingers.

“I warned you to stay off my streets,” the policewoman chastised, readying another blow and sending it smashing into his throat, “and here I find you plotting not even half a block from a murder scene. I think we’re finally going to throw the book at you, Tahno. Judge Cartright has got a nice new gallows he wants to try out. I’m glad you’ve volunteered.”

“What’re you talking about?” he exclaimed, trying to back away but not managing to avoid the swing that connected with his right eye. “Ow, shit! I didn't kill anybody!”

“Then start talking,” she advised, kicking him in the gut and sending him sprawling down a small, filthy ridden alley. Strictly speaking she was in the green to do this kind of thing, what with her target being a known criminal, but the bad publicity sure wouldn't help their already beleaguered reputation. She could see it now ‘Detective assaults defenseless man on way to work’. The tabloids would print anything these days.

“What d’you want to know?” the pretty boy whimpered, clutching various parts of himself.

“Mary Kelly, what do you know about her?” the detective demanded, reeling her foot back to deliver a heavy blow if he failed to answer quickly. “And Raava help me, if you lie to me I'll use you as a punching bag for the rest of the day, you creep.”

“Hold on, hold on,” he begged, cowering from further punishment, “I know her, yeah. Working girl, Irish, real sweet. She likes going to that pub up down on Wentworth and getting plastered when she has a bit of cash. Last time I saw her she'd just broken up with her man 'cause she was thinkin' about getting back in the business after that place she worked at got torched.”

*That checks out, at least,* she thought, setting her foot back down and checking the fit of her jacket. “Anything else?”

“Um, I think she's got a new guy,” he rattled off, voice muffled by his bruised larynx.

“Name!”

“I don't know,” he whimpered, cowering even further.

With a sigh, Korra turned on her heel. Apart from narrowing her search a little the past five minutes had only helped wind her up more. Talking with that little slimeball was among the most irritating things she could have done, only just offset by the opportunity to pummel him. He had been the first person she had arrested all those years ago, for selling counterfeit cigarettes, and ever since she seemed to be cursed to run into him at almost every turn. Still, the spineless weasel was good for one thing, easy information. A couple of firm socks to the jaw and he'd sell out his own mother.

“Inspector Waters! Inspector Waters!” one of the constables called to her as she started to meander down the square.

“Yeah,” she huffed. All she asked for was one moment of peace.
The young man ran up to her, panting and dripping sweat. Taking a moment he wiped his brow and took a few gasping breaths. “We-hu-we found someone who says he saw the victim taking a man home with her at around 2:30 this morning,” he reported breathlessly, bending over to rest his hands on his knees. He coughed roughly, nearly retching with the strain of his running.

“You've done enough running for one day. Grab a drink and send someone else.”

“Hold on,” she stopped, grabbing his elbow before he could manage to slip away. “You've done enough running for one day. Grab a drink and send someone else.”

“Right away, Inspector,” the constable huffed, jogging over toward a gaggle of his fellows.

“Hey, what's your name?” the detective asked as the sweaty faced boy left her to stew in her thoughts.

“Hopkins, Ma'am, Stanley Hopkins,” he replied over his shoulder.

“Good job, Hopkins,” she praised, resuming her aimless walk north. His reply is lost in the clacking and clattering of a cab going past. Frankly, Korra was glad it was. One more person calling her Ma'am and she might just snap.

So she walked, first north to Brushfield. then over to the church on Commercial. Turning right again she wandered down towards the highstreet. Even so short a distance away the atmosphere was totally different. Most of the buildings here were clean, well-maintained, some even painted. The shops had colorful signs and people walked with a confidence in their step that came from knowing there would be food on the table when they went home. Like an entirely different world.

The middle-classes milled about only blocks away from the gruesome scene she had just left. It was just a few blocks but it might have been ten miles. Sure, the men all had noses buried in the paper and the women were walking with frequent glances over their shoulder, but it was a far cry from the near panic of the back alleys. They simply didn't care here. The murders weren't their problem.

Who had been killed? Prostitutes. These men didn't care about them unless they wanted to share a bed for the night and their wives didn't care unless they caught them together.

It was the most obvious case of “out of sight, out of mind.” Jack's handiwork was only something that happened in the morning paper.

“There you are!” Bolin shouts out the window of his cab. “Hey, stop! STOP!”

Tossing a handful of money at the driver, he jumps out to join her. “What'd you go wandering off for? My house is that way.” He pointed over in the completely wrong direction.

“I wasn't going to your place, Bo,” she said with a little half-smile. Her friend was infectious if he was anything.

“Oh, then where were you headed?” he asked taking up step alongside her.

“I don't know,” Korra admitted, head down to avoid looking at any of the passers by. She didn't want to look at them, rich or poor. She couldn't. “I just needed to clear my head.”
“I know the feeling,” her partner agreed with more of his usual chipperness. For a moment they walked in silence, just letting the city swallow them up. But Bolin was never good at keeping his questions to himself. “So, what did you find in the stove?”

“Nothing,” she lied.

“Come on, I know you better than that,” he said, spinning and catching her shoulder with his hand. When she looked up he caught Korra right in the eye. He wasn't going to budge on this. “I know I'm not as good a detective as you, but I can at least tell when you're lying to me. Tell me, Korra.”

Putting her hand into her pocket she pulls out the flier and hands it to him. He gives it a glance, trying to look as casual as possible. “What does it mean?”

“I don't know. Half of it is burned,” she groaned reaching for her stolen evidence. Just as her fingers brushed the page her friend yanked it away. “Stop playing, Bo, I need that.”

“What you need is lunch,” he told her, tucking the paper into his own coat, “A nice big warm meal to get the cold out of your bones. And we're gonna think about something other than work. Opal's gonna talk our ears off about whatever she wants and we're gonna listen to every word and smile.”

“It's not that cold.” It's the only argument she has to offer.

“Just because you're a freakish snow person doesn't mean it's not cold for the rest of us,” he kidded, wrapping an arm around her and pulling her towards the street. “You're paying for the cab, by the way. I left my wallet at home.”

“You're terrible,” she chuckled, finally relenting to his insistence.

“That's why you love me,” he argued, waving down a buggie.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if Korra seems a little off. She's got a stressful, thankless job and we all know what that can be like.
As always, criticism and advice are welcome.
Lunch had been fun. A much needed combination of distraction and a good time. Bolin had fallen over himself as usual, trying to help but only causing problems for everyone. The biggest laugh had come when he had dropped the main course down the stairs and the absolute fit Opal had thrown as a result.

After that they had settled down to a nice quiet meal. Opal had told them about her job at the theater and how much fun it was to act on stage. Somehow, Korra had managed to get roped into coming to a show that weekend.

Nice, quiet, friendly. But, of course, there had been the questions. “Have you seen, Kuvira lately? Mom's worried, we're all worried. Has she written you? Do you know where she is?” She gave the same answer she always did. “No. No, I haven't seen her, I don't know where she is. You know how she gets. If you haven't heard from her it's because she doesn't want to be found.” And it was true. Mostly.

It didn't help her conscience, though.

All the way to the station she mulled over her friend. How they had gone through training together. Went on patrol together. Got shitfaced drunk together when times were tough.

It was a big hole to be left with but, unlike the others, she had tried her best to move on. Let sleeping dogs lie, as it were. The way things had gone on that last day she wouldn't be surprised if it took years for her to come back around. Pushing would only make things worse.

Even as they rumbled into view of H-Division headquarters her thoughts kept switching between dwelling on her friend and focusing on the job at hand. The crowd was thick outside, as per the usual of late. Reporters, concerned citizens, and the ever bothersome 'Whitechapel Vigilance Committee'. Nothing more than a mob baying for vigilante justice, by any means. Necessary or not.

As the door swung open they were bombarded by yet more questions and abuse: “Excuse me, Detective-”

“Cowards-”

“-any comment on-”

“Is the nature-”
Korra and Bolin practically had to bulldoze their way through the crowd, elbow first, to reach the door. The noise was deafening, the crush horrifically claustrophobic. All the pair could do was keep moving forwards, shouting “No comment!” at the top of their lungs to anyone who would listen. Few did, fewer cared.

Just like any siege the doors were braced for storming. Four of London's biggest, roughest, meanest looking cops stood watch over the crowd. In their hands, they wielded heavy truncheons and hidden under their coats she imagined each had his revolver close at hand. It wasn't without warrant, either. A mob had already tried to raid two other stations earlier in the year after rumors had spread that the killer was being held within. The incidents had left dozens injured and one young man dead, trampled after falling.

Panic did strange things to people, apathy even stranger. No one had come for the boy. Maybe there was nobody to come.

She passed the spot where they'd found him, taking a second to stare at it as she did. Some of the boys at the station had arranged a small service for him. Korra had even paid for ads in some of the more popular papers in the neighborhood.

Two people had showed up. Two out of seventy-eight thousand, and twenty-nine off duty Met officers.

The doors opened stiffly, the frame still sagged enough to catch it even after being replaced twice and repaired once. Part of the charm, or so the old timers had told her when she first arrived. All it was was annoying. Something else to deal with if you weren't beat down enough already.

“Afternoon, Inspector Waters, Detective Bolin,” the duty sergeant said without looking up. The man was a wizard when it came to the comings and goings of everyone who worked here.

“Afternoon, Perkins,” she returned giving him a little wave.

“Anything we need to know?” Bo asked, patting his now bulging belly. The way he put food away was remarkable. How he didn't just keel over was anyone's guess.

“Nothing in your department,” he said, completely disinterested in the conversation. Why would he be? He had papers to sign, re-sign, file, and re-file. The perfect day for a pencil pusher like him. “Twelve muggings, twenty-one burglaries, seven assaults, fifty pickpockets, more public drunkenness cases than I have forms, one arson, and one count of theft of duck.”

“Mrs. Cherny again?” her partner asked with utter disbelief.

“The poor woman can't help herself,” the clerk sighed, shuffling a couple of papers before he found the one he was looking for. “Luckily, just the one murder so far.”

“So, a slow day,” Bolin said happily, slapping her on the back.

“Lucky us,” she muttered, not feeling the slightest bit lucky. Without another word Korra headed right for the stairs up to the offices.
There were five floors to the H-Division main building. The basement beneath her feet housed the lockup, mostly for petty criminals: vagrants, drunks, pickpockets, fences, and the like. On the main level she was leaving behind was the duty desk, ever manned by Sergeant Perkins, interrogation rooms, and the junior constables billets. Everyone started off their careers in Whitechapel here, close to the top, under the watchful of Tenzin.

Next floor was the squad room, long-term holding, the sergeant's and senior officer's desks, and the lounge. It was just a room with a stove, a kettle, a few packs of cards, and some old beaten down furniture but it wasn't a bad place to take a load off during the day.

The third was her stomping ground. If you were up here, you had made it. Detectives bunked up here, often literally. Long nights were part of the job and the streets weren't any safer to walk in alone if you were an officer than a greengrocer. As for cabs, well, even the most industrious cabbies had to sleep sometime.

Coming out onto the landing, she swung open the door and sniffed the air. No tobacco. Fitzroy must still be out on call, thank the spirits. Korra couldn't stand the smell of that man's pipe.

“Waters!” Sergeant Steinman welcomed from behind his fluffy white mustache.

“Hey Stu,” she returned, unable to hide a smile. Stewart had shown her the ropes when she first moved upstairs. Even helped her and Kuvira out with a few cases on the side when Tenzin was too busy. “How's Phyllis and the kids?”

“Good, good,” he said happily, with a warmness in his smile that could part seas and melt glaciers, “My wife's got just as much fire in her now as back in the old days. Franny and Jinora spent all day yesterday playing cops and robbers, pretending to be their big sister Korra.”

“That's good to hear,” Bolin chimed in, poking his head over her shoulder. “Maybe she can be a detective too, someday.”

“Oh, no. Oh, no,” Stuart refused, throwing his hand up and holding the idea at bay. Even so he kept the playful, nostalgic smile he got every time he talked about his family. “No sweet, innocent daughter of mine is going into the family business, no sir. That girl can be a doctor, a lawyer, even the Mayor of London if she wants, but she ain't turning out like her old man. The big boss can do things his way and I'll do them mine.”

“And how's tha', Stewie?” she heard Reid ask as he came out of his office. His face was scruffy, probably hadn't shaved in days again. “Way ya spoil those kids of yours. It's disgraceful.”

“Like you don't spoil yours,” the sergeant accused, brushing off the gentle jab as always.

“Guilty as charged,” her boss admitted with a little chuckle. Turning from Steinman he looked at the two newcomers. “There's my two shinin' stars. How you doin', Bo?”

“Not bad, Mr. Reid, sir,” Bo replied, giving a totally unnecessary salute, cracking Korra in the back of her head when he does. “Sorry,” he muttered before continuing on, “Me and Korra just got back from the new Ripper deal up on Miller's Court.”

“What was for lunch?”

“Floor spaghetti,” Korra answered for him. This would be her one chance to get a little ego bruising in as revenge for the rest of the day. The others didn't take to kindly to manhandling your partner in front of the public, so that would have to wait until after hours. “Bolin took a spill down the stairs. Sauce everywhere. Opal nearly lost it, isn't that right buddy?”
There was nothing like a good shaming to get even.

“Yeah,” he agreed shyly, hands moving to cover the mortified glow in his cheeks.

“How ya holdin' up, kid?” Reid asked, turning his attention to Korra, now. For such a stern looking little man Edmund sure knew how to turn on the sympathy. Maybe it had something to do with being the shortest man on the force, just under Korra at 5'6”.

“I'm okay,” she lied. There was no real reason to. Of everyone in the city her senior detective was probably the most likely to understand.

He was also just as good at spotting her lies as Tenzin and Bolin. Unlike them, however, he wasn't nosy about them, having more than a few skeletons in his own closet. Some a whole lot worse than hers. “Alright, kid,” he sympathized, walking closer and swinging his cane absently, “Let's go then. Tha big boss wants all senior staff in his office for a head session.”

“What for?” Korra questioned, spinning on her heel and opening the door for him.

“Don't know,” he shrugged, instinctively tipping his hat as he passed, “Came down half-an-hour ago looking for us, even called in the station heads and Locals from the branches.”

“Sounds serious,” Bolin remarked, tossing his hat onto his desk by the door.

“Probably is,” Reid agreed without giving anything away, “We'll fill you lot in when we get back.”

“Got it, boss,” her friend accepted collapsing into his seat. Time for his midday nap. It was a wonder he ever made detective, let alone sergeant. “Hey, Korra, I'll pass that tip onto Mako and see what he can get off it, 'kay.”

“Okay,” she agreed. If anyone could get something from that scrap it'd be Mako. How he managed it she couldn't imagine, nor did she want to. There were enough problems with proving what he found, let alone justifying his methods to some of the new generation of judges. “Keep that close to your chest, you hear me?”

“Yes sir, Boss Lady,” he said before burying his head in leftover paperwork. He'd be out before they hit the stairs.

“Come on, Avatar, we're gonna be late,” Reid beckoned, pretending to ignore the back-and-forth between his juniors. With that he threw the door open and started his hustle upwards.

The top floor was mostly admin. Tenzin's office, the records room, evidence lockup, some pencil-pushers past their sell by date as street cops. The armory.

Every gun that was issued in most of Whitechapel was locked up just outside the Superintendents office. To even think about checking one out you had to fill out half-a-dozen forms, receive approval from on high at Scotland Yard, and most importantly, Tenzin had to trust you. No easy task. Even being in his good books like she was and climbing through the ranks faster than almost anyone, it had taken three full years and an entire drawer of death-threats for her to be allowed into the club.

Under supervision.

“Go right in,” Miss Fawkes, the secretary welcomed, waving them past.

The room was packed. All the big names were there: McLaughlin and Sloane from Commercial
Street, West and Thick of Arbor Square, and making up King David's contribution Boon and Lafayette. Add to that Tenzin behind his desk and them, the two new arrivals, and it was standing room only.

“Ah, excellent, now we can begin,” Tenzin said, standing as they took their place in the line. The old man took his time to look each of them in the eyes until they nodded, saving her til last. “I'm sure you are all aware that Inspector Arnold is perfectly willing to wait out the rest of his time until his pension taking vacation with his wife. Frankly, since the man's third heart-attack, I'm inclined to let him do so.”

“The old dog deserves some time off,” Sloane declared to here-heres all around.

“Precisely my opinion,” Tenzin agreed starting to pace. All eyes followed him as he did so. Retirement meant replacement and all but a couple people in this room could fill that post. “Of course, that means we will be needing a new Divisional Inspector.”

“Anyone in mind, sir?” Boon asked, flashing his gaze over at the two HQ picks. Being close to the top often meant favoritism when it came to assignments.

“Yes, I was wondering if Mr. West might be interested in the job,” the man everyone called 'the Monk' behind his back suggested. That surprised Korra more than even West himself. He was a good man, from what she could tell, and a solid case solver but head of CID was way above his skill cap.

“Thank you, but no thank you,” he replied, shaking his head slowly. “I'm sorry, sir, but I don't see enough of home, as it is.”

“Ahem, well, fair enough,” the head honcho conceded, seemingly taken aback. Stroking his beard he mused, “Well, I suppose the second most senior Station Inspector Mr. Reid would be next in line for the position.”

The focus turned again to Korra's boss. With all eyes on him Edmund shook his head and smiled, “Alright, I know when I'm beat. Look no further, Tenzin, you've found your lamb for the slaughter.”

All the detectives laughed at that. H-Division hadn't kept a Division Inspector for more than a year since before Korra had joined the force. Health problems and resignations plagued the position like a curse.

It also happened to make you the biggest target for the newspapers when something gruesome came along.

“Good, good,” Tenzin said approvingly. A small round of applause broke out until their host held up a hand to silence them. “Now for some more unpleasant business,” he proclaimed, leaving a faint chill in the air. “Commissioner Warren has just resigned. Assistant-Commissioner Beifong will be taking over, effective immediately.”

Everyone was stunned. Warren was well liked by everyone who had ever met him. An army man by trade, he'd stood for parliament only a few years ago, losing by just a handful of votes. Why he would quit was…

“The Home Secretary has also seen fit to provide us with twenty further additional constables, to help make up for what he sees as our 'manpower shortage','” he added, pinching the bridge of his nose. “They will be arriving tomorrow, so please inform your staffs.”
“I'll tell you what, Superintendent,” McLaughlin warned in his thick Irish accent, “If this lot are anything like the last ones he dredged up, we'll have a real manpower shortage.”

“You'll be picking Scotland Yard boys outta the Thames faster than you can swing that old staff of yours if I catch one of these trying to shake down store owners like the last bunch,” Boon agreed, menacingly.

“Gentlemen, please,” he begged. To their credit both men stepped down from their threats and fell into line.

“Yes, sir.”

“Apologies, sir.”

“That's, quite alright,” Tenzin dismissed. What Korra wouldn't give for half of this man's patience. “Getting back to our original subject, if Mr. Reid will be moving upstairs we will need a new Station Inspector. Any takers?”

“Looks like that's your number, Waters,” Sloane said nodding in her direction.

“I could use a new office,” she half-joked. The extra space would actually be kind-of nice. That and adding another record to her collection. At twenty-five she would be the youngest station head in department history.

But that now left her replacement as no.2 open. “So, who gets my job then?”

“McPherson?” someone recommended.

“Too lazy,” West said, ironically.

“Bolin?” Lafayette offered.

Korra took that one. He was her partner so letting anyone else be the turn down felt wrong. “No. He just made sergeant a few months ago and the guy just got married less than a year before that.”

“Besides,” Boon added, “he's way too green. Our Avatar here might be some kind of prodigy but the kid just ain't there, yet.”

Everyone nodded respectfully. It was true, much as it hurt to admit. Bo, just wasn't ready. If it were an admin job, then yeah, give him the pay rise, but he needed someone else to look out for him during cases. He was tough, loyal, and a kind heart to comfort victims and their families but his observation skills left to be desired.

“What about Steinman?”

“How do you think I got the job?” Korra asked. Stu was what he liked to call a 'career sergeant'. Happy where he was and not to eager for what came after. But there was one person she knew who would jump at the opportunity of a promotion. “I think I have somebody.”

“If it's who I think it is, you'll have to find them first,” Reid pointed out to more nods and muttered support.

“Let me worry about that,” she said quietly enough that only he could hear her.

The old war-dog gave her 'the look', then rolled his eyes. “Up to you, Tenzin. It's your circus, you want us to add another clown to the sideshow?”
“If we can locate Miss Beifong and convince her to come back into the fold, I don't see why not,” the boss man reasoned. Korra could feel the sideways looks she was getting. Her old partner wasn't too popular among the old guard. And for good reason. “But I'll say it now, if she comes back—and that is a large *if*-I want her to be kept in check. No more of her unique methods of getting things done or you'll both be suspended, permanently.”

“I think that's called firing, boss,” Reid kidded, turning the tone slightly more bright. A few chuckles and jokes later and Tenzin ushered everyone out. Except Korra.

“One minute, Korra,” he said as she made for the door. Here it comes. The request she's been dreading almost as much as Opal's. “I was wondering if you had reconsidered your attendance at the Gala this year?”

“No,” she answered, fingers wrapped around the handle.

“Korra, you know that this event means a great deal to our department,” Tenzin reminded, beginning the guilt routine early this time. “A great number of important members of British society will be there: Members of Parliament, Cabinet Secretaries, even members of the Royal family. It would help encourage the integration of the service if one of our brightest stars were to show up and spread the word.”

“And be your royal envoy? No thanks,” she declined, “I got enough of that garbage at home, or don't you remember?”

“I do, indeed remember,” he said with regret showing in his face. It made Korra feel bad to bring it up again. It was a true low-blow and Tenzin had been just as roughed over by the whole deal as her. Sighing deeply, her old teacher started to move to his desk again. “There is another reason I want you to go,” he revealed, taking up his chair.

That peaked Korra's interest. “What is it?” she asked, letting the door go for the moment. If the ever noble and straightforward Tenzin had an ulterior motive, it was bound to be a good one.

“There has been talk of...” he inhaled deeply, bracing himself for what he was going to say. “Hiring a consultant to assist in the murder investigations.”

“Who?!” she demanded, storming over to his desk.

“A Mr. Holmes,” he said calmly.

“Holmes, you mean that opium addict Lestrade drags around with him?” she asked, totally dumbfounded. Had they gone completely fucking mental? Bringing that madman in would just prove to the people they had tried so hard to protect that they were just as incompetent as the papers made them out to be. “Have you told Reid about this?”

“I have,” he confirmed lacing his fingers together and leaning on them. “He seemed to be of the same mind as you on the matter. Although, he used far harsher words to describe his opinion.”

“I won't let it happen, Tenzin. No pipe-smoking, deer skin wearing, amateur detective is taking that sick bastard away from me, you understand!” she bellowed, slamming her fist down finally. “He's mine, and I'm going to see him hang, personally!”

“Then I suggest you accept the Home Secretary's invitation and tell him in person,” the beardy father of three (soon to be four) told her.

For a minute Korra just fumed. To be so outmaneuvered by her old mentor again. It felt like old
times, and not the good ones. “Fine, on one condition.”

“What?”

“Tell me where I left my dress uniform.”

“I think Pema put it in the linen closet,” he pondered, scratching his chin. “Stop by for dinner tonight and pick it up.”

“Yes, sir.”

Chapter End Notes

This is the last chapter I had anything written for before I started posting, so updates will slow down for a bit while I build up a backlog again. Asami shows back up next chapter and Mako’s around briefly. That’ll round out Team Avatar and we can move forward with the story from there. Tips and advice are welcome and encouraged.
The Royal Metropolitan Police Gala

Chapter Summary

A Prince, a Politician, a Party, and a Pair of Pretty Faces
Or the reunion of Korra and Asami

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Houses of Parliament were many things: a royal palace, the seat of British democracy, an excellent representation of Gothic Revival architecture, and Korra's prison for the next five hours.

Getting in was easier than she expected. Being one of only three women in uniform probably helped things a bit. At the very least it let her stand out in a crowd. Having half her credentials on hand didn't hurt either. No one was going to stop her, much as they wished they would.

Once passed the outer and inner ring of paper checkers, she was ushered into the opulent ballroom their shindig was being held in. Familiar faces abounded in the edges of the crowd. Her old running buddy Atkinson had brought his plus one, and she their one-and-a-half. Sloane was trolling the wine selection for all it was worth, offering to steal her a couple bottles for her collection. Some staff from the embassy had tried to flag her down, but she gave them the slip when they got ambushed by lads from the foreign office.

So far she had managed to get through this thing exactly like she wanted. Quickly, quietly, and without getting dragged around like some exotic display.

That was, until she heard, “Korra, hey, Korra!” Dar she blows! The ex-boyfriend approached bearing a plate of canapes and a glass of red that gave her flashbacks.

“Hey, Mako,” she replied, coming out of her little hiding place. He balanced his glass on his arm and extended the now free had for her to shake. “Didn't think this was your kind of deal. I figured you'd be spending the night in some nice, dark back-alley, gambling dice in one hand and notepad in the other.”

“Me? Look at you,” he countered, tugging on her collar, “I haven't seen you in your dress blues since graduation.”

“That's because they've been in a box under the stairs since then,” she revealed, fixing a cuff that had been bothering her since she got there. “Tenzin thought it would be a good idea for me to come out and put a good word in for us over in the East End. You know, use my endless charm and connections to make sure stuff stays in house.”

“I get the charm part, but connections?” he laughed, nearly losing his plate as he did so.

“I have plenty of connections,” she shot back, arms folded. “How else do you think I kept my job with all those self-righteous ass hats at the big house?”

“Bribery?” he suggested, shrugging.
“Fuck you,” she said, giving him a discreet bird.

“We've been there and done that already,” he returned softly enough that it was almost lost in the din of the party. They looked at each other for a moment, the same mixture of regret and disappointment mingling between them as always. “I'm sorry it didn't work out.”

“So am I,” she said. Believe it or not, this was the first time either of them had apologized for what had happened. Awkward meetings at terrible parties turned out to be good for something, after all. With that done Korra searched for anything else to break the creeping silence. “So, who's your plus-one? Someone had to drag you off the street for a few hours, if you're here.”

“How could you tell?” Mako asked with an impressed grin on his face.

“Easy, you don't drink wine,” she pointed out, nodding her head at his glass. “I tried for six-months to get you to drink one glass and here you are, parading about in public with what I assume is a Merlot that's been in this building longer than either of us has been alive.”

“Maybe I'm just trying something new out,” he said trying to counter both her stare and logic.

Korra could barely keep her snort to polite levels. Even with her effort some prudish looking minglers gave her a hard glance. “Are you kidding me? If you ever drink something that isn't the byproduct of the excess wheat crop from Canada, call me. That way I know to hide from the coming apocalypse.”

“Deal,” he said with a smile, giving her a toast for good measure.

“So, who is she?” she needled, waggling her eyebrows.

“What makes you think it's a she?”

“Because you never struck me as the type to chase trousers,” she pressed, moving in close so only he could hear.

“Fair enough,” he whispered back. Pulling back her ex had a flash of recognition. “How about instead of talking about her, I introduce you?” he offered gesturing towards his date. “Korra Waters, I'd like you to meet Miss Asami Sato.”

“He-” they both began as Korra spun to greet her. Utter panic filled her mind for a split second. She knew those eyes trimmed with violet, the hair styled to perfection, and that impeccable fashion sense. About the only thing that had changed were her dress and lipstick, which had gone a few shades darker from scarlet to pomegranate. “Why, Miss Smith, it's a pleasure to see you again.”

“The feeling is mutual,” Miss Sato returned with equal composer, offering her hand. Korra took it and gave it a firm shake. “I see you and Mako are acquainted.”

“My partner, Bolin, is his kid brother,” Korra said politely. There was no sense causing a scene in front of this crowd. Besides, the pieces had already started to fall into place in her mind. “The three of us all roomed together when we first joined up.”

“Small world,” she chuckled, letting go and reaching for the glass. Mako handed it to her and Korra watched as she slowly swirled it before taking a sip.

“Indeed,” Korra said, returning the smile.

“Do you two know each other?” Mako asked suspiciously, eyes flicking between them.
“In passing,” Asami confirmed vaguely, fixing her former interrogator with a warning look. *Don’t tell him anything.* With a barely perceptible nod, she agreed.

“Miss Sato witnessed a purse snatching a couple days ago,” the new Station Inspector lied, passing it off as the most likely story she could think of with such short notice. “We wanted to keep her name out of the papers so she became, Miss Amy Smith of Leeds.”

“That makes a bit of sense,” he agreed, nodding along. She’d tell him the real story later, when there were fewer people and politicians knocking about. “Do you mind if I leave you with Korra, here, for a minute? I just saw my old sergeant and I’d like to tell him about some stuff on and old case.”

“Go right ahead,” his date acquiesced, gesturing him off for what Korra assumed wasn’t the first time. Excellent officer, terrible company that man.

As Mako wandered off to pull aside his old squad lead he left Korra with an urge to drink she hadn’t felt in, oh, a day or so. It was a wonder they had lasted as long as they had in the first place. “Don’t worry, he does that a lot,” she counseled with more than enough experience to back up her statement.

“Oh, we’re not,” Asami told her before starting to giggle. “We met maybe thirty minutes after I saw you. My cab hit him when he tried to cross the street. I jumped out and asked him if there was anything I could do to help—”

“And he asked you to come here, with him,” Korra finished, shaking her head.

“Yeah, how did you know?” the young woman asked, seemingly stunned by her knowledge.

“Because he pulled nearly the same stunt on me when I was a Constable,” she growled, staring daggers into the man's back. If looks could kill, this one would make Mako burst into flames.

“You’re kidding,” Asami whispered, shaking her head.

“Don’t worry,” Korra reassured, taking a few deep breaths to suppress her bubbling anger. Not her man, not her problem anymore. “He’s just not that original.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” the raven-haired party goer said, rolling her eyes at her apparent deception. Looking back at each other, the two women entered a familiar test of wills with Asami being the one to offer the first olive branch. “I imagine you’ll want to ask me some questions now, huh?”

“Not really,” the Inspector replied smoothly. She had been thinking about it since they had been reintroduced and the scales had all pulled her that direction. “You didn’t lie about how you found things, just who you were and why you were there, right?”

“Right,” she confirmed.

“Then forget it,” Korra declared, “Dragging your name into things would just muddy the waters and give Fleet Street enough coal to power their little carnival of stupidity into the next decade.”

“So you know who I am?”

“I know that a Hiroshi Sato owned that factory that was burned down in the garment district,” the detective confirmed, rattling off what she had learned from her deep dive down the rabbit hole, “and that he has a daughter who’s some kind of whiz with machines. Supposed to have come top of
her class at Cambridge in Engineering.

“Guilty as charged,” said whiz toasted, lifting her glass to her achievement. Another sip and then she seemed to mull something for a moment. “It seems my escort has abandoned me.”

“Yep.”

“I take it the two of you were involved?”

“Intimately.”

“How intimately?” Asami asked casually, returning to a more impassive facial expression.

Korra smiled at the little fishing expedition. The woman was a natural sleuth, if a little on the direct side. “Enough that my father'd try to wring his neck if he ever found out.” When she saw the look on the elegantly dressed woman's face, she explained, “He's protective. Only child and all that.”

“I know the feeling,” Asami sympathized, rolling her eyes. “My dad dotes on me like I'm sick, all the time. When I was a kid it was kind of fun, but going to school was just impossible.”

“Try being a cop,” Korra joked, seeing a cluster of men approaching them. “The first time someone tried to jump me on patrol dad threatened to track the guy down and beat him to a pulp.”

“I sense a theme,” her companion noted, also turning to look at the approaching trio.

“Speak of the devil,” she whispered before greeting them, “Hi, dad.”

“Asami!” the man exclaimed, holding his arms wide and warmly embracing his daughter. “I didn't know you were going to be here. What made you change your mind?”

“I figured it would be more interesting than sitting around at the house all night,” she said, returning the gesture just a tad less enthusiastically. “I was just talking to-”

“Well, well, if it isn't Princess Korra, in the flesh,” the tallest man interrupted when he got a good look at her face. She almost hadn't recognized him. It had been years since last she'd seen him. In the meantime he seemed to have grown at least six-inches and a Royal Navy uniform. “Mr. Sato, Mr. Secretary, may I introduce you to the woman who broke my heart.”

“Knock it off, George, that was ten years ago and we barely knew each other,” Korra chided, despite opening her arms to give the man a hug of her own.

“How dare you discount my heartbreak,” he joked back, giving her a firm squeeze. “I'll have you know, I was inconsolable for weeks after you brushed me aside so callously. Why else do you think I ran off and joined the Navy?”

“The same reason I ran off and joined the police,” she countered, breaking her hold on him. When they had resumed more dignified poses again she gave him the once over. “You look good.”

“High praise coming from you,” he charmed with a small bow.

“Hold on. Princess?!” Asami demanded gathering everyone's attention onto the massive elephant in her room.

“Our most talented Inspector Waters is the heir-apparent to the Northern and Southern Water Tribes. Which makes her royalty of the highest caliber,” Secretary Blackwater explained smoothly. The superior smile that crossed his lips as he did made Korra's eye twitch. But then, most of what
politicians did had that effect. “Congratulations on your promotion as well, Milady. The paperwork just crossed my desk this morning.”

“Thank you, sir,” she replied, choosing to ignore the honorific.

She needed his help, not his teeth.

“So, that must mean you're-” Asami began before she realized who she was talking to and immediately curtsying. “Pardon me, Your Highness.”

“Not at all, Miss,” he chuckled, waving his hand to dismiss her apology. “It's actually somewhat refreshing not being recognized, every once in a while. Usually, I have to travel to America to experience it, so you have my thanks for saving me the trip.”

“I believe introductions are in order,” Mr. Sato said once the Prince had finish talking.

“Yes, Miss Asami Sato, meet Mr. Tarrlok Blackwater, the Home Secretary and my boss,” Korra obliged, gesturing to the man who bowed his head slightly before moving onto the navy man. “and Prince George of the House Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the Prince of Wales and my former betrothed.”

“A pleasure, Miss Sato. Though I believe Commander will do fine for titles.” George greeted, giving her a bow. “I read your paper on the future of combustion engines. It was rather fascinating.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” Asami thanked, giving another little curtsy. “It was nothing, really.”

“I beg to differ,” he said back, with a friendly smile.

“Excuse me, but what do you mean by 'former betrothed'? the elder Sato inquired, face befuddled by the term.

“Do you want to tell the story or...” Korra left the end open in case the man wanted to keep the matter private between them. She wouldn't really blame him if he did either. He didn't come out of it looking well.

“Why not?” he shrugged, flagging down a waiter and ordering some drinks. “Well, we were what, 15?”

“I was 15, you were 14,” Korra reminded snatching a wine off the tray as soon as it was within reach. One sniff and she had it pegged. Bordeaux '71, a classic if not all that special. She probably had a half case of the stuff at home.

“Oh, that's right. Either way, I was coming to the age that Father was trying to arrange a marriage for me before my grandmother could do the same,” he recounted, swirling his whiskey in it's glass. “He had just failed with Albert, you understand, and he was rather determined to pawn me off the first chance he got.”

“You sure know how to make a girl feel lucky, George,” she kidded, making everyone around her's eyes bulge at the disrespect.

The Prince just laughed at the friendly jab and continued. “Father was dragging me on state visits all over the place, at the time. India, China, Japan, and some others I'm sure I've forgotten. We were just about to leave Kyoto when he told me I was engaged to marry one of the most beautiful princess's in the world.” He raised his glass to her and Korra shook her head at his flattery. “All the
way to the South I was asking everyone who would let me questions about her. I was in love almost a week before we arrived. Hadn't even seen a picture."

“That's quiet the story,” the Secretary said, apparently speaking for the others who nodded in agreement.

“It gets better,” Korra assured, taking a sip of her wine. Not as good as she remembered, but still a step above what she could get the boys to drink.

“We arrived in the middle of a blizzard,” George related, twiddling his mustache, eyes lost in the past. “No one knew we were coming. It was a total mess. But I was sure I was going to meet the woman of my dreams. She was standing out in the courtyard in this driving snow when I found her and the first thing she said to me was…."

“Just so you know, there's no way I'm marrying you,” she finished, remembering the line like it was yesterday. She had spent nearly an hour out in the snow in the hopes it would keep him away. Points for determination.

“Wow,” Asami breathed, clearly impressed. “You just turned him down, like that?”

“No,” she denied, “I had to do it about five times before he caught on.”

At last the laughter spread beyond the two of them and the entire conversation started to chortle. Even some of the eavesdroppers joined in, laughing away merrily.

“Grandmother sent a wire on our third day,” George concluded, slamming his drink back. “She did not 'approve' of my father's choice in match. But then, she doesn't approve of a great many things.”

“How unfortunate,” Tarrlok sympathized in the most patronizing tone she had ever heard. “Still, there's no use wondering what could have been.”

“You seem to misunderstand me, Minister,” the navy man corrected, “We've been rather good friends, ever since. Now I was wondering if I might have a word in private about some rather troubling rumors I've been hearing.”

“Of course, your highness,” the politician obliged.

The two men wandered off towards one of the doors to the hall, muttering all the way. It was a wonder what you could get done with one well written letter. So long, Mr. Holmes.

“So, tell me, Inspector Waters, what exactly is a Princess doing as an Inspector for our humble Scotland Yard?” Mr. Sato asked turning back to her with curiosity etched into his features. “It seems an odd choice of professions, if you don't mind me saying.”

“No at all,” she replied politely. Did this make the hundredth time she'd been asked that or the two-hundredth? It was so hard to keep these things straight in her head. “I figured I'd do more good during one day on the beat than I ever would on a throne in a palace.”

“A noble sentiment,” the man said with just the slightest twitch of his smile. It was hard not to read into that, but this wasn't an interrogation. Maybe the appetizers didn't agree with him.

“Very,” Asami said more genuinely than her father.

“Tell me, Mr. Sato, did anything ever come of that investigation into the fire at your factory?” Korra asked, switching subjects away from herself. She tried to sound interested, but frankly, the
only thing she wanted to get acquainted with right now was the contents of her glass. “I heard through the grapevine that it was quite the blaze.”

“That it was. The entire building was burnt to ash,” he agreed, scratching his chin. “Your people and mine went over the place with a fine tooth comb and couldn't find a cause.”

“That's strange,” Korra remarked between sips of fruity bliss. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Asami briefly flash her father a look. What kind she couldn't tell, but she doubted it was one of warm affection.

“I thought so, too,” he concurred. “If you'd like, I could let you look at my files on the matter. See if you could find something no one else did.”

“I'm afraid that it's out of my jurisdiction and my department,” she said, desperate to get herself out of the work. J-Division didn't take kindly to people stepping on their toes.

Mr. Sato's eyes furrowed at the attempt. For whatever reason, he seemed very determined to rope Korra into his problems. “If it's a matter of money…”

“Think who you're talking to, dad,” his daughter reminded, shooting down her father's offer in an instant. For a moment the elder Sato gave his daughter a stern look before softening again “Her family could buy us out without even noticing.”

“I could give it a shot,” Korra pondered, cursing herself for bringing it up in the first place. She didn't have time for this. There was a murderer on the loose. But letting these two go at it would make her feel sick. If she was careful the old jackass at J would never be the wiser until it was too late. “Off the record, of course.”

“Thank you,” the bearded industrialist thanked, giving her a bow. “How does Sunday afternoon sound?”

The play. How was she going to explain to Opal? She couldn't. “I've got a thing.”

“Saturday?”

“Saturday. Around three?”

“Perfect,” he said, clapping his hands. “We'll see you then.”

After that he too wandered off back into the crowd. That left just the two of them, again. “I hate these things,” the Inspector whispered without realizing.

“You and me both,” Asami agreed, taking about half her remaining wine into her mouth and swallowing it in a single gulp. “My parents started dragging me to galas as soon as I could walk. Once mom died, I swore I would never let myself get dragged to another one. That is, until your friend got run over by my cab.”

“I'm sorry about him,” sighed Korra, rubbing the back of her neck. “I'll talk to him later.” I'll kick him in the throat, too.

“Don't worry about it,” she dismissed, smiling softly and setting her glass on a passing tray. “It's actually been pretty fun. After all, it's not every day you get interrogated by a real, live princess.”

“Don't you start, too,” the detective groaned. It had taken her almost two years to beat that out of everyone at the station and another for all the others.
“So long, your majesty,” the woman waved as she left. “See you on Saturday.”

“Saturday, yeah,” Korra muttered, draining her own glass.

The rest of the night was spent sneaking around the edge of the room. She'd dodged Yard men, the Foreign Office, the Embassy Staff again, and her creepy cousins. Towards the end she'd slipped one of the wait staff a couple tenners and had him lead her to the wine cellar. Another hundred and she walked out with the three best bottles in the place. The pricks could live with it. Or rather, without.

The cab ride home had been silent apart from the clattering of wheels on cobblestones. She'd taken the steps to her townhouse two at a time, nearly kicking the door down to get inside. Her jacket didn't make it to the hook, her pants joined them on the floor. Moments later she collapsed onto the couch in front of the fire the house-cleaner had left her.

That night she fell asleep thinking of home, fine wine, and the most interesting woman she had ever met. Miss Asami Sato.

Chapter End Notes

This was a pain to write so I'm sorry if the quality sagged a bit. George will actually be relevant to the story later on but he won't be popping up too often.
Of Friends in Low Places

Chapter Summary

Korra goes on a recruitment drive to find her replacement at Leman Street. Where better to do that than an illegal cage fight?

Chapter Notes

I neglected to mention last time because I had just come off about an hours sleep that Korra's £120 bribe for the three bottles of wine is worth around $20,000 USD in today's money. Korra really likes good wine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Compared to where she had been last night, Korra's present company was distinctly more down to earth. Perhaps it had something to do with being in the basement of one of the sleaziest pubs this side of Shanghai? In the past twenty minutes she had been offered opium twice, solicited six times, and groped once by a man now gingerly sporting a shattered wrist and a broken collarbone.

All in a day's work.

Under normal circumstances she would have brought about a score of London's finest with her to bust this den and everyone in it. But the circumstances were anything but normal. Tonight she was here to see the fight, or rather one of the participants.

It was just like her old partner to get wrapped up in a place like this. Dark, secretive, violent, and tucked away where no one could find it unless they already knew it was there. Yeah, she could run a joint like this. With an iron fist.

The bookie as making his rounds again as she worked her way to the pit. “Place your bet, place your bets!”

“Hey, what are the odds on the next fight?” Korra asked as the man made his through the crowd.

“One-and-a-half to one, you interested?” he said already, moving off.

“How about for the challenger?” she pressed, reaching her hand into her jacket.

The man's eyes lit up as he heard that. “Are you crazy, lady? The kid's half the size of the champ,” he scoffed, no doubt praising whatever he worshiped for stumbling onto a sucker. “I'll give you ten to one odds, but it won't do you any good.”

“Put me down for a hundred,” she said, turning back to the competitors. He wasn't wrong about the size difference. Kuvira was dwarfed by her opponent, not that it would help him much.

“One-hundred shillings-” he wrote down, probably tasting the money already.
“No, one-hundred pounds,” the Inspector corrected, pulling out the cash and slapping it down on his pad. “I like my chances.”

“Hey, it's your money,” the bookie shrugged taking the money and walking off.

Korra snorted at his cocky attitude. When the fight was over she'd have to make it to the door before he did. Otherwise, her money would disappear as fast as his legs could carry him.

“Ladies and Gentlemen!” the ring announcer called, gathering the crowd back to the impromptu ring. And gather they did, pressing in from all sides to witness what most of them thought was going to be a slaughter. “Our final match of the night. Presenting first the champion: from the Midlands, weighing 268 pounds, The Boulder!”

Cheers erupted as the giant man lifted his arms. He had a good eight inches on his opponent, granting him a reach advantage as well. Still, Korra would be surprised if he got one hit in.

“And the challenger, from the fighting pits of Taipei, The Iron Lady!” the promoter announced to a chorus of boos and jeers. One man even threw a bottle of some kind at her friend who stepped out of the way without even trying. Kuvira glared at the stooge, committing his face to memory for later. She pointed one single finger at him at which he burst into laughter.

He was going to regret that.

Half a second later there was a loud gong as the match began. Kuvira immediately dropped into a fighting stance and braced for an onslaught.

The Boulder came charging forward, telegraphing a massive right hook. With one small step it went sailing past. As did the left that followed. The kick was harder, broad and sweeping as it was, but her old partner danced out of the way like it was child's play.

Like a textbook she snapped to another pose, this time deliberately leaving her face open. The trap was set, would he take the bait?

Of course he did.

With a wild swing, he made to take Kuvira's head right off. Only her head wasn't there. But rather than let it go sailing past like before her friend caught the man's wrist in her grasp. The next part always made Korra grimace. Her palm collided with the Boulder's elbow, snapping the limb taught and then going farther.

POP!

His elbow dislocated in the blink of an eye. From personal experience Korra knew exactly how painful that was. Right now the pain was radiating up his arm as muscles that weren't supposed to went slack.

“Agghhh!” he wailed, eyes wide with astonishment. The giant looked at Kuvira as though to ask: why?

She didn't give him the chance. With a kick of her own, she buckled the man's knee. After that she followed up with a vicious forearm to the temple. When he didn't fall she started to lay in punches: one, two, three. An instant after the second he crumpled like an accordion. Only then did she let his arm fall.

The crowd was stunned silent. What once had seemed like a room on the verge of ecstasy had gone as quiet as the grave, save for the slow clapping of the sole victor of the betting pool.

Like a hawk, Kuvira focused on the sound. To her credit she barely reacted when she saw who it was. Slowly she knelt down and checked her opponent's pulse. Satisfied, the fighter rose, taking
the bottle in her hand as she did.

“Hey!” she called to the man who had thrown it. “Catch!”

With a smash the glass shattered on his forehead, sending both him and shards flying back into the crowd. The uproar began again as people either laughed or screamed at the attack.

Now, as to her winnings.

Sure enough, as she worked her way out of the crowd the bookie was trying to work his way out of the building. Korra caught him at the base of the stairs up, leaning against the exit to block his path. “Cough up,” she ordered, smiling wide as he backed away. “Or you'll end up as bad as Boulder boy down there.”

“I don't have that much on me,” he argued, putting his hands up to hold her off if needs be.

As if he could.

“How would you like me to take you down to the station?” she suggested, reaching into her pocket and pulling out her badge. “Let's see, what does illegal gambling run now? Two years, three? And assaulting an officer.”

“Doing what?” he asked, baffled.

“Assaulting an officer,” she repeated closing the distance between them. “How else did you get my money?”

“I think I catch you,” he nodded, reaching into his breast and pulling out a wad of bank notes, probably cleaning himself completely out in the process. Must've been a good week and a dumb man to be carrying around that much cash. Shame he'd have to close up shop. “One-thousand pounds, Miss. With my complements.”

“Take care of yourself,” the Inspector thanked, stuffing her winnings back in her pocket.

It felt wrong to do that to him. Even if he was a scumball. Her gut roiled as she walked away, but the money was better off with her than it was with him. At least some people would eat a decent meal off the back of her bad feelings.

The door to the back was just as tucked away as the one to the hidden club. Unguarded, fortunately.

Quietly as she could, Korra slipped inside. It looked empty, aside from some stacks of booze against the wall. Moving down the hall, she heard what sounded like people arguing behind another door. “The Boulder will not fight for you again as long as she's here!” a gruff voice proclaimed.

“Don't be like that,” the ring announcer begged. “I'll double your cut.”

Moving on she searched for signs of her former partner. Empty rooms abounded, mostly barren apart from a small locker and a dirty mattress on the floor. Turning the corner she ran face first into someone at least as big as the man Kuvira had taken apart.

“Hey, what're you doing back here?” he demanded, trying to grab her collar.

Dancing away in almost the same way as her quarry, her hand went for her flapjack. If this got
violent she'd need to move fast and blunt force trauma tended to speed things up. “I was just looking for the bathroom,” she explained innocently. A kind voice and a pretty smile often proved just as disarming as brute force. Fingers crossed it worked.

“Don't worry, Hippo,” a familiar voice called from the next open door. The second after a sweat covered face poked out around the corner. “She's with me.”

“Okay, Miss Kuvira,” he accepted, standing aside.

“I'll just, squeeze past you here,” Korra whispered, pressing herself against the far wall and scooting by the man's massive gut. He watched her closely, beady eyes creeping her out almost as much as that doctor's assistant.

“Get in here,” the walkout said stiffly.

Her room was just as barren as all the others. If anything it was still too extravagant. Hard packed dirt was more her speed.

“Nice place,” the detective joked, lifting the edge of the mattress with her toe. A roach came scurrying out. Because, of course there were roaches.

“What do you want?”

Despite herself, Korra laughed. “Really, that's the first thing you say to me after all the shit you pulled?” she asked, shaking her head slowly. “No 'thanks for keeping me from being drummed out of uniform and thrown in prison'. How about 'gee Korra, it sure is swell how you lied to my mom, sister, and all our friends to cover my ass'.”

“If you're here to guilt trip me, get the fuck out,” Kuvira countered, giving her the total brush off. With apparent zeal she started to unwrap the bandages around her wrists while give Korra the evil eye.

“No.”

“I didn't ask for you to cover for me, okay?” her partner insisted, yanking so hard that the bandages tore like tissue.

“You didn't have to,” Korra told her, pressing while she had the other woman off guard. “You know why? Because we're friends. Those things normal people who don't run off and make a living beating the shit out of people have.”

Her friend sighed at that, slumping slightly. “Did mom send you?”

“No,” Korra said truthfully. “But she is worried about you, Kuv. So's Opal and all the others, too.”

“I don't know why,” she huffed, starting with her other wrist. “It's not like I haven't-“

“Run off before,” the Inspector interrupted. For a second the tension peaked again and the Avatar was sure she'd have to fight her way out, after all.

“Yeah,” Kuvira admitted, yielding to her friend's logic.

“They love you.”

“I know.”
“We need you back,” Korra added, taking the moment of weakness to spring the proposal she had worked so hard to arrange. Kuvira perked up at that. “We're shorthanded and overwhelmed and we need as many bodies as we can get our hands on. That means you.”

“You wouldn't come find me if you just needed another body,” her running buddy said suspiciously. “You could go upstairs for that. Send a letter to HQ.”

“We've done that,” Korra told her. “They sent us idiots who I wouldn't trust to dig a trench and yet their somehow wearing a badge and more than half of them brought their own guns.”

“Thought you liked guns,” Kuvira laughed, starting to work on her feet while leaning on the cleanest wall. This one didn't have water-stains.

“Not with these guys,” she said coldly. In the past seven years there had been 48 officer involved shootings in Whitechapel. Of those five had been while off-duty and another five had been attacks on armed constables. Two were domestic violence, a sergeant about to lose his job shot his wife then himself. One was ruled unjustified and the man was spending the next twenty years in prison. Close to thirty had happened in the last six months. The hiring surge brought in a lot of good men but it also dredged up some of the same scum they were meant to be hunting down.

It was a couple of ticks before Kuvira replied. “I want a promotion,” she demanded, fixing her eyes on Korra.

“Done,” the Inspector said with a nod, “You can have my old job.”

“Tenzin finally dragging you upstairs?”

“He dragged Reid up, I've got his job,” she corrected, finding the words had to form. Not being right under Eddy's watchful eye was already disconcerting. It had always felt alright to take a walk up and ask Tenzin's advice. But Reid? He had been one of them, no high horse to speak of, just an army career a mile long and a kind soul that refused to be beaten down.

“I want a raise, too,” the woman said plainly.

“You'd have to ask Tenzin about that,” Korra tried to deflect. Finances were never a problem for her since her parents insisted on sending her a massive 'allowance' every month, but Kuvira had always refused money from her adopted mother. Said it was 'ungrateful' to accept.

“No deal,” came back the reply. “I want to hear it from you, not the monk.”

Sighing deeply, the detective pondered how to proceed. Any extra pay to get Kuvira on board would have to come out of someone else's paycheck. Might as well be hers. “I'll kick an extra tenner your way each week. Should pay for anything you need, other than room and board.”

“I can deal with that,” her friend mused, starting on her other leg. “Who'd I be working with?”

She hadn't thought of that. The new job had been so busy. Files upon files, no clerk, and a sudden uptick in violent crime. Personnel had been low on her list of priorities. “Anyone you want?”

“You.”

“Kuv I-”

“No,” the elder Beifong sister cut off. She pushed off the wall and started to lift her top. Without missing a beat Korra turned to give her some privacy and kicked the door closed. “If I do this we're
a pair. I don't trust anyone in that building but you anymore.”

“Don't start up again,” Korra pleaded, clasping her hands together.

“And I don't want to see your boy-toy anywhere near me, okay,” she pressed anyway. There's the sound of something whipping by and a ball of shift collided with the wall on Korra's right. “Pretty boy comes anywhere near me and I'll beat him until he can't remember what he looked like. After the shit he pulled, he's lucky I don't kill him.”

“Mako was just doing his job,” the Inspector argued, caught between protecting her friend and her own anger at his stunt with Asami.

“He ratted me out!” the fighter screamed at the top of her lungs. “He had no right-”

“You were tampering with evidence!” the Avatar yelled back even louder.

“To send a pedophile to the gallows where he belonged!” Korra spun on her heel when she heard the same argument, again. Nudity be damned, she was going to speak her mind.

Just because you thought he was guilty doesn't mean he was. Doesn't mean anyone was,” she argued, slamming her foot down on the rotten floorboards so hard that one of them cracked. “How many times did you do that, huh? Five, ten? I don't even want to know.” Throwing up her hands, Korra started to leave. “I want you to come back because you're the best and because you're my friend. But if you do, we do it my way. No beating suspects unconscious, no searches without warrants, no falsifying records. Period.”

For a moment she paused, waiting for a response either way. When she didn't get one she gripped the handle of the door and pulled it open. Just as she as about to pull it closed behind her a voice called out to her.

“Fine! We'll do it by the book!”

“See you tomorrow,” the Station Inspector said happily. Finally, she'd won an argument.

Now she had to make her keep her word. But then, impossible tasks always were her thing.

Chapter End Notes

And so the universe rights itself. Korra gets her money back and more, Kuvira's coming home, and a bookie goes bankrupt.

It's back to murder next time though, so strap in for the madness.
Chapter Summary

A pair of killings divide H-Division's resources even more. But are they connected?

Chapter Notes

This was another pain to write so the pacing is a little all over the place. I was going to start over but the next one came to me all in one fell swoop right as I was falling asleep. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tomorrow came swiftly. After a fitful night's sleep and a breakfast of eggs and stale bread Korra began her morning routine. A brief workout followed by a cold bath got her blood pumping better than any cup of coffee, although she still had one anyway. The stuff was expensive so she might as well drink it before it went bad.

On the way out she let in the housekeeper, Ms. Jones, another of her father's insistences, though this one didn't bother her so much. If she had to worry about doing housework after the days she'd been having lately Korra would have simply collapsed.

The walk to work was short and far more enjoyable than a bumpy cab ride. Besides, it gave her a chance to barter with the local shop owners, get a feel for how the people of the neighborhood were feeling, and drop off her frequent anonymous donations at the shelter and the orphanage. £250 pounds each this morning, enough to pay for a couple weeks running, at least.

Most of all, it let her see the Whitechapel she wanted to have and wanted others to see.

Bustling and bright. Full of hard working people just trying to make a better life for themselves and their families. Immigrants and locals mingling elbow to elbow, happily.

The side of life the papers didn't talk about. The side without the crime and gangs and all the other horrors you could slap up on a front page to shift copies.

The crowd had yet to gather by the time she snuck into the station. Despite that the big men had already taken their positions, ready to hold back the tide when the time came.

“What's the news?” she asked Perkins as she passed to head up to her new office.

“A rash of burglaries on Batty street overnight,” he droned sifting through documents and handing her the corresponding reports. “Five rooms in two separate buildings.”

“Thanks, Stan!” she called, taking the steps two at a time. Hopefully she would be the first one there so she could get some of the mountain of paperwork done. No such luck.

“Good morning, Inspector,” Steinman greeted, not bothering to look up from his own stack of
“Morning, Stu,” Korra replied, flashing a smile. “Did you pull another all-nighter?”

“I did, indeed,” he sighed, slowly removing his glasses and rubbing his eyes. The lamp on his desk still burned dimly despite the growing light of day creeping through the windows. “I though I had gotten a new lead into Nichols case, but sadly it seems to have come to nothing.”

“Thanks for trying,” she told him, walking by to the end of the row of desks.

Her hand had just closed on the handle when the door to the stairs flung open. Coin flip now between Bolin or Fitzroy. Spirits, let it be the first.

“Hey,” Bolin announced with a loud yawn.

“Long night?” the sergeant asked, looking like he was about to pass out on his desk. Korra couldn't tell who looked more exhausted between the two. When the junior sergeant nodded he chortled lightly. “Join the club, my boy.”

“Opal had me up all night helping get the production ready for their new play,” he groaned, slumping into his chair with a heavy thud. It made Korra cringe when he put his feet up on his desk, right on top of a stack of evidence reports. “If I never see another ruffled sleeve it'll be too soon.”

“What play is it?” she asked, trying to decide if she should duck the evening after all.

“Romeo and Juliet,” he said from beneath his hat.

Damn it! She liked that one. Oh well, the best laid plans of mice and women. Besides, there were worse ways to spend an evening. Like going to a gala, for example.

Well there was still paperwork to be-

The door opened again, this time with a familiar rattle as a mug was use to leverage it. That could only mean one thing. Kuvira had shown up despite all the odds, fates, spirits, and everything else being against it.

“Ugh, morning,” she greeted with her usual boisterous cheer. Now there were three people in the running for most ragged looking detective in London.

“Morning, Kuvira,” Bolin replied, obviously already half asleep. Then the pin dropped and he shot up like a roman candle. “Kuvira! You're here!”

“Looks that way, Bo,” she grumbled, tilting her head back and swallowing what Korra assumed was either coffee so strong that it would corrode away the lining of your stomach or a fifty-fifty mixture of black tea and bottom shelf whiskey. Breakfast of champions! “How's my kid sister, still dragging you to all her plays?”

“Yeah, yeah,” he nodded, clearly still half in the realm of dreams. “Hey, you gotta come to the house. Opal's gonna flip when she see's you.”

“Much as I'd like to play hookie, kid, I promised the boss lady I'd finish all my classwork before I snuck out,” she said, wandering over to Korra's old desk. “Besides, I don't feel like a threesome today.”
“A what?” he asked, face befuddled.

“I'll explain it when you're older,” she promised, waving a dismissive hand at him.

Steinman sniffed loudly, a disgusted sneer passing over his always smiling face. “Disgraceful,” he muttered under his breath, “Absolutely disgraceful.”

“Beifong, my office, NOW!” Korra ordered, eyes bulging out of her head. All she'd asked for was five minutes. Five minutes where she didn't have to deal with this shit.

No sooner had the door shut behind them did she start to erupt. “You haven't even been back a full minute and you're already back at it. Making sex jokes about my friends and your sister! What is wrong with you?”

“Look,” her friend protested starting to get hot herself, “I came back as a favor.”

“You came back because I promised you the position and the pay raise you've always thought you deserved,” the boss shot back, pointing her finger accusingly at her choice of replacement.

“That's because I do deserve it!” Kuvira countered, slamming her hands down on Korra's desk.

“Then act like it!” she barked back. Taking a deep breath Korra tried to calm herself down. “You're an Inspector, now, and I'm you're boss. As much as I'd like it to be like back in the good old days, we've got responsibilities now. But I still need someone to watch my back, Bolin's too. Can you do that for me?”

“I can do that,” Kuvira agreed with a little smile. Whether it was because Korra had stroked her ego or she'd just given into angry logic was anyone's guess.

A sudden commotion outside sidelined any further arguing for later either way. Through the grimy window, that really should have been cleaned by the previous occupant before he left, the Station Inspector could see a sudden hustle that only meant one thing.

Murder.

“Let's go,” both women said at the same time, smirking at the familiar coincidence.

“After you boss,” Kuvira insisted, opening the door for her patrol mate.

“What's going on?” Korra asked as she led the way back to the office space. Steinman was grabbing his coat, Bolin tucking his Bulldog into it's holster and kicking his chair under his desk. In the door stood a familiar messenger.

“We've got two murders and a kidnapping,” Hopkins reported, giving a sharp salute that the Inspector halfheartedly returned. “An officer down on the highstreet, a B-and-E with homicide on Thrawl, and a 13-year old girl snatched from her schoolhouse.”

Panic mode set in. An officer down could be anybody, from Tenzin on down to a rookie on his first patrol. Unlikely as that first may be she always feared that it would be one of her closer friends. Atkinson, O'Niell, Mako. “Which of ours?” she demanded, checking that both her Webley and her backup were in their respective places.

“Don't know,” the constable admitted, passing coats out to the detectives. “Just got the calls in.”

“We're shorthanded,” Stu noted, grabbing the cane he wielded rather than a gun. 'Unsporting' he
called them. As though clubbing them over the head was any better.

He was right. Time for an emergency decision. “Congratulations, Hopkins, you just made Detective Constable,” she said, thinking fast, “Go grab Abberline from his house and take the five break ins. Welcome to the team.”

“Thank you, Ma'am,” he said before jogging off down the stairs. They'd have to knock him out of that or running man would end up sprinting himself to a coronary.

“Abberline's on holiday,” Bolin reminded her, heading out the door and onto the landing.

“Not anymore,” she argued. Vacations can wait, rookies that needed watching can't. But Hopkins had spirit and that counted for a lot in their line of work. “Stuart!”

“Kidnapping. Right away, my young friend,” the sergeant acknowledged, making a much more calm and dignified exit. “God willing, I'll find the girl before the day is thru. I'll start with the father and work my way from there.” Solid, logical place to begin. Kidnapping was a lot more common in the family than out.

“Bo, go-”

“Getting Mr. Reid for the B-and-E,” he finished, taking the steps up to admin two at a time.

That left just the two of them. And a dead policeman.

“You haven't given me my gun back,” Kuvira noted, falling into step behind her boss. Said boss hid her scowl by focusing straight ahead, letting her hair and bowler hat.

“Ask Tenzin when we get back,” she told her, trying to push it off til later. That was not a conversation she wanted to have now. It was a knockdown, drag-out fight just waiting to happen. “You know I can't give it to you.”

No reply was good a reply. That or she was about to receive a blow to the back of the head that would send her tumbling down the stairs. But they made it downstairs and out the door into a black cab without incident. Even as they rumbled off Kuvira sat in stoney silence. Before the front door was out of sight and she had leaned up against the wall and tilted the brow of her hat low to block the morning sun.

“You don't trust me,” she finally said as they rounded the first corner.

“I trust you.”

“Then why didn't you talk to Tenzin?”

“Because he didn't want to talk to me.”

More silence stretched between them as Kuvira started to dose. Judging by the rings around her eyes she hadn't slept last night. And with the faint bruise starting to pop up under her right cheekbone Korra could guess how she had been spending that time.

The streets were crowded, their progress slow. Conversation, nonexistent. Anxiety, high. Higher than when she had been going to see Mary. She couldn't help but see faces. Friends, more than friends, her family. One of them laying in the street, eyes cloudy, skin cold. The only question was, who?
As they rumbled up the usual crowd swarmed around the circle of police, hurling insults, and in some cases fruit. Death to Pigs seemed to be the new phrase of the day.

Suddenly, a shot rang out and the crowd scattered. As they did Korra leaped from the still moving cab followed swiftly by Kuvira. Rather than pursue the small team of constables was falling back into an even tighter perimeter. “Who shot?!?” she demanded, fuming at the sheer idiocy of opening fire into a crowd of civilians, no matter how angry.

“Not us!” one of the men yelled, checking himself for holes.

“Did anyone see the bastard?” another asked to a smattering of ’No's.

“What are you waiting for?” Kuvira grumbled, voice still muddled by sleeplessness. “Look for the damn bullet. Just ’cause it's not in one of you doesn't mean it's not in someone else. They might not have been shooting at us.”

Around half of the men pealed off and started searching while the other five or so formed an even tighter barrier above their fallen comrade. He lay still, facing the sky, eyes open and glassy. A hand limply clutched at his chest, the other was reaching out with a cane just out of reach. Only one constable had a cane like that. “It's Richelieu,” she said crestfallen.

“Ah, Frenchy,” Kuvira sighed, taking off her hat. Gerard Richelieu, 34, ten-year veteran and father of four of the cutest boys in London. Possibly the most well liked beat cop she'd ever met.

“What time?” Korra asked, gesturing for a break in their line. The puddle of his blood was small. His heart hadn't been beating for long. Heart stops beating and the blood pools inside the body rather than being pumped out. The cause was obvious, a single stab wound to the chest. Right above the heart.

No pain, at least not much. He'd been dead before he hit the ground. Probably just startled by his attacker.

She could tell his wife that.

After she'd found his killer, too.

“Not sure,” another officer replied as he scanned the wall for holes.

“Witnesses?” her partner asked, looking down impassively as the corpse at her feet.

“We've got three of them for you, Ma'am,” the first man on watch said, gesturing with his thumb behind him. “The shopkeeper and two laborers that were putting in a new window next door.”

“Three witnesses!” Kuvira demanded loudly. “You're telling me that on the busiest street in Stepney, during the morning commute a police officer can be stabbed in the chest and killed with only three people seeing what happened?”

“It didn't happen during the commute,” Korra told her, checking the victim's arm. She had to think of him as the victim. If she thought of him as Gerard, the delightful man with the Parisian accent who's wife made the most delicious fudge for him to bring to work… Stop! Be objective. “He's cold but rigor hasn't set in. Probably been here close to an hour in this weather. How come the call took so long to reach us?”

“Dunno, Ma'am,” he shrugged. “I think you'd have to ask the witness.”
“Can you handle that? I'd like to take a look around,” Korra asked, sliding her hand into a pair of thin calfskin gloves.

“Sure thing,” her partner replied, still miffed. “You know me. I'm a people person.”

“Hands off,” she warned, throwing a look at her.

“Oh, I won't have to lay a finger on them,” Beifong said, grinning wide and unconsciously cracking her knuckles, one by one. Then she walked off to likely torment the witnesses, whistling a cheerful tune. It was her way, be more intimidating than the criminals she hunted. Much as Korra wanted to fault her on it, it worked.

Besides, her own methods were hardly any closer to the handbook. A good smack to some of the neighborhood scum could take days off a case.

Unfortunately, the local street crews weren't likely to be of much help today. Killing bobbies or even just talking about doing so made you a social pariah in the underworld. It was bad for business. The surest way to ensure that the long arm of the law meddled in your affairs was to have a man in uniform end up dead. That was why most of the gangs in London didn't carry guns as a rule. To avoid ending up on the wrong end of a gunfight with the police.

So if not them, who?

Frenchy was well liked. Polite, respectful, laid his coat over puddles so women could walk over them. No disagreements she could think of. The perfect gentleman. Even the criminals loved him. More often than not, when he brought someone in they would both be laughing at some story he had told about being in the army on the other side of the channel. She loved those stories.

Robbery could be ruled out, too. His wallet and watch were still there, as was his cane. Finely crafted and tipped at both ends with silver. It had been a wedding gift from his old Colonel, or so he told people. Why would anybody doubt him? The man never lied.

That left either an unknown to her personal vendetta or a hit.

Checking further, she examined the wound. The blade had passed right through his thick outer coat, his summons pad, his uniform, vest and shirt before piercing his chest over the heart and going through at least one partial rib. Nearly an inch long meant that they were dealing with someone who both knew what they were doing and were strong enough to force a large blade passed a lot of material.

And out the other side.

If his heart had stopped when he fell as he had almost all of the blood would have stayed inside his body. Despite that simple fact there was still a small puddle that had oozed out onto the walk below.

With a grunt and a silent prayer, she turned his body. Sure enough, there was another hole, the same size as the first just below his shoulder blade.

“I'm sorry, Gerard,” she whispered as she returned him to his resting place, “I'll tell Suzy it didn't hurt. You don't have to worry about her or the boys, we'll take good care of them. All of us will. You'll have the best off family in the city.”

Even though he was cold she could almost hear him say “Thank you.” Lack of sleep, probably. Messing with her mind.
“What have you found?” Kuvira asked, sauntering back up to her.

“Looks like a hit,” she said, brushing the snow and slush off her knees. Just like spring back home.

“Well you're not going to believe what he got killed with,” her partner continued, with only slightly subdued enthusiasm. Sometimes Korra envied her friend's ability to ignore the personal aspects of murder cases. Keep a totally even mind despite the horror of it all. At work, at least. She couldn't count the number of times she'd had to drag Kuvira home from some new pub she'd found to kill her feelings in. One glass at a time.

“A sword,” Korra spoiled, looking up a the deflated smile.

“I never get to tell you anything,” the junior Inspector sighed, pulling out a cigarette and lighting a match on the sole of her boot.

“What would Suyin say if she found out you were smoking again?” the Avatar questioned, flicking a bit of ash that fell onto her shoulder in the cold breeze.

Kuvira shrugged and took another drag. “Dunno. She'll probably yell at me about rotting my lungs. Why? Are you going to tell her?”

“No.”

“Great,” she said, blowing a large puff of smoke and steam. “Mom's already going to chew my head off.”

“Do we have a face for our killer or are we just going to talk about our mommy issues?” Korra pressed, already wrinkling her nose at the smell of tobacco smoke. For whatever reason it had always been foul to her. Maybe it had something to do with those cigars her uncle was always smoking.

“Can do you better than a face,” Kuvira boasted, seemingly proud of herself. With a twitch Korra decided she would rather stay ignorant to the methods that had just been used. It was still too early for a disciplinary hearing. “I’ve got a nickname. Apparently our perp's called 'The Lieutenant' 'round here. Tall, skinny guy with a big mustache and real thick glasses. Rumor has it he's some kind of ex-army stiff that's been providing some muscle for the local revolutionaries.”

“What kind of revolutionaries?” It was so hard to keep track these days. Between the Socialists, Anarchists, Irish Nationalists, anti-Semitic/anti-Catholic groups, and far-right isolationist anti-foreigner cabals there seemed to be almost as many 'movements' as there were people.

It helped that most of them weren't her problem unless they caused trouble. Until then the fell under the 'Special Irish Branch's purview. Not her favorite name or her favorite people.

Another drag and Kuvira pulled out her pad. “Apparently they're calling themselves the Equalist Society.”

Upon hearing that name Korra had to struggle to keep her face impassive. The half burned letter she'd found at Kelly's apartment came leaping to the front of her mind. “Hmm?” she hummed a steadily as her pounding heart allowed. “We'll pass that on to-” she had to catch herself before saying the name that would likely trigger another outburst “-the plain-clothes team. See what they can turn up.”

Never mind she'd already had Mako working on it for the better part of a week.
With one last look at her fallen friend, Korra stood. She instructed the constables to escort him to London Hospital for autopsy. No way was she going to allow that moron Phillips get his hand on another murder case. She might not be able to fire him, but she sure wasn't going to make his job easy. Police Surgeon her ass.

What came next was always what she dreaded most. Talking to the family. Under normal circumstances it was hard enough. But she knew this man, had met his wife on almost a dozen occasions, even ate dinner at their house.

This would hurt.

Kuvira ditched her a few blocks from the station, claiming to want to get to work as soon as possible. More like find somewhere to drink away the pain for a few hours. Korra half wanted to join her. Duty and friendship were more important though.

Susan met her at the door with her youngest tucked up in her arms. The confused look on her face when she saw her husband's cane only made what came next harder.

“Mrs. Richelieu...” she began before trailing off. No that wasn't right. It had to be right. “Suzy, I'm so sorry.”

The new widow took just a few seconds to break down completely. Toddler still in hand she fell to her knees in the doorway and began to weep. Richie, the boy, soon joined her. Mourning the father he barely knew and now never would. Their world would never be the same.

But Korra held them both. Made promises to keep them fed, send the boys to school, and find the person responsible. Like it made a difference apart from keeping her from joining in. Keeping her just this side of sane for one more day or maybe hour.

It all felt hollow compared with the anguish. She had lost a friend and Susan and her boy's had lost a devoted husband and a loving father.

Whitechapel had swallowed another victim.

Gerard Richelieu's tour had ended.

Chapter End Notes

And so Korra takes another step closer to madness and/or apathy. She's going to be going through lot of stuff. I wonder what or who will keep her from running off the deep end?
Chapter Summary

Korra gets a letter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The days had all blended together after that. Mindless calls, hundreds of signatures, interviews that led nowhere. Tours came and went in one giant blur. It had been all hands on deck for five straight days without any leads on any of their murders. The five other murders hadn't helped much, tho they had been much easier to solve.

It was Thursday before Korra went home. She had promised herself that she would bathe, eat something, and head right back to the office. But the bath was so warm, the food was so filling, and her couch was right there with a bottle of Rosé already set out.

Just one glass.

Just one more.

Just this bottle.

Just resting her eyes.

Just five minutes.

Two hours later and the clock's chime woke her. Ten o'clock. Another fifteen minutes and she was sitting. She struggled to remember what she had been dreaming. It had been a good dream. A memory. But the faces were all wrong. Some were too young, others she didn't recognize. Where had they been?

A wedding!

His wedding.

But she wasn't a he. Was she? She had to check herself to be sure. One touch to her chest reassured her that she was her. Breasts and all. Scars and all.

It had all seemed so real. Like she was actually there, or at very least had been. Her head hurt trying to wrap itself around the paradox.

The sound of the letter slot clacking open drew her out of it. A second later and the slap of a letter dropping to the hearth drew her suspicion. Checking the clock again and the wheels started turning. 10:23pm. No mail courier in British history made the rounds this late and if it was someone from the station they would have just knocked.

The hair on the back of Korra's neck pricked up. Like she was being watched.
Her hand shot to her Webley, laying where she had left it after removing it to wash. A quick check of the cylinder to make sure it was loaded and she cocked the hammer. She made her way to the door slowly, silently. Ears strained for any noise other than the hammering of her heart.

Nothing.

With practiced precision she darted out into the entryway, checking her corners both ways. No one there. But there was a letter on the ground under the slot.

Outside.

In an instant she charged out her front door to find…

Nobody. Not a single soul in sight. The street was totally deserted and the nearest alley was almost a hundred yards away. Then who left the letter?

Slowly backing into her house, Korra lowered the hammer on her revolver and set it on the small table where she left her necklace and her badge. Just as slowly she bent down and lifted the envelope. It was heavier than it looked, bulkier too. It seemed like there was something other than paper inside.

She didn't open it immediately. First she felt it, for anything hard, sharp, or extra. In the middle there was a lump, slightly soft yet still firm. Lifting it to her face, Korra smelled. Not the wisest move but she had a sinking feeling what it would be.

Formaldehyde.

Her finger looped into the lip of the envelope and she tore it open. The smell got worse. So did the pounding of her heart and the dread in her soul. Inside was a letter, small, folded in thirds and an object wrapped in wax paper. She debated for what felt like hours inside her head. Which one to look at first? Letter or package?

Letter.

Korra half expected the paper to burn when she touched it. A couple years ago a detective south of the river got a letter soaked in quicklime. Second-degree chemical burns on his fingers.

But it was just paper. She held it up to the light, looking for needles or powder, alarm bells still ringing in her ears. Nothing. At last she had no more excuses, so she opened it.

The text was large and neat but the spelling was virtually childlike. It read:

From hell

Mis Waters

Mam

I send you half the Kidne I took from one woman praserved it for you tother piece I fried and ate it was very nice. I may send you the bloody knif that took it out if you only wate a whil longer

signed

Catch me when you can

Mis Waters
Her hands were shaking. Her whole body was shaking. First with fear, then with rage. Dropping the letter, Korra pulled out the package. It was small enough to fit in the palm of her hand and reeked to high heaven of preservative. With trembling fingers she opened the wax paper. Not all the way, just enough to see inside.

It was red, just like the fresh caribou meat back home. Only, it looked off. Shriveled, violated. Bleached by the chemicals that had kept it from rotting. A last remnant of Mary Kelly or Annie Chapman or some other woman they hadn't found yet.

Something snapped inside her. The thin line she had been treading between professionalism and obsession was cut out from under her as the thick black bubbling anger she had been carrying around for days boiled over. The front door screamed as she ripped it open, nearly tearing it of it's hinges. She scanned the street for Jack. He was here, she could feel it in her bones.

“Where are you?!” Korra bellowed in a primal fury. Every part of her was twitching. She wanted to fight, wanted to kill. That man! “Where are you, you sick fuck?!”

Silence greeted her. Deafening, soul-crushing silence.

“I'll find you!” she screamed, an oath, a promise to all the blood on both of their hands and the souls she hadn't saved. With every blink she pictured wrapping her fingers around a faceless throat and squeezing until she felt the life slip away under her fingers. “I'll find you, Jack! I'll kill you myself!”

For a moment there was nothing, but then, slowly it began.

Laughter. Cackling, gleeful laughter. From all around, it seemed. Bouncing off the walls, raining down from the sky. From directly behind her.

Korra span around, then again. Searching, searching, searching.

It echoed all around her. He was everywhere and nowhere all at once. Maybe it was in her head? Maybe she was just as mad as him?

“WHERE ARE YOU?!”

The laughter stopped and then she heard clearly, in the stillness of the night, almost like it was being whispered in her ear: “Catch me if you can, Mis Waters.”

Chapter End Notes

Is it real? Is it a dream? Does it even matter?
Your Comments and Kudos mean everything!

(HISTORY: Seeing that I am a historian by trade, I thought I would pass on a bit of knowledge to you lovely people. The letter in this chapter is, in fact, real. Known as the “From Hell” letter (hence the name of the chapter) it is one of the few out of hundreds of letters supposedly written by Jack believed to be genuine. It was sent to the head of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee, a Mr. George Lusk, on October 15, 1888. It, along with most other documents relating to the Ripper cases disappeared shortly after the murders stopped. Most are still missing, likely taken by detectives that
worked in H-Division at the time.
Or maybe Jack took them.
Sleep Well.)
Chapter Summary

I need some input (please).

I realize I just updated yesterday, but I've reached a turning point in this fic, I think. I've got a couple of dedicated readers and I like where the story is going, but I would like some input. There are a few ways I can go from here and I'd like to hear from anyone that reads this far what they think.

There are three options to choose from, as I see it:

A: Fast track Korra and Asami's relationship with the two of them eloping, focus on Amon and the Equalists, ditch my later plans for Zaheer or leave it for a sequel piece if anyone wants that. That would keep things shortest, most likely (and happier). It would also cut out alot of OC's, filler (which some people might appreciate), and all but 2 or 3 appearances of Holmes and his biographer.

B: Keep things slow on the romantic side, focus on the tension, big interweaving plot with one final payoff way down the line. This would basically tie us all in for the long hall with the added benefit of more Holmes, Watson, and character development.

C: Something in between. A long story with Korra and Asami being a couple throughout. While I would LOVE to write this, my inner historian would be rebelling at how hard being a lesbian couple in Victorian London would be. Practically world breaking. This would be my preferred route but I'll leave it up to you lot how it goes.

I'll leave this up for a couple weeks to see if anyone wants to give an opinion and if nothing happens I'll just default to Plan C.

Please vote in the comments, as I am truly stuck here.

Yours Humbly etc.

P.S. As to Jack, I already have it planned who he is, what he does, and how he'll be caught so that can go basically anywhere in any story.
Korra does some digging on the arson at Mr. Sato's factory and finds out something interesting about his daughter instead.

Oh god, this ended up being about twice as long as I was expecting and I'm still not sure I'm entirely happy with it. There's some important stuff buried somewhere in here, but I'm not going to force my roommate to proof read it again because they might throw my computer in a lake.

“I'm telling you, Korra, it's the weirdest thing,” Bolin said as they sipped calmly at their afternoon tea. The British and their customs still baffled her. Drinking a caffeinated beverage in the afternoon was crazy unless you'd stayed up all the last night.

Which they both had.

The play last night had run long and Opal had somehow tricked them both into helping tear down the set. Again. Luckily, the only thing she had to do today was sift through some papers at Mr. Sato's house.

“You keep saying that but you haven't told me what 'it' is,” she grumbled with growing irritation. More sugar. That's what she needed. “So either spit 'it' out or let me pass out for half-an-hour.”

“Oh yeah,” her friend replied, sudden realization in his face, “Sorry about that.”

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

“Sorry,” Bolin shrugged, reaching over to grab his bowler, “Didn't think I should put it there until we got the autopsy back. Besides, there's no way he got shocked anyways. Me and Mr. Reid checked and there wasn't a single wire in the whole building. All gas.”

Not unusual. Electricity was just the latest fad to hit Europe from across the Atlantic. Apparently it
was making a big splash back home, too, if her aunt Kya's letters were to be believed.

“You're sure?” she asked, taking one of the tiny sandwiches from the plate between them.

“Yep,” he said, checking his watch for the fifth time. “Even ran down all the utility companies in the area. House was clean. Jimmy the Fin was strictly gas powered.”

Korra's eyes rolled at the name. “Why do your gangsters all have such stupid nicknames?”

“Not my idea.”

“I know, Bo,” she said with a grin around her sandwich. “Look, I'm sorry about-”

“Don't worry about it,” he waved off with a smile of his own. With a flourish he dropped a cube of sugar into his empty cup before pouring another cup of tea over it. “Until you get as scary as Opal when I tear one of her outfits, you're fine. Besides, if I'd got that letter I'd be doing a whole lot more than knocking people's hats off.”

“Yeah.” No need to tell him that she'd broken her punching bag and it's replacement. And started throwing knives into the wall over a big sign labeled 'Jack'.

“Say, you should really be heading over to that rich guy's place,” her friend told her going for number six with his watch. “I'll get the bill.”

“That's kind of the point of taking someone to lunch,” she joked, popping the last bit of food in her mouth. They said their goodbyes and Korra grabbed her coat. In the past few days the temperature had plummeted to just above freezing. Last night there had been a hard sleet that only now had fully melted.

Waving down the first cab she saw Korra gave the man the instructions Perkins had got her. Then she closed her eyes to rest.

“Miss? Excuse me, Miss?” the cabbie woke her. She jerked as she was ripped out of her dreams. This time she couldn't remember what it had been this time. Was it sweet or grim? Most likely grim. Most of her life had been grim since that letter, awake or asleep. “We've arrived.”

“Thanks,” the Inspector muttered, wiping the sleep from her eyes.

Reaching into her pocket she tossed the man a jumble of coins without bothering to count. Since he didn't call out to her as she walked off it must have been enough. With a hefty tip, too. What did she care? Her parents wired a thousand Pounds into her account every month no matter how much she tried to protest. He needed to eat just as much as she did.

The Sato House was impressive for a non-royal London home. It was surrounded by a high wrought-iron fence at least twice Korra's height topped with decorative, but no less sharp, spikes.

Just on the other side were another layer of defense and grandeur: six-foot rose bushes. Even dormant she could tell that there were at least three different varieties. They were probably beautiful in the springtime. Did the servants care for them or did Asami have a green thumb?

Ha! They'd only met twice and Korra was already calling her Asami in her mind. How odd?

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The gate was guarded by two men in well fitted, matching black jackets and pants. “I'm sorry, Ma'am, but this is private property,” the guy on the left said in an accent way above his pay grade. Since when did bouncers go to Eton? As though he had some kind of death-wish he stuck his hand
out and jabbed Korra in the chest with his palm to stop her.

With one finger the Avatar brushed the hand aside before he did something with it that would warrant removal. She smiled her most elegant smile and told him, “I have an appointment.”

He blinked, once, twice. Not too bright, this one. He must've flunked out of Eton. Hence why he was standing out in the cold.

“Inspector Waters.”

“Oh, Your Majesty!” he declared, startling a passing team of horses and drawing the attention of the few people willing to brave the cold and damp. “Yes, we were told to be expecting you. Mr. Sato said to let you right in.”

There's a rattling as he pulled out a ring of keys and unlocked the gate.

“It's Inspector,” she grumbled, slipping passed him before he could do something like bow. Bowing was the worst.

“Of course, Your M-” Korra shot him a glare over her shoulder. “Inspector.”

Turning her back on the pair the Detective continued up the path towards the house, passing under the arms of skeletal trees spaced equally on either side. “Yes, You Majesty, let me kiss your boots, Your Majesty,” Korra mocked before kicking a stone skittering down the path. “Didn't even know who I was and he started sucking up to me.”

Grumbling had long been her pastime. Growing up in a compound with no friends most of her life did that to you. All she'd had was complaining and sneaking out whenever her tenders backs were turned, and after George's visit she'd had a lot of people watching her.

Tutors for her studies, masters to teach her how to fight, monks to evaluate her soul.

Everything but friends her own age.

It had been lonely. This place reminded her a great deal of home. On the outside, at least. Beautiful and comfortable, yes, but far too empty and devoid of life to really be called a 'home.' It had been were she slept, ate, grown up, learned, and (rarely) even played but Korra had always felt far more like a prisoner than a princess.

Sure, she'd had Naga, her massive white dog. That had counted for a lot. Her parents were great, if a little high-strung and over protective. And Katara and Sokka and Aunt Kya had been there to sneak her toys and candy whenever they came. It just hadn't been enough sometimes.

Looking around she wondered how similar Asami's childhood had been.

Maybe she would ask, if she got the chance. After a few months and half a dozen drinks.

The steps leading up to the door were white marble, because, of course they would be. The upper-classes were so predictable. Careful not to slip the Detective took the final few moments before the heavy oak door reviewing what she already knew. Fire investigators report, arson team, insurance claims, witness testimony she'd managed to sniff out of the central archive all filed away in her brain. Surprisingly sparse pickings for the price she'd paid.

*Knock, Knock!*
In a matter of seconds the door creaked open. In the gap stood a well-dressed man in his mid-to-late forties. Too old to be a footman, but not well-dressed enough to be a business partner on the way out. A butler, she concluded, quite pleased with herself.

“Inspector Waters, I presume,” he greeted warmly, ushering her inside. The blast of warmth was as shocking as it was delightful as Korra felt her whole body shiver in response.

“Yes, Mr. uh?”

“Wan. Just, Wan,” he said with the same obedient smile all servants wore, no matter how miserable they were.

“Wan,” she returned, offering her hand. “Call me Korra.”

“Of course, Miss Korra,” Just Wan obliged, shaking her outstretched hand briefly before returning to his previous pose. “Shall I take your hat and coats, or would you rather keep them?”

“Depends how many papers I'm supposed to be going through,” Korra shrugged. She liked her coat and hat. It set her apart from almost every other woman in the city. Except the ones trying to pass as a man for one reason or another.

“Hmm. I think I should take them,” he mumbled, flashing her an apologetic smile. What had she been roped into? Suddenly, Asami's behavior towards her father was starting to make sense.

With a brief shuffling Korra shed her outer layers and draped them over the man's arm. As she turned around he started slightly when he saw the pair of revolvers holstered on either side. The heavier Webley on the left and her backup Bulldog on the right. It was no wonder he was surprised. She had them positioned by design, about navel height so they would be all but invisible under her coat.

“Would you like me to take those, too?” he asked, voice calm, but eyes betraying the nervousness of a man that had never held a firearm in his life.

“I'll keep them,” Korra told him with a smile. “My boss would bust me if I lost them.”

“Very well,” Wan swallowed, turning to deposit her outer wear someplace. While he left the Inspector took the time to have a look around.

The inside of the house was even more familiar than the outside. Art from all over the world decorated the walls of the entryway. Empty suits of armor stood guard at every hall (though these, she suspected, were reproductions). Old swords and guns hung from elaborate mounts, some realistic, some outright fantasies.

Yes, this was very familiar. If you swapped the color pallet from reds to blues then…

“I'm afraid Mr. Sato was called away to Birmingham on important business,” the butler said as he returned, “He said to let you into the study to look over the papers. Please follow me.”

Turning his back, the besuited man started up the stairs with Korra close behind him. As they went the detective did her best to remember the route they were taking in case she had to let herself out. Always have a way out, that's what her father had taught her.

Too bad he hadn't meant the house.

Luckily for her there were only three turns between her and her destination. Wan stopped outside
an unassuming door, no different than any other she'd seen so far, apart from this one having a slot for a key in it. As he turned the handle a surprised “Oh” escaped him as it turned without needing the key he still held half in his pocket.

From inside a now familiar, if muffled voice called, “Come in, Wan.”

They did. As the door opened Korra's senses were assaulted by a barrage of sensations. The smell of steam and oil, sound of whirring motors and crackling electricity. Flashes of light and blasts of hot, damp air coming from every direction.

Taking center place in the room was a single, massive steam-engine the likes of which Korra had never seen. And just up top she could see a grease covered red bandana poking up from the other side.

“I wasn't expecting you for another hour, Your Highness,” the young Miss Sato apologized with a teasing grin. There was a loud squeak and a shudder and the machine started to die. In a flash, Asami disappeared, landing with a thud on the other side. As she walked around the edge of her mechanical beast, wiping black gunk on her overalls as she went, Korra noticed she still managed to seem… dignified. “If I had known you were coming early, I would have sent for caviar and champagne.”

With and over dramatic flourish right out of the Georgian-period, Asami curtsied so low it made Korra's knees have flashbacks.

“Ha, ha,” the detective returned, brushing off the little jab. “I guess I deserve that.”

“Just a little,” Asami assured her, holding her finger and thumb a fraction of an inch apart. “I wasn't exactly the nicest person in the world to you, either, the first time we met.”

Korra shrugged again. She hadn't been going to bring it up. It was one of her rare off days and she wanted to avoid thinking about murder as much as possible. But... “The first thing you learn in my line of work is that everybody lies.”

“I guess figuring out what they're lying about is lesson two,” the engineer reasoned logically.

So close, but not quite. “Nope. Why is more important than what,” she corrected with a smile. “You lied about your name. There are a few reasons you could have done that. One,” she held up a finger, “you killed her. Seeing as you don't strike me as a serial killer, we can rule that one out.”

“Two,” another finger, “You're a criminal. We can toss that out, too.”

“Does that mean I can keep all those diamonds I took?” Asami joked undoing her bandana and shaking out her hair.

“Sure,” Korra chuckled, shaking her head. “Three, you weren't supposed to be there. My guess is you met when she worked at the factory that your dad owned. I looked into her records,” the detective provided when her host's eyes widened just enough to be a tell, “She left her position almost two weeks before the fire. That means she either quit because she had something else lined up that fell through or…”

“She was fired,” Asami confirmed, rubbing her hands together, clearly uncomfortable about something. “My father found out she used to be a prostitute.”

“And he fired her because she was moonlighting?” Korra tried to lead. Anything to help fill out the timeline.
The other woman shifted from side to side, pulling her gloves off and tossing them onto a crowded workbench. Her eyes studied Korra for a while, flitting over her face, softening and hardening over and over as a war raged behind her eyes.

“No,” she said, finally. When she did she paused again for half a breath as though choosing her words carefully. “My father isn't very forgiving of that sort of thing. He doesn't hire people who've made mistakes like Mary, even if they had to to get by.”

“You were going to give her her job back,” the Inspector deduced by how Asami’s eye twitched when she talked about her father's decision.

“Why wouldn't I? She was a good worker, never had problems with anybody. Drank a little, but then everyone does, sometimes,” Asami said, turning to grab a pad and pencil from the desk. Once she had them she started to scribble numbers off dials lining the whatever she had been working on. “I'd heard that she was still living at Miller's Court while I was fixing one of the machines on the floor. I figured I'd just convince her to apply under a different name. Maybe dye her hair so she'd look a little different to anyone who didn't look too close.”

“How were you planning on pulling it off?”

“I got a few forged documents she could use,” the green-eyed woman admitted freely. Apparently done with her cataloging, she tossed the pad on top of her gloves and started sifting through paper. “Some reference letters, employment records, bank statements. You know, the usual.”

Yeah, the usual.

“Were you friends?” Korra asked, both touched by the kindness and doubtful someone would go to all the trouble of committing fraud for someone they barely knew.

“No,” Asami denied firmly, this time for some reason Korra believed her, “I just think people deserve to have a second chance when they make mistakes.”

It took a moment for her to figure out how to respond. “I agree.”

What else could she really say? “Well done committing a felony for someone that ended up dying anyways.” The woman as willing to go behind her father’s back to help someone that needed it. Korra could respect that, hell she'd basically done the same thing with Kuvira, only without the fraud. At best she could come off as patronizing, at worst like she was preparing to do something stupid like file charges if she pressed too hard.

Instead she searched for a way to switch the subject, sensing the waves of roiling emotions being sent off by her host. This had been a touchier subject than she had realized.

“So, what were you working on?” she asked casting her eyes at the machine that was radiating heat into the room like a bonfire.

“Oh, this?” The woman nodded her head back towards it. “It's a Stirling engine.”

“A what?”

“It's kind of like a steam engine without the water and all self contained,” the engineer tried to explain and completely failing to help. Even with all the nice hand gestures.

“Uh huh.”
“All you need to know is that it's more efficient than a combustion engine and makes less waste than, like, a coal boiler,” she dumbed down even more, trying to put it the simplest terms she could probably think of. “And it's quieter, too.”

“Not that quiet,” Korra argued as the sound of contracting metal set the hairs on the back of her neck on end.

“Oh, yeah?” Asami pushed back. “Did you hear anything out of the ordinary before you came in here?”

“No,” the Inspector replied. Nothing but footsteps and a few creaky floorboards.

“I've had this thing running all day,” she bragged, tapping one of the gauges with a knuckle. “This baby has been my little pet project since University. With one layer of padding around this room, it's like it's not even here, but it puts off enough power to run three blocks of flats.”

“Really?” Korra asked, interest peaked. If that were true she would have to send a letter home to her parents.

Something like this could really be useful.

“Yep,” the young Miss Sato said, evidently very proud of her creation, “But you didn't come here to talk about that, did you?”

“Oh, no,” she agreed, smirking at how she'd managed to see through her ruse. “Do you know where those papers I'm supposed to be looking at are?”

The heiress pointed a grease stained hand over to her right. “Second filing cabinet from the left, top and middle drawers,” she said from memory, then shifting her finger to another set of cabinets. “The insurance paperwork is all in there if you want to take a look at it, too. Here's the key.”

The Inspector caught it and thanked her host.

“Do you mind if I keep working?” the engineer asked, once again nodding at the Stirling engine.

“It's your house,” Korra reminded, shrugging at the prospect.

“You'll want these,” Asami told her, digging in the clutter and pulling out jar of cotton.

“Thanks.”

Once she'd put in her ear protection the Inspector started her 'work'. Not that there was much she could really do.

All of the real police work was over, and boy there was a lot of it. There were more reports, statements, witness testimonies, and potential suspect descriptions in this one drawer than she'd seen on most murder cases. No less than half a dozen Detectives from New Scotland Yard had signed off on the contents of just the first three folders she'd pulled out.

Even if she tried to ignore it the stench of money reeked on the files. Not bribery, most likely. More like coercion. The Sato family and Future Industries were among the top benefactors of the Met's pension fund. Number four, if the rumors in the lounge could be trusted. Right after the Royal Family, some coal magnate perpetually running for Parliament, and themselves.

And with such generosity came certain benefits: free tickets to the annual Gala, a likely heads-up
on any new regulations working their way through the pipes, and the best service money could buy with the added boon of keeping all the work at your house when it's done. Meanwhile, some people had to wait weeks for their problems to work their way to her desk because of red tape. Bureaucracy, it's for winners!

There was a loud hiss that cut through the rumbling of the machine sending another blast of hot air into the room. Turning her head Korra watched as the black-haired woman calmly turned a valve to shut off the escaping gas. If she wasn't running everything was probably fine.

Hopefully.

Either way she had more papers to look at than minutes left in the day. At least now she had something that made it a little more interesting.

Every few minutes, or every couple of folders, she'd toss a glance over to see what was happening. She moved smoothly from task to task, no less than she had walked around in an elegant dress at that, Korra shuddered, 'party'. At least Desna and Eska hadn't been there, the little freaks.

It was an oddly fun game. Trying to figure out which lever, valve, or meter would draw the woman's attention next. But she could only play for a few seconds at a time.

WORK! She had to focus on work.

The fire-brigade's reports were next. The were just as detailed, if not more so. Apparently by the time the first team had arrive on scene most of the building had already gone up, which struck Korra as very odd. The nearest station was only a handful of blocks away down what would have been a rather empty large road.

She dug through the papers until she found what she was looking for. The building's plan. While most buildings in the city were still framed with wood they also tended to be built with brick, especially industrial ones. A hard earned lesson after the city burned down.

Three times.

Sure enough, so was this one. For the fire to have spread so quickly it must have been very hot or had a lot of help.

Korra's money was on both. Not much burned that hot or fast.

Another glance at Asami to check her other bet. Only to catch a flash of green looking back. Just for an instant before she grabbed some kind of wrench and headed for the edge of her machine, ducking behind it and out of sight. It had to be a coincidence. A fluke of the universe.

“Is that one of the new Webley's?” she asked over a sudden spike in the rumbling. Okay, that was it. She was looking at the gun, not her. “I've been trying to get my hands on one to try it out for a while now but they've all been snapped up by the army.”

“You shoot?” Korra asked, somewhat surprised. Shooting in Britain seemed to be a more male-centric pastime than back home. But then, if she was comfortable building an electric generator in the middle of her home, a trip or two to the target range wouldn't be too strange in comparison.

“I used to do it semi-professionally before I went to University,” she revealed, poking her head back around to tap on a dial. “Even won a couple trophies.”
“You must be pretty good,” the detective said, impressed and a little tempted to find out exactly how good she was.

“I was, but that was years ago,” Asami half-agreed dropping the wrench and grabbing a heavily stained rag. After running it over the seams of the pipe to wipe away whatever was leaking from the gap she leaned in and checked closely. With a nod she tossed it aside too and grabbed her pad. “I haven't shot anything in years.”

“We could go together,” Korra suggested, her urge to compete momentarily getting the better of her.

None of her friends or colleagues would go with her to the range anymore. Even Tenzin and the brothers had started to make excuses not to join her. The idea of a new su- partner to go with was enticing.

Even someone she barely knew.

“Sure,” her host accepted with a smile. “I could use a break. Knock the rust off.”

“Great!” she said so loud that it surprised both of them. Above one of those emerald eyes an eyebrow quirked and Korra felt a slight flush in her cheeks. Guess I need that vacation Reid keeps talking about, after all.

“Alright then,” Asami replied slowly, “So, when were you thinking about doing this?”

She hadn't actually thought of that. Technically speaking she got weekends off, although this had been the first time she hadn't been to work on a Saturday in almost eight months. Sunday was more like ten.

“I don't think I'll be doing anything next Sunday,” she proposed, thinking fast while trying to sound sure of what she was saying. If she was wrong she would just kick it to Monday.

“No, I've got a thing.” And a little salt to rub in. “Real sudden thing.”

“Alright,” her new ‘friend?’ agreed.

For some reason Korra's heart fluttered a little but she just chalked it up with how tired she was. Everything was all messed up in her head. On her way to lunch she could have sworn she'd seen Doctor Phillips and his assistant twice and George once, but that would be impossible. Or really fucking unlikely. Add to that her frequent bouts of passing out at her desk, or in cabs, or wherever she managed to sit down for more than a couple of seconds and her body was probably just catching up on the whole 'playing tricks' bandwagon.

“Okay, next Sunday then,” Korra said, taking a glance at the clock she had seen when she had walked in. Two hours, really? It hadn't felt anywhere close to that long. “Do you mind if I take some of this stuff home so I can look at them with an expert at work?”

“Sure,” she said, shrugging. “Take whatever you need.”

Korra gathered all of the pictures she had come across as well as most of the fire-brigade's documents in three bulging files and tucked them under her arm.

“I guess that's goodbye then,” she said cheerfully, giving her company a wave.
“It was good to see you again, Korra,” the engineer told her, offering her hand.

Without even a thought the Inspector took it and they shook. “It as good to see you, too, Asami,” she bid before turning for the door. “I'll see you Sunday.”

No sooner had the door closed behind her did the rumbling of the Stirling engine fade. Retracing her steps, she found Wan who got her coat and hat, even loaning her a briefcase and umbrella to shield her and her papers from the renewed sleet outside. With another goodbye she stepped outside into the cold, taking a deep breath and picturing the good times as a child.

A heart full of warmth she walked out into the blustery weather. And with every blink of her eyes she pictured that green looking back at her.

She knew that tea was a bad idea…

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this came out a few days after I tend to upload. If I don't write almost everything in a chapter in a couple sittings it becomes a real slog 'cause I forget what I was trying to do and have to read back through to jog my memory.

Also, the poll is still open since votes do keep trickling in although Plan C is well in the lead. I will say that this will never be a full romance story. I'll be focusing on the crime in most chapters with the lulls between the gruesome being used for the girls to develop their relationship. It should still nip along rather nicely without messing with the drama at all. Sound okay?

Holmes and Watson next. Because, why not? You've earned it.
Chapter Summary

Enlisting the medical advice of a Dr. John Watson, MD. Some guy named Holmes is there, too, but we don't care about him.

Chapter Notes

Plan C has clearly won the poll so I'll be heading in that direction. I would still appreciate input on how you think the story's going though. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next morning, around 10, she finally arrived at her destination. She could have been there earlier but after another night of strange dreams and fitful sleep she'd felt the need to stretch her legs and let her coffee catch up to her. The conveniently placed Regent's Park had done nicely for that.

The whole place had been nearly deserted as last evening's sleet had turned into an early snowstorm that had left close to an inch of powder on the ground in some places. Most people who weren't on their way to or from church had decided to stay in, huddled around fires and drinking warm beverages if they were lucky.

The snow simply didn't bother Korra, though. At home this kind of weather generally rolled in around mid-September. By now most people would be settled in for the long nights to come, gathering their animals indoors and keeping the greenhouse roofs clear of snow so what few winter crops could be grown had a shot at the sun. It was a different way to deal with the winter, fighting back rather than hiding.

Still, she was glad for her heavy overcoat and stiff hat for protecting her from the biting wind. Most of all for her heavy fur-lined boots, keeping her feet warm and dry.

The faint, crunch, crunch, of her footfalls had become all but background noise by the time she lifted the knocker of 221 Baker Street and rung three times.

After some small commotion inside the door swung open to reveal a woman perhaps a few inches shorter than herself with mousy, brown hair speckled with gray. Despite the faint lines on her face and a slight stoop of her spine, her eyes were just as alive as someone half her age. And they appeared distinctly unhappy with someone.

“You must be here to see Mr. Holmes,” she said, stepping aside somewhat reluctantly and letting the Inspector in out of the cold.

“Actually, I'm here for Dr. Watson,” she corrected, scraping her feet on the entry mat to knock loose any slush. “Is he in?”
When she was told that the woman Korra could only assume was the landlord perked up a little. That is until the squeaking sound of a poorly-tuned violin started creeping through the roof. “Yes, they're both in,” she spat, casting a loathing look towards the stairs. “Go right up.”

“Thank you, Ma'am,” Korra replied, being extra polite to help offset what seemed like a rather tense relationship with her somewhat infamous boarder.

“And tell Mr. Holmes that his poxy tea will be ready as soon as he knocks off that awful racket!” the landlord shouted after her so loudly that the music upstairs stopped on it's own.

Even before she reached halfway up the stairs Korra's nostrils were filled with the lingering odor of pipe smoke. Like the office but concentrated ten-fold. Enough that she had to wipe the tears from her eyes. Was that turpentine?

Just as she reached the landing she heard a voice call, “Come in, Miss.”

This door, too, swung open and she came face to face with a gentile looking man. He had a thick, bushy mustache on his upper lip and his hair was well trimmed and combed. His clothes were almost identical to hers, minus the coats and guns. A well fitted vest with years of good use behind it and a freshly laundered shirt covered his decent gut. He had the stiff backed posture of a military man but the physique of someone who had left service a good while ago. Maybe five years or more.

Plenty of time for good food and less for long marches in the tropical sun.

Still, he remained a reasonably imposing physical presence, with thick arms and the swagger of a man that knew he could hold his own in a fight.

This must be her Doctor Watson.

“Good morning to you, young lady,” he greeted her warmly, bowing his head respectfully and ushering her inside. “I do hope you will excuse the mess, it has been rather hectic of late.”

Mess was a…vast understatement. Crowded would be the polite way to describe it. Horrifically filthy would be more apt, so she went with that. A varying layer of dust clung to most everything and the atmosphere was almost stagnant. She was half tempted to throw open a window, or chuck a brick through one. Anything for some fresh air.

Hardly a free inch of space could be seen. Towers of letters, newspapers, and documents of all kinds tied together by brown twine lived in stacks that had all but consumed an entire corner of the sitting room, spilling out onto the surrounding furniture.

On the opposite wall stood a well-stocked chemistry station. Bottles of various colored liquids label in thin frantic writing stood open, leaking Spirits knew what kind of toxic fumes into the already cramped and noxious environment. Cyanide, chlorine, arsenic, and the previously smelled turpentine. It was a wonder no one had died yet with a chemists worth of poisons just lying out.

Especially with the dozens of bullet pocks in the wall behind them. A rather patriotic V.R. adorned the wall accompanied by a smattering of randomly placed shots.

“I've seen worse.” Miss Kelly's, for example.

“It's a pleasure to finally meet you Inspector Waters,” the other man said from his perch behind the cluttered writing desk. In profile his long nose was his most impressive feature, followed closely by his high widow's peak. “Sherlock Holmes, at your service.”
When he turned she was surprised to see him wearing pajamas under his thick red bathrobe. Tall and lanky, in his arms he held the source of the music she'd heard earlier. The most well-cared for looking thing she had seen so far: a violin.

“Let me guess,” Doctor Watson interjected, holding up a finger. Apparently he was used to his companion guessing visitors names before they provided them. “You deduced it by the sound of her boots walking up the stairs. Padded, unlike is the style in London at the moment, so it muffled the sound of her footsteps. Seeing how ghastly the weather is outside, the only person willing to brave it would be a Police Officer. The only one of such would wear such boots is our present company, the talented young Inspector Waters.”

It was quite the guess and Korra couldn't help but crack a thin smile. Enthusiastic as well as polite, just the man she needed. It was almost a shame to dispel his reverence for his muse's abilities.

“He saw me out the window,” she said to both men's slight shock, though Holmes concealed his better. “The blinds were open just a crack as I was walking up. You closed them after and started playing your violin so you'd hope I wouldn't realize you'd been people watching. Were you trying to impress me or just trying to play some kind of joke on your buddy?”

“A bit of both,” he admitted bowing respectfully to her skills. “Dr. Watson is a good friend and a fine biographer, but I'm afraid he over thinks my little deductions rather frequently.”

“Holmes I-” the medical man began before his colleague held up the bow of his instrument to silence him.

“I do apologize for using you as a pawn in my little game,” the amateur told him humbly, or as humbly as his massive ego would let him be. “Although, I am impressed by your observations about the Inspector's footwear. Rather insightful, my friend, if perhaps in the wrong direction.” He pointed over his shoulder at the window.

“That's quite alright, old chap,” he accepted with a little chuckle at either the gentle praising, being in on the joke, or likely both.

He seemed the type to want for little and be pleased by much.

“But that does still leave the question of why you would brave such unpleasant weather, Your Highness? The bright, shining spot in that dull company that is the Metropolitan Police department graces our doorstep with a problem, my dear Watson. Would you care to hazard a guess as to why?” Holmes inquired of his friend, simultaneously managing to put him on the spot once more, insult her friends and colleagues, and give Korra that little twitch in her eye whenever someone called her 'Your Majesty'.

This guy was another bow away from a fist to the face.

“Well,” the broader man pondered, turning to face her, “I suppose it would be about that dreadful business in Whitechapel?”

“An excellent deduction!” his friend exclaimed, setting down his instrument and clapping his hands together. “I would go as far as to say it might be about that letter you received late last week.”

Korra sighed. Even though she'd managed to keep the actual details of the letter secret, mainly by only telling five people (Tenzin, Reid, Bolin, Kuvira, and Steinman), it hadn't stopped rumors from leaking out. The grapevigne was strong and Fleet Street were the crappy winemakers that plucked
the fruit any reasonable people would know to leave be.

“I suppose you came to enlist my skills in the art of examining penmanship?” he offered switching
to a more confident tone that seemed to match his demeanor better.

For a moment Korra just looked at the hand he outstretched to take a letter that wasn't there.
“Actually,” she said, turning to the doctor, “I came to see you, Dr. Watson.”

With a pleased smile the man turned his head to his companion and gave one short 'Ha'. Then he
put his thumbs in his vest and tugged it taught, removing what few wrinkles there had been. “And
how might I be of service to you, Inspector?” he asked, seemingly very happy to be the center of
attention while in the company of his far more famous friend.

“We have a man in the morgue at London Hospital that we're pretty sure got shocked to death,” the
Detective revealed, reaching into her breast pocket and pulling out the pictures she had been given
by their new medical examiner. “I heard you were some kind of expert in the field.”

With a muttered thank you he took them and held them up to the light. “Yes, well, these injuries do
appear to be,” he shifted to the next photo, “indicative of a rather powerful shock. The burns and
bruising are fairly distinctive. However, I would be remiss to give you a proper cause of death
without actually,” the next picture got the same treatment, “examining the body, personally. It is a
rather uncommon occurrence, you understand?”

“Well, nobody's claimed the guy, so he's still on ice down at the morgue,” Korra told him, taking
back the pictures and sticking them back in her pocket.

“Excellent!” Holmes exclaimed again, tossing off his robe and rushing to gather a few scattered
bits of clothing more suited to the outdoors at 28°F. “Well, we have no time to lose. Quick,
Watson! Gather your things, we mustn't keep the Inspector waiting.”

Oh, hell no. She was not letting this prick tag along. Not after he had all but confirmed everything
she had thought of him. “Actually, there is something I would like to talk to you about that isn't
about this,” Korra told him, hoping to pause his frantic efforts.

Fortunately for her, it did.

Pulling out her pad and pencil she scribbled out a hasty note to whoever had pulled the short straw
this week and ended up on guard duty. “This should get to past the man on duty, Doctor,” she said,
handing him the note. “It's got my name and badge number on it so you shouldn't have any
problems.”

“I thank you,” the man replied, reading it briefly before grabbing his coat. Just as he was about to
leave he cast a look over at his friend.

“We'll be along shortly,” Holmes assured, waving his biographer out the door.

They didn't speak immediately after he left, both waiting for him to start walking down the stairs.

“I don't want you involved,” Korra told him sharply. The veil of civility she had worn for Watson
and the landlady's sake faded as her resentment for the man she now shared the room with leaked
out.

“I understand,” he acquiesced, giving her another respectful nod. “It only makes sense that you
would want to be the one to apprehend the men responsible for killing one of your own.”
With that she thought it was over and headed for the door.

“Pardon me, Inspector,” he called to stop her. When Korra looked back his face had nearly completely changed. Gone were the emotive expressions he had worn just moments before, replaced with a cool, almost emotionless mask

“I understand that it was not the purpose of your visit, but I would ask you to help sate my curiosity,” he requested, gesturing for her to stay. “A little brainstorming between like minds, if you were. A back and forth amongst those in the same field and with the same goals.”

Jack, she thought, immediately. Some people just didn't know how to take a hint.

Sometimes you just had to beat it into them.

“Fine.”

“Yes, well, I think we can be rather sure your man has killed before he began his current spree in the East End,” he began, starting to pace back and forth. Much as she hated to admit it, she often did the same thing when she was stuck on a case. “Whether he did so abroad or elsewhere in Britain, I'm not sure, but we can be sure by the nature of the crimes he has done so and perfected his methods before coming here.”

“We've already reached out to all the neighboring jurisdictions,” she told him, helping him pour on steam.

“Then farther afield, perhaps,” he suggested, “Scotland or Ireland perhaps. Maybe even on the continent. America.”

“I'll keep that in mind,” the Inspector obliged.

“But what of the nature of the man?” Holmes continued, picking up his pipe and filling it as he went. His choice of a Persian slipper to store his tobacco was rather unique. “What drives a man to act as he does?”

“Unhappy home,” she provided immediately. “Absent father, at least one other sibling, probably older that got all of his mother's attention.”

“Yes, yes,” he agreed with more feeling behind it. “The man was likely alone most of his young life, perhaps learned to prefer it that way. But he was smart, buried his nose in books as an escape from his sense of powerlessness at his situation.”

“Did well in school.”

“Yes, but not too well. Without the attention of a parent to vie for he was probably an under-achiever,” Holmes carried on, his ball really rolling now. She could see it in his eyes. That manic look of the obsessive eying over what had latest caught their interest. “Habitually so. Carried on that habit into manhood. Rather than become an engineer or doctor of some repute he likely toils in obscurity.”

“Yeah.” That sounded about right.

“He is a native of the area, I think,” Holmes said, pausing to let her contribute.

“That makes sense,” she shrugged. It was pretty fucking obvious, actually. “He picks somewhere both out of the way and with as many escape routes as possible. And he seems to know how to
avoid our rounds, even when we shift them.”

“Yes, he was likely involved in police work or something similar at some point,” he concurred, striking a match and puffing. The way he shuddered as the first coil of smoke snaked into him made her think there was more than just nicotine in his mix. “A way to satisfy his morbid curiosity whilst learning all he needed to know about their procedures.”

“Great, what else?”

“He most likely has trouble socializing and forming relationships. At least those of any real meaning and duration.”

“Especially with women.”

“Yes, yes!” he declared, taking a deep puff and filling the room with acrid smoke. “My young Inspector, you are almost as helpful a partner of conversation as Dr. Watson.”

Korra wasn't sure if that was supposed to be a complement or an insult. Maybe both.

“Yes he likely has an aversion to women, but why?”

“Rejection,” she answered. It fit perfectly into the puzzle.

“Precisely! He was in love with a woman,” Holmes deduced pausing to look right at Korra for the first time. “Utterly and completely, but she hurt him in some way, perhaps without even knowing. Left him for another man or passed on before he could disclose his feelings. Perhaps, even abused in some way.”

“No, I think she used him,” Korra countered, “She knew exactly what she was doing. That woman, whoever she was led him on for years, always giving him just enough for him to hope for something she would never give him.”

The amateur's face began to change again. A growing suspicion behind those beady eyes.

“But he was too enamored to even notice how she was manipulating him,” Korra thrusting taking a step forward that caused Holmes to take a corresponding one back. “Until it was too late and he had lost her, forever. And she made him help.”

Her eyes turned to focus on the one thing one his desk that was as pristine as his violin. A single picture frame with the portrait of a beautiful dark haired woman perhaps ten years his junior.

Right around her age, in fact.

“Am I close?”

With a trembling hand he reached out and lay the picture flat, hiding her face. Of course he had fallen for someone like her. Beautiful, charming, and just as witty and manipulative as himself. And a criminal to boot. Just the thing for him to hide his affections behind, or to hide them from himself. She was just another criminal. The one that got away.

“I see I have met my match,” he said carefully, not looking her in the face anymore.

“Stay out of my business and I'll stay out of yours,” Korra warned, menacingly. She watched as he slumped against his desk, satisfied. Hopefully she’d managed to show she wasn't messing around.

“Otherwise, Irene Adler will be the last thing you'll need to worry about.”
“I understand, completely,” he assured her, seemingly genuinely crestfallen by the turn the conversation had taken.

“Good.”

With that last word she turned to leave. Holmes had been dealt with, once and for all. All she’d get from this visit was a consult from an expert. Dr. Watson. No tag alongs, no butting into her work by snooping civilians with a hero complex.

“Before you go, Inspector, a warning,” Holmes called out one last time. When she turned to see him his face was stern and dire. “Men like him are most dangerous when they have found a new obsession. With that letter and his apparent fixation on women, I fear that new obsession may be you.”

“I can take care of myself,” Korra dismissed, turning to leave.

“I desperately hope so, Miss Waters,” he said grimly, “He knows where you live.”

She closed the door behind her softly and fixed her coat. With a deep breath she headed back down the stairs. Before she had reached the third step the music had begun again.

*Salut d'Amour.* Only this time it was perfectly in tune.

She wondered why?

Chapter End Notes

Your comments always brighten my day, so feel free to tell me how you liked my Holmes. I think I’ll be trying for Monday updates for a while rather than just posting when I have something done, like today. It should give me more time for quality control and keeping the story straight.

P.S. If you have even a passing interest in classical music and haven't heard it already I would highly recommend *Salut d'Amour* by Edward Elgar. It is very beautiful and rather short so it wouldn't waste too much of your time.
You can only press someone so far before they snap.

Korra finally snaps and Mako is the victim of her rage. This is Korra's rock bottom. So far. Mix a heap of stress, a pile of anxiety, a few ounces of misdirected anger, a dire lack of sleep, and some confusing feelings about a girl you've only just met and you'll get yourself a blow up that makes Vesuvius look like a firecracker.

He was late.

An hour and twenty minutes late.

This was why she'd wanted to meet before he went out on his rounds. But Mako had insisted, he had work that needed to be done early. Every minute he spent, however, was another minute she was wasting away from her work. Catching at least three murderers being the top of her priorities.

All hands were still on deck, despite the worsening weather. Bolin and Kuvira were out taking statements, partly to take up the slack from her being stuck in her office and partly to avoid drama. Fitzroy and Abberline were handling the backlog: muggings, extortions, assaults without a known assailant. Everything the regular beat cops kicked upstairs when they were overloaded.

As for Stu, he was babysitting.

Showing Hopkins the ropes, as it were. Just like he had for everyone else that had passed through in the last ten years.

They had started simply, an overnight break-in at a local jewelry store. Simple smash and grab, plenty of witnesses, no disguises. After a couple trips to the local fences they'd be done by lunchtime.

Meanwhile, Korra was trapped in an empty office. Sure, she had paperwork, but most of that she had done on her recent string of near sleepless nights. As a result her surroundings had been reduced to basically the bare essentials. The end of day report stood waiting for the end of her tour. Her coat, hat, and weapons hung from the rack by the door.

The morning paper had occupied her for all of thirty minutes before becoming an improvised ball as she repeatedly used it's pages to bounce off the wall or sink into her trash bin. War with the Boers, political scandal, and other things she didn't care about.
No time to, even if she wanted.

She'd read Dr. Watson's report more than a dozen times, until she could close her eyes and picture it from memory. "Cause of Death: Violent, Murder. Method: acute Coronary Failure brought on by electric shock, accompanied by numerous injuries resulting from blunt force trauma to the Head, Neck, and Torso. Defensive injuries to the Arms and Hands. Conclusion: referred to Metropolitan Police, H-Division for investigation."

But rather than investigating she was waiting for her ex, each moment building on her anxiety and frustration. This sitting around was going to have her pulling her hair out or putting holes in the wall.

When the door to the stairs finally opened the Inspector leaped from her chair like a spring. "You ass!" she shouted as he came through.

“It's good to see you again, too,” he replied, hanging up his hat. “How's everything?”

“Oh, no,” she blocked, holding up a threatening finger. “You're not getting out of this one. Where the hell have you been?!”

“Working.”

“My ass!” Korra barked, closing the distance. “I made sure this entire floor would be empty to prevent drama because of you and your 'work.'”

“She's still mad at me?” he asked, running his hand through his hair. It looked like he hadn't washed or shaved in days. Even his clothes had started to look threadbare.

So am I. “It depends,” she told him, stalking ever closer. Getting between him and the door would certainly help keep him from wandering off again. “Yesterday she was only talking about knocking out your teeth. On Friday she wanted to shoot you.”

He sighed and leaned against his brother's desk. “I did the right thing, Korra. You know I did.”

“She doesn't care,” Korra told him, getting between him and the door. He would face her wrath whether he wanted to or not.

With a thin frown he asked, “I really screwed up, didn't I?”

“You really did,” she agreed, aggressively. Then with a deep sigh of her own she said more calmly, “The two of you need to figure this thing out. I'm tired of having to tiptoe around her like a sleeping bear. You two were friends and you sold her out. She broke the rules and ran off instead of facing the music. You're both assholes, deal with it!”

“I'm guessing you didn't just call me in to yell at me about Kuvira,” he guessed after letting that sink in for awhile.

After staring at him for a while, she nodded. I have a lot of things I want to yell at you about.

“Have you found anything?” the Inspector asked. Every part of her was prickling. She wanted a lead to chase, a rumor to track down, anything that could help her.

“I've got a couple things I'm looking into,” Mako said quietly. The way he said it didn't make her feel any better. “Mostly hearsay, nothing I've been able to pin down.”

“So, you've basically got nothing?” she questioned. Unknown to her she'd started popping the
knuckles on her right hand. “What about that flier I gave you?”

He was supposed to be the best at digging this stuff up. Blending in, loosening lips, and slipping into conversations and he had NOTHING. Sure, he could take time off to screw with her and ditch his date at the gala, but actual work? Nah, not important enough.

Digging in his pocket he pulled out a jumble of folded papers. He flipped through them, tossing a few onto the desk and stuffing others back in his tattered coat. Four, five, six little sheets of paper. All the same size. “I've found tons of these things all over the place but no one's talking. They either know nothing or aren't saying it to me.”

“Let me see those,” she said, snapping up the little sheets of paper and combing through them. They were a match, alright. Down to the print type. The Equalist Society of London invites you to join us in our Great Crusade to help cleanse this City. Together we will change civilization and the world. A the top was an image of a hooded man wearing a mask.

“Where'd you say you found this?” she asked, scrutinizing the page for watermarks.

“Take your pick,” Mako replied, scratching at his stubble. “I’ve found one in almost every pub, back-alley, and side street. There’s suppose to be some kind of head honcho type that travels around giving speeches but he doesn't seem to have any kind of pattern.”

“You got a name for this mystery guy?”

“Amon,” he said, “Some people call him Brother Amon.”

“Is he a preacher?” Korra asked, giving up on the watermark. Unmarked paper, probably an unlicensed press, too.

“I doubt it,” Mako dismissed, shaking his head slowly, “From what I can find out this guy's pretty extreme, even for a breakaway sect or cult.”

“How extreme are we talking?” she pressed, getting frustrated at his slow, drip-drip of information. “Burning crosses, burning buildings, or burning people?”

“Revolutionary,” he said darkly. The most dangerous kind of whack job, the kind with a message and a cause to fight for.

“That explains going after a Constable, but not a gang boss” she mumbled. After checking all of the leaflets to make sure they were the same she tossed them back onto the younger brother's desk. Then her mind seized on something. “I thought you said people weren't talking to you? How'd you find all that out.”

“Gentle persuasion.” That fucking smile. As much as they'd both deny it, he and Kuvira were cut from the same cloth. It was a wonder only one of them had ever ended up on report.

“Thanks for these,” she said, pointing at the papers. Later, she'd read them later. Her eyes were heavy and she had to rub them to keep them open. But something still gnawed at her insides, making her blood want to boil. “What's with you and Asami?”

“Asami?” he repeated, eyes briefly knitting together in confusion before returning to their previous overworked state. “Nothing. We met, talked, she was going to the gala and I asked if she wanted to go together, she said yes.”
“Oh, really,” the Inspector nodded before cocking back her fist.

Not for the first time Korra’d caught him totally by surprise. Her fist cracked into his jaw with a loud *thud!* The ambush had been perfect, he hadn't suspected a thing until it was too late. But even though she'd struck the fist blow he immediately dropped into a fighting stance. Instinctively, her guess. But she'd tasted blood and she'd had time to stew and plan.

Her left hand snuck under his guard and hammered him just below the ribs. With a loud puff all of the air got knocked out of him.

His hands fell to clutch his wounded gut and the Avatar took the opening to send another blow hurtling towards his face. She followed up with a sweep to his legs sending him crashing to the ground, smacking his side against a chair as he fell.

“What the hell!?” he demanded, spiting a mouthful of blood onto the floor.

“Shut up!” she spat back. The overwhelming urge in her body was to sink the toe of her boot into his stomach so he'd stop talking. She didn't want to hear him talk, she wanted him to fight back. “You didn't think I'd find out you were pulling the same stunt you did on me to hook up!”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” he coughed, rolling onto his knees. Why wasn't he fighting back! Fight back! “What is wrong with you?”

Her knee rocketed towards his face but he rolled at the last moment. A split second later he launched himself at her, smashing all his weight into an elbow directed towards her ribs. Rather than try to withstand the weight of heavier opponent's blow she used the momentum it gave her to retaliate with a spinning kick.

They flew apart into separate desks, scattering papers and furnishings. Neither stayed down for long though before righting themselves and putting up their fists.

“The Gala!” she roared, standing her ground and waiting for him to make the first move this time. “I talked to her, she told me what you did!”

Only, he didn't. But he didn't drop his guard, either, not fully at least. They were stuck in a weird limbo halfway between the two. Not coming to blows but not wanting to be the first to disarm. Sudden realization crossed his face. “Korra, look, I'm really sorry about that. But it was an accident, I promise.”

“An accident!” she scoffed, slowly letting her hands fall. “You're trying to tell me that you just *happened* to meet her the exact same way we did? Was it the same cabbie, too?”

“No, Korra, it's,” he tried to explain, growing more frustrated by the second. “Why do you even care!? You're the one that kicked me out. And now you punch me in the face because I have another freak accident after six years and meet someone.”

His question dug itself into her head. Why did she care? He was right, they were done, had been for a while. There was no reason she should be this angry with him.

Was she jealous? No.

“I'm sorry,” she said, slumping onto Abberline's desk. She rubbed her hands together then pressed them into her eyes. “I don't know why I did that. I'm so, so sorry.”

Rather than get angry Mako cautiously walked over and sat down next to her. “It's okay,” he
sighed, sounding just as tired as she felt.

“No it's not,” she told him, looking over at his scruffy face out of the corner of her eye. His lip was split where she'd hit him and she was pretty sure he'd have a bruise to match. “I don't know what's happening with me. I'm angry all the time, I can't sleep, don't even get home most nights anymore.”

“I know how you feel,” he sympathized, reaching into his jacket and pulling out an identical flask to his brother's. “A couple days ago I got in a screaming match with one of my Sergeants over a misspelled name on a report.”

They both took swigs of his whiskey, trying to dull themselves to the world a little. “Is this about the letter you got?” Mako questioned reaching back to search Abberline's desk. Top right drawer, to be exact. As far as his wife knew the man was a teetotaler. But old habits died hard, as does Bourbon.

“No,” the Inspector returned, checking the glass he handed her for grime. “I haven't had a good night's sleep in months.”

“Your working too hard,” he told her, ever the hypocrite.

“So're you.”

“Cheers,” they both chorused, clinking their stolen liquor together. Korra would buy him another bottle. It just meant she'd have to pass up adding a bottle to her own collection.

“Ugh,” Korra shivered. The taste burned her throat and she could only just hold back coughing. This is why she liked wine. At least it was a pleasant way to get wasted. “I'm sorry,” she said again. With every breath she felt worse as her adrenaline rush started to fade.

Now she just felt tired and guilty.

A little sore, too, but she deserved that. A retaliatory elbow to the gut would do that.

“I think I've had that coming for a while,” her ex dismissed. When he finished his drink he offered her another belt which she declined with a wave of her hand. “At least you didn't try to throw me out a window.”

“Bolin told you?” she asked with a little quirk of her lips. It had been Kuvira's big daily rant on Thursday. Her exact words had been something along the lines of 'throw him out the window and dance on his corpse'. Not exactly poetic but certainly put a colorful image into her head.

“No, Opal did,” the elder brother replied. “Bo left his wallet at my place again, I stopped by yesterday to drop it off.”

Pouring himself another glass Mako dipped his finger in the liquid and rubbed it on his fresh cut. “When was the last time you ate anything?” he asked, stirring a grumbling in her stomach that she had been ignoring for a while. Now she couldn't even think of anything else, even sleep. Or that other thing.

“I had lunch yesterday,” she remembered. Pema had brought in soup for everyone. The kids had come, too, giving her a brief chance to play around for an hour.

“Let's go get something to eat,” he offered, patting her on the back, “Then we can go somewhere and let off a little steam.” Korra quirked her eyebrow at that. Surely he wasn't talking about…
“We'll make it a fair fight this time.”

“Ha, you're on,” she accepted. “I'll buy.”

“Deal,” he said with a smile, “Just as soon as I can feel my jaw again.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if this one seems a little out of left field. Insomnia plays hell on the mind so Korra isn't really thinking all that straight and Mako knows it. A little of my inspiration for this came from A Helmet For My Pillow by Robert Leckie. An excellent example of how stress and exhaustion can make people lash out.
Taking the Day

Chapter Summary

Tenzin puts his foot down.

Chapter Notes

I'll be switching to weekend updates, most likely. Things have started to get a little hectic, schedule wise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even after the best night of sleep she'd gotten since the night of the Gala, Korra still woke up feeling like trash. Part of it was probably the afternoon she'd spent tossing Mako around like a rag doll. Sure, he'd gotten his fair share of licks in, but she'd always been able to outfight him. Turns out honing your skills with some of the best martial-arts teachers in the world was more effective than getting a few pointers from a washed up enforcer with a flashy nickname.

The guy had fire, that's for sure. She had the bruises and nearly dislocated ankle to prove it.

Another good chunk came from offloading the rest of her evening on his head and making him go over the Sato files with her. As arson experts went, Mako was in a class of his own. He'd given her a list of the likeliest accelerants judging by the burn patterns in the photos as well an explanation for the destruction of the brick structure of the factory.

Burning metal.

According to his expertise, metal shavings could burn under the right conditions. Hot enough to crack masonry and set fire to supports safely tucked away in walls. It bugged her that no one else seemed to be able to figure that out. More than a dozen Detectives and nobody had thought past the most basic explanation of some fault in the construction of the facility. Even she could have done better and she worked homicide and violent crime.

But the big one was that she had run out of coffee and the tea she'd drunk instead just wasn't cutting it. Apparently, people could notice.

“You look like shit,” Kuvira so eloquently told her as she clambered into the cab to join her.

“So do you,” she bantered back, rapping on the divider to get the wheels moving. Red eyes and nose, pale skin, and a rather crumpled handkerchief poking out of her pocket. With the recent bout of weather she was guessing a cold.

It felt like old times, almost. A couple fewer faces than there used to be but at least they weren't fighting.

With a quick jerk, she whipped out her rag and sneezed. “It's all this cold weather,” her old friend
complained, stuffing it back into her jacket. “I always get sick this time of year.”

“You sure you want to come in today?” Korra asked, already sure of the answer.

“Yeah, sure,” Kuvira agreed, tipping her hat forward and starting to dose again. Before they had begun rolling she’d started to snore faintly. Korra envied her ability to fall asleep just about anywhere. It must be nice.

Without anyone to talk to she reverted to what she'd been doing all morning. Reading. Trying to relax after yesterday. A Penny Dreadful to lose herself in for a while. Unfortunately, this one was living up to it's name a little too well for her liking. It was torture to turn the next page. The story was half children's fairy tale, half bad romance novella masquerading as something deeper.

It wasn't. Finally, she just ditched it, tossing it onto the floor and defaulting to people watching.

It had risen above freezing overnight so the snow had finally melted. With it's retreat came the return of pedestrians, street vendors, and beggars. From every mouth little puffs of steam erupted as people spoke and laughed. Life carried on despite everything.

She even heard a couple retorts of laughter peal through the cold air.

Still there was the tension. The almost crushing weight of it pressing down on all sides. Almost smothering her with it's intensity.

Maybe that book wasn't so bad after all.

By the time they reached the station she had finished it, reluctantly. A quick nudge of her foot to rouse her partner and Korra climbed onto the sidewalk. To her fortune the eventual crowd had yet to gather today and they only had to avoid a few particularly eager members of the committee.

“Morning, Perkins,” she greeted the desk Sergeant as she came inside.

“Morning, Inspector, Ma'am,” he replied, scribbling a little note on his pad and handing it to a waiting Constable. “The Superintendent wants to see you.”

Beside her Kuvira snorted. “What did I do this time?”

“No you,” he corrected, nodding to her boss.

“I guess I'll see you later,” the Avatar shrugged, heading for the stairs. By the time she got back Kuvira would have gotten them a case to work on.

The trip up was familiar. Many of her early days were spent getting sent upstairs running messages or getting reprimands. Lots and lots of reprimands. Never anything official, but a good amount of shaming from the man at the top in the hopes of setting her straight.

“Hey, Reid!” she called as she passed his open door.

The man looked up from his mountain of paperwork and flashed her a smile. “Hey, kid,” he returned, “Any news on Frenchie or the stiff?”

“Yes, got a couple tips we're hunting down,” she said in passing. If she threw the old dog too big a bone he might try to wrestle in on the case. Much as she liked him, both professionally and personally, Reid had a habit of taking over when he had a personal interest in a case. The loss of a friend was very personal.
“Keep me in the loop.”

“Got it boss.”

With him dealt with the Inspector moved on to Tenzin's office. Compared to last time his room was downright homey. A wonder what seven fewer bodies could do to a space. “Korra,” he welcomed her, hands clasped in front of him, waiting. “Take a seat.”

With a slight quirk of her eyebrow, she did so. Tenzin never made anyone sit unless he had bad news. At the very least news he didn't think they would like. “So what's this about, Tenzin, I'm busy?” she asked when he didn't start talking immediately. It was another bad sign. He was letting her get comfortable first. If his pattern held up he would offer her-

“Would you like some tea?” her mentor offered, twiddling the end of his mustache between his fingers.

“Sure, Earl Grey, no milk, one sugar.” It was the closest thing they had to coffee in the station.

No sooner had the words left her mouth did one of the secretaries come in bearing her beverage. Already prepared, meaning he'd been planning on having her up since at least last night. Korra always had the same thing when they had tea so his staff had been sure to have a cup on hand.

After it was set in front of her she thanked the woman that had brought it. Whose name she couldn't hope to remember.

A sharp tapping took hold as her boss started tapping restlessly on the edge of his desk with the hand that wasn't playing with with his mustache. They looked at each other as the seconds ticked by until, finally, Tenzin spoke. “I want you to take the rest of the week off,” he said in his most quiet, disarming tone. “You've been spending so much time here you've practically become part of the furnishings.”

“No,” Korra refused immediately, “I'm busy.”

“I would be more than happy to take up the slack while you were gone,” he offered, returning to clasping his hands in front of him.

“I don't want you to take up the slack,” she insisted, pushing her tea away and rising to leave. “This has been fun. We should really catch up again soon.”

“Korra,” the man insisted, just enough warning in his voice to keep her from leaving. “Sit down, please.”

Reluctantly the young woman turned and returned to her chair, making sure to show in her face how unhappy she was at the circumstances of her little visit.

“There are almost six-hundred men and two women under my command and none of them work harder than you,” he told her gently. While he spoke he pushed her tea back towards her, practically into her hand. “Few are as dedicated to their duty, none have sacrificed as much as you, and I can think of only a handful that have even half the talent that comes to you naturally.”

Ah yes, first he builds her up and then…

“That being said, most of them have the good sense to not try and carry the weight of the world on their shoulders,” he continued, starting a familiar lecture. It must be the twentieth time she'd heard him give it.
Tenzin had his opinions of everyone: Kuvira was too brash and arrogant; Reid was haunted by his past; Mako clung to the rules like a safety net, but abandoned his principles when under stress; Steinman was talented but unmotivated and unambitious; and Bolin didn't take things serious enough. As for his protege, gifted but unrefined.

Korra had laughed at the description. She'd seen this city's definition of a 'refined woman'. Prim, proper, always knew which fork to use, but many of them didn't have a thought of their own to share when asked. They had them, of course, screaming at her from behind their eyes but they'd had the desire to express them all but beaten out of them from the day they were born. Sometimes actually beaten.

“Neither do I,” she argued, trying to head him off. “I don't have a hero complex, I have work.”

“When was the last time you slept through the night?” he asked, pointedly. Having someone live under your roof and follow in your footsteps certainly helped him get under her skin.

“The night of the Gala,” she admitted. The cots at the station were nice, but she couldn't stay down when she was so close to work that needed doing.

Besides, a lot of the guys snored.

“A Gala which you left at half-past eleven,” he noted. Damn him and his spies. Probably watching to make sure she actually showed up. *Atkinson, you bastard.* “Now, let's say it took you around thirty-minutes to pick out your wine, another thirty to get home-”

“How did you-”

“Every time you've gone there you've stolen at least one bottle. I never mention it because I find it rather amusing. You also wake up at five every morning meaning that full night was barely enough for a normal person to function,” he rattled off, leaning closer and speaking softly. “Go home, Korra. Sleep, drink your wine, spend time with friends, take a trip to Paris if you like. Just get some rest. Avatar or not, if you keep going like this you'll drop dead at your desk.”

“I hate Paris,” she grumbled.

“Go home,” he repeated, an order now. “Everything will be fine without you for a couple of days.”

“Do I have a choice?” the Inspector asked, slumping defeated.

“No.”

“For how long?”

“Until Monday morning, at least eight o'clock,” he informed, making a note in his diary. “You can come by tomorrow night, Pema's making a pot roast. Stuart and his wife will be there and the kid's would love to see you again.”

With a sigh Korra picked up her tea and drank it all in three gulps. She didn't bother telling him she'd be there. Pema's cooking all but confirmed that.

Still, it took all her self-control to keep from putting her foot through the door and turning it into splinters on the way out. More than all to not rip it off it's hinges slamming it closed. Only when she felt every eye on the floor turn towards her did she quell her outburst. Deep breaths flooded her lungs, calming her.
Blowing up here would only make things worse. Suspension and that's only if he didn't know about her brawl with Mako.

What she needed right now was to meditate. Or try to meditate, anyways. Korra had never been good at staying still. Clearing her mind would be next to impossible while it was racing so fast she could barely hold onto a thought. With all the adrenaline pumping through her it was flashes at best.

On second thought, meditating would be a waste of time. She wanted to go get some coffee and a good book to read when she got home.

All those reports had given her an itch for more of Dr. Watson's work. A glimpse inside the head of the man she had met so briefly met on the Sunday prior. Hopefully his writing was better than that rag she'd brought in with her this morning. Where could she find a copy of The Strand?

Chapter End Notes

As much fun as it would be to have a chapter with Korra reading The Red-Headed League or A Study in Scarlet I won't force you to endure that. Up next is the first totally not a date between these two lovely young ladies. After that it's going to get bad again so enjoy this brief stretch of semi-levity.

As I've said before, comments make my week, so please tell me what you think.
British Weather

Chapter Summary

A fix of Korrasami. Only this is the south of England in the winter, so, yeah. The range will have to wait. Hope you can settle for my feeble attempts at banter.

Chapter Notes

It's not a date!
It is, however, the most rewritten thing so far. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the past three days Korra had come to several life changing realizations.

Firstly, as nice as he seemed, Dr. Watson was just as mad as his friend Holmes. She'd read all of his stories about London's infamous private detective. He had proven to be just as manipulative, conceited, and narcissistic with his friend as he was in general.

But Watson just kept following along like a puppy dog. Loyal to a fault.

Either he was deranged or just had a higher tolerance for insanity than she did. Going along with the antics of The Red-Headed League proved that.

Avoiding him as well had been added to her priority list.

Secondly, she reaffirmed her love for her homeland's weather. This time of year the heaviest of the snow storms would almost be over. Soon, the light flurries would begin, coming off the southern sea every morning. It would be cold, but beautiful.

This was simply unpleasant.

Rain hammered on the side of her cab, drops trickled down her hat and the pair of umbrellas she had brought, one hers, the other to return. Her weapons, cleaned and prepped as they were, still sat locked away.

The spirits seemed to be conspiring against her. While the first few hours of her enforced vacation had nearly been a living hell the one solace she had been able to take, other than her evening at Tenzin's house, was preparing for her trip to the range. With gentle care she had cleaned both her rifles until the actions practically shined. Both the Winchester and the Metford hadn't gotten any attention in months, languishing away in a safe while she had her nose pressed to the grindstone.

The anticipation of doing something enjoyable had kept her going.

Now all her work had come to nothing.

Or almost nothing. With changing times came changes of plans. Sure, they wouldn't be able to do
what they had planned, but hopefully they would do something else, instead. After all, Tenzin had told her to do something with a friend and Asami was the closest thing that wasn't working at the moment.

This time she wasn't stopped at the gate, the sopping wet guards barely gave her a nod as she passed. Up the path she went, sheltered from the gusts of wind by the branches overhead, then the stairs to knock on the door.

It was answered almost as fast as it had been her first time, only the face that welcomed her was different.

“Hey, come on in,” the lady of the house greeted with a nervous smile. “I was starting to think you weren't coming.”

Korra's eyebrow threatened to quirk, but she quashed it down. She was half an hour late. Waiting in vain for the rain to stop had seen to that. That and slamming her hand in the door on the way out. Luckily she hadn't broken a finger in her rush.

“Just had some trouble getting out the door,” she explained, stepping gratefully into the dry warmth, careful not to drip on her. “Were you leaving or is Wan just not here?”

A little smile crept onto Asami's face. “Why do you think he's not here? You don't think I know how to open a door, Your Majesty? I'm surprised you walked here. Where's your white horse and flaming sword?”

Tucking the umbrellas under her arms, Korra slowly applauded her teasing. It was truly a gift and yet she couldn't help but enjoy it.

When the boy's at H had put her through her hazing it had been murder. The bowing, the flowery speech, the 'we're not worthy'. All of it driving her mad until they just started to slowly give it up. Either finding a new, safer target to torment or just finally accepting her as a colleague and not some foreign royal with a chip on her shoulder.

“Flaming swords is more a British thing,” she chuckled warmly. It felt good to laugh. Healthy. “We tended to go with 'Ice Weapons' because of the whole being blanketed in snow half the year, thing. Use what you have, I guess.”

“Speaking of the weather,” Asami noted, taking a glance at her pair of coverings, “Seeing as you've doubled up, I guess our plans are probably on hold.”

“Safe bet,” Korra agreed as a tear of lightning lit up the sky shortly followed by a clap of thunder. They both sighed sadly before turning to face each other again. Asami had worn her hair back today, tied with a red ribbon. It looked good, showed off her cheekbones and her eyes. Eyes that Korra found herself staring a little too hard at. “Sorry about this.”

Her new friend just shrugged and took her umbrellas, tucking them into a stand by the door the Inspector hadn't noticed last time. “It's not your fault it's raining,” she forgave with a renewed smile, “Besides, I probably would have been terrible anyways.”

That was doubtful. The way she had casually dropped being competitive last time meant she had been very good back in the day. Winning trophies wasn't easy. You only lost so much of that over time, unless you got knocked on the head a bunch, which Korra doubted she had. It would have been a good match, she imagined.

Next time, maybe. Next time.
“Well, if you still want to do something, we can go grab something to eat?” she offered before instantly regretting it. It was 9:30 in the morning, way too early for lunch and there was no way the other woman hadn't eaten breakfast.

Luckily Asami seemed to be treating her more kindly than the spirits were. “That would be great,” she accepted eagerly. “I haven't eaten yet today. Let me just leave a letter for my dad in case he gets back before we do.”

“He's not back yet?” Korra asked, intrigued. Surely the trains weren't delayed because of a little rain.

“Oh, no,” the green-eyed woman answered with a little shake of her head. “He just had to grab something from his office.”

Korra nodded. It made sense, Mr. Sato would be a busy man, even on the weekends. “That's cool then,” she said, offering up her pencil and pad for her to write on. Technically it was only for official business, but who would ever find out? “Any idea where you want to go? I don't live around here so I really don't know my way around the neighborhood.”

“Oh, you,” the other woman pondered, scribbling in hurried but neat script. “Yeah, there is someplace nearby. Do you like French food?”

“I love it!”

“Just let me grab my coat and tell Wan I'm leaving, be right back,” Asami instructed, jaunting off to do her preparations. Another peal of thunder echoed and Korra sighed again. She should have brought a third umbrella.

One cab ride later.

As it turned out, French breakfast was actually just about the perfect thing for Korra right now. Coffee strong enough to peel paint, pastries loaded with sugar and butter, eggs, bacon. All the best things. It was so good. Almost as good as the company.

The two of them had just finished going over her findings on the factory arson and Asami had been almost as helpful to her as Mako. She had explained exactly how hard it was to set metal on fire. You needed an extremely hot ignition source, much hotter than the accelerants she had a list of could have produced. That left either an act of god or an intentional lighting and a skilled arsonist, likely ruling out a disgruntled former employee or drunken hooligans. Barring some cosmic coincidence, of course.

A gaggle of drunk, recently fired chemists seemed unlikely, though.

Since then they had moved onto other subjects, namely her work. “So, what's being a Detective like, really?”

“Mostly paperwork,” she admitted, scratching the back of her head and wishing she had something more exciting to say. “Most of the interesting and dangerous stuff is handled by the uniforms.”

“You don't, like, chase criminals?” Asami pressed, leaning closer in interest.

“Oh, we chase people,” Korra assured, remembering back on some of her more exciting pursuits. “I broke three ribs and my leg falling off a roof going after a smuggler. Most people just give up though. Fold as soon as you confront them. A lot of folks just commit crimes to get by. No skills, no education, so they break into someone's house and steal the silver.”
“Yeah,” her companion replied a little shakily. For a brief moment something flashed behind her eyes, just long enough for Korra to catch it. Sadness. Deep and old. Clearing her throat, she continued, “You sound like you don't blame them for the things they do?”

It took a moment for the Inspector to respond to that, seeing as she was midway through a bite of something flaky and delicious. “Just because I can empathize with some of them doesn't mean I approve,” she replied, carefully. Even with just that brief warning she could tell that this would be a touchy subject. “Plenty of people in the East End have nothing and still make an honest living for themselves. All I'm trying to do is help them do it.”

A slight flutter of her heart took hold when that smile started creeping back. “You really think you're helping people?” the engineer asked softly.

“Yeah,” Korra agreed, “Yeah, I do.”

“Did they give you a hard time for being a woman?” she asked, even more quietly than before. It was one of her most commonly asked questions. Practically everyone had asked it. Her parents, Tenzin and Kya, the Foreign Office, the press (both here and from back home). It was normal, she guessed.

“They used to,” she admitted, for the first time. If she had told anyone else and it had gotten out her father would have dragged her home, kicking and screaming if he had to. But she felt she could trust Asami, for some reason. “At the start. Chief Beifong was actually the first to join up, back in the day. Way Tenzin tells it, she just kept showing up with applications until they let her on the force. Now she runs the whole thing.”

“Who's Tenzin?” her meal partner asked with just a hint of confusion.

“Have I not mentioned him?” Asami shook her head no. “He's the head honcho down at H-Division. Bald guy, really big mustache.” She demonstrated by twirling an imaginary mustache making her new friend giggle musically.

“Do you like him?”

“Y-yeah.”

“That doesn't sound very convincing,” Asami said, starting to interrogate her again.

With a sigh the Inspector internally debated how much she wanted to say about her issues. "We had a bit of an argument about how much I've been working." Korra revealed, holding her thumb and finger a fraction of an inch apart. “Made me take some vacation time.”

“I'm guessing it was was too much and not too little,” she joked, flagging down the waiter for more coffee.

“How could you possibly have figured that out?” the Detective laughed back awkwardly. Was it really that obvious? More coffee, more coffee.

“Because, I went through University,” Asami replied, gingerly sorting through the tray of pastries for one not totally covered in sugar. “For a few years there I pretty much lived in the library. Cambridge doesn't officially have female students, so I had to study about twice as hard to get by as everyone else.”

“If you weren't a student, how did you get a degree?” Korra asked, confused by the backwards logic. She'd seen the paperwork as she was digging in Miss Kelly's employment. Master's Degree
in Engineering, Bachelor’s in both Chemistry and Applied Mathematics. An impressive resume, doubly so when you considered the school.

“That's the thing,” Asami said, pointing at her companion with her pastry, “I was a student and I also wasn't.”

“You're gonna need to explain that a little better.”

“ You see, we were allowed to do all the stuff the guys did. Go to lectures, take exams, even get grades at the end of the semester,” she rattled off, counting on her fingers.

“And pay tuition,” Korra added with a smirk.

“That too,” her friend chuckled. Setting her morsel down, she grabbed her spoon and balanced it on her finger. “We did all the same stuff, but we aren't allowed to earn a real diploma at the end of it. It's called a titular degree. Basically a fancy way of saying 'fuck you and all your hard work.'” She practically spat the words out before getting a more familiar, calm grin and letting the spoon clatter to the table on top of her napkin. “That just wasn't enough for me though. I stayed in the library when everyone else went to sleep, wrote the best papers, did the most research, asked the most questions in class until they just couldn't ignore me.”

“Sounds like you really poured everything into your work,” the Inspector said, even more impressed than she was before.

“Yep,” the green-eyed graduate said proudly, “I pissed a lot of people off when I did it. Proctors, other students, the head of department. But I managed to impress the one person that really mattered.”

“The Vice-Chancellor?”

“Yeah, turns out he likes the publicity of giving a woman her diploma, even though it went against the rules,” she confirmed, rolling her eyes. That must have been the reason he released publicly. “That and my dad threatened to pull his funding for the new building for the medical school.”

“How noble of him,” Korra snorted, “And they say chivalry is dead.”

“Not at Cambridge, they don't,” Asami laughed back.

“You were in Girton College, how did you like it?” the Detective asked after the amusement had died down slightly. Instantly recognizing the little twitch of an eye when she surprised someone with a question, she added, “And before you ask, I looked up the watermark on the stationary at your desk.”

“Are you spying on me, Korra?” Asami accused, playfully. Returning to her delayed treat she gingerly lifted it and took a bite.

“It's a habit,” she apologized, scratching a spot on her neck. “Sorry.”

“It's okay,” her friend smiled back. Then a look of fond remembrance passed over her face. They must have been very good memories. “It was nice. Had a lot of good friends. There were maybe eighty of us, plus the Matron trying to keep us in line. Since there were so few of us we pretty much had the run of the campus. We used to take bets to see who could make the boys the most awkward during class.”

The two of them laughed quietly at that, though likely for different reasons. “You used to flirt with
guys during class.” Now that she could not believe.

Asami snorted, drawing the attention of a table of the posher diners. “Hardly. But, most of them hadn't seen a girl that wasn't their teacher, a servant, or a relative. So if a sophisticated young lady happens to lift her dress a little to cross her legs.”

“Really, that's what got them going?” Korra asked, utterly bemused. Outside the occasional function for the Department and her few visits to the Beifong's back in the day she had mostly ignored the upper crust of British society. But if all of them were this repressed it might be fun to take George up on one of his offers.

“I had a dozen marriage proposals from my engineering classes alone,” she whispered with barely suppressed bemusement. From the way the corner of her lip kept twitching Korra guessed she was barely holding in her laughter for appearances sake.

“Ha, I only had to turn down one!”

“But yours was a prince,” Asami argued, popping the last bit of pastry in her mouth.

“Yeah, so what? If I’d been one of your classmates they wouldn't have even noticed me,” Korra insisted. “Hell, I might have even given it a try.”

Korra's world stopped for a moment. Completely frozen as her brain tried to figure out what had just come out of her mouth. Raising her cup to her lips, she tried to hide the faint blush that started to creep into her cheeks. It had been a joke, obviously. It had to be. There was no other logical explanation. An amusing one if Asami's little giggle could be trusted.

They all had before.

“You really think I have what I takes to be a Princess?” Asami teased, fluttering her eyelashes dramatically.

“Well,” she rebounded quickly, trying to keep her voice even, “It's not really up to me. There's a whole application process. You're dad would have to talk to my dad-”

“Wouldn't that be a meeting of the minds?” Asami groaned, rubbing her eyes with the palms of her hands.

“They could compare notes on how to shelter us from the big, bad world.”

“Excuse me, Miss?” the waiter interjected as he walked past. “Will either of you be needing anything else?”

The pair looked at each other, questioning. "I'm good,” Korra said reaching for her wallet. Might as well try to get ahead any attempts by the other woman to pay.

“So am I,” Asami agreed, mirroring Korra's movements for her handbag.

“I've got it,” Korra headed off, pulling out some cash and handing it to the man. After a quick count he walked away in silence.

“Thanks,” her friend said, setting her purse back down.

For a moment they just smiled at each other, studying, meeting eyes and breaking away to study some more. With every second that passed Korra noticed something new about her. She parted her
hair on the left but wrote with her right, little smudge of ink on her hand from writing her father the note. Meaning she was at least partially ambidextrous but favored her right for creative tasks. Her favorite color was red, judging by the color pallet she had worn every time they'd met.

And she wanted to ask her something.

“I, uh, I heard about the Constable that was killed,” she began, giving Korra plenty of room to stop her. A part of the Inspector wanted to, to stop the ache she felt every time she pictured him, laying there. “Did you know him?”

“Yeah, I-I knew him,” she confirmed, withdrawing in on herself slightly. Suddenly her urge wasn't for coffee anymore. “His name was Gerard Richelieu. Good man, good cop.”

“Were you friends?”

“He was everyone's friend,” she muttered, unable to meet her eyes.

“I'm sorry,” Asami comforted, offering her hand. After a second Korra took it, enjoying the comfort it provided. If she closed her eyes she could almost picture it was her mother. But something about it felt better, more honest. It felt… good.

“Thanks,” the detective replied, hurting a little less now.

When Asami pulled her hand away, slowly, Korra realized that she didn't want it to go. When it left all the pain, all the loss and stress came crashing back in a wave that she quickly buried again. Deep.

As she looked into her eyes, Korra could see the engineer doing much the same thing. Her mother weighing heavily on her.

But then she smiled again and Korra felt it all burn away. They were friends having a meal, having fun. It wasn't the time to mope about things. She'd find them, she always did. Put his soul at rest. Something in that smile told her that. The confidence in it, maybe. The surety of someone that knew what they were doing.

“What about you?” Korra asked, her momentary lapse almost completely forgotten. “What do you do when you aren't building and engine in your dad's study?”

“You really want to know?” Asami asked back, quirking her eyebrow. “It's not half as interesting as what you do.”

“Yeah, I do,” she said, cheerily.

“We might need some more coffee, after all,” the heiress joked, flagging down there waiter. From the roll of his eyes it looked like he already knew what was coming. When the new round of coffee came they started to talk.

And they kept talking. About this and that: friends, their families, Korra's home country and some of her old cases (only the ones that were pleasant to discuss in public), combustion and stirling engines, machine tools, electrical currents. A lot of what Asami said flew right over her head but she hung on every word regardless.

One hour went past, then two. It was after noon when the chef finally, personally asked them to clear the table. Still they talked, walking down the street under the cover of their umbrellas. Joking, laughing, telling increasingly ridiculous stories.
The rain stopped and they kept walking. It started again and the pair ducked into a curiosity shop. When they left they each had a few less coins in their pockets and a new knickknack to take home. Asami bought an old silver picture frame, while Korra had gone with a pocket watch to replace the one that had finally died on her the day before.

It was as they left that they finally parted ways. Reluctantly.

“I really should be getting back,” Asami sighed, giving Korra an apologetic smile. “My dad has probably already sent out people to look for me.”

“Do you want me to walk you back?” the Inspector offered, hoping for even just another twenty minutes when she didn't have to think about H-Division and all it's drama.

“Thanks, but I think I'll take a cab,” her friend declined, shifting her weight to let the pressure off first one leg then the other. “I'm not used to walking a beat and these shoes are murder on my feet.”

“I guess you won't let me talk you into letting me pay for it as an apology,” she kidded, waving down the nearest passing carriage.

“What do you think, Korra?”

“It was great to see you again,” she said instead of answering. “I'm sorry we got rained out of our plans.”

“There'll be other sunny days,” the raven-haired woman brushed off. Implying she'd be open to going when it was. “Besides, this was a lot of fun. I'm glad you decided to come anyways, even if you paid for breakfast.”

They chuckled to themselves as the horses pulled up.

“Say,” Asami said as she started to climb into her cab. For a moment, as she turned, she paused as though she was rethinking whatever she was about to say. With a minute shake of her head she shook off whatever doubts she may have and asked, “Do you want to get lunch again, tomorrow?”

“I'd like that,” the Southerner said without a moment's pause. Spending time with a friend that had their arms elbow deep in grease instead of blood would do her some good. Besides, she wanted to know more about Asami. “I'd like that a lot.”

With a beaming smile she couldn't help but return, her new friend bid her farewell. “I'll see you tomorrow, Inspector Waters.”

“Sure thing,” she confirmed as the door closed and the sharp crack of the whip drove the horse into motion. “Miss Sato.”

With a gayety in her step she could even remember having Korra turned herself East and began to walk towards crowded slums and an angry populous. But now she could greet it all with a smile and, for some reason, she was sure she’d get a full night's sleep when she closed her eyes that evening.

What might tomorrow bring?
How was that for a first 'totally not a date'?
I realize the prudish stereotype of the Victorian upper class is a little over blown here, but I found it funny to imagine a bunch of posh, repressed, boarding school kids falling over themselves when they saw Asami. From this point on just assume any day that isn’t covered in the story these two are having a lunch like this. Korra's a bit of a goof, Asami is supportive and understanding. I would write them all but I’m not very good with small talk or flirting and they’d pretty much be filler. Tell me what you think, please.
A New Lead (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Korra and Reid put some pressure on a potential witness to the killing of their friend and colleague.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so this chapter ended up being over 6k words long. I've decided to split it up into two parts, rather than just having it as one huge chunk, sorry if it messes with the flow too much.

Inspector Reid features rather heavily here, I'll warn you. While Ripper Street isn't required viewing for this, by any means, I've based my Reid more on Jerome Flynn's character from the show (Inspector Bennett Drake) than the real life Inspector. From what I can gather, the real man appeared to be a rather happy and content family man with a great deal of respect from his fellows. But I've already given Korra a sleeping disorder so I've just spread the misery around a little more.

Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Work had seemed to fly by the last few days. A steady case load, decent progress on her backlog, and a steady stream of leads had seen to that. Not a minute of her waking hours had been spent idle. Whether she trolled through the back streets tracking down witnesses, re-reviewed the coroner's reports on her stack of unsolved homicides, or spent a stolen hour bantering with her new friend over a meal Korra remained alert and active every day of the week.

Tenzin had mostly backed off, so long as she went home at a decent hour.

Reid, on the other hand, had started to hover. Upstairs wasn't agreeing with him, apparently. Every couple of hours he would sneak down and ask how things were going. Offer to lend a hand.

The regret hadn't taken long to set in.

The higher up the chain of command you climbed, the more politics you had to deal with. If Korra knew anything about the man, other than that he desperately needed a shave, it was that Edmund Reid hated politics.

"Hey, kid," he groaned as he walked through the open door to her office, clutching his back gingerly.

"I guess you still haven't bought that new mattress you've been talking about?" she noted, taking a moment to look up from her files to study him. He looked as tired as she must have the week prior, but in significantly more pain.

"No," her old boss confirmed, leaning heavily on the chair across from her and moving to sit. "The
wife's been bugging me about getting the kids new kit 'fore they start school again next week. Ate up all the spare coin, but by god, do they look smart in their nice new clothes.”

“Good for them,” Korra smirked back. Hard pressed as he sometimes was, the man never spared expense when it came to his children. “If only you'd remembered to buy a razor when your were out.”

The veteran investigator rolled his eyes at her jab. “You've been out voted there, lass. My Emily says the beard stays, so it stays.”

“Good thing I'm not the one that has to wake up to that stubble, then,” she said, returning to Hopkins interview transcript with Miss Kelly's former lover, a man named Joe Barnett.

He'd been caught during her brief vacation trying to stow away on a freighter bound for Rio de Janeiro. According to him, he had nothing to do with the gruesome events that had taken place in the cramped flat he used to share with the deceased Irishwoman. Still, her new recruit had grilled him for four hours. Asked him every possible question to trick him into revealing guilt then doubling back when that failed to make sure the answers stayed the same.

They had.

He also didn't fit her profile. Barnett had spent most of his life in Cardiff before meeting Mary, or so his story went. After their falling out when the two of them lost their jobs in quick succession he'd fallen on hard times. So hard that he'd decided to skip town to avoid his creditors.

That and he was thick as a post.

According to the little notes scribbled in the margins this man was either a superb actor or a total moron. He failed to understand some of the common terms of British law. Like alibi and habeas corpus.

No genius and no proper schooling past the fifth year, thus unlikely to be her man.

Regardless, she'd keep just as sharp an eye on him as the other dozen or so men that had caught her eye as potential suspects.

“How're you holding up?” he asked, slumping roughly into the seat.

“Better than you,” she replied, once again flicking her blue eyes over at him. Red rings under his eyes, slight shake in his hands. Trying to give up drinking again. Or maybe it was smoking this time.

“Fair 'nough,” Mr. Reid shrugged, reaching over and grabbing a file.

“Hey!” Korra protested, snatching for the documents before he could take them out of reach.

“Those are mine!”

“Calm down, kid, I'm just having a look,” he chided, flipping the folder open and starting to review the contents. “You find anything useful at Frenchie's crime scene?”

“No,” she sighed, slumping back into her seat and trying to find her place in the interrogation. “Busy street, lot of foot traffic, I couldn't tell one piece of trash from another. Why? We had three witness's say they saw the guy.”

“Yeah,” he hummed, turning the first page. “Figures. You got anything else to go on right now?”
“Not really,” Korra sighed, making a few notes in her case files. “Uniforms canvassed the entire area for three days trying to find people who saw what happened. Came up with around half a dozen conflicting descriptions of what happened and a whole bunch of slammed doors in their faces.”

“Don't make sense,” Reid mused, setting the first file down and switching it for another, “Even if our man was the scum of the earth, somebody would have seen something. People in this city are nosier than my mother-in-law. Anyone we might have missed in the search? Vagrants, paper boy, shoe shines, neighborhood peep?”

“They talked to everyone except the baker at the place directly behind,” she told him, looking up to see what his new pondering piece was. Closed case, nothing to see. He must actually be bored out of his mind right now to use such a thin veil. “I was thinking about swinging by once I got this done.”

“Mind if I tag along?” her boss asked, tossing the folder back on it's stack with his usual lack of care for tidiness. “I've been doing requisitions and warrant requests all weekend. Feel like my brain's turning to mush.”

Setting aside Hopkins work for later, Korra grinned in satisfaction. If she ran into him she'd have to compliment his tenacity. When she looked over at Reid, however, a little of her old Constable days flared within her. Back when she had time for things like pranking a certain stuck up, old traditionalist. Letting him tag along wouldn't go wrong in helping her continued quest to make up for all the grief she gave him, back in the day. “How do you feel about taking a walk, old man? You sure those dusty old bones of yours won't just crumble into dust?”

“I'm 45, I'm not decrepit,” he told her off with a scowl. Then the corners of his lips twitched and he rose from his seat, just as quickly as he'd entered it. “Come on, Avatar. We've got work to do.”

Grabbing her coat, Korra followed Mr. Reid out the door and past the desks of all the other Detectives. Most of them didn't even look up. Abberline didn't even bother to wake up until she wrapped on his desk with her fist, startling him so much he nearly toppled to the floor. He only avoided doing so by gripping the edge of his desk to steady himself.

“Sleep on your own time,” she scolded, walking by without giving him a second glance. “Yes, Ma'am,” he mumbled sleepily. Blinking the drowsiness out of his eyes he started search his desk for his glasses.

“Where are you two going?” Kuvira asked suspiciously, half rising out of our own chair. “Heading to skin a baker,” the Station Inspector told her. Not telling her would only make her either throw a fit and storm off or follow them. Nip it in the bud now and save herself a massive headache later. “You're in charge until I get back.”

Now, with the bait set all it would take was for her friend to snap it up.

“Sweet,” she said, letting herself fall back into her chair. “Does that mean I get to use the office, too?”

“Sure, whatever,” Korra obliged, tossing her the keys. “But my liquor cabinet better still be full when you leave.”

“You think I'd steal your booze?” her partner asked with mock hurt, already searching the ring for the right key to secret away part of the stash. This is why she only kept cheap stuff at work.
Something to fight off the cold and calm panicking victims, but still wouldn't break the bank when the new lads on patrol got sent up to steal for their initiation.

“Top shelf, on the left,” she replied as she led the way out onto the landing.

“Thanks!” the eldest Beifong daughter shouted after her, shortly followed by the person who most likely would be the one to keep things running while she was away.

“I'll make sure to keep her sober enough to go on call,” Stuart shouted after them, looking over the brim of his glasses as Kuvira practically skipped into Korra's office to plunder her stash. Bo was out sick leaving the office even more short staffed than usual. In the past couple hours she'd had to pass off over a dozen cases to the other stations in the Division because she just didn't have the bodies to throw at them.

But with just one lead she could turn it all around, she was sure of it.

She took the stairs as quickly as she could, squeezing past the unusually high foot traffic this morning. Looked like a squad meeting since most of the faces she could see were from the night shift.

Passing the desk-sergeant she gave him the normal 'I'm stepping out' brief, which he just nodded along with as he tried to explain how to properly fill out a missing person's report in what sounded like mangled Russian. Or maybe Polish? Korra had never gotten along to learning either, useful as they may have been. Being forced into cramming four languages into her head was plenty for one lifetime.

“Perkins, just send the lady up to talk to Kowalski,” the scruffy face veteran said as he followed close behind, a little more bounce in his step as he was headed out than when he had come in this morning. “Ya' can't hold up the bloody line all day 'cause one drunk ass didn't come home night.”

“Yes, sir,” Perkins obliged, switching tactics and trying to usher the woman into the back rooms to search for their unofficial translator.

That dealt with it was out the door, through the growing throng of angry East-enders, and into the nearest cab. Only then did her mentor allow himself the luxury of rubbing as his aching leg.

Korra had never managed to find out exactly what had happened to Reid to give him his signature limp. In fact, she hadn't even noticed it when she had first moved to Leman Street. Only after making Detective and spending a great deal more time with the man had he let it slip.

It was a subtle thing, really. Hardly there most of the time. Unless the man felt stressed. Then the pain would start to show. The grimace, the set of his teeth would change as he would go from a man spry as one half his age to a person that struggled to cross from one side of the room to another.

“What's the pot up to now, eh?” he asked when he noticed her staring.

“Don't know,” she lied. It was a game that went back farther than she'd been on the force that everyone, from Constable on up to Inspector, that did a stint at CID in Leman Street would put a wager on the cause.

Her money was on war wound. One he wasn't proud of.

“Fine then,” he sighed, slipping his hand into his pocket and pulling out his pipe, “I guess if you don't want to tell me you won't mind if I 'ave a puff, will ya?”
You ass, the Avatar thought, nose already wrinkling at the thought of that putrid smell filling such a tiny space. “Thirty pounds, ten,” she admitted, breathing a sigh of relief when her fellow detective tucked the pipe back into his jacket.

“Not quite there, yet,” he chuckled. “I’m waiting for it to hit at least fifty before I spill.”

“That’s gonna be a long wait, boss,” Korra told him, turning to do her usual people watching. “The buy-in's ten shillings. Unless we start letting the other stations in on the action it'll take years.”

“I'm pretty sure you could fill out the pot if you really wanted to,” he reasoned before slipping into silence.

The trip was shorter than she remembered. Maybe half as long as her first. Whether it was because of the dryer conditions or the conspicuous lack of a dead colleague waiting at the other end, Korra was grateful. Time spent in a buggie was dead time. Useless to her. Especially when Reid was involved. While he loved banter just about as much as anyone she had ever met, he always seemed to mum up when they rode together.

It was only as they pulled onto the block that he started to speak again. “Talked to the widow yesterday,” he hummed passively, not bothering to say which widow he meant. There was only one that he would have reason to bring up.

“Oh?” Korra replied, feigning disinterest. It was a fight to keep from flicking her eyes in his direction to gauge his mood. Pretend not to listen and people will tell you everything you want to hear. That was what Tenzin had taught her.

“Said she missed you at the funeral.”

A pang of guilt stabbed at her. And sometimes things you don't. “I was busy.”

“Yeah, that's what I figured,” he said, returning to his jacket if the rustling told her anything. “Still, it'd be nice if ya' paid the poor woman a visit, when ya' had the time. She could use someone to talk to.”

There was no time to mull on what she would say when she inevitably went to visit, however, as the wheels under her came juddering to a halt in front of an all too familiar stretch of storefronts. Clambering out, Korra breathed a lungful of the chill, dry air. The confines of the little vehicle had grown rather uncomfortable in the last few moments. Even the brisk breeze blowing up the street felt good by comparison.

“Looks like he's here,” she noted as a pair of women walked out with bundles of fresh baked goods. The smell of fresh bread wafted out after them. A scent that had been noticeably absent when last she was here.

“Hmm,” Reid hummed, no doubt noting her lack of response. “You want to take the lead on this one?”

“Afraid you've gotten rusty?” she teased back, throwing him a little smirk.

“Bite me,” he grumbled back, sticking his foot out to catch the door before it closed.

“Mornin’,” the proprietor greeted them as warmly as his little shop.

All around the place the smell of flour and yeast pervaded, making the Inspector's stomach growl hungrily. A downside to finally getting a decent amount of rest at night had been a lack of time to
make a proper breakfast in the morning. If he was helpful she might just pick up something to munch on on the way back to the office.

“Mornin', sir. My name's Reid and my companion here is Miss Waters,” her superior introduced, clearly deciding to take the lead, after all. “We're Inspectors with Scotland Yard and we were wonderin' if we might ask you some questions about that nasty business outside your establishment a couple weeks back?”

“I, uh, I don't rightly know what I could tell ya, Mr. Reid,” the man stammered, picking up a nearby cloth and starting to wipe down the counter. “Twas out of town that whole week, I was.”

“Payin' that no mind Mr…?”

“Sullivan, sir,” he supplied quickly. As the detectives closed on him his scrubbing grew quicker and quicker until he sent a display of rolls skittering towards the floor.

Catching it, Korra lifted one of them and examined it hungrily. A split second later and she decided that her hunger was a little more important than she'd thought and started to dig into her pockets for coins. After tossing a couple pence the man's way she took a large bite and almost choked on it.

“You alright?” Reid whispered in her ear, to which she nodded. Turning back to their man he continued his questioning. “Right. So, Mr. Sullivan, where were you on the morning of the 12th of November?”

“I-I was out of t-town,” the baker said, continuing to trip on his words.

“Where?” Korra asked once she managed to force down the bite she'd taken. The bread had been gritty and coarse, leaving her mouth dry as a bone and her brain with the distinct impression that she'd just eaten a mouthful of mostly sawdust.

“Birmingham,” he said, pausing briefly before adding, “Visitin' family.”

Unlikely, she thought. The man sounded more local than most of her colleagues. So, unless he'd shaken his Midcountry accent he'd already told a lie. That was promising.

“And did ya' have anyone watching the shop for ya' while you were away?” Reid pressed, tipping his head at Korra to signal her to take a look around while they continued to talk.

“No, no,” the smaller man denied, shaking his head slowly. It seemed as though he'd recovered somewhat from his initial surprise and was settling into that oldest of routines. Obstruction.

While he was distracted by the rather standard script Reid was quizzing him with though his junior started to wander the room. Not that there was much to see. The shop itself was rather small up front, most of the room in the building likely taken up with the ovens and storerooms behind the counter.

Still, the displays had a modest collection of different goods out for the walk in customer to sample. More rolls, loafs of bread in various sizes, and even a small collection of confectioneries and pies further towards the end. Some still held the warmth of the fire that had formed them while others were cold to her hand's brief touch. All appeared to be just as outwardly tasty as the foulness she had purchased, but what lay within was anyone's guess.

Signage appeared new, professionally done. Big block letters too fine and uniform for a human hand to have made. A new purchase, perhaps, due to a sudden uptick in business?
As unlikely as him visiting family. It was just the three of them here, which meant he was hardly popular in his craft. Especially for a highstreet establishment. Korra had to practically brawl her way to the counter sometimes at her regular supplier of baked goods and this place clearly didn't have that problem.

The furnishings were bare. No tables or chairs to wait at, only a couple of pictures hanging on the walls. One was of a family of five, all decked out in their Sunday best for the camera. The man was older than this one by at least a decade, but he still held a resemblance. Likely his father, as between him and the woman next to him she could piece together the narrow face, long nose, and curly hair.

The other showed the shop owner in a huddle with around ten others in British field khaki, posing and smiling. The mustache was gone but the rest of him knelt prominently in the center of the group.

“Anyone help you out around here that might have been here, anyone at all?” Reid pressed, sensing the same lie she did.

“I have a couple people,” he shrugged, starting to shift uncomfortably again. “A lad that help me carry in the supplies in the morning and a couple apprentices.” Seeing her fellow Inspector writing down every thing he had just said he blurted, “But I-I-I sent them all home when I left town.”

“I'm gonna need those names, Mr. Sullivan,” the rough-faced veteran requested, smiling broadly as he got back into things, “Please?”

“Y-yes. Of course, th-there's-”

“What's that?” Korra interrupted. She'd just caught sight of them, out of the corner of her eye as she turned. A little stack of papers tucked under one of the baskets that looked all too familiar after studying one every morning over her coffee.

“Oh, those?” the baker chuckled nervously. With a hand that was trying desperately trying to not shake he retrieved the pile and smacked them on the counter with what she was sure he thought was a dismissive look on his face. “Some bloke came in here tryin' to hand 'em out a couple days ago. Dropped 'em when I chased 'im out.”

Picking up one of the leaflets she read it, just to make sure. Everything was the same: paper, ink color, font.

Something clicked in her mind and she looked over the sheet at the little label for his wares. Also the same.

Handing off the paper to Reid's outstretched hand Korra leaned over the counter to get up close and personal with the guy that just sold her a cut chunk of garbage passing as food. “Oh, yeah?” she asked, flicking her eyes over his mousy face. Beads of sweat glistened on his brow despite the, at best, temperate atmosphere. “What'd this 'guy' look like? Tall, thick glasses, big mustache?”

The Adam's apple in his throat twitched as he swallowed before mouthing wordlessly.

“Maybe he carries a sword around with him?”

“I don't know what you're talking about,” he denied firmly after taking a moment to steel himself.

“Course ya' don't,” Reid backed up from behind her, the smug grin dripping into his voice at their good fortune. “But your gonna have come with us, anyways.”
A few seconds pass and the man's face falls, skin whitening to a ghostly pale, then hardened again. His posture changed, too, as he apparently resigned himself to some decision. “Can ya' give me a moment so I can tell my wife I'm leavin’?” he asked with dead calm, “I don't want her to worry.”

Pulling back Korra looked over her shoulder at Reid for advice on what to do. When he shrugged she gave the man a nod.

Almost mechanically, Sullivan turned on a dime and walked to the door leading to the kitchen. A few seconds ticked by before Korra realized they'd been played.

*Shit!*

Chapter End Notes

Next part should come out either tomorrow or the day after with the chase scene. But, how did this go? Comments really help me make this work better.
“He’s not married!” she shouted, leaping over the counter, sending baked goods and leaflets flying in every direction. In her momentary glee she had forgotten the lack of a ring adorning his finger, or even the impression of one.

Throwing her weight against the door separating her from her quarry Korra felt the lock and then the frame give way as wood splintered from the force of her assault. Crashing through the gap she just caught sight of a foot sprinting out the back. Behind her the Avatar heard Reid curse as his leg protested against his having to follow her so quickly, but she ignored it.

As fast as her legs could carry her Korra gave chase, sprinting for the open door into the alley.

CRACK!

An explosion of splinters flew into her eyes as a bullet shattered just inches from her face. Slivers of oak and metal alike were sent up in a shower of debris. Stunned, Korra instinctively threw up her hands to shield herself as a second shot whizzed past her ear. Her momentum carried her to the far wall, luckily hiding her behind a pile of barrels and rubbish.

“Fuck!” she cursed, brushing the sweat out of her eyes and diving her hand into her jacket to pull out her Webley.

“Drop it now!” Reid ordered from the door she’d just hurled herself out of, weapon already in hand. Without even giving the baker time to react he drilled a shot back, shortly followed by another.

Sullivan recoiled as at least one of the hot chunks of lead tore into his shoulder, spinning him round and nearly sending his revolver flying from his fingertips. The pained shout was all the warning they got before he started to flee again, just as fast as before. His footsteps echoed off the walls as Korra watched a red splotch appear on his back.

He couldn't get away! Every part of her screamed it. She needed him alive.

Leaving the other detective behind Korra began her pursuit again. Even after a few steps she could tell she was faster than him. She started gaining ground, fast.

But he was desperate. Without even bothering to aim her prey blasted two shots back at her sending up little red puffs of brick where they struck the wall on either side. “Fuck off, pig!” he screamed,
fear, anger, and pain mixing into a deadly cocktail in his voice.

“Stop!” she ordered as he turned right down the next alley and began to sprint towards the street. “I said stop!”

Slowing to a halt she lifted her weapon and aimed down the sights, right at his heart. It would be so easy. One twitch of her finger and…

“Damn it,” the Avatar muttered, lowering her gun again and resigning herself to doing this the hard way.

Her moment of indecision had cost her though. In the few seconds it had bought him, her assailant had nearly reach the busy mess of foot traffic that was his only possible refuge now. “Move!” he demanded, brandishing his pistol and sending shoppers and commuters alike scurrying from danger.

It was the wrong move, again.

Sending the crowd away from himself might have made running easier, but it also meant he was impossible for Korra to lose. “Everyone down!” she called, sending those few people between them hurtling out of her path.

With every second she knew the distance between them would continue to close. Even with his pair of head starts she held the advantage firmly in her grasp. The man's gate was starting to shrink, his left arm dangling uselessly at his side. The red stain had spread to cover almost his entire back and drops were starting to slicken the ground underfoot. As he turned sharply into another gap between buildings Sullivan's leg nearly gave out and the sound of agonized cursing was followed by a loud crash.

But like every wounded animal, the baker was more dangerous now than ever.

A shot rang out and Korra was nearly flattened by as man rushing in the opposite direction clutching his side. The bystander collapsed to the ground a few feet later, moaning weekly.

“You can't run, Sullivan,” she told the fleeing man around the corner, holding her breath for another bang.

“Leave me alone!” he pleaded desperately.

“Yeah, like that's gonna happen after you just shot someone,” she said under her breath. Her eyes focused on the unfortunate victim. He was still moving, that was a good sign. Moving meant he was alive, the moaning meant he was still conscious. If either of those stopped keeping him alive would have to jump to the top of her priorities list, even if it led to her suspect bleeding out instead.

“I'll kill you!” the man in the alley threatened, apparently too weak to continue running.

“You will not, you fucking coward,” Korra taunted, goading him into firing once more at her. The bullet thudded impotently into the corner between them “You can't even hit me.”

“I've done it before,” he warned, the sound of scrambling reaching her ears as he used the last of his energy to drag himself farther away. “I-I, oh, god.”

She didn't need her gun anymore, she thought. Unless he's got himself one of those French numbers, he had just ran out of firepower. Tucking her hefty pistol back into it's holster, the Inspector replaced it with her hat. Sorry buddy, better you than me. With a flick of her wrist she
sent it spinning across the gap. Better safe than sorry, after all.

Using the distraction Korra span around the corner and made a dash for her man, making sure to stay low to pose as small a target as possible in case he'd secreted another pistol on him.

Judging by the way he sent it's empty frame hurtling at where her head would have been if she'd stayed upright, she guessed no. It was a sight of desperation. A last ditch attempt to protect himself from her wrath.

Stupid, that's what it was.

At least if he'd held onto it he could have used it as a club. Now he was defenseless, guard open, half-crouched/half-lying against the wall for balance. A perfect open target.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl as she measured him up. He was hurt, big advantage to her. At best he was a couple inches taller than her, but his current position all but negated whatever advantage of reach this would normally give him. And he was off-balance, heavily depending on the building his good arm was clutching to support his weight.

Korra's only handicap was the sweat running into her eyes and the hair plastered to her forehead. She had the momentum, she had the initiative, she had the strength due to his blood loss. And she had a nice, pointy boot.

Allowing herself to sprint until she was just a footstep away and slightly to the side, the Avatar planted one foot hard and levered the other one as hard as she could into Sullivan's ribs.

“N-ugh!” he exclaimed as the full weight of her body crashed into him at full speed. The energy she imparted lifted him almost a foot off the ground and sent him flying back a yard-and-a-half. Through her toes she felt at least one rib crack as bone shattered under her blow.

“That's for trying to kill me, moron,” she spat as he gasped for air on the ground. Turning on her heel she jogged over to the other man that lay bleeding some few yards away. A small gaggle of people with nothing better to do crowded round him in a ring of ineptitude. “Move it! Out of the way!”

Elbowing through the onlookers Korra knelt down over him. He'd rolled to clutch at his side, blood leaking through his fingers. The commotion picked up as she brushed it aside and started to apply pressure to the hole with one hand while tugging out her handkerchief with the other.

Whistles blow as a swarm of Constables descend on the scene.

One of them roughly pushes his way through the throng to join her, adding his hands to hers, applying pressure and starting to talk to the man to keep him awake. “Alright, mate, you're gonna be just fine,” the officer assured before tossing a shout at one of his colleagues, “Gonna need some help here, Charlie!”

“You got this?” the Inspector asked as 'Charlie' started to crowd her as well.

“Yes, Ma'am,” he nodded. Then his eyes narrowed as they flitted over her face, “Are you alright, Inspector?”

“Yeah, I'm fine,” Korra answered, wiping her forehead with her sleeve. Ow!

Stinging pain erupted from her face as she recoiled. Rather than sweat, a thin gloss of red shone on her arm, now. Some of the splinters must have caught her harder than she realized.
Dabbing lightly at her wounds Korra made her way back to the runner's prone form. Around him stood three variously cross looking men gripping their clubs so tightly their knuckles had started to turn white. In the middle, tending to the injured perp crouched a familiar Doctor.

“Ah, Inspector!” Watson greeted her warmly, a broad grin on his face despite the crimson stain coating him up to his wrists. “Fancy meeting you here.”

“The hell are you doing here?” Korra asked, getting a little twitch in her eyebrow and turning to scan the growing hoard of onlookers for a long, hooked nose and a deerskin.

“I had a patient call me in this morning complaining of chest pain,” he lied without missing a beat. With a little chuckle he elaborated, “Afraid he was having a heart attack, but it turned out just to be a bad bout of indigestion. You can't pretend to be surprised when your morning meal consists of whatever scraps are left over from last night's supper.”

“I guess not.” She never had that problem. Neither did anyone on this block or any adjacent. The nearest grouping of somewhat well to do houses was five blocks down in the direction of his abode.

Personal physicians weren't cheap. Especially, ones that made house calls.

“Get off me,” his patient and her prisoner moaned weakly. Judging by the fresh syringe laying nearby she guessed that Morphine was likely involved in keeping him subdued.

Hopefully Holmes didn't mind sharing.

“You going to be just fine,” the doctor soothed, pressing firmly, but steadily on the man's chest until the grip he held on his jacket slackened entirely and his arm fell to the ground. Turning his attention back to Korra he said, “Once I help that other man, I'll see what I can do about getting those fragments out.”

“Thanks,” Korra muttered, stepping aside as he rose up to his full height and dusted off his knees. Fragments? What is he talking about?

“Hey, kid,” Reid greeted, limping up the other end of the alley. “You alright?”

“I'm fine,” she told him, putting extra weight behind it so he'd accept it without question. He didn't dote like Tenzin. Korra liked that about him, but he had his own ways to be overprotective, when he so chose.

“Well, I, uh, I got something ya' need to take a look at once this is all dealt with,” he said, taking the time to lean so he could let much of his weight rest on a barrel.

“What's the hurry? We've got to get this guy interrogated,” Korra protested, nudging at a leg that had now gone limp as her quarry began to float between awake and unconscious. The best protest he could offer now was weak half-worded murmurings and hazy swings of his arms. “Find out why he tried to turn my face into a colander.”

“I'm afraid he won't be answering any questions for at least,” Watson checked his watch, “four hours. I gave him a sedative to make him more agreeable. What's the nearest Hospital?”

“London Hospital, sir,” one of the constables answered, not making a move to help the man slowly bleeding through his makeshift bandages.

“Excellent, have this man sent there at once. Now you'll excuse me as I tend to my other patient,”
the Doctor said, quickly wiping his hands on a rag he kept in his pocket before moving on to his
next patient. Once he'd forced his way between the now doubled up lines of people that had
gathered, only just held back by the slowly increasing number of officers rushing in from all sides.

“Korra,” Reid said, drawing her attention back to him. He never called her by her first name.
“There's another one.”

Her heart plummeted to the pit of her stomach.

No. No, it had just started going well for her again. She'd found the man that would give her the
killer. That bastard 'Lieutenant' who'd stolen her friend away from his family.

The only thing that could tear her away from hunting him down was…

*Jack.*

“Where?”

"Follow me," he beckoned, turning to lead her farther into the maze of alleys beyond, "You're
gonna want to bring that Doc along."

Chapter End Notes

And with that this monster is done. I'm gonna take a break for a bit so next chapter
will probably be late by a few days.

Comments make my day, as usual, so leaving one would help.
Chapter Summary

Jack the Ripper strikes again.

Chapter Notes

And so we truly enter the realm of fiction, today. Miss Kelly was the last of the 'canonical five' Ripper slayings, although it is rather likely there may have been more and nobody at the time realized. What with the lack of computerized records, modern forensic science, and communications more advanced than the telegraph. This isn't nearly as graphic as the first killing, so that's good. Or bad, depending on your point of view.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was all too familiar, now. The feeling of dread in her gut, the weight on her soul, the barely containable desire to scream her lungs out in frustration and rage. And the weariness.

Each step felt like a thousand. Every breath was heavy and hard to hold in. With every blink of her eyes she feared they wouldn't open. That she'd fall asleep, to be consumed by the nightmares that swarmed her every night.

As the three of them walked the aura began to surround her again. That putrid stink of evil that followed her foe wherever he went. Every shadow took on life, hunting her, stalking her for her failures. Hands reaching out to almost touch before fading into nothingness. Invisible eyes bored into Korra from all directions. The Spirits, the shades, the city itself was watching her. Judging.

A rat came scurrying out from the pile of rubbish that was it's home, stopping halfway across the alley to stare up at the passers by. First Reid passed, then Watson, drawing no reaction from the vermin other than to scramble out from underfoot.

Then it saw Korra, tilted it's head, and smiled. Or maybe just grimaced, before letting out a panicked squeak and fleeing the scene in terror.

Shaking her head to banish such absurd thoughts from her mind, the Avatar turned her attention to the biographer that had volunteered himself as their companion. “How long has Holmes had you following me?” she asked, trying to keep her voice as level and passionless as possible.

“Pardon?” the doctor parried expertly. His voice was the perfect balance of disarming and innocence. How many people had fallen for that ruse?

Not many, she suspected. Despite his great effort and apparent practice, the performance still came off as slightly awkward and rigid. Just enough of a tell, if you were looking for one. No wonder Holmes liked him. Honesty suited him so much that lying seemed to be beyond ability to perfect.
“How long has Holmes been following me?” she asked, more directly this time.

“Since you graced us with your visit, I believe,” he admitted, tossing an apologetic smile at her over his shoulder. “I do apologize for him, young lady. His case load has been rather light, of late, and your 'rather unique' problem has drawn his interest.”

“I will warn ya, Dr. Watson,” Reid said from the head of their little column, “Your friend needs to keep his nose out of my people's work, understand. I don't need any more trouble than I've got.”

“I have tried to explain that to him, on many occasions, Mr. Reid,” Watson hummed, bemused.

“Tell him to get a hobby,” the Avatar grumbled, mentally sharpening the sword she was going to stab into Holmes' brain. As far as she was concerned, he'd declared war and she would have to finish it.

“He has a hobby, Inspector,” the Doctor related with a big grin on his face. “He attends the opera regularly, plays the violin with no small amount of skill, and consumes books as easily as you or I would water. I believe, he simply finds his work more enjoyable than those other pursuits.”

“Great,” Korra deadpanned, resisting the urge to remind Watson that this was her work and not his muses.

He probably found this all more exciting than anything. That would change, soon. The turnover at H-Division wasn't a coincidence. It was high because crime was high, and often gruesome. 'Murder' was an all too common cry on these streets as those with nothing battled with those with even less for every scrap.

Gangs were everywhere, infecting everything they touched like a plague. With them came drugs, gambling, loan-sharks, and all the rest of their ilk.

Prostitution was rampant, thousands of them roamed the street each night, if rumors were to be believed. London's most vulnerable forced into the world's oldest profession because it was their only option to feed themselves or their families. They, themselves, became the target of those that would take advantage of them, offering protection and a place to sleep for a cut of the income. Thus, brothels would spring up. Centers for illegal activity of every kind.

And who would flock to these dens of debauchery? The working man, tired from his long days at thankless jobs, wanting to drink and gamble and whore until he forgot he had to go back the next day. The artist, with their tortured mind and craving for life, longing to be noticed, quick to be forgotten. The wealthy man who wants for nothing, besides companions that will laugh with genuine glee and not obligation, a touch other than his wife's, dice to fritter away money he'll never notice missing, and liquor to fool him into thinking he was truly one of the boys.

At least for a night.

The muggers and pickpockets followed them. From street orphans up to hardened thugs. A knife to the heart for the contents of a wallet, the watch in a pocket, the rings on a finger. Sometimes, just a nice pair of boots.

This was where she hunted him. The worst of them. Yet also, bizarrely, the best. A predator in a land of predators.

The man called: Jack.

If anything could snap Dr. Watson's fascination with the macabre, it would be him. She'd seen his
work first hand. The little romance she had left for her work had died with Martha Tabram. Her body left in tatters, close to forty holes defacing her remains.

She could smell it now, wafting down the alley.

Blood.

Decay.

Death.

Flicking her eyes to Watson, she studied him for any reaction. None, not a thing. No falter in his stride, no tensing of his muscles, the puffs of steam from his breathing all even and steady.

“Right up here,” Reid gestured, stopping well short of their goal. Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew his flask and started to fumble with the cap. Brandy, that was his choice. Strong and sickly sweet with the sugar he added to it so he could gulp it down in one go.

“You alright?” Korra asked as she passed him.

“No. No, not really,” he admitted with stern determination armoring his features. “But that's the job, eh?”

“Yeah,” she agreed in less than a breath.

The victim lay in an almost comfortable position, propped against the wall with her arms laying to the side. Once again the eyes stared blankly skyward. Glassy and empty.

Blood spattered much of the wall behind her, some of the higher streaks reaching well above head height. Much of the rest lay in a half dried pool that framed the remains or soaked into the flimsy remains of cloth that still clung limply to the shattered frame.

The similarities were obvious, even from here. Frantic slashes stretched across the woman’s chest and bosom. Again, the head had nearly been severed, only the spine itself not cut through. Viscera littered the surroundings, carefully arrayed like some hellish museum display. The care he’d shown in the 'aesthetics' of his work had remained a constant, twisted artist that he was.

“Dear, lord,” Watson remarked in mild shock. At last, a reaction. Brief, but there. Horror, disgust, rage, and sympathy all cycled past like the passing of the sun and seasons.

“Found her when I came after you,” Mr. Reid remarked as he tucked his flask back into place. “Damn near tripped over her, as a matter of fact.”

“And you didn't think it was important to, I don't know, secure the scene?” Korra chided as she started to scan the ground in a grid. The bare earth was dry, spared from the mist and rain by high walls and tight spaces. Only on the far side of what could generously be called the 'path' had the dampness lingered long enough for any mud to persist.

Too far away to be of use, likely, but she'd check it just the same. The closer she looked, however, the more interesting the ground became. Scrapes disturbed the gravel scattered in lieu of the usual cobble pavers.

This woman had made a fight of it, for whatever good it did her. Hopefully that meant she passed that way, fighting to the last, rather than cowering in fear.
“We're in the middle of nowhere, kid,” the older man rebuffed, moving to join her. “I was probably the first person to find her here and it's not like I had a whole crew o' lads with me.”

“Sure,” she replied, absently. In the past few seconds her mind had shifted entirely, all desire for conversation lost. The world faded away as she started her process.

As Dr. Watson made his way to preform his examination, Korra searched the periphery, searching for any possible scrap left by her killer. If it were there, it would be hidden, mingling with the remains deposited there by ten-years worth of shortcutters and passers by. Gingerly, she picked through the discarded, a ten-foot long mound of detritus almost as high as her waist. Everything that looked less than two-weeks old fell into her purview to be lifted, examined, noted, and either replaced or set aside depending on it's potential merit.

A shattered lantern with the smell of oil still strong in it's innards. Some bloody cloth, little more than shreds but matching the dress of the victim closely. A key and purse, both discarded in the same small patch with their contents intact, including some petty cash and a name.

“Agnes St.Claire,” she breathed, if only to taste it on her tongue. _Was that your name?_

Turning, Korra looked at Agnes. She would have been pretty, fair hair and what must have been stunning gray-blue eyes, were the not dulled by death's unflattering embrace. It was hard to tell in her current position, but Korra guessed they might have been around the same height, the deceased slightly taller, perhaps. Age, early to mid-thirties, barring a hard life.

Whatever life she may have led it was over now. Snuffed out in an outburst of violence.

_You’ll pay, Jack_, she promised, clenching her fists tight, nails cutting into her palms, _you will pay a thousand fold for every life you take. No more._

A sudden gust of breeze cut through the alley, swirling down between the buildings. With it came the sound of rustling from an envelope tucked neatly into the bag she had found.

Would they see? Reid had joined Dr. Watson and the pair were discussing the injuries and desecration at some length, her boss taking careful notes as they did so. Quickly, quietly, Korra lifted the letter and read the all too familiar writing scrawled on it's face: _Hulo Mis Waters_

“Bastard,” she muttered aloud without realizing, causing the older man to look over his shoulder at her.

“Find something, kid?” he asked with barely peaked curiosity, much of his focus still on the body at his feet. “What's that?”

“Nothing,” Korra lied instantly, pretending to toss the document aside while keeping careful track of where it fell. “Just some trash.”

“Right…” Reid said, feigning his belief very poorly. Despite this, he let her continue her work without any further questions.

There was a lot of it to do.

As soon as he turned around the Avatar pocketed the letter as stealthily as she could, patting it in her pocket once she did so. Next came the footprints. Indents, scrapes, disturbed earth, faint partials, and one singular print that didn't match either of her companions. If she'd have blinked she would have stepped right in it, wiping it's existence away without ever realizing. Whose was it, though?
Not the victim, too large and the wrong type of heel. A random wanderer, so far from the beaten path? No, this person had stood here. The weight had been evenly distributed, without the extra disruption near the toe a walker would have.

And then there was the cigarette. A single butt, laying just inches away where it had been discarded. Lifting it she turned the nub over gingerly, checking for a makers mark but it was pretty obvious that this was hand rolled. Poorly. The corner coming loose, several bumps where he'd rushed and hadn't smoothed them flat.

Pausing to admire his work. Getting sloppy. If that were the case, what else might he have left behind?

The more she searched, the closer to the body she got. Her stomach coiled, twisting itself into knots as she navigated the tight, claustrophobic space. The two had come from the opposite direction as her party, she determined. Three sets of tracks in and one out each way.

She felt a pull to go that way. Excuse herself so she didn't have to stay so close to yet another shattered corpse. Try to forget the face that would haunt her dreams that night.

“Hey, kid?” Reid called, stopping her mid-step. “Give me a hand with this, would ya?”

The two of them had moved the victim so she was laying in a more dignified position, if such a thing really existed, and her boss was examining a small gouge in the mortar between some bricks.

“What d'ya got?” she asked, keeping her eyes fixed on the mark and nothing else.

“Looks like he got a little carried away when he was doin' his carvin','” her fellow detective mumbled, trying to use his nails to dig what looked like a nail out of the wall. “Can't bloody get it, Ahh!”

He yelped, face going sharp as he stared murder at what Korra could now see was the imbedded tip of a knife in the masonry. Blood dripped down one of his fingers to join the mostly dried pool on the ground. Seeing it made Korra's face sting all the more, aggravated by the temperature and another gust of breeze.

Kneeling next to him, Korra dug out he little pen knife from the bottom of her side pocket. After a bit prying, and nearly snapping the tiny blade in half, her prize was pulled forth. The broken tip of the murder weapon, like not even missed in the frantic glee of taking a life.

The end was more rounded than she had expected. More machete like than the usual blades she came across in her day-to-day. Over the years she'd seen hundreds, from cleavers that could lop a man's head off with one lazy swing, to toothpicks that would snap if you looked at them the wrong way. This one looked like it fell somewhere in the broad 'middle'. That swirling encyclopedia's worth of blades she had neither name for nor experience with.

Regardless, she could make a few conclusions with what she had:

A. This blade was not a weapon. Not by design, at least. The tip just wasn't sharp enough. Pointed blades were good for stabbing, the knife's main utility in combat. They were just too light to cut reliably through thick clothing.

B. It was a tool, a well cared for one at that. It's ability to draw blood so easily, even after being dug into abrasive mortar and a passing through flesh with enough force to score bone deeply. Not many positions required such a blade: upholsterers, dock hands, sailors, and surgeons popped into her head, though that third one would be a much smaller portion than it would have a decade
C. He was much stronger than she had expected. Breaking off a third of an inch of steel was no small feat. No wonder only one of his victims had manage to cry out in time. They'd likely just died before they had a chance to, overwhelmed in a sudden rush and slaughtered before their brains even caught up.

“D’ya recognize it?” Reid asked, quietly, so as not to interrupt Dr. Watson's continued work. When he lifted what looked like a lobe of liver with his bare hand Korra nearly lost her meager breakfast.

“No,” she swallowed, shivering. The way he touched it so casually made her insides squirm. Blood and gore had never really bothered her much. Hunting and fishing had been some of the few pastimes her parents had let her have outside the walls of her prison. “But, it looks like he hasn't made the investment for a proper blade, yet.”

“Looks pretty proper from where I'm standing,” he argued humorlessly, once again turning to watch the doctor work his grim task.

“You're squatting,” she teased, desperate for some levity.

With a bit of a grunt, and some light assistance from pushing off his good knee and the wall, Reid managed to stand up straight. “Better?” he asked, obligingly.

“A little,” the Avatar smirked, swiftly joining him.

There was nothing left to it, now. No getting around her least favorite part of the job. “What's the ruling, Dr. Watson?” she asked the mustachioed medical man, while peeking into the open cavity that took the place of a midriff. It wasn't quiet as bad as Kelly had been, but it was far too close for her liking.

“It's quite the mess, I must say,” he reported, wiping his hands as clean of blood as he could. Once that was done he repeated for her the bullet points of what he'd said to Reid. “Death by sharp force trauma to the neck, though I'm fairly certain most of said trauma was likely post postmortem. Part of the disfiguration of the deceased. Several of the major organs have been tampered with: liver, kidneys, bowel, and the, um,” he looked up at her and paled slightly, “left ovary have been removed.”

“That fits,” she said, flatly, doing her own cursory headcount of the internals littering the area. They were short at least a third a liver and a kidney.

“Yes, well,” Watson continued, “As to a time of death, the best I can give you is sometime in the last twelve hours.”

“Any way you could be more specific?” she pressed, irritated, despite the fact he had already been more useful to her than any of the previous doctors that had consulted on her cases.

“I'm afraid not, Inspector” he sighed, also rising to his feet. “Not without a proper autopsy.”

“Would ya' mind terribly doin' that for us, Dr. Watson?” the senior Inspector requested, pulling out his pipe and starting to clean it. “For some reason, our surgeon doesn't seem to want to come into work.”

Korra could feel the sideways look he was giving her. Subtle, but still withering. Trying to force her into feeling shame for giving their old surgeon the chewing out he rightfully deserved. So, she'd pissed the bastard off, big deal! If he'd been any good at his job, she wouldn't have any reason to be
pissed at him in the first place. Incompetence deserved beratement, idiocy earned mockery.

At least, despite whatever questionable company he kept (even admired), this doctor hadn't clipped his medical degree out of the back of a catalog. Still, the work did seem to be getting to him, no matter what he tried to portray for the benefit of current company.

For a moment his mouth moved without making a sound. Lips formed words, but breath failed to give them life. His mustache twitched, nose wrinkled, hand moved to swat away some flies that had started to circle like urban vultures. Korra could see the cogs turning in his head as his mind formed the thoughts to catch up with his impulses. Another thing Holmes enjoyed about him, perhaps? Why he tortured him so endlessly. His raw, barely filtered emotion compensated for the amateur's own lack of the same.

It took him a moment to gather his thoughts. When he finally spoke, however, she blew all her expectations. Rather than the subdued disgust she had been expecting, Watson sounded like he was only just restraining his rage. “Barbaric! Simply barbaric!” he exclaimed, slowly simmering over, “Such wanton cruelty. I tell you, Miss, I have never seen the like in all my years on this earth.”

“I thought you were in the army?” the Avatar pointed out, causing both of her companions to shift from side-to-side in discomfort. Oh, if she could get the two of them drunk in a room together, what a time to be a fly on the wall that would be.

“Inspector!” someone called from back in the direction they came in from. “Dr. Watson!”

“Over here!” Korra called, letting the two men be alone with their thoughts for a moment.

A smartly dressed young Bobby came jogging around the corner, brow slick with sweat. “Ah, Mr. Reid, Miss Waters!” he cried, gratefully. Looks like she'd found the sergeant's new least favorite. “I've been looking for you everywhere.”

“Congratulations, you found us. Mind giving us a hand now that you're here?” she asked, nodding to the late Miss St.Claire.

Following her motion the man's eyes widened as they took in the horror of her mortal remains. “Oh my-” he began before scrambling to pull his whistle from his pocket and blowing on it with everything he had. The shrill noise echoed off the walls and sent shivers down Korra's spine. Soon, it was followed by the sound of heavy footfalls coming closer.

A team of sergeants and constables soon surrounded them as reinforcements poured in. Quite what they expected to do was, frankly, beyond her.

After the usual muttered curses and prayers, complete with crosses, one of the more composed men asked, “Orders?”

“Doctor?” Reid inquired, waiting for the medical man to list his requests.

“Yes, well,” Watson puffed, seemingly inflated by the sudden attention a score of eyes brought him. While the stiffness of his stature still radiated some of the fury of earlier, his voice had returned to it's usual, jovial self. “I quite think were all wrapped up here, don't you?” he asked rhetorically, once again tucking his thumbs into his vest and pulling it taught. “If you gentlemen would be so kind as to escort the deceased to London Hospital, I would be more than happy to accompany you.”

The eyes then divided themselves rather equally between the two Inspectors, who both nodded their approval.
A stretcher was soon retrieved, along with a blanket to protect what little dignity they could from prying eyes. Maybe Agnes would be spared the flash of the photographers camera. As the officers gently lifted her, however, something managed to catch Korra's eye.

“Hold it!” she ordered, stopping them dead. It had been there, just for a second, she saw it. A flash of gold among the pallid skin and faded scarlet, catching the sun at it moved. Kneeling once more the Detective leaned in close, searching for the glint again. *There!*

With gentle care the woman reached out and started to pry at the cold fingers that formed the cage around her target. They were stiff with rigor and it was hard not to break a digit in the struggle. At last, though, she had it. Her most solid lead in months of searching.

A single, solitary, button.

Korra almost cried as she held it up to the light, watching the hidden sun dance off the faded, dulled surface. A faint design could be seen on the front, a pair of letters stamped in a makers mark: *H.P.*

*Thank you, Agnes,* Korra blessed inwardly, turning the little miracle over and over in her fingertips so she could see the reflective reverse side and the stamp over and over and over again. Once she had ingrained every detail into her mind she clamped her hand tight around the little thing and held it close, as though it was her most valuable possession.

It very nearly was.

“What is it?” Reid asked, apparently confused by the look on her face. “What'd ya find?”

“She did it,” she almost prayed, heart hammering in her chest, “She grabbed his button. Ripped it right off his chest when he killed her.”

“You're this excited about a button?” he asked, even more confused than before.

Korra just blinked at him. How couldn't he understand? This changed everything. Her phantom had been made flesh. Now, she held the proof in her hand. Jack was no longer a monster, he was a man. And Korra knew just how to hunt men.

With a letter, a lantern, a button, a cigarette butt, and a broken knife she would start her chase in earnest. The scent of his trail was stronger than it had ever been.

He'd made his first mistake and she would make sure it would be his last. The only one she would need.

Jack had his fun. Now, it was her turn.

“I'm coming for you, Jack,” she breathed, almost giddy as something she had long lost started to kindle in her chest once more.

Hope.

Chapter End Notes

More Asami next time. Mostly because I need to write something cheerful. I hope you
enjoyed this chapter. Feedback is always appreciated, so feel free. ’Til next time.
A Day In The Country

Chapter Summary

It's still not a date!

or

Korra and Asami finally have their friendly shooting match.

Chapter Notes

I hope you folks enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At last, the day had arrived. As Korra clambered out in front of the station she could feel her heart hammering in her chest. The straps of her bag weighed heavy on her shoulder, both rifles tucked safely away in their carrier. But that wasn't why they felt so heavy.

No, it was all in her mind, she realized. Yet another night had been spent sleeplessly staring up at the ceiling listening to the ticking of the clock going by. Only this time it wasn't fear, or anger, or even anxiety keeping her up. Rather, it had been a near giddy state of glee and excitement.

The previous day hadn't ended as she had planned. Of course, it was just Korra's luck for Tenzin to be hovering about when she and Reid returned. Word had traveled fast, as it normally did, and her mentor had made sure to be the first person either of them saw upon walking through the doors of Leman Street. His face had been placid, as per his usual, but even he couldn't hide the swirling mass of emotions behind his eyes.

With one look at his protege, he'd turned her 'round and marched her straight back out the door. “Go home,” he'd ordered, firmly, leaving no room for negotiation this time.

But, Korra being Korra, she'd still tried to do it anyways. Only after assurances that Sullivan would be kept in a nice dark hole until she got back did the Avatar finally relent. There were some fights even she couldn't win, it seemed.

Much of the way home she'd been livid, one smart comment away from taking someone's jaw off with her fist. Walking had always calmed her though and before long she'd just fallen into disgruntlement, then, finally, apathy. All she'd had left at that point was figuring out how to pass the time until she could go back.

Her mind had been utterly focused on the letter sheltered in her pocket, the only thing she would have to work on until Sunday.

That is, until she'd checked the mail.

Tucked under the usual bills, messages from home, and threats on her life and body (always
hilarious, those) was a single letter that had entirely erased all of her frustration.

Asami. She'd finally gotten enough of a gap in her schedule to let her take a day in the country. Just what they would need for a trip to the range.

After that, all Korra could think about was getting ready. Jack's letter was left in her pocket where it couldn't ruin her mood, to be examined at a later date. Up the stairs she went to make sure all of her previous effort was still holding. After checking the actions and cycling through a few dummy cartridges she'd laid them in their case and lent them by the door to her room. Another bag she filled with a days worth of ammunition and some repair tools, just in case.

Anticipation had kept her awake all that night.

In only a matter of a few days the two of them had become close friends, confidants even. After their now regular midday meals the two of them would take in the sights of London, meandering about in long walks with no destination in mind.

Tales from their past flowed freely between them, no thought of judgment censoring their minds. Korra had frequently caught herself telling stories known only by a precious few. People she'd known for years, some only shared with her mother. Despite this, Asami was just so easy to talk to that it simply felt natural to relate them.

Her new friend had returned the favor, in kind. They'd gossiped about first kisses and teenage crushes, with Asami providing most of the latter. Childhood dreams had been relayed at length: Korra’s wish to be a doctor, Asami’s to be a Lady of the Court. When they needed some extra joy they'd laughed at each others jokes, even the bad ones. Dreams, hopes, work, no subject was left untouched.

And every time they'd been forced to part, Korra had noticed it was harder for her to say goodbye. The little hug they shared, harder to let go.

That made the sight of raven hair all the more welcome as the Avatar scanned the crowd, eager for a glimpse of her friend. “Hey there!” she called in greeting to catch the engineer's attention.

“Oh, hey, Korra,” Asami replied, spinning on a dime and flashing that wonderful smile of hers.

Her attire was somewhat between her usual day wear and what she put on when working on her stirling engine. A simple, if still elegant, dress with matching sun hat adorned her usual red trimming. She'd taken the practical option when it came to shoes, it seemed, as well as the foresight to bring what looked like a change of clothes in a bag over one shoulder.

In her 'off' hand she held a picnic basket, likely filled with goodies whipped up in her family's kitchen by the wizard that worked there. Much as Korra enjoyed eating out, if she could just have an endless supply of the cake Asami had brought with her on Wednesday she could die happy.

For a split second Korra was taken aback by how beau-

Good.

How good she looked.

Warmth started to tickle her cheeks as she realized just how hot 50° could feel. “Sooo, did you get tickets already, or were you waiting for me?” the Avatar asked, willing the redness in her face to go away.
“Picked them up yesterday. Got ’em right here,” her friend informed, flashing the two little pieces of paper. The smile on the woman's face faltered slightly, losing just a touch of it's warmth. A tinge of concern passed over her emerald-green eyes, tarnishing the cheerful glow Korra had grown so fond of.

“Great, lets get going then,” Korra said, smiling a little wider to compensate. “Don't want to miss it.”

“After you, Milady,” Asami insisted, playfully, giving a theatrical bow that drew the eye of many of their fellow commuters.

Which did not help Korra stop blushing, especially when a passing group of school-aged well-to-do's start to mimic her friend's bow, albeit with slight hesitation. “Do it and you'll be doing your oral exams without teeth,” the Princess warned, sending the group scurrying and drawing out a string of bemused laughter from her companion.

Their banter on the way to the platform mainly consisted of Korra grumbling about the stunt, while Asami kept getting more and more amused with every gripe. Even while she had her fun, though, she took the time to apologize in between fits of giggles.

Korra accepted with a sigh. She couldn't stay mad at Asami. It was just a stupid prank, after all. When they reached the platform Korra start heading towards one of the less crowded looking carriages, only to be stopped by her friend calling out to her.

“Where do you think you're going?” she asked, seemingly confused by her companion's actions.

“Uh, getting on the train?” Korra replied, shrugging so the strap stopped cutting into her so bad.

“We're up here,” Asami corrected, jerking her thumb in the direction of first-class. “Come on, I think we're right up front.”

“O-okay,” Korra complied, following along closely.

Once more taking up step beside her friend, the blue-eyed woman took the time to look into each carriage as they went by. The loud crowded cars towards the back, filled with the working-class. The middling sort sorted themselves into second, with separate compartments to segregate themselves into little cadres according to party or profession. Finally, at the very front, passed the dining car, was there destination.

A porter, waiting at the door, held the entrance open for them. He then helped load their bags inside, being extra careful with the food. Once he had been properly tipped and sent on his merry way Korra finally took the time to look around.

The accommodations were far more lavish than she had imagined. Her work didn't often require the use of long distance travel, and when it did she always took a third-class seat. Luxury didn't often suit Police business. A policy she might need to rethink.

The carriage was almost as well furnished as her home and separated into just three compartments. There was a smattering of furniture that wouldn't seem out of place in Asami's house: hardwood table, velvet upholstered seats, a miniature chandelier for lighting, and a pair of fold out bunk beds for overnight travel. Already adorning the table was a bottle of wine and a pair of glasses with a note reading: Compliments of the Company.

“Well that's nice of them,” Korra mumbled, having a look at the label. With even a casual glance
her eyes bulged.

“What is it?”

“Château Lafite, '22,” she breathed, already drooling. This one bottle was worth more than her entire collection. Probably worth more than every ticket on this train put together. She had to have it. She had to have it, right now!

“Ugh,” Asami groaned, temporarily taking Korra's attention away from the bottle of liquid gold in her fingers. “My dad did this, I bet.”

“Your dad likes wine?” Korra asked, surprised. He seemed like more of a Scotch man.

“No,” Asami corrected, “I like wine. I don't like it when he buys me bottles just because they have a big price tag.”

“This stuff is supposed to be amazing!” Korra consoled, energetically, setting the apparently unwanted fatherly present back on the table for her companion to do with as she pleased. “At least there's that!”

“Yeah,” the heiress hummed, fondly. Lifting the bottle herself, she turned it over in her hands before tucking it into the basket with the other refreshments. “He does get them right, sometimes. This'll go great with lunch.”

“Sweet,” Korra said with brimming anticipation. Inside she was cheering with joy, reminding herself to thank Mr. Sato profusely when next she saw him.

The conductor came by to check there tickets, shortly followed by the refreshments as the train began to pull away from the station. After they had gotten a couple snacks and a pot of coffee to share, Asami pointed at Korra's face.

“So, I guess we just aren't going to address the massive, shrapnel laced, elephant in the room, then?” she asked, not bothering to hide how her eyes were flitting over the constellation of small scabs on Korra's forehead and cheek. “Just going to ignore the fact that you made the front page of every single late paper in the south-east?”

“I was, kinda-sorta, hoping for that, yeah,” Korra chuckled, humorlessly.

Dr. Watson had done good work, commendably so. He'd managed to remove all of the bits of lead and door from her face without too much hassle. Seven stitches later and he'd even been bold enough to promise she wouldn't have any scars.

Didn't make the marks any less visible, though.

Taking a deep breath, Asami said, “You really scared me. Most of the headlines just said you'd been shot. Didn't bother to mention you were still alive.”

“I'm sorry,” Korra apologized, feeling a pang of guilt for scaring her friend.

“Why are you sorry? You're the one that got shot,” the other woman asked, giving the Avatar a sympathetic look and extending her hand to around halfway across the table. “Are you okay?”

“Y-yeah, I'm fine,” Korra confirmed, eying the hand on the table, nervously. Why was it there? Should she…
Slowly, Korra let her own hand inch towards Asami's, giving her plenty of time to pull away. She didn't. Their fingertips brushed against each other and the Inspector felt a jolt of goosebumps leap up her arm. Barely able to keep herself from shivering, she went the rest of the way, laying her hand atop the other woman's. With her thumb she gently stroked the soft skin there.

Asami was warm, soft, despite the work she did. Korra had always expected little burns and cuts to mar her hands, and yet, there was hardly a callous on her fingers.

The burning in her cheeks was raging again, no doubt glowing like a bonfire for all to see.

“I, uh, I gotta say though,” Asami almost stammered, her own cheeks starting to turn pink, “It does make you look kind of cool.”

Both their eyes flicked to their hands and back, the heiresses face growing a few shades darker after doing so. Korra mentally chastised herself, withdrawing back from the contact, despite how much she didn't want to. She'd made it awkward.

Holding hands as they walked was one thing, but she had to go all out.

“Y-ya think so?” Korra asked, smiling proudly, buoyed by the compliment.

“Yeah,” her friend continued, “Didn't do anything to the good looks, either. Bonus.”

“Hehehe,” the Avatar laughed, both softly and with a tinge of embarrassment, feeling the warmth creeping onto her ears now. Hopefully her hair would hide it. With her luck it'd just make it more obvious.

For a moment they just sat in silence, blushing at each other, listening to the sound of the train rattling over the tracks. Asami poked at her crumpet without ever lifting it, while Korra did much the same with her coffee.

“So?” Korra said after a while, breaking the ice between them once again. “You like wine, huh?”

“Yeah,” Asami confirmed with a nod.

“Then I have just one question,” the detective continued, leaning a little closer and narrowing her eyes to study for any hint of a lie, “White or Red?”

“Red, obviously,” the emerald-eyed woman dismissed, casually. In a flash her confident smile had returned and the pink started to fade from her face. “How is that even a question?”

“It's not,” the Whitechapel transplant smirked, delighted that she agreed. It looked like they'd just found a way to pass the time. They had so much to talk about, now. Oh, so very much. “What's your favorite?”

And so the time ticked by as they delved into their love of the fermented grape. Gradually it evolved into cuisine in general, with Asami spending a better part of half an hour asking about Water Tribe delicacies. Apparently, she found the differences rather fascinating, especially the prevalence of venison as the red meat of choice, instead of the beef and pork she was used to. Korra just chalked it up to using what they had. Besides, she wasn't really much of a cook (some lessons from Katara close to a decade ago had proven that), so explaining rather quickly devolved into speculation on both their parts.

When that was over, the conversation swiftly morphed into gentle teasing, comments on the scenery and weather, and a brief foray into the most recent slaying. Not without resistance, mind
you. Agnes was the last thing Korra wanted to think about, let alone tell Asami.

Thankfully, her companion caught on rather quickly to her discomfort. Another apology and brief bout of hand holding later and they moved onto happier topics, again.

This time the Avatar was better at hiding her flustered blush. What she couldn't hide was how her heart started to hammer in her chest once more. She was almost grateful when the train started to slow as they pulled into the station, allowing her to busy herself by gathering her things.

Hours had seemed like minutes as they talked and laughed, as it always did. Outside, the atmosphere had totally changed. Gone were the tight streets, throngs of people, and near suffocating smog of London and it's surroundings.

Replacing them was a small, cozy village of around two-thousand. Breathing deeply, Korra relished the clean country air, sweet with winter wheat and clover. People milled about, much as they did in the city, but they lacked the urgency that their urban counterparts had in spades. Smoke rose from the chimneys of thatch roofed houses, mingled among some newer, all stone structures.

After Asami joined her on the platform, the Inspector started to lead the way out towards the street. Not much had changed in the months since she had last been here. They even managed to get the same old cab she always did.

Without even bothering to ask the destination, the man stirred the horses into action. Before long they had made it out of town and into the countryside proper.

“So how did you hear about this place?” Asami asked as they crept further from the town. “It's really out of the way.”

“Oh, uh, my uncle told me about it,” the Avatar told her. It wasn't a lie, really. No need to tell her that her family owned a rather lavish stately home nearby that her parents tried to shack her up in when she first came over.

“Does he shoot, too?”

“Not really,” Korra sighed with a little wry chuckle tacked on the end, scratching a spot on her chin, “He thinks it's 'undignified', or some shit like that.”

“He sounds delightful,” Asami returned in the same tone she used whenever she described some of her father's more overbearing habits.

“Yep,” she agreed, packing as much sarcasm as she could into one word.

“How far is it to where we're going?”

“Not much farther, Miss,” the driver said, cutting into the conversation. “Just 'round that bend there.” He pointed farther up the road to the swiftly approaching entrance to the Club's grounds.

Said club had clearly seen better days. Little care had been given to the entrance for quite some time. Rust clung to the gate in patches of dirty reddish-brown. The fence showed an equal level of mild disrepair, with peeling paint and a single plank hanging impotently from one of the posts.

Just about the only things that showed off that they area wasn't merely abandoned was a well polished brass plaque set into the wrought iron bars and the well trimmed hedges on either side of the path up to the main building. Old, relatively small, and two-stories tall, the club house had been a long time refuge for Korra during sweltering summer days between bouts of fishing in the well
stocked pond or shooting at the small, attached range.

“And here you are, Miss Waters,” the driver said as they came to a halt, “Shall I pick you up at the usual time, then?”

“The train back isn't 'til six,” Korra told him as she awkwardly clambered out after her friend. Next time she'd put on the guns on after she got out of the cab. Maybe if she could focus on something other than those lovely, cheerful eyes. “Come back 'round in time for that.”

“Sure thing, Miss Waters,” he bid her, waving his hand in casual dismissal of Asami’s offer of payment. “No, thank you, Ma'am. The young Avatar and her friends don't have to pay me.”

“O-okay,” Asami replied, quirking her eyebrow at the refusal. As he made his way off, the heiress tossed the detective a questioning look.

“I helped his son out of a bit of trouble a while back,” she explained, checking to make sure she'd grabbed everything.

“Not what I was going to ask about, but good to know,” her companion noted, taking up step alongside.

They checked in at the front desk without much trouble. Korra bickered with the groundskeeper about the state of the fence out on the main road, while Asami just looked on, perplexed. Soon after, she took the opportunity to change into her shooting kit, not all that different from Korra’s.

An older pair of trousers in one of the many shades of the many beige with a matching hunting jacket. The hat she kept, tying the ensemble together with a delightfully warm looking scarf. In red, of course.

Afterward, the pair walked out into the glorious sunshine, so welcome after the overcast of late. Turning to her competition, Korra asked, “Say, what do you think about making this a little more interesting?”

With an equally eager look in her eyes, if a somewhat less obviously self-confidant grin, Asami inquired, “What do you have in mind?”

“Loser has to buy the winner the supper of their choice,” she suggested, already sure where she wanted to go.

“Anywhere they want?”

“Yep.”

“Deal!” the engineer accepted in an instant.

“Alright,” the Avatar said, setting her bags down and opening them. Looking dead into those startling green orbs, forcing down the little flutter it caused, she asked with a perfect calm, “British or American?”

After leaning over to look at her options, the reply came: “American.”

Perfect! Filet mignon, here she comes!

This was going to be a breeze.
‘WTF?!’ Korra screamed internally as Asami mechanically drilled shots downrange. What was this woman made of?

The way she worked the lever was right out of the manual, frame for frame. Smooth, exact, no wasted motion. Just the essentials. It was oddly hypnotic to watch. Like something from another world. No one was this precise. Was she even blinking when she fired?

The woman was an angel with a rifle, that much was for sure. Not to mention well above Korra’s league as a shooter. In over a hundred rounds she hadn’t missed the inner two rings once. The inner most one only five times.

As for the bull's-eye? Destroyed. Absolutely destroyed.

Even when she was totally in the zone, Korra wasn't anywhere near that exceptional.

“And, boom,” Asami capped off, finishing the smiley face she’d taken to making after Korra had traded off. Even with the theatrics she still kept within the previous spread. “I win.”

“Uh-huh,” the Inspector nodded, utterly dumbfounded by the display. “Remind me never to piss you off.”

“Deal,” her companion agreed, cycling the last empty cartridge and flicking the safety. “On one condition.”

“What?”

With a look of victory on her face, the engineer turned to ask for her prize. What would it be, Korra wondered. Whenever Asami had chosen where they ate lunch the two of them always ended up somewhere on the slightly fancier side. But now, if she was so inclined, Korra might just end up footing the bill for somewhere actually out of her comfort zone.

“Dinner at your place, next Friday,” she said happily, practically beaming with triumph. Then a wave of something seemed to roll over her as she started to blush. “I-I mean, if that's okay with you?”

“I, uh,” Korra said, pausing to let her brain catch up. Asami wanted to come over to her house? That giddy elation bubbled in her belly once more. Inside her head only one word repeated itself, over and over again. Yes. “Yeah! That would be great!”

The enthusiasm of her response took both of them by surprise and for a moment they just stood there, waiting for the other to make the first move. It didn't take long for the pause to get awkward, both of the women starting to fidget.

“What are you hungry?” Asami asked to break the ice.

After a couple beats Korra finally nodded.

As they gathered their things and put them carefully back in their case the detective's mind whirred like a top. With quick flits of her eye she stole glimpses of her friend's fair face. The suspicion she had been harboring these last few days started to ferret around inside her head again, like an obnoxious little pest.
Only the exact opposite.

Rather than pester her like a case would, the dwelling seemed to calm her. She knew this feeling, this jumble of emotions, with just a tinge of desire as an undercurrent. The last time she had felt it was when she and Mako were…

But that was impossible. Surely, she didn't feel like that for Asami?

Affection, sure, she wouldn't deny that. They were friend's, after all. You felt affection for friends, that was normal.

She would also admit, if only to herself, a deal of attraction. Who wouldn't be, though? Asami was easily the most stunning woman she'd ever seen. Eyes turned to look at her as she walked down the street, men and women. It was normal.

And so what if every time she smiled, or Raava forbid laughed, Korra's heart melted? If just the thought of looking into those eyes made her drift off into daydreams in the middle of work, so be it.

The other thing, well that was a little less normal, but…

“Hey, are you alright?” the object of her introspection asked, stirring her from her thoughts just short of their conclusion. “You kind of spaced out a little there.”

“Huh? Yeah, sorry,” the Inspector replied, rubbing at her temple to vainly try to banish the thoughts from her mind. “Just thinking about… work.”

Something about the little tilt of Asami's head made Korra think she'd seen right through the lie. Spirits, she really was something else. What Korra needed right now was a few stiff drinks to go with the meal they would soon be sharing. Good thing she had brought a flask with her.

Maybe, if she drank enough, she might figure out what to do next. Because, right now, she was so fucked. There was no point denying it to herself, anymore. She'd gone and got herself a crush on the most eligible bachelorette in London: Miss Asami Sato.

Even so, this was the best day she could remember, for a very long time.

Chapter End Notes

I actually wrote most of this before the last chapter, but there's been a lot of tweaking since then. Tell me what you think about how I'm getting the girls together. Too fast, too slow, too roundabout, whatever?

As I've said before, your comments make my week.
Interview

Chapter Summary

Bolin and Korra take a trip to London Hospital.

Chapter Notes

Oh, God! This was really tough to write, the middle bit of this chapter has gone through about a dozen versions in the last few days. Hope it turned out well!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So, tell me why I’m here, again?” Bolin asked as they climbed the third flight of stairs on their path so far.

“You’re here to keep me from doing something stupid,” Korra reminded him in a low growl.

Of course she hadn't allowed herself to bask in the warmth of good feelings that her day with Asami had brought. The amazement at her skill with a rifle, the giddiness of holding her hand as they wandered the grounds, the simple pleasure of learning little tidbits of science in a way that didn't make her want to dose.

No, she simply had to read it.

The lunatic ravings of a madman. They bored into her brain like a drill, setting off some primal revulsion inside the very core of her being. Everything about the man repelled her, for he was everything she reviled in this world.

And yet, strangely, she felt this odd pull towards him. Like the effect of the moon on the tide. Subtle, but ever present and irresistible.

She had tried to resist, truly, she had. Oh, but her obsession had won out in the end, as it always did.

Jack wasn’t just her obsession, he was her addiction. An all consuming presence that dwarfed everything else when it was present. Not to be admired, not in the traditional sense, at least. More like one would watch a house burn down with morbid fascination, even as the flames spread to their own.

He was calamity and disorder. A disease to be burned out with a hot iron.

Mr. Sullivan, on the other hand. He was a distraction. A pothole in her vengeance on Jack and on the ‘Lieutenant’, whoever they might be. Adding to that, he had become an inconvenience. Too weak to be moved to a cell in Leman Street, thus demanding that she travel to him, instead.

Watson had managed to keep him alive, though. Both fortunately and unfortunately, in her opinion. His first attending, on the other hand, had seemed to be intent on killing the man.
Without even consulting with the men who had brought him in, the madman had attempted to administer another dose of sedatives, resulting in Sullivan's heart and lungs nearly giving out. The overdose that followed had sent the staff into a panic, apparently. Only with Dr. Watson's resumed care did he survive the incident and, therefore, the night.

Now, on the morrow of her most lovely day, she would be forced to trudge through what would, likely, end up being a worthless endeavor.

“So, you brought me here to keep you from doing something stupid?” Bolin asked for clarification.

“Yes.”

“I'm sensing a flaw with this plan,” he hummed, quietly.

With a roll of her eyes, Korra pushed open the door onto the floor that held her nuisance. The hall was mostly empty, save for a single nurse making her way from one private room to another with an empty wheelchair and the pair of guards posted outside the door.

After flashing their identification the pair swooped inside like birds of prey.

The man who had so nearly ended her life was in a sorry state. Shackled to his hospital bed hand and foot, ashen with blood loss, and in obvious discomfort. When he turned his head to look at who had disturbed his convalescence a sudden flurry of emotions took their turn to pass over his face.

Recognition, remembrance, defiance, anger, then fear.

“Hey there, remember me?” she taunted, stalking towards him with a satisfied grin. “I'm the one that broke your ribs.”

Stoney silence met her as the baker attempted to gather his defenses, preparing for the siege. If there was any consolation prize to be had here, it would be the opportunity to break him. She might not have Holmes' psyche to carve into, but this would do.

“Mr. Sullivan, my name is Detective Bolin, I don't believe we've been introduced,” her partner greeted in a much more cheerful voice than her own.

“Fuck you,” the perp replied. The little dog trying to show it had teeth.

“Hey, hey, watch your language, buddy,” Bo bounced back, without missing a beat, “There's a woman present.”

“Fuck her, too!” the man snapped angrily, glaring at Korra with murder in his eyes. He even made a show of yanking at his shackles, feigning a wish to charge at his foes.

Korra smiled a little more. His bravado would have been funny, if it weren't so pathetic. “Listen up,” she lifted the chart hanging from the toe of the cot, “John, you know why we're here. So let's cut the parts where you threaten us, tell us you'll never talk because you're so loyal to your cause, and lie to send us on a merry goose chase before we have to come back here, eh? I'm a busy woman.”

“And I don't fucking care,” he growled, mirroring her own confidant look. Poor bastard, thinking he held all the cards. “Why are you even here? Ya' know I won't ever tell ya' anythin’.”

Oh, here we go.
“Me, I’m here because I missed you. I just can't stand it when a guy tries to blow my brains out without even giving me his first name,” Korra said, sweetly. Her words dripped from her mouth like molasses. Then, pulling a complete 180, she continued with a sharper edge, “And he's here so I don't throw you out of a fucking window.”

The man chuckled, seemingly unimpressed. “You her boyfriend, or something?”

“I'm married,” Bo denied.

“To a pig?”

_Yes, just keep digging that hole_, Korra urged in her mind, begging for the opportunity to turn this man that so irked her into human jelly. He was all show, no substance. Sure, he was quick to bounce back, but he cracked so easily in the first place.

Hardly a worthy sparing partner.

“I'm going to pretend,” Bolin breathed, just above a whisper, “for both our sakes, that you didn't just say that.”

Even though she wasn't the target of the look on her usually jovial friend's face, the Inspector couldn't help but catch some of it. Cold rage kindled in his expression, contained, suppressed, but obviously there. John Sullivan didn't know how lucky he was with Bolin had started off in a good mood this morning.

He'd gone and pressed the Opal button.

No one pressed the Opal button.

No one.

“So, we're gonna have to do this the hard way, huh?” Bolin asked, mostly directing the question at her, rather than the man laying prone before them. Kudos to him for keeping a level head, Korra thought.

“Looks like,” the Avatar nodded, pulling up a couple chairs for them to sit in.

“Alright then, Mr. Sullivan,” he began once he had settled himself on his seat. “You are hereby under arrest for the murders of Martha Tabram, Mary Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, Mary Kelly, and Agnes St.Claire. You do not have to say anything, but anything you do may be taken down and used as evidence. If you have an-”

“Now, hold on just one minute!” the baker shouted, his confidence leaving his face in an instant and being replaced with utter and complete horror. “I-I didn't kill anyone!”

“Oh, really?” Korra asked, leaning a little closer, putting on a tinge of sarcastic bewilderment. “That's not what you said after you tried to bore a new hole in my head.”

“I was-I was j-just t-t-tryin' to get ya' away from me,” he stammered, what little color he had bleeding from his face.

“So, it's just a coincidence we found a woman brutally murdered just about four blocks away from you're crappy little sawdust factory?” she carried on, turning to her partner and asking him, “Does that sound likely to you?”
“Mmm?” her green-eyed junior hummed, questioningly, screwing up his eyes in thought, “I don't know. It would be one hell of a coincidence, if you asked me.”

“N-no, ya have to believe me!” he begged, once more yanking at his bonds, only, this time in earnest. In just over a minute Sullivan had gone from a man willing to throw down the gauntlet, to a penitent, ready to hurl himself to the ground for forgiveness from his god.

_Cowards_, the Inspector chuckled inwardly, _They never change._

When she blinked, she pictured Tahno laying in the bed instead of it's current occupant. If only.

“If you don't want to find out what it looks like when you're swinging from a rope, I'd recommend telling me everything you know,” Korra told him with deathly calm. “Right now.”

“I-I can't tell you,” he said, trying to add a little backbone to his voice. It was too late for all that, but she'd give him points for trying. “You wasted your trip, Miss Waters. If anything, you just proved him right. So, go ahead with you're threats.”

Not gonna tell her anything, huh? Admitting you knew about Brother Amon was a poor start to that plan.

Barely batting an eye, Bolin resumed his little speech. “If you have an attorney with which you wish to consult, they may be summoned for you. If you cannot afford one, the court will appoint one to act in your defense.” With that he reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew his pad and pencil. “Now that that's done, how's about we start at the beginning?”

“W-what p-part of I-I won't t-t-talk?” the baker attempted to stonewall. Frankly, it was impressive just how spineless the man was. It would be worth checking if their was some kind of record, Korra imagined.

More silence. She could see it in his eyes. The hawks were circling overhead. His resolve was hanging by just a thread. All he needed was a little push.

“Bo, take a walk,” she instructed, not wavering in boring into her mouses eyes.

“Huh?”

“Take. A. Walk,” she repeated, feeling his eyes on her, now. “I need to have a private chat with Mr. Sullivan.”

“I think we can add that to the 'bad idea' column, too, boss lady,” Bolin told her, just a hint of nervous energy in his tone.

After a brief period of weighing his options, her partner slowly rose to his feet. “Five minutes,” he whispered in warning, making sure it was just loud enough to carry and giving the wounded man one final glance. That last gesture done, he turned on his heel and made for the door. With every step he took the distance between them grew and the baker's face fell.

_Ca-click!_ The door closed fast. They were alone. He was hers, now.

Pulling back the lip of her coat with one hand, Korra gingerly withdrew her secret weapon from her pocket. A single, folded piece of paper.

“W-what is that?” he asked, reversing his previous motions, suddenly trying to get as far away as he possibly could. Fear of the unknown. Tickbox one: checked.
“This is a press release, naming you as the lead suspect in the Ripper slayings,” The Inspector revealed casually, gauging his reaction. Confusion crept into his eyes. Not enough to replace the fear, only accent it. It wasn't good enough, she needed him on the verge of panic. “You know what that means, don't you?”

A moment of tension lingered between them. The cogs whirred in the man's head, fight or flight responses, no doubt, kicking in as he tried to piece the answer together.

An over-worked gerbil could only work so fast, however, so the Detective decided to speed up the process.

“It means, you're about to become the most wanted man in the British Empire, and not just by the police, either. Every man, woman, and child in this country will know your name and face by tomorrow night,” she told him, waving the paper in his face. “Even if you get out of this room, somehow. Say you even avoid going to prison for that stunt you pulled, you will never sleep well at night, again. I won't need to come after you, because you won't make it out of this city alive.”

“Y-you wouldn't!” he protested, without the surety his words would suggest.

“No, normally I wouldn't even think of it,” she agreed, twirling the little, fluttering the sheet in her fingers. The motion transfixed the man, drawing his eye from her face. Although, he might just be looking for any excuse to avoid the burning hate simmering in her sea of blue. “But here's the deal: contrary to what you might think, you are not the biggest problem I've got on my plate, Johnny boy. You are small fry.”

“I've got a psychotic slashing up women and dropping letters through my door in the middle of the night, a mob outside my office that wants to burn it down with me in it, and your buddy just killed one of my closest friends,” the detective listed, grabbing Sullivan's chin and forcing him to look right down the barrel of her tirade. “I don't have time to play games, with you! The only reason you aren't in a pine box, right now, is that I need whatever is rattling around that empty little head of yours, SO SPILL!”

“I c-c-can't t-tell you,” the baker blabbered before devolving into nonsense. “They'll kill me,” she heard amongst the wordless stammering that now eschewed from her captives lips. The sound of chains rattling, metal straining on metal as he yanked on his bonds once more. Tears poured down his face, dripping like rain from his cheeks.

There it was, pure terror. The tipping point of the mind.

Usually isolation would be her tool to reduce someone to this state, but, she simply didn't have the time or patience for that, right now. Every second she wasted here was a second she could be spending hunting her marks. Every day, her chances slipped away, until the would be close to nil.

“Your life is over, now, Mr. Sullivan,” she informed him, levelly, releasing him to cower as he wished. With a deep breath she soothed the fire in her soul. Gently, the inspector lay her document down on the little table next to the bed.

Clasping her hands in front of her, fingers interlocked, she suddenly switched gears. Logic would carry her now. Hard fact championing her cause better than any threat or beating. He was weak, resolve broken. Little more than clay for her to mold.

So, she would shape him. Give him an open door to walk through, self-preservation would do the rest.
“You will spend the rest of your life in a cell. That isn't up for debate,” she reasoned, laying the truth out for him to pick up. The tactic almost always worked on the desperate and guilty. “But you can still spare yourself the noose, John. The only way you can help yourself, is to talk to me. Help me, help you.”

“How?”

Victory. Bittersweet on her tongue. Stale and empty.

“Tell me everything you know about The Equalist Society.”

A torrent of information spilled out of her assailant as he vomited forth every shred of information he had to offer. In moments he bared his sins to her. How he had harbored the man that killed her friend until his rounds brought him into striking distance. Looked on a steel pierced flesh and life faded. Watched alongside the culprit from the upstairs as the police arrived, searched, and silently mourned.

Following on were meeting places, details on how they gathered themselves, a rehashing of what she already knew about their cause.

All of it made her blood boil. The Webley at her side weighed heavy on her, as did the weight of her failure. Her prey had been so close. Watching, mockingly nearby. She should have seen, she should have-

A creak of floorboards. Out in the hall. Her 'five' minutes must be up.

Korra held up her finger to silence the river of blubbering. It was getting pathetic. Besides, half of what he had said was lies. Even under such an imminent threat, he still attempted to paint himself in a brighter light. He wasn't a conspirator, just a lowly grunt. Another victim, really. Swept up in a noble cause, too blinded by rose-colored glasses to see the truth, until it was too late.

And then there was the worst offense. "I don't know what his name is, I swear, I swear." Untrue, but telling. Apparently proximity was less important than familiarity.

His fear of his comrade seemed real enough.

“Hey, Korra?” her partner questioned from the crack in the door he was peering through.

“Yeah.”

“Got something you need to look at.”

With a reluctant sigh the Inspector stood. Turning her back on the man she both despised and pitied, the woman made her way for the exit. Bolin stepped aside to let her through, both guards tipped their hats, as well.

Shift change must have happened without her noticing, as both the uniforms wore different faces than when she entered. Or, perhaps, Koh was playing his tricks, again.

When the door closed, Korra allowed herself to shake. Fists clenched tight, nails biting into the flesh of her palm. She wanted to hit something, someone. Whether that man in there, his cohort, or the wall.

“Did he fall for it?” the youngest of the three men asked. The green of his eyes betrayed his concern. He didn't like it, going this far, even for a friend.
“Yeah,” she nodded, trying to keep her voice low and calm. It was hard to do, what with the blood pounding in her ears like the drums of war. “He sold his soul for a Langham Hotel drink menu.”

“Guess that means it's my turn, huh?” A quick fix of his collar, the brim of his hat. There was something to be said for looking respectable at a time like this. Want me to call you in if he gives me any trouble?”

“I don't think that'll be a problem, buddy,” the quivering detective told him. If only Kuvira had tagged along. Korra might have been able to choke down a cigarette, just to soothe her nerves a tad.

One last check of his appearance and he was ready. "Here I go," he muttered, gripping the handle and turning.

The door closed behind him, softly, and the switch was made. Bo would turn on the sympathy. The kind face with the soft voice. Her mirror, the savior. In comparison, he'd be so open, welcoming. Like a mother's embrace after a long, dark night full of monsters. Then he'd milk him for all he was worth.

What was she left with, on the other hand?

Only her rage and guilt. Korra hated when it came to this. The extremes she could be pushed into. It used to be easy to convince herself it was alright to do things like this.

No, that's not it, he conscience berated her. Shame reared it's ugly head in her belly, churning her stomach like the sea never had. Sickness washed over her like a wave. Chills, goosebumps. Her legs felt like jelly as the adrenaline started to bleed away, only the wall kept her standing. The foundation that kept her from crumbling entirely.

There it was, again, gnawing at the back of her skull like a trapped rat in a sewer drain.

Failure. Sloppy, that's what it had been. She'd let herself be distracted by her grief. Any other time and she'd have had the door kicked in. But, no, she'd just done the bare basics.

Sloppy.

“Are ye alrigh', Ma'am?” one of the newcomers asked her. A sergeant, one she hadn't net before. That was strange. A new transfer, perhaps, or maybe…

No. Even HE wouldn't be that bold.

And stupid.

“I'm fine, just ate something weird,” she excused. More deep breaths, soothing, calming, helping to retain the mask.

“Ye' migh' want ta get that looked at, Ma'am,” the 'Sergeant' advised, with a little tip of his hat for deference. “Beggin' yer pardons, but ye look pale as a ghost. I think ye may have had more than just some sour milk.”

As he spoke, it became more obvious. The false patches of hair sticking out from under his cap were just a shade too light to match. The makeup he wore was nearly perfect, as well, but it still streaked in a couple places.

A fine job, if one didn't look too hard. Save for one glaring weakness.
“Thanks, I'll do that,” the Avatar accepted, if only so she didn't have to put up with this charade anymore. Of all the shit she had to put up with, and now this! *Keep calm,* she told herself, *Don't let him win.* “Oh, and Sergeant?”

“Yes, Ma'am.”

“Your mustache is peeling.”

With a flick of his wrist, the obsessive fixed the crack in his disguise. “Thank you, Inspector,” he returned, gratefully, letting his accent slip. “I have yet to find the right adhesive for the task. Would you happen to have any recommendations?”

“No,” the detective replied, flatly, before turn her attention to the other officer. “Constable, arrest this man.”

“What for, Ma'am?” he asked, reaching for his cuffs.

“Impersonating a Police Officer,” she informed, beginning to wander away from the scene. All this clutter in her head, rattling around every time she tried to think. A walk, that's what she needed. Bolin could handle things from here.

Even with her back turned to the man Korra could feel his amused smile and beady eyes. “A pleasure, as always, Inspector Waters,” he bid as she walked away.

The satisfying clap of irons signaled his capture, at least until the end of the day. “Until next time, Mr. Holmes,” the woman returned, finding her only, tiny shred of joy this morning.

And there would be a next time. She was sure of it.

*Damn it,* she thought, cursing her overbooked schedule once more, *I'm going to be late for lunch.*

Time to put on a brave face. To hide the frustration and rage. If she was lucky, Asami would know exactly what to say to make her smile again.

But first, a trip to the restroom. She needed someplace to be sick in private.

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Chapter End Notes

A couple things: more of the specifics of what Korra heard and all of Jack's letter will both be in the next chapter.

Also, said chapter will be from Asami's POV, so we'll get to have her perspective on things. Huzzah!
Tick, tock, tick, tock, her watch ticked merrily on. Oblivious to her watching it, willing time to move faster.

She was late. To be suspected, Asami supposed. Taking a day off always sent her internal clock out of whack. Lucky for her though, she headed up her entire department. No one to shout at you when you turned up late, once in a while.

Still, she couldn't help but worry though. The memory of opening her paper that morning to those horrible headlines: *Princess Shot In Attack!; Shooting In The East End!; Violence Erupts!*. Even remembering them sent a cold chill down her spine.

Watching the crowd outside the window had helped at first. Countless faces passing by in a blur. Nameless, forgettable, and not the one she was looking for.

After a while, Asami had just devolved into what she usually did when she was bored. Drawing. Designs mainly, either ones she had seen before and committed, in part, to memory or fresh ones as they popped into her head. Right now it was one of Edison's designs that graced her journals pages, with a few minor alterations to make it her own. She had thought about doing one of Tesla's, but after meeting the man it felt a little repulsive to do so.

That ego would be the end of him.

A man came to refresh her tea, the only reason she had to justify keeping the table for as long as she had without ordering.

“Has your other party arrived yet, Ma'am?” he asked for the third time.

“No,” the engineer replied, a little more sharply than was necessary, “Clearly not.”

“Apologies,” the waiter returned, giving her a small, thin, mirthless smile. No sooner had he turned to where he assumed she couldn't see did he start to mutter silent curses to himself.

With a roll of her eyes Asami returned to her doodles. No sooner had she done so, however, did the sound of footsteps rouse her once again. *Back already*, she sighed inwardly, *what part of 'she's not*
“Hey there,” a far more welcome voice greeted her, immediately drawing out a smile. Korra, warm coat, bowler hat and all. “Sorry I'm late. Got held up a little longer than I thought.”

“Work stuff?”

“Work stuff,” the detective confirmed, pulling out the chair directly opposite and practically falling into it. Despite the rather blaise tone to her voice and cheerful mask on her face, it was rather obvious that something was bothering her.

First, there were the eyes. Someone had once told her that the eyes were the gateway to the soul. A straight shot right into someone's innermost thoughts. If that were the case, then Korra's held a great deal within their cerulean depths. The color was dulled, betraying the lack of actual joy beyond the surface. Contrasting this was her skin. She looked pale, almost sickly so.

The only time Asami had ever seen her anywhere close to this was when she had mentioned her friend's death. Richelieu, was that his name?

Even in less than a month Asami had long since figured out just how emotive her friend was, to the point of animation. She always spoke her mind on whatever topic was at hand, and wore her emotions on her sleeve, no matter how good at hiding them she thought she was. It was something that Asami admired about her. So many people in her life spoke so much, yet said so little.

However, there was a blind spot in this filter free attitude of hers.

Her work.

The detective always grew more hesitant and evasive when the topic of Whitechapel and it's current events were broached. 'I can't talk about an open case' had become somewhat of a mantra at such times.

“Want to talk about it?” Asami offered, sensing that, despite her usual reluctance to discuss anything of Whitechapel and it's current events, Korra was looking to vent.

“I-”

“Can't talk about an open case?” the heiress finished from memory. Her lips twitched a little more at the old spiel. “You know, as smart as you are, you're really predictable, Princess.”

“I told you to stop calling me that,” Korra grumbled softly, gaining a little color back as her frustration traded sources. “It's annoying. Raava, if Bolin and the others heard you talking like this, it'd be open season all over again.”

“Then, I guess you'd better tell me what's bugging you,” she reasoned back, giving her friend an impish grin. “After all, I know where you work.”

After a little more huffing Korra finally relented. She bent, resting her elbows on the edge of the table, head following suit so that her face was buried in her palms. “I got a letter,” the detective groaned through gritted teeth. When the detective looked up, she seemed to have aged ten years. Weariness clung to her like a cloak. Smothering her entire being. It was at times like these that she could really appreciate how hard the schedule Korra worked really was.

“Bad news from home?”

Another pause as the wheels turned inside the formidable woman sat across from her's mind. Had
she guessed wrong? Korra was stubborn like that. Brave, but stubborn. That iron will of hers likely served her well, but it could be rather frustrating to deal with, as well.

“No.”

That left only left one option. It had been an off hand question the week before. Monday, she thought. They had been discussing the news. Various headlines from across the world, scattered amongst the stacks of newspapers left abandoned at their table. The American election, the war in Sudan, and an interesting piece of gossip, tucked away in the ‘true crimes' section.

“He sent you another one?” Asami inquired, amazed and somewhat horrified. The idea of someone like that, lurking just outside Korra's door, sent a shiver up her spine. If anything were to happen…

“Not exactly,” she denied, shaking her head slowly. The dam was breaking, right before her eyes. “I found it at the crime scene.”

“What did it say?” No sooner had the question left her lips did her friend recoil slightly. It was more a twitch than anything. A slight tightening of the shoulders and neck, before the return to her slouched state. “Korra?”

“I have it with me,” she revealed in a low mumble.

“Can I read it?” the engineer asked, narrowing her eyes to hide her surprise.

“You, uh, you might want to wait until after lunch. It's not exactly pleasant reading.” she tried to subtly refuse, withdrawing even further than she had already.

“You just don't want me to look at it,” she accused in as light a tone as she could, pointing her finger at Korra.

Another moment of internal debate, another heavy sigh tearing from Korra's lips. Reaching into her jacket, her dining buddy withdrew a weathered looking envelope. The paper was creased heavily, clearly having been folded and unfolded many times. What looked like the smudged remains of fingerprints dotted the surface, either in ink or pencil lead. Whether they were original or Korra's addition, Asami couldn't tell. At the top was a long, jagged tear. It looked like, in her rush, Korra hadn't bothered with a proper letter opener. Probably just used her finger, instead.

With a displeased and reluctant scowl spanning the Inspector's visage, the exchange was made, Asami gripping the letter gingerly. Just as gently she slipped her fingers inside and withdrew the contents.

The writing was messy, as if written in haste, or in the height of excitement. The ink was a deep red, blending unusually well into the stained paper that made it's canvass. A faint smell came off it, as well. One that Asami remembered all too well from her chemistry courses.

Formaldehyde.

The scent of death.

Dear Boss,

Mam

Herd a rumor Id been caught twas sitting in one of yer cells. Laughed when I read that yo wer on the right track made yo sound al clever like. That joke abot Leather Apron gave me the real fits.
Made yo a present I did do you like it? Twas good work it was real fun. Gave the lady no time to scre em. Saved sum of the best bits fer myself take them home fer later. Put sum of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write wit but it went all thick like glue and I can't use it. Red ink fit enough I hope HA. HA.

Keep this letter til I do a bit more work. My knif is nice and sharp I want to get ta work right away if I get a chanse. Catch me if ya can Mis Waters. Good Luck. Yours truly

Jack the Ripper

Like that name I do

PS Herd I was a Doctor now HA. HA.

A sense of primal fear flowed through her veins. It was like staring down the muzzle of a rabid dog, jowls snarling, froth dripping from it's maw. Such relish in the words, such savage glee. Was this what madness looked like? “That's sick,” she coughed, close to gagging, shoving the offending document back into Korra's waiting hand. “I see why you have trouble sleeping.”

“Yes,” the other woman hummed, softly. As though it was the most precious thing in the world, the overworked Inspector, ever so gently, returned the shred of madness to it's resting place. Once it was there, she took the added step of patting coat above said spot. “I did warn you, though.”

“That you did,” Asami conceded. Slowly she felt the smile creep back into her lips. It was inevitable, really. Especially as Korra began to relax once drinks were served. Adding ridiculous numbers of sugar lumps seemed to occupy her mind. “Other than that, how are you?”

“Pretty much the same. It's only been a few hours since we saw each other,” her trousered companion pointed out, eyebrow raised. “How much do you really think happened?

“A lot of things can happen in a morning,” she rebounded, “I, for one, have just wrapped up a bid for the new Naval Board power-plant competition. If we get it, every new ship in the fleet will have a Future Industries boiler powering it.”

“No even you work that fast.”

“No, that's what lawyers are for.” the busybody admitted “The accountants do all the heavy lifting with the number crunching, then they pass it off to me to put in all the technical details. After that, the lawyers get their hands on it. They handle the flowery language and presentation stuff. Back to me for my signature, and off to the Navy it goes.”

“I would have though your dad would sign off on something like that.”

“Mmn,” she hummed around her tea, “Not really. He usually just gets involved at the tail end of a deal. Irons out all the fine details: supply chain management, setting line quotas, making sure the profit margins look solid.”

“Yeah, all of that went,” the Inspector whistled like a bird and waved her hand over her brow, fingers waggling for added effect.

She couldn't help but giggle a bit at the amusing display. Whether through her slightly brash sense
of humor, an entertaining anecdote, or a particularly sharp point of banter Korra never failed to make her laugh. As much as she appreciated her tireless work ethic, nothing could compare to the entertainment that she could provide when she really dug into something.

Best of all, however, was the small smirk that followed her dash of self-deprecation. It had a tad of that confidence in it that all the previous she had seen today lacked.

With that push of motivation, Asami carried onwards with her explanation. Relating all the little hems and haws of such a contract, with regular questions from her partner across the table.

They nursed their little cups of warmth, relishing in the escape from December's chill. The waiter returned, only to be sent away again. When he'd repeated his previous stunt of silent abuse, Korra had shot him a look strong enough to send him scurrying for cover in the refuge of the kitchens.

Their chat remained light and lively, a battle of the wits on every subject under the sun. Once again, Asami was left longing for her mother's chess board. What a game they could have.

After a while, however, they both admitted the truth. The food wasn't going to happen today. Hunger was a fond memory, appetites kept at bay by that letter that still dug itself into Asami's mind like a fencing saber. Who could eat after reading something like that? So, it was swiftly agreed: a walk in the park to settle their stomachs, perhaps with the promise of a sweet treat on the other side from the little confectionery there.

Together, the two of them rose, leaving the money for their drinks behind.

A cry came out after them, laden with indignation. “You're leaving!” The man was shocked. His eyes were wide with indignation, pointing accusingly at the pair.

“Why do you care? The money's on the table,” Korra pointed out, jerking her head towards the payment for their drinks.

“I-uh,” he stammered, watching them leave with rage burning in his eyes.

Asami didn't pay him any mind, however, instead choosing to pull her coat tight around her, to defend against the new cold front sweeping in from the north. Despite the blustery weather, the usual human traffic remained, almost unabated. Together, they turned into the gust and began their march east.

They turned this way and that, winding around the largest crowds on the way to Hyde Park. On the way, the two of them remained mostly mum, save for a few passing observations on something of interest in a shop window. Far from being awkward, the stillness between them was, actually, rather comforting. They each stole glances, trying to work out what the other was thinking. Piecing together the puzzle in their mind.

Through the entrance they went, without so much as a passing mention. The inside of the park was rather empty for a Sunday. They passed a few other pairs, and even a few single walkers, enjoying a brisk stroll in the scenery.

As the comfortable silence started to stretch on between them, Asami felt herself moving even closer to Korra. Soon, their elbows were brushing with every step. In no time at all their hands had met, fingers weaving together in a now familiar way. Her hands were rough, calloused by long hours of hard work. But they had a softness to them, too. A tender quality that the young graduate liked. Kind hands, if there was such a thing.

In the back of her mind, Asami wondered if she realized how her thumb was absentely stroking at
her own. No need to tell her if she didn't.

With another sideways glance, she checked her face, just for a glimpse of that lovely smile, and the eyes that shone like moon over the sea. *What would they look like waking up to?* she wondered, causing a flush to rush into her cheeks.

Lucky for her, Korra wasn't paying attention, busy guiding them around a puddle that lay in their path.

When the silence started to grow heavy, Asami decided to touch on a lighter subject. “You changed your hair,” she noted, eyes drawn to the new style by the unusually brightly colored accessories in her bangs. The flash of blue and white suited her, accenting her features without being too distracting.

“Huh? Oh, you mean these old things?” the chestnut-skinned woman asked, toying with the ornament on the far side of her face, so as not to let go of Asami's hand. “They've been sitting in my drawer at the office for months. I only put them on because I forgot to tie my hair back this morning.”

“I like them,” the heiress declared, reaching across to touch the one closest to her. They were hard and cool to the touch. Bone maybe? “They really bring out your eyes.”

“Th-thanks,” Korra replied, shrinking away from the touch. As she turned, the tinkerer caught a glimpse of a faint blush to match her own. “I'm not good with makeup, and all that. Mom had people do all that stuff for me. Apparently, I 'wasn't to be trusted' doing it for myself after...”

As she trailed off the flush in the detective's face crept into her ears. Waves of mortifying embarrassment radiated off her. Oh, this was a story she had to hear. “After what?”

“Hah,” the woman sighed, resigned to share the story. It was her turn to do so, after all. “It was maybe seven, eight years before George and I had our little run in. This princess from one of the Nordic countries, Denmark I think it was, came for a royal visit. She had this long, curly blonde hair.” Eyes flicked to look at Asami for a moment, before returning to their path. “I remember thinking it was the prettiest I'd ever seen.”

“And, let me guess, you decided to bleach your hair to look like hers,” Asami teased, picturing a seven-year old Korra with a head of bottle-blonde locks. The little giggle that came echoing out of her belly as a result felt wonderful.

For her part, Korra snorted a laugh of her own, growing another shade darker, despite that, she carried on. “If only,” she chuckled with fond remembrance, “If I'd have done that, I might have gotten away with it. No, I tried to curl my hair. Had no idea what I was doing, mind you, and left the iron on the heat way too long. Damn near set my head on fire.”

“Wow!” Asami exclaimed, both shocked and tickle by the younger version of her crush's extreme efforts.

“Yeah, you should have seen the look on my dad's face,” the Inspector said, turning to give her best imitation of the horror. Another set of laughter, from both of them now. “I had to wear a wig for, like, four months, until it grew back.”

“Did they at least let you have a curly wig?” the naturally curly-haired woman asked, already sensing the answer. What would her father have done?
“What do you think?”

“I’m going to go with ‘no’,” she guessed, still picturing little blonde Korra, only now with a very singed appearance. The nod confirmed her suspicions, dashing her hopes of pictures. Oh, well. There wasn't any need for improvement, anyways.

For a moment Asami's lips debated with her mind. Restraint battling with the gentle plucking of her heartstrings. “If it makes you feel any better, I think your hair is beautiful just like it is.”

“Mmm,” the hummed reply. At this point, Korra was virtually glowing. The telltale sign of her thumb suddenly switching to a far more random pattern on her hand signaled her agitation.

If anything, it just made her look even more adorable.

Something mumbled into the wind escaped Asami's hearing. “Hm?”

“Said you're beautiful, too,” she mumbled a little louder.

“I-uh-thanks,” the raven-haired designer replied, enjoying a taste of her own medicine. Fingers moved to toy with a few stray stands. Idle fiddling, a way to conceal herself, if only just as poorly as Korra usually managed.

The quiet returned, both of them lost in their private thoughts. But time marched onward, regardless. They would have to part, soon. It sucked. The idea of returning to that dusty office, with it's piles of papers, rejected designs, and projects that might never come to completion for any number of reasons. It was simpler here, less hectic, with no shareholders to please. Just Korra's kind hand in hers, the soft swish of the breeze on her skin, and a surety in her heart.

This feeling, this familiar feeling in her chest, became all that mattered. Different than any time before, more urgent and immediate.

“What will I see you tomorrow?” she asked, hopefully. The fingers tensed again and she returned the gesture.

“No,” the somber, regretful reply. “We got a tip that something big is going down, sometime this week. Don't know exactly what it is, but it's gonna be all hands on deck, for a while.”

With a nod, she accepted the fact. Concern started to fester again, tainting the happiness in her soul. 'Something big'. Even the words made her worried. Of all the things they had touched on in their time together, from smuggling rings, to gang wars, kidnappers, and Jack himself, never had Korra used such a phrase. It rang of the ominous. A storm cloud encroaching on the horizon.

A familiar churning in her gut prompted Asami into action. “You'll be careful, won't you? I don't want to open the paper tomorrow morning and find out you've nearly got yourself killed,” her tone was kept light, carried along by the warmth in her heart. It was easier for her to make the request trivial than to play the pining damsel. Simply, not her style. “Again.”

The added little jab tacked on at the end wasn't exactly necessary, but it sure felt good.

When her friend turned to look at her, she wore that big, goofy grin that formed part of her trademark look, just mush as her hat or well worn coat. “You don't have to worry about me,” she declared, oozing confidence. “I'll be fi-iteq!”

Huh? Oh!
Before her eyes, Korra stumbled, and then began to fall. There was no time to react, and the engineer found herself being dragged down with her, pulled by their connection.

“Oof!” one or both of them wheezed as the ground rushed up to meet them. Instinctively, her hand shot out to catch her, arrest the momentum of gravity and stop her decent. Sadly, friction seemed to working against her as well, the only purchase she found being soft mud, likely the cause of their slip in the first place.

They landed in a pile, a spray of muck flying form the force of their misfortune. A hard crack and a throbbing pain as her head struck something hard. Something that replied to the sharp contact with a loud “OW!”

She'd landed on Korra, who’d somehow managed to spin in their descent to land on her back. Little drops of mud spattered her face, making her look like a child that had just come in from play on a rainy day.

“You'll be careful, huh?” Asami teased as she blinked the water out of her eyes.

“'Sami,” was Korra's reply. Low and fleeting. Like the whisper of the waves crashing in the distance, just far enough away that you could mistake it for a trick of the ear.

*Ba-dum, ba-dum*

It would be so easy. Just a dip of her head, a few whispered words. No one need ever know. “You okay?” the other woman asked, pushing herself up with her hands. As the distance grew, the opportunity fade.

_Not the time,_ she told herself.

“Yeah, I think so,” she responded, mirroring the motion to right herself. “You?”

A quick check showed that all was well. Her knees and part of her dress were dampened by the puddle they had found themselves in. With it came the biting chill of the southern wind, cutting her to the bone. With a shiver, for multiple reasons, she gave her report. “I think so. Pretty sure this dress is a write off, though.”

“Sorry, about that,” Korra said, flicking one of the larger globs of muck off her arm with a disgusted grimace.

“Don't worry your pretty little head about it,” the engineer dismissed, waving her hand to brush the apology away. A second later, she realized what she'd just called Korra, ears reaching a whole new level of crimson. “I've got plenty more where this one came from.”

Another shiver shook her as the dastardly weather saw fit to send a puff of cold air swirling up her leg.

“Here,” the other woman offered, peeling off her heavy overcoat and laying it on her shoulders. It was still warm from the Inspector's own body and remarkably dry on the inside, despite the spill into unforgiving dampness.

“Th-th-thanks,” the businesswoman accepted, graciously, teeth chattering for a different reason than before. Damn that winter air and it's accursed chill!

“Let's get you home so you can change,” Korra prompted, once again offering her hand. Fingers slid into place and Asami allowed herself to be led out of the maze of paths to the street.
As they neared the exit, her friend's posture started to stiffen again. “Asami?”

“Yeah?”

“Can you do me a favor, please?” The request came as a surprise, as did the direness of the tone.

“Uh, sure,” she agreed with a shrug.

“Stay out of the East End for a while, okay.” Concern and apprehension swirled in the words, with no small amount of premonition. There was something she wasn't saying, Asami was sure of it.

“Of course,” Asami said, giving Korra's hand what she hoped was a comforting squeeze. A question of her own rushed into her head, nagging to be asked. “Does that mean you want to push dinner off, too?”

Turning to look at her, Korra's face split into the most cheerful smile, yet. “Are you kidding me?” she laughed, no trace of her warning to be found, “I never go back on a bet.”

The affirmation tickled at the engineer's heart, setting it to pound in her ears. Returning the grin, the frigid young lady settled back into the old routine. “Alright, then, but I'm warning you. Everything we eat better be made in your kitchen. No skipping out to a store and buying something.”

“That would be a… bad idea,” the detective tried to decline, scratching at one of her stitches until Asami swatted the hand away. “Sorry,” she shrugged, taking to the back of her neck instead.

“My prize, my rules,” the victor declared, boldly. She would cave, otherwise Asami would just spread the word around that she'd taken a renown markswoman a peg or two. Maybe even take out a full page add. “Meal of my choice, that means you have to cook it. No ifs, ands, or buts.”

“Fine,” the other woman conceded, beginning to complain under her breath about how difficult she was being.

The last few minutes together were spent working out a proper time for their next meeting, as always. After that was a tentative menu for the evening, with Korra attempting to block her from anything other than the bare basics of culinary options. Honestly, though, how hard could it be to find venison in a city as diverse as this one?

Still, despite her wishes, the break from her work had to come to an end, sometime. If only it hadn't brought to such an abrupt conclusion. The cab was hailed, hooves clacking on cobblestone like the inevitable ticking of time. Just as it reached them, they hugged, tight and friendly. It was hard for her to let go, even as the driver cleared his throat behind her.

“See you on Friday,” the young heiress whispered softly into an ear.

They broke, with Korra holding her at arms length a little longer than usual. Something danced behind those eyes that she saw every night before she fell asleep. Her lips mouthed breathless words, not giving them life to be heard. Finally, with another smile, she said, “See you then, Miss Sato.”

“Until then, Inspector Waters.”

Clambering into the waiting cabin, the engineer kept her eyes firmly out the window, even as she relayed instructions to the man up front. From out of nowhere, a crowd magically materialized, as if summoned by some unseen force. Head rising to look up at the sky, her detective turn east and
started to make her way back home. To the poverty and violence that Asami had only ever seen from afar. Even so, there seemed to be a bounce in her step that wasn't there earlier. A spark of hope, maybe.

“Damn it,” Asami breathed as she watched that back fade into the throng of humanity that was London. Despite only just parting, she could already feel herself counting the seconds until the weekend.

Reflecting back, she cursed her wasted opportunity. She had come so close to saying it, in that moment. That brief instant of vulnerability they had shared, scent of their breath mingling in the cold winter air, lips just bare inches apart.

*I have to tell her,* she realized as the carriage rumbled to life, carrying her away from the park and the person she had to care so much for in these last weeks. Off to her gilded world of servants and corporate conniving.

A little tendril of fear snaked it's way out of the back of her mind, threatening to show her all the myriad of ways she could be rejected or scorned. Their friendship might even come to an end.

With a thought, she crushed her doubts. Korra deserved to know.

Friday, she'd tell her Friday.

Until then, she would do her work as she'd always done. There were projects to finish, schematics to pour over, and a team to lead.

It was only a few days, she comforted herself, pulling the Princess's coat tightly around her. It smelled of coffee, nutmeg, and chimney smoke straight from the hearth. If she closed her eyes tight enough, maybe she could pretend.

If only for a little while.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked this as much as I did writing it. There won't be an update next week, unfortunately. I'll be out of town for personal reasons and there won't be much time to write or upload. If I can, I'll try to post a double chapter week after next so I don't delay these two finally getting their act together for too long.

As always, comments keep me going, so feel free.
Of all the times to be right, why did it have to be then?

Like clockwork, everything had gone to hell in Whitechapel. Leman Street, and by extension all of the other stations in H-Division, were in total chaos. Calls kept coming in from every corner the East End, more every few minutes. The resources that had generously been called 'stretched thin' before, had now proven themselves entirely inadequate to the task at hand.

Every tour had been called in, vacations and days off canceled. All of the surrounding Divisions had sent what men they could spare to plug holes in the gaps. Even the City of London Police had sent a squad of men to aid in controlling the chaos.

It still wasn't enough.

They still needed extra bodies to throw into the line, despite the outpouring of assistance from all sides. Hence why Korra ended up sharing a carriage with the most unlikely partner she could have expected: Mako. Her former lover sat in silence across the small gap, scribbling absently in his notebook. It had been two years since they'd worked a scene together.

For good reasons.

To say that the aftermath of their separation had been awkward would have been putting it lightly. The brief moments of contact between them had been almost entirely in passing. Muttered hellos with averted eyes on the stairwell. Long hours spent sitting just feet away without even a glance in the other's direction. It had only been in the last year or so that they'd begun to interact with each other in anything resembling a normal way, and then only at work.

Only after the Gala had they spoken at any length and it had taken an actual brawl to have a meal together.

Neither of them spoke on the journey, both of them dwelling on their own thoughts and problems. Korra's normal way to pass the time suited the situation perfectly. Her eyes gazed unfocused out
the window, taking in the sights.

Or, what passed for sights, that is. While much of Stepney and Whitechapel were in a constant state of disrepair, the farther you got from the highstreet, the worse it got. Far from the main road and it's fairy lights, busy traffic, and frequent police patrols was were the true horrors of city life would unfold.

Trash was piled high in great mounds, swarming with flies and giving of a putrid smell that could work it's way through any window. Bricks lay shattered where they fell on the meager walkway, decades of neglect by absentee landlords causing the shops and house to literally decay around their occupants.

Not to mention the people. Beggars and the homeless, overflow from the workhouses, lined the street. The lucky ones might manage to earn a few coins and perhaps a meal with odd jobs pick up from those that passed, but that was rare.

Many resorted to stealing, men to thug work, some women to prostitution. A good portion were ill, typhoid, cholera, and diphtheria being the most dire of the common afflictions. All were undernourished, going for days without meals, at times. It was a dire life to lead. A pitiable one.

The worst was the children. No smiles creased their faces. They played no games, laughter and youth were lost to them. They sat apart from the others, in their own little huddles. Both orphans and unwanted suffered the same fate. The lowest of the low in the pecking order, ripe for exploitation, no recourse for their suffering.

Korra counted the streets and alleys at the rumbled along, updating their location on her internal map of London. As they crossed blocks, they entered Triad territory.

This was hostile ground.

One of the first rules taught to young constables, with their shiny new badges and heads full of dreams, was to avoid this area entirely. If you didn't have someone with you, or simply didn't have a death wish, you stayed well away. The Triad had it's own laws, it's own justice and hated interlopers. It wasn't fair, it was often brutal, but it kept the peace. Outwardly, at least.

That is, unless they were the ones under attack.

Their destination this morning was a brothel. One of the major money makers for the syndicate and a frequent hangout for some of the lower hierarchy.

How ironic, that a house of pleasure might be turned into a house of horrors. Still, it was fitting for the times. What with that man lurking about, poisoning the very ground he walked upon. The violence had been sure to escalate at some point. The only question in her mind was, how much?

The roaring crowd signaled their stop, shoving and hollering at each other to be the closest to the mayhem that lay within walls they would normally never want to be associated with. Flashes of cameras as the press (bloody vultures that they were) forced their way right up to the line of uniforms blocking their entrance to the building proper. Shouts, screams, wails of grievers and children. A regular circus of commotion.

It was a sight playing out at almost two-dozen spots across the city. Like by some psychic command, a spree of killings had taken place. All of the victims had been involved, in one way or another, with one of the myriad of cabals that formed the backbone of the Empire's shining city's seedy underbelly. Smugglers, fences, drug peddlers, extortionists, pimps, and a pair of hired killers.
wanted in at least three countries.

From kingpins to dead or dying.

An all out assault on the criminal element of Whitechapel, in other words.

Clambering out of the safety of the cab carried the same risks as always, these days. Insults were hurled openly and freely, every one under the sun used to berate her.

“Trash!”

“Pigs!”

“Worthless cu-”

“-matters into our-”

“Murderers!”

“-rty foreign sl-”

It was infuriating. The same shit, every time. There weren't enough knuckles in the world for her to crack to keep her fists from clenching in anger. Didn't they understand? She didn't have time for this! There were already a score of murders today, not counting these. Why were they angry with her?

“Fuck off!” the Inspector retorted, ready to pummel her way through the to the line of constables if needs be. At least it would let her work off some of the steam she'd built up this morning.

As though he had chosen to volunteer, one of the gutsier members of the mob broke ranks with the others, raising his young fist and bellowing to the heavens the police had let this happen.

“Look out,” her companion shouted, already moving. Korra felt, more than saw, Mako sidestep his wild swing. The momentum carried the thug passed, weight of his attack throwing him off balance without the resistance of hitting home. It made her retort all the more simple.

No fancy words from her this time. Planting her left foot hard into the cobble, the Avatar made a swing with her right. She put all of her weight behind the kick, turning it into a hammer blow to batter the idiot with as much force as she could muster from her awkward stance. Even if she missed she'd have the opportunity of a follow through, simply letting the motion of her body do the work. As it turned out, that wouldn't be needed.

The padded toe of her boot connected with a satisfying whack, feeling resonating through her bones. Before Korra had even completed her turn he was out cold, daylights knocked clean out of him and into Kent.

As the man crumpled to the ground a collective hush went over the crowd. “Anybody else!” the Avatar challenged, sending everyone back a couple of steps, even her fellow officers. “Good.”

After her little display the previously vicious bunch were a docile as lambs, parting like grass as she made her way to the front of the building. With each step that sense of dread started to build in her stomach again. Only, it was worse than ever before, like a very part of her being was begging her to not go any closer.

“You didn't have to kick him that hard, y'know?” Mako pointed out in a hushed tone as they
flashed their badges at the senior sergeant.

Some of the man's friends had hefted the unconscious body onto their shoulders and were leading him away. To her surprise, he'd already started to regain some of his faculties, having enough strength to provide token support for his own weight. That would be a bitch of a headache, and most likely a concussion, but it served him right for being such a dumbass.

“No, but I really wanted to.”

“Hah, it's gonna be one of those days.” Resignation coated his words. A familiar taste the latter part of their relationship, every argument ending with him throwing up his hands and wandering off to sulk.

The sergeant's report was dutiful, if vague on specifics. Received a call for multiple gunshots being fired at the premisses around half an hour before. Upon arrival, officers had discovered multiple men dead, both in the downstairs bar and stairwell, and a number of women having locked themselves in the upper stories.

“Alright, Avatar, let's get to work,” the scruffy faced man coaxed, giving her a pat on the back.

She let him go first, needing a moment to steel herself with no one watching who could tell she was doing so. Deep breath, in, out. Letting go of that nasty presence at the back of her skull. Put one foot in front of the other and…

Step into darkness.

The scene inside was appalling. Like Jack's work, but less focused. Random violence, as opposed to the more intimate savagery he could be expected to provide. Twas less a murder than a massacre. Even getting inside required her stepping over the corpses of two rather well-built men. Likely the mortal remains of the doormen, set to stand watch for the Met and guard against rival bands of thugs.

“Fat lot of good that did ya,” the Inspector breathed, doing her level best not to slip on the pool of blood that had oozed out a deep gash in one of the men's necks. Exsanguination in seconds, betrayed by your body as each heartbeat drove you closer to an inevitable doom.

“What?” Mako asked, catching her voice, but not her words.

“Fat lot of good having guards did them,” she repeated, only loud enough for him to hear.

With a low hum he voiced his agreement. Letting Korra pass further into the bar, Mako squatted down next to the first pair of corpses. He'd be taking those two, apparently.

Not that she wanted for other options. The number of dead was impressive. One, two, three, she counted, recording every empty shell her eyes fell upon. Four, plus one behind the bar all bringing the total, so far, to seven. With practiced familiarity, she began her search pattern, moving clockwise around the room. With every footfall she had to be careful, lest she tread on any small scrap of evidence.

Rifle casings and shotgun shells by the dozen lay abandoned about the floor, like so many discarded cigarette butts. Judging by the body count and numerous pock marks on the far wall, someone had really gone to town. Or, numerous someones, as the case may be.

Stooping as she passed, her hand gathered a collection of the spent ammunition. In her mind, she collected the calibers and manufacturers of each: .44-40 Fl, .303 2, 12 Gau Fl. The 2 was simple
enough to figure out. Royal Ordinance, Woolwich, right here in London. Practically a stones throw away.

The other she'd never seen before. But, if she had to take a guess, Asami and Mr. Sato's company seemed to fit the bill. One of their many ventures had been weapons production, after all. Mostly catering to the domestic hunting and target shooting crowd. A small, if likely profitable, business to be a part of.

She could probably nip down to the shop and buy a box with their name on it for a shilling and change.

Whether intended for quail or Kashmir, their effects on flesh had been all the same.

The first man she came across was missing the back half of his head. Within the open cavity was naught but paste where his brain used to be. As for the missing, said bits of skull and hair and gray matter were quickly found spattered across the wall behind, right around where a seated man's head would be. In his lifeless fingers he still clutched the hand of cards he'd played until the end. Two pair, aces and eights.

Those he had played with fared little better in their fates. One was slumped forwards onto the table, many holes in his back and arms. Some of the shots had passed through the back of his chair, adding a spray of splinters to the works.

To his left, his other companion was crumpled, face down on the floor. He could have merely been enjoying the aftermath of an over exuberant bout of drinking, save for the crimson liquid still slowly spreading from his chest.

Drinks still sat on the table, money in the pot. It was a strangely calm scene, betraying the explosion of violence that likely took place. Whatever had happened, it had been sudden. To swift for them to react, either in defense or fear. Another small solace to take in her work. It was always worse when they lingered.

The man by the wall had gone first, shotgun blast doing him in one shot. Next had likely been the one that had managed to stay seated upright in his death. Even so, he had only lasted a few seconds longer before being torn down in a hail of pistol fire. The second man on the ground was the last survivor, by default, having had the time to throw his flush across the table before his flame had been snuffed out, as well.

There had been no fight for them, only a moment's confusion before the end consumed them.

Korra checked each man's temperature with her palm. Hardly cooled, were they, kept warm by the brevity of time since their deaths and the roaring hearth not far away.

“Sorry about this,” she whispered into the gambler's ear, lifting his coat and checking his pockets for anything of note. Nothing of any import: a larger than average amount of cash, a pair of pocket watches. His single remaining eye stared up at her, accusingly. “Don't you look at me like that. Most of this stuff is probably stolen, anyways.”

A laugh echoed inside her head as she returned 'his' valuables to their resting place.

The seated companions had much the same in the way of content, save with less cash and more tacky baubles. One of them even had one of the fliers that had been popping up everywhere she looked.

Next to be looked over was the wounds. The little circular entry points told a story of each of the
trigger pullers that made them. A brief glimpse into their personality and mindset. That would give her a better understanding as to their motive. And motive was everything.

To her surprise, the man with the shotgun had shown the most restraint, only unleashing the one barrel into his victim's face. Cool, calm, levelheaded. Just doing a job.

The pistol was similar in this regard, having focused his six shots in a tight group on his target's spine. The marksmanship was average, simply peppering center mass, no better than she could do with her off hand. Still, he showed the barest minimum of professionalism in his work. Satisfaction, perhaps, but not outright glee in his exploits.

Now, the rifleman on the other hand. He was a different beast altogether. In total she counted twelve total rifle caliber entry holes on the men facing the wall. That meant reloading, in the heat of the moment, just to fire twice more into the corpse of someone that, obviously, was already dead.

This one had felt rage. Blinding white hate. It hadn't been about the job for him, it had been about causing as much pain as he could while he did it. A true sadist, like her Leather Apron.

A calm man, a thorough man, and a man filled with psychotic anger all walk into a bar. It was like the beginning to some bizarre joke.

“At least three,” the Avatar called, keeping her temporary companion informed of her findings.

“Make it four,” he corrected, standing up from his pair and brushing the dust from his knees. “Unless you think one of them was a carrying around a sword along with whatever else?”

“Sword?” Korra's ears perked up at the word. She knew who carried a sword. Someone who's actions were just as ambivalent towards these victims as her side of the line. The Lieutenant, her memory whispered, summoning in her a deep loathing that was second only to her hatred of that slayer of women who stalked the night.

“Yeah,” Mako affirmed with a great deal of surety. “I'd say a long, straight blade, like an old officers saber. Maybe a cane sword if it was hefty enough.”

Tucking that knowledge away, making sure to keep the excited hum in her head well contained, she continued their exchange. “Were those two armed?” the Inspector asked, nodding her head at the men he had been examining.

“Yeah,” he nodded, pointing her to where he had lay their little pocket pistol. Alongside it were a hefty looking truncheon, not unlike the ones the Met liked to keep handy for riot control, and a pair of knives, glinting meanly in the light. “Bet they felt pretty safe carrying all that around.”

“They weren't.”

Leaving the three gamblers behind her, she went to check on the others. The barman had collapsed behind his counter. Sandy-hair was caked in blood, and what smelled strongly of bathtub gin. This man would have ended up dead, sooner or later, cutting his stock like that. Korra'd seen dock hands kill for less. Those with next to nothing had nothing to lose, except for pride.

Unlike the middle-aged trio, he'd had time to attempt to protect himself, though to little effect. The tray he'd tried to shield himself with was shattered by the weighty impact of gunfire. Lifting it, she checked the holes for size. Close to half an inch. Her extra .44 casings had their place now.

Laying on his back, it was clear that this man had lasted the longest of those she'd seen, so far.
Perhaps he had been aided by the benefits of youth, being only in his early thirties by the look of him. Faster reaction time, healthier body, simply looking in the right direction? Any of these could have bought him the precious few seconds he would need.

All had come to nothing, however. The Inspector counted three holes in the upper left quarter of his chest. Blood formed a corsage over which his hands were pressed. What had truly finished him was the single shot to the forehead. Another .303 based on the damage left in it's wake. Rage seemed to have turned to blood-lust, at this point

Searching him as she had the others, Korra came up empty. Just some spare change, half a cigar, and a busted pair of glasses.

“Hey, Korra!” Mako called, much to her disgruntlement. He knew damn well not to interrupt her while she worked. “Come look at this guy!”

“He'd better be alive or on fire!” she warned, making sure to lay the corpse back exactly as she found it.

“No, but will you settle for singed?”

Burns? Electrical burn, her memory recalled. The return of her mystery weapon, perhaps. The little puzzle she had been forced to set aside as other, more pressing, events popped up.

With a casual leap she vaulted the bar, so as to avoid the puddles of liquor and broken glass that had nearly proven to be her undoing on the way in. All of her other little problems shuffled to the back of the line as this old one came back to the fore. Last time, she hadn't been able to see the wounds for herself until well after time of death, being forced to settle for the same pictures she'd used to seduce Dr. Watson into the fold.

Now would be her chance.

The closer she got, the stronger the smell became. The foul reek of charred flesh. It was one of the few scents she hadn't been able to accustom herself with. Murder came in many flavors, each with it's own aroma. The coppery tinge of blood, the putrid reek of decay, the various excreta that voided themselves as the body relaxed as the brain lost control of the nerves. All were foul, but this one she found the worst.

“Take a look at this,” her fellow busybody revealed, lifting a tattered, burnt scrap of cloth over the breast of his late charge. Once moved, the injury was revealed in greater detail, as was the smell. It was far grimmer in appearance while fresh. The blistered skin still held that glossy, wax-like quality that typified deep burns. The pattern of damage was very centralized to a single, roughly circular patch over the heart, only a few smaller burns radiated out for an inch or two in all directions. “What could cause something like this?” she wondered aloud, leaning closer to search for any trace fibers.

“Damned if I know,” Mako admitted, matching the quiet, contemplative tone in her voice. “It's like he was hooked directly into generator.”

“Bad way to go,” Korra said, shaking her head. In her head, she wished a silent prayer for his soul and all the others. Not for peace, no, they might not deserve that much. This life they'd chosen had only a few ways it could end. Death of old age was only rarely one of them. But, perhaps, they might find rest.

“Can you tell me a good way?” her ex half-chuckled. It pricked at Korra, the way he said it. Trying
to pass it off as a joke. He hadn't been like this before, had he?

For a moment, Korra was dragged out of the here and now. Instead, she pondered that missing time between them. What had happened, she wondered. His eyes were sad, far sadder than they had been during their last two meetings. Although, that might be due to circumstance.

In an instant, though, it was gone. Features settled back into his usual brooding exterior, eyes hardening to the outside world.

“They sure made a mess,” he said, climbing to his feet. More people had joined them, now. A sergeant and a few constables in their thick woolen uniforms had peeled off from the detail outside. They would handle all of the grunt tasks.

Wandering from body to body, Korra worked her process. Lifting, studying, examining everything. What might prove useful was set aside, all that wasn't was discarded from both her hand and mind.

In the periphery of her awareness she heard Mako try to start a conversation. Abortively, mind you. Inquiring after petty things in an effort to talk about something other that work for a while. Something, must've been bothering him. An unrelated, yet still pressing, issue.

In the end, they both realized it wasn't the time for small talk. Korra's mind was racing, forming and reforming how the events had taken place. A group of men arrive outside, heavily armed. So heavily that walking openly down the street would have been impossible. Mum might be the word, but those that stirred the pot earned themselves just as much ire as snitches.

That meant a cab or a private hire. A witness that wasn't here among the dozens that had been gathered. They might be a hostage, or even dead. Finding them would be a priority.

If they had been left alive, it would be the single most reckless and brazen thing possible. Someone who knew your face, where you came from, and where you ended up was no small loophole in a plan.

That's not even going into the absolutely insane target the group had chosen. In the city there were any number of known gathering places for criminals, plus Spirits knew how many secret ones. Over the years, Korra had seen almost all of them become targets at one time or another.

But these morons hadn't just gone after people, they'd gone after the money.

An attack some nameless courier might slip under the radar of all parties involved, depending on the package. People go missing, people run off, people steal. Going to the trouble of arranging a hit on the operators of a moneymaking establishment such as this was well on the far side of insane. Everyone would be hunting you. Getting caught by the police would, actually, be your safest option at that point.

Maybe that's what he wanted. This all seeing and unseen Amon.

There was a gentle balance in Whitechapel, between the gangs, the Met, and the civilians. No side outright controlled the other in full, instead opting to let some things slide for the same in return.

An unpleasant system, a broken system, but it had worked for longer than anyone could remember.

But if someone were to disrupt that order?

*Cleanse this city...*
A rather unsubtle meaning for his message, if that were the case. Wage war on the black stain on the golden jewel that was London. Gun down those that would do harm to the innocent, hard working people of the slums. If so, an attack like this likely would make for a good recruitment tool, showing off both your power and lack of fear.

But she would teach him fear, soon enough.

“E-excuse me, Ma'am,” one of the constables spoke up, pulling Korra from her thoughts. With a glance over at him, she could tell that he was eager to show her something. The way he shifted his weight, bouncing on his heels like a child eager to please a parent. “I found this over there, like, thought you might want to take a look.”

“Let me see that,” the suddenly exhausted woman breathed. It had only taken a second for her to recognize what the rookie held. She'd surely seen enough of them in her youth to do so. “Where did you find this?”

“T'was set up in one of the windows, Ma'am,” he told her, pointing to the one in question. “Thought it was quite of place, I did.”

“Good work,” she dismissed, staring into the empty eyes of the face she now cradled in her hands.

Memory flooded back to her as her fingertips brushed the smooth surface, lifting it with a deal more reverence than she used to use. Walrus ivory, smooth like glass under her touch. Each time she blinked a different scene played. Days long forgotten danced like blades of grass on her eyelids.

“You recognize it?” her partner asked, a tinge of concern in his voice.

She must've drifted farther off than she'd realized.

“Yeah,” Korra coughed, clearing her throat and thoughts at the same time. “I-uh-I told you about them back in the day. It's a ceremonial mask that priests wear at festivals and weddings and stuff. Only,” she turned the head-piece over in her hand, searching it's every surface for markings, red flags popping up every additional second she searched, “this is all wrong.”

“Every mask is made for one purpose and has the inscriptions to match. Sure, you'll have some variation between them depending on who made it and their own style, but this one's all over the place,” she explained as her finger circled the designs, “But look at this. There's the symbol for war, marriage, the Painted Lady, and a bunch of other random spirits.”

What kind of idiot would put this collection of signs together? Back home it would be considered in the worst of taste to do so. Even sacrilegious to some of the more old-fashioned types.

“So, it's a fake?” Mako inferred, leaning closer to follow the track of her finger.

With a shake of her head, the Avatar dismissed the idea. “No, they're real. The material is right, so's the construction. It's just, everything on it is gibberish. Like someone only half-learned the process.”

“Hm,” the undercover man hummed again. Likely because he had nothing to add. The very few times she'd talked about her people's customs he'd zoned out pretty quickly. “Could it be stolen?”

“I doubt it,” she pondered, handing the mask over to him so he could take a closer look without crowding her. “It would be like stealing a crucifix from a church. Who'd buy it from you, except another church?”
“Just throwing out ideas,” her ex shrugged, reaching his spare hand into his coat for a smoke. Honestly, sometimes Korra felt like the two of them did it just to bother her. It had taken six months to get the smell out of the bedroom alone. “You never know what some rich collector will want to get their hands on. I'll check with the local curiosity dealers, just in case. Might just get lucky and find someone that can point us in the right direction.”

That sounded reasonable enough. Water Tribe religious artifacts would, at least, be an odd item to have pass under one's nose. Maybe even strange enough to warrant recollection.

Much as she detested the idea, a consult with her uncle might also be a good idea. No one she knew had his knowlege on the subject. “While you're at it, see if you can find out how these guys got their hands on government stock.”

With a flick of her thumb, she sent one of the spent .303 brass his way. Catching out of midair, he nodded.

“What do you think the odds of everyone's favorite Minister sticking his nose into this one are?” Mako quizzed, rolling the casing between her fingers so it clinked with every flip. “2-to-1?”

“I'd go for 1-to-1.” He loved to interfere with his favorite PR piece.

“Pretty sucky odds,” he chuckled, giving his task one final flick before catching it midair again and tucking it in his pocket. “You up for doing those interviews now or do you want to wait until you see the rest of the place?”

What a question. There was so much to search, so many nooks and crannies for the smallest shred of a clue to be hiding in. Prioritizing would be key. At the moment, she had only a general idea of the who and why of this grizzly display, with a far more concrete knowledge of when and how.

“Let's get the talking done with,” she decided with a deep sigh. It would take the rest of the day for her to comb this building to her satisfaction. Her work would take her deep into the night and well into tomorrow morning.

With a pang, the Inspector realized what that meant. Sacrificing that which she had only just regained. Warm food, soft sheets, and dreams that didn't wake her screaming into the void.

It was going to be a very long week.

But the scent was so strong. First Jack, then the Lieutenant. Both of them had gone too far, pushed their luck to the breaking point. They were hers now, they just didn't know it yet.

Leaving a calling card in the window was stupid.

Leaving a taunting letter was infuriating.

No, no, they wouldn't get away. They tasked her, they tasked her and she shall have them. 'Round bends that men feared to tread, in alleys so dark the sun never shone, to the Fog of Lost Souls she would hunt them before she gave them up. Without sleep or rest, their trail would be followed. For hates sake, Korra would bring them to heel. In their pursuit she would follow, 'til her last breath.

For the city she now called home.

For those whose lives she was not able to save.

To protect her friends and avenge the one she had lost.
And to be able to return that smile that lit up the world every time she saw it.

Oh, the way she smiled...

Chapter End Notes

Should be the last of the truly gruesome. Hope you liked Mako's belated return, he and Bo have kind of been languishing with nothing to do in the narrative, which should change in the future. He shall return in the next chapter coming up sometime this weekend, along with Miss Beifong.

A big 'Thank You' to everyone who's stuck with me this far, I do greatly appreciate it.
Chapter Summary

Mako needs a drink, ends up meeting Kuvira. Hilarity ensues.

Chapter Notes

I realized that I had forgotten to write this despite promising to do so, like, ages ago. I'm just forgetful like that. Hope this isn't too little, too late.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was late when he got off, sun having long set behind the horizon. Korra had proven herself to be just as big a drill-sergeant as he remembered. This way and that she had ordered them, leaving literally no stone left unturned in her search.

Close to forty interviews, most contradictory and effectively worthless. An inch by inch search with a fine-toothed comb of the surrounding area for anything the culprits had left behind, from weapons to pocket lint. Then off to the depots for every cab service in east London, hedging on whomever had driven them there being loose lipped enough to give in after some gentle questioning.

All of it fruitless, in his eyes. From what the plain-clothed detective could tell, his major accomplishments for the day had been to watch Korra slowly wind herself up until she looked like she would break, while simultaneously revealing his affiliation with the Met to nearly a hundred potential future sources.

She'd even given him homework, not letting him leave until he assured her he'd hit up every fence and under-the-counter weapon dealer he knew of. So his week was effectively scrapped.

When the clock ticked passed one, Mako had finally excused himself. With the way she was acting, the Station Inspector likely wouldn't stop until she actually collapsed of exhaustion. He'd seen her do it before, falling asleep midway through cataloging some little trinket that would end up blowing her whole case wide open.

He, on the other hand, was tired, hungry, and in desperate need of a drink.

And so he'd found himself wandering into one of the usual haunts, just a few blocks from the station. To his great relief, the air was thick with pungent smoke, an open invitation for him to light up. Spending the day with Korra whilst struggling with a nicotine habit was close to torture. That look she got in her eye if she even saw him reach for his lighter was enough for him to suffer through.

Disgust, plain and simple.

For years he'd lived a constant double life, stealing a drag whenever possible. Even if it meant
hiding in some rarely used room of Korra's flat to do so.

Finding a table had been easy enough for him to manage. Just go to the darkest corner, way in the back, and you're always certain to find some room amongst silent companions. There, you could be free from prying eyes and ears, whilst still being able to pry yourself.

Sadly, it had been once he got to his safe haven that his problems had begun.

Said 'problem' had come stumbling out of the bathroom, liquor in hand, only a few minutes after he'd seated himself. Her face was flushed pink, likely having a decent few hours of a head start on him in 'relaxing'. With a huge smile on her lips she'd flopped at the bar, drinking heavily from her bottle and singing to herself in a soft voice that made her words resonate despite the clamor of life around her.

Off in her own little world, she was, blissfully indulged in her daily unwinding. Unaware of the many eyes upon her, likely for those unfulfilled and desiring's benefit, rather than her own.

Luckily for him, she also hadn't seemed to have caught sight of him, yet. The last thing Mako was willing to deal with, after the day he'd just had, was a scene. And Lord knows, Kuvira could cause one hell of a scene when she wanted to.

Her presence confined him, regardless of awareness. Trapping the officer in a tiny corner of the bar where the light wouldn't hit his face and betray his presence for her to find. And so they had been for the last hour, each nursing cups and bottles, smoking until their lungs ached. It was a tense time, but it also presented him with an opportunity.

In past experience, Kuvira became less hot-headed the longer she drank. The more she downed, the more her ego seemed to slip. If she got wasted enough his old partner might even become agreeable enough to be approached without trying to skin him alive. A massive boon for him to make an attempt at reconciliation, or, at the very least, coexistence.

Carefully, he measured her intake, waiting for his prime opening. First her current bottle, then a second were downed with great relish. Apparently her tolerance for booze hadn't diminished any.

Finally, as she opened her third serving of spirits, having spilled most of the second when a man bumped her on his way out (surprisingly only earning himself a sour look in response), she started to waver. As she popped the cork with her teeth, the resulting jerk nearly sent her tumbling back off her stool. It was as good a chance as he was likely to get. With the way she was going, in fifteen minutes she'd be passed out on the floor.

Lifting his glass, Mako downed his drink in one gulp. He had a feeling he'd need it.

On his way the officer passed many a joyous drunkard. Sailors, soldiers, laborers, bobbies, and shopkeepers all mingled freely. It was the one place that most of them would interact with one another, drawn together by the prospect of company and a stiff belt.

They played cards, sang songs, and made friend's with people they'd never seen before. Some of said friendships would be forgotten as soon as one of them walked out the door, others would last for a lifetime.

How would his fair the night, he wondered as he wormed his way closer to the confrontation he'd been putting off for far too long.

Spinning on her mount, as she often did once boredom set in, Kuvira finally spotted him. With mixed emotions, the former street-rat watched her eyes narrow, shortly followed by a predatory
smile that he often saw as she stalked her prey through darkest alley. This was not going to end well for him.

“Hey, hey,” she greeted him with arms stretched wide in welcome. A bad sign if he’d ever saw one. “If it ain’t the walking rulebook.”

“Miss Beifong,” Mako returned simply, tipping his hat for her. Flattery had work with her before, god willing it would do so again. “Do you mind if I join you?”

“Oh, so formal,” the green-eyed detective teased, waving her hand at him like an embarrassed lady. “What could possibly have happened for you to decide to darken my doorstep, hmm?” With absolute confidence, she leaned back, propping herself against the bar. Never once did her eyes waver from his face, the burning hate within complimenting rather startlingly with the wolfish nature of her smile. “Did mommy finally tell you to make nice, or are you just tired of hiding in the basement like the rat you are?”

Textbook baiting on her behalf, nothing special at all about how she tried to push his buttons. Counting himself unimpressed, Mako replied levelly, “I just want to work things out. You and me, sitting down and talking like adults.”

A scoff from her, finding his proposal most amusing. The spread of her lips grew, stretching from ear to ear. With every gust of wind as the door was opened for someone to leave or enter, the lights danced, glinting off her teeth.

“Are you kidding? I don't want to 'work things out' with you,” she said with mirthful spite, “Thinking about how I'm gonna kill you has been the most fun I've had in years. Current plan is the Edward the Second treatment. You know, cause you fucked me up the ass and I figured you might want to return the favor.”

“You don't scare me, Kuvira,” he remarked, swiftly ordering a fresh gin and tonic.

“I'm not trying to scare you,” she laughed, an almost dangerous level of suppressed violence behind the sound. “You said you wanted to talk, that's what we're doing. Catching up. Reliving the good old days.”

“Uh huh.” There was not enough sarcasm in the world for him to use.

“Yeah,” the dark-haired woman confirmed, spinning on her chair so she faced her drink again. A tense and toned arm slithered it's way around the back of Mako's neck, her effort to keep him from going anywhere in a hurry. “So, tell me, friend, have you ratted out anyone else recently, or was it just me?”

“God, you're such a child,” the unshaven man sighed into his glass, enjoying the slight sweetness that contrasted with the sharp bite of his earlier whiskey meal.

“And you're such a stuck-up ass,” she countered, releasing him and returning to drinking her liquor by the gulp. “Balance in the universe.”

“Fine. If you want to be that way, I'm not going to waste my time,” he dismissed, rising to leave. Tossing his payment on the counter, he shot her a disappointed frown. “It was good to see you again.”

“You know what I don't like about you, pretty boy?” Kuvira asked, with quite the shift in tone from before. She was less harsh, more conversational. It was yet another lure to get him to stick around. A more direct method was the unyielding hand with an iron grip attached itself to his old, tatty tan
overcoat, stopping him dead.

Plopping himself back down, Mako guessed, “Everything?”

“No, I mean other than that,” Kuvira cackled, a clumsy swipe of her hand nearly sending her drink skittering off the edge of the bar. When he shrugged, she leaned in close, expression hardening until she looked almost sober. “You give up too easy. You gave up on me when Opal and your little-bro started seeing each other; you gave up on Korra when she didn't blindly go along with your plans; you damn near gave up on your career for some stupid reason. Now, look at you. Trying to have a heart-to-heart with me in a dive bar and you can't even follow through on that.”

“The way I see it, you both broke up with me,” the increasingly frustrated young man pointed out, forcing her arm off him and jamming his sharply finger into her shoulder. For a moment her eyes flicked to the digit and it's owner was left with the fear that she might try to snap it off. “What was I supposed to do, cling on like some creep because I didn't like what happened?”

“Oh, look at me, my name's Mako and I'm sooo noble and chivalrous,” she mocked, putting of a deeper voice and puffing out her chest as the flush flooded back into her cheeks. “I always put other people first, so I can go mope around in dark alleys and tell girls how great a person I am. Bleh!”

“I do not sound like that!”

“Yes, you fucking do! You've never stood up and fought for what you've wanted, for as long as I've known you,” the drunkard berated, jamming her finger into Mako's chest this time. “It's pathetic, and you make me sick. I get not wanting to piss people off, but you're just fucking ridiculous!”

“Oh, so I should be more like you, eh?!” he hurled back, smacking her hand away and giving up all pretense of civility. “Be a massive bitch to everyone around me, just because I have issues! News flash: some of us didn't have the luxury of getting adopted by a family that took care of us! I didn't have shit growing up, except a brother I raised all by myself, and you don't see me drinking myself to death to spite the woman that took me in!”

“Shut up!”

“No,” Mako refused, tired of Kuvira and her shit. Years of this, a decade of crap, and he'd just taken it on the chin. No more! “You want me to stand up to someone, fine! I didn't give up on you because of Bo, I gave up because you don't give a damn about anyone but yourself. No matter what you do, who you hurt, Kuvira Beifong is always right. All you've ever given Suyin is crap for bothering to love you!”

“DON'T YOU DARE TALK ABOUT MY MOTHER!” the newly minted Inspector roared, thrusting her hand into her coat so fast it was a blur.

Mako's response was instinctual, body reacting without the need for thought. His arm snapped down, catching his former partner's elbow and holding it in place. If she couldn't move, she couldn't attack, either. Or so he thought.

Blinding pain radiated through his skull as the fist he hadn't occupied smashed into his jaw. If possible, it hurt even more than when Korra had clobbered him. He couldn't focus on the comparison, though, as the arm was being cocked back for another blow.

Not releasing Kuvira's elbow, Mako gave her a firm push, depending on gravity and her hampered
sense of balance to give him the edge.

Back she fell, only narrowly avoiding smashing the back of her head on the vacant stool behind. With a loud, clattering thud her back hit the ground, air fleeing her lungs in an audible puff. The look on her face quickly fazed through a wide spectrum: pain, embarrassment, a flash of sudden humility, and the swiftly returning anger.

“Son of a-” she began, only to be cut off by the first outside interference they had so far received.

“Oi, knock it off!” the man behind the bar warned, reaching under the bar and grabbing who knew what. “You two're causin' a racket, and I can't have ye scarin' 'way me customers! Better sort yerselves out, 'fore I get tha cops to do it fer ye!”

“We are the police, you dumbass!” Kuvira retorted, changing the target of her rage, if only for a moment. “We've been coming here for years!”

A flush of rage crept into the server's face, fist coming down on the counter so hard that drinks were sent flying. “Why you little harlot! I'll tell ye what, not anymore, ye don't! Get tha fuck out, and take yer lover's quarrel someplace else! I ain't got no time ta deal with little punks whose mother's never taught them no manners!”

“The fuck'd you call me!” the belligerent drinker challenged, attempting to make a lunge for the portly man. Luckily for her, fate seemed to have other plans.

The abortive attack was undone as their surroundings reasserted themselves. Her spilled drink, likely forgotten until now, found it's way underfoot. Momentum and traction gave way, sending the Inspector well off track, cracking her head upon the seat from which she had fallen.

What few faces weren't already pointed in their direction turned in a heartbeat, just in time to catch the stream of curses that erupted like a volcano from enraged lips.

Ah, that was the Kuvira he knew. Painting the town blue, one four-letter word at a time. Mako couldn't help the low chuckle that built itself in his gut, spilling forth in a merry break from the tension of the last few minutes.

“The hell are you laughing at?” the woman demanded, pulling herself to her feet, wobbly legs threatening to send her right back down from whence she came.

“You,” he said, laughing even harder than before as he watched her blink the pain out of her eyes. Who would have thought he would have gotten out of this exchange in better shape than her? “You look like an idiot.”

To his amazement, she didn't lash out at him, despite the goading, with words or fists. Instead, she cracked a renewed grin and joined him in his enjoyment. “You're not looking so smart, yourself,” she laughed back, gripping the bar for it's added stability. It would be an honest miracle if the room wasn't spinning for her right now. “Bet there's gonna be a nice ripe shiner on that stupid mug of yours tomorrow.”

“At least I won't have a massive lump on my head,” he balanced out, giving her a shrug and offering her an arm for her to hold on to.

“The hell do you think you're doing?” the Inspector asked, staring at the limb with greatly diminished venom.

“Helping you up.” Mako flashed her an apologetic smile, which she, begrudgingly, seemed to
accept. Up she came, nearly unable to stand at this point. As she tried to take a step, the plain-clothed officer had to catch her, knees turning to jelly under her weight. “Whoa, there.”

“Watch those hands,” she slurred, her ridiculous consumption finally catching up to her. At last she'd reached her proper state, utterly hammered. A big stupid grin split her cheeks and Mako was left wondering if Kuvira could even remember what had just happened. “I'm pretty sure it's illegal for you to be getting frisky with me, pretty boy.”

Taunting giggles bubbled in her throat, although she kept whatever filthy thoughts had triggered them to herself. “Okay,” Mako said, steadying her from yet another near collapse, “let's get you out of here.”

He kept it nice and light, a friendly filter on everything he did. From the way he kept his smile plastered on his face, to his smooth, nonthreatening approach. From all sides, he could feel the eyes on them. Drunken stares projecting their own view of the situation upon the pair.

You could cut the collective tension with a knife. Who knew how many of the onlookers were looking for the slightest excuse to let off a little steam or settle some old scores? Too many, that was for sure. One more good push and there'd be a fight to deal with.

A circumstance Mako would greatly love to avoid, thank you very much. With a perfect understanding of the situation, the secret keeper started to gently guide his shouting partner towards the exit.

“Hold on,” she halted, reaching for her precious addiction, laying just beyond her fingertips. “Hey!”

“Bottle stays here,” the owner stated, firmly, leaving no room for debate in his tone.

“I paid for that, you cocksucker!” Kuvira growled, threatening to tear free of Mako's grasp, potentially sending the entire room into disarray. “Give it here!”

With a firm tug, her keeper forced her farther away, practically dragging her from the building. “Look, if you promise not to kill me, I'll buy you any bottle of booze you want,” he swore, kicking the door open, only to receive a blast of cold air to the face in payment.

The sudden shock of the temperature change seemed to dampen Miss Beifong's intoxication, once more. “Fuck this weather,” she complained loudly, pulling her coat tight around herself and shivering against the bitterness. “You'd better get me something top shelf if you're dragging me out into this shit.”

“Deal,” he agreed, eager to put as much distance between them and whatever might happen in the pub. As far as he was concerned, after they left it wasn't their problem. Let the night tour take care of it, he had enough on his plate.

With the arrangement tentatively settled, the duo lapsed into an uncomfortable, if calm, silence. Around them were the sounds of nightlife. Shills and whores both plied their wares, tempting passers by with offers. The state of them hardly deterred the efforts. If anything, it just drew more attention to them.

For every one that encroach upon them, an excuse he had to offer. From the pitiful to the provocative to the persistent, every solicitation was shot down. He had no need for stolen watches, diluted whiskey, or a lady-of-the-night with whom to share an evening and he made that all perfectly clear.
“I don't trust you,” Kuvira whispered weakly as she was carried down the street.

“I don't trust you, either,” Mako concurred, shifting her weight so her arm didn't cut so hard into his neck.

For most of a block they returned to silence, the dark streets swallowed them up in their cold embrace. “Good,” she laughed softly after a while, sliding further into her drunken drowsiness. “That'll keep us honest, at least.”

With a little laugh of his own, he supported the added load as the pigheaded woman's legs started to give out on her. A soft snore rang in his ear as she passed out on his shoulder. How many times had that happened, now? Twenty, fifty, more? He'd lost count years ago.

It wasn't like the old days. Probably never would be again, but, he could live with that. They'd mend things like before, screw up, fall out again. Such was their relationship. An endlessly spinning cycle of stupid mistakes.

As the wind whipped up around them, Mako felt the first snowflakes begin to fall on his face. A storm was brewing over London. One that would coat the city in white and hide everything under a thin veil of purity. Just a mask, like so much else in this city. A way to hide the things people didn't like to see, either in themselves or the world around them.

Damn, he must be drunk if he was philosophizing like this.

With a little effort, he managed to gather Kuriva up in a way that wouldn't lead to her trying to murder him if she awoke. It was only a few blocks to his flat. A night on his couch, under the gaze of a roaring fire, would do her a lot better than sending her back to whatever rat infested hole she was kipping in these days. She'd wake up before dawn, raid his kitchen for all it was worth, and slip out without saying a word.

As it should be.

They would never speak to anyone about tonight. Whether either of them remembered it was a toss up, at this point. So far as Mako could tell, they were square. Anything else Kuvira would just consider a sentimental waste of breath.

Why were all the women in his life so hard-headed?

“Better get you inside,” the Detective muttered to himself, trudging onwards despite the weight on his shoulders. “You always did hate when it snowed.”

Chapter End Notes

Question: Would you guys prefer if I cut up the larger chapters into smaller chunks and post them like that, leave stuff like it is in the big ones, or some third option? I realize I have tendency to go off on tangents/ramble, so I'm looking for a solution.

The outline really firms up now, so there'll be less filler from here on out. Gonna get the gang and the girls together soon. I promise.

P.S. If anyone gets the little reference in here, I'll be right pleased.
Mr. Sato and The Home Office

Chapter Summary

A re-introduction to Asami’s father.

Chapter Notes

A double update of shorter chapters this week since I couldn't figure out a non-tedious way to join up the tones in them. This is a bit of a refresher chapter, for both Hiroshi and his factory.

No, I hadn't forgotten about that, why do you ask?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I see,” Mr. Sato hummed as he walked alongside Korra through the bowels of the ever so creatively named Foreign Office Main Building. And incorrectly, seeing that it held no less than four departments within it's walls. “I'm sorry to have troubled you with this, but I'm glad your efforts have come to something. You must thank this colleague of yours for me, as well. I can't imagine who else would have thought of metal shavings as the cause of the blaze.”

“I wouldn't call them the cause, Mr. Sato, just the tool. Like a really over-engineered firebomb,” the Inspector corrected as they finished their fifth circuit of the wing. With each pass the decorations had appeared to become even more gaudy and lavish. The paintings, in particular, had taken on an almost ridiculous level of extravagance, in her eyes. “And you've already met him.”

“Oh?”

“He took Asami to the Gala,” she reminded, trying to jog his memory.

“Oh, I see,” the captain of industry nodded, screwing up his eyes as he cast his memory back. With a shake of his head he said, “I don't believe I actually met the man. From what I remember, you were keeping her company when we met.”

“Oh, yeah,” the still slightly chilled woman said, having completely forgotten. That's right, he was with George and...

The Avatar's nose instinctively curled as though someone had cracked a rotten egg under her nose. The Minister always had that effect on her in her memories. Did the same for a lot of people, if she was honest.

On the other hand, it did remind her to start looking for excuses to get out of George's annual invitation to spend Christmas with his family. Had it been long enough to use the “I'm a pagan” excuse again? Surely, it must have been. Three years? No one would remember that long ago, right?

“I suppose, though, that we are no closer to finding out who carried out this attack?” her companion
inquired. From the look on his face, he was greatly anticipating a certain answer to this query.

“Afraid not,” she sighed, tucking her hands into her pockets, further disappointed in her report. “It's been too busy around the station for me to spend much time digging around. The best I can give you is that it was some organized group that pulled it off. Maybe some anarchists or socialists with an ax to grind. Have you been having any problems with people like that?”

A thin, satisfied smile creased his face, letting Korra know he was pleased with her reply, though she couldn't for the life of her figure out why. “No, no, nothing like that,” he denied, shaking his head slightly, “Well, nothing serious, anyways. We do get your standard threatening letter, every once in a while, but I've never paid them much mind.”

“I know what you mean,” the Princess hummed. Although tailing off in recent years, she had been the target of no small number of violent threats on her life and body. After a while, she just accepted them as part of life in Britain, even taking to rating them on their level of creativity. “Still, I think bumping up your night watches might be a good idea, for a while.”

“As you say,” he concurred, nodding vigorously. Behind his eyes she could see the wheels turning, likely his figuring out who he could trust with such a task. “I must say, Miss Waters, that my daughter has not exaggerated your skills in the slightest.”

“Asami talks about me?” she inquired in as dispassionate a voice as she could muster. The heavy ba-dum, ba-dum of her heart had to be kept under control, especially under the circumstances.

“Only in the highest regard, I assure you,” the businessman related, cheerfully.

“I'm glad to hear it,” the Detective smiled back, know perfectly well 'glad' didn't even scratch the surface of how she was feeling.

“It's been a long while since she's spent so much time with someone her own age. I'm afraid she inherited both her mother's brain and my work habits,” he chuckled, massaging the back of his neck. “Always one project or another with her.”

“That sounds about right.”

“You should have seen her when she was younger,” the boastful father continued, such fondness in his words that it kicked Korra's heart up yet another notch. “One day, I came home only to find a two-hundred year old clock taken apart on her bed. Turned out, she had decided to fix it after it stopped ticking, bless her.”

“And she didn't just try winding it up again?” Korra asked, quirking her eyebrow at the obvious oversight.

“Oh, she did,” he remembered fondly, only just able to keep his laughter to 'socially acceptable' levels. Honestly, the British could be so prudish. “After she'd taken it apart.”

They shared their amusement on that with another round of hearty laughter. Apparently that clever mind she adored so much had always had much to offer, if untempered by life-experience. Eyes followed them as they passed, humorless bureaucrats expressing their disdain at such open frivolity. With their upturned noses and thinly pressed lips, the civil-service repelled such glee with their mere presence alone. Hence why Korra hated this place. Almost as much as Parliament.

The presence of Asami's father had been all that made her summons to the Home Office even remotely bearable. It had allowed her the pleasantness of a companion that wasn't constantly trying to suck up to her in some vain attempt to gain favor or looking down on her for trying to crack a
smile.

Very much like his daughter, Mr. Sato seemed much more willing than most of his countrymen to treat her as a person, rather than an opportunity for advancement. With every moment, she suspected more and more the he must be the source of Asami’s charm. He was quick to laugh, blessed with a cheerful smile, and all too interested in her methods.

Still, it had been over an hour since her arrival, having been summoned with what she was told was an 'urgent message' from the Secretary, himself. And what had she gotten when she arrived?

“Please take a seat, Ma'am,” the woman at the desk had told her, not even bothering to look up from her typewriter out of courtesy.

'Urgent Message', her ass. The only reasons the Avatar had ever been brought down to the center of domestic policy had been to be paraded before some foreign dignitaries, tempted by lucrative offers to put her stamp on some nonsense bill, or to be shoehorned into the Minister's latest pet project. Which one would it be, today?

Security had been rather lax, only taking a cursory glance at her ID before allowing her entry. That seemed to preempt the idea of someone important being present. Parliament wasn't currently working on anything particularly important, so far as she was aware, scuppering the second option as well. That left only some new, inane plot for her to be wrapped up in. Tarrlok's latest 'Plan to Save Britain'.

“Oh, would you look at the time?” Satoshi noted with some surprise and a good deal of suddeness. When Korra came out of her inner pondering she saw him staring down at his watch with an impatient tinge to his gaze. “Begging your pardons, young lady, but I appear to be running late for a rather important meeting.”

“Oh, uh, don't let me keep you, then,” she said, mildly confused by the suddenness of this revelation. Not that she was much better, really. Once she had something interesting to do, time just seemed to leave her behind.

“My thanks, again, for your help, Inspector,” the thickly-mustached gentleman professed, with all the air of polite civility she had come to expect from him.

“Don't mention it,” Korra waved off, dismissing his humility and offering her hand instead. “If you need anything-”

“I don't think that will be necessary,” he cut off, taking her hand in his and shaking it firmly. It was a gesture that carried authority behind it, weight. The Inspector could only imagine how many deals he had sealed in just the same way. “You've already done more than enough, Inspector, and I'm sure you have more than enough on your plate without worrying about my little problems.”

Huh. How odd, she mentally noted as he released her and stood at attention. His eyes, they had changed. Veiled hostility clouded them, disrupting the kindness that had been present only moment’s before.

He didn't want her digging anymore, the Detective concluded. Whilst he had shown nothing but satisfaction when told about her findings, and tremendous enthusiasm in recruiting her in the first place, the idea that she may continue her work further seemed to have tripped something in him. Likely fearing for the sizable insurance payout his company would lose if anything even remotely shady turned up.
It wasn't an idle fear on his part. More than once she'd seen policies voided on the flimsiest of evidence.

Still, something in the back of her head, the same part of it that screamed at her every time she approach a crime scene, refused to sit quietly. There was just something that bothered her about that face. Something familiar.

“Sure, if you say so,” the Avatar shrugged, chewing on the inside of her cheek and letting her suspicions fester for now. “It was good seeing you again, Mr. Sato.”

“And you, Miss Waters,” he concurred, giving her a little bow for good measure.

With that, he was off, abandoning her to gilded halls and disapproving stares. The lack of distraction quickly began to grate on her. This place disturbed her. It was too clean, too regimented, too sterile. Too perfect.

Too much like home.

As soon as he was out of sight, her body slumped as the past while few days caught up with her. All week she had existed on a diet of cold coffee and scraps from the lounge. Once, she had managed to allow herself to slip away long enough to grab some food from a stand down the street, only to lose it when her foot slipped on a patch of ice hidden under the snowfall.

Each night had been spent in her chair, or restlessly turning on one of the lumpy cots downstairs. Nightmares plagued her. Even now the shadows seemed to watch her, eyes following her in every portrait.

With a shiver that had nothing to do with the cold, Korra straightened. “Fuck waiting around,” she declared softly, making a beeline straight for the office she had been snubbed earlier. If Tarrlok was going to drag her halfway across the city, interrupt her work, and force her to endure this place on top of everything else, he'd best be ready for the consequences.

Good thing she remembered to bring her door kicking boots today. She could use always use a little practice.

Chapter End Notes

Off to the Minister's office!
Yes Minister

Chapter Summary

Minister Tarrlok and Inspector Waters have a lively discussion.

Chapter Notes

I tried to try and write some comedy into this one, since both I and the story have been in a bit of a dark place of late. The return of sassy Korra, kinda.
BTW Korra really hates Tarrlok.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What is this!?!?” the Minister demanded as Korra forced her way through the door of his office, practically trampling a poor clerk that had gotten in her way underfoot. “How can you people expect me to get any work done when you keep barging in every five minutes!?!?”

It took him a moment for him to register the target of his outburst. A wondrous, delightfully savory moment. The closest thing to the thrill of true happiness since Sunday threatened the Inspector's lips as she watched his face fall, sudden horror creasing his features.

Oh, she was going to have so much fun with him.

“I'm not a what, I'm a who,” Korra replied with a chipper note in her words that hid her true frustration rather well, “Back home, I can vote and everything.”

Was it possible for a man to die of embarrassment? If so, her boss was well on the way to doing it. The blood drained from his features, brown skin going impressively pale under her gaze. What must be going through his mind right now, she wondered, allowing herself just the tiniest tinge of sadistic pleasure at his discomfort. It was only fair after all the crap he put her through over the years.

“Y-y-y-your M-m-m-maj-jesty,” he stammered, pupils dilated so wide he looked off his head on something or other.

“Hey, kid,” his previous appointment greeted in a slightly amused tone.

“Ma'am,” she returned, snapping a quick salute as demanded by regulation and respect.

“Is my niece still causing trouble for Tenzin, or have you finally managed to whip some sense into her?” Lin Beifong asked, standing at rigid attention while their superior took the opportunity to compose himself. After letting the Avatar stand at attention for a good while longer than normal, the Chief returned her gesture, allow her subordinate to relax.

“We've been keeping her busy,” Korra replied simply. The odds of her reporting back to Suyin were slim, but still high enough to warrant caution. The entire Beifong clan had always struck
Korra as a little… odd, to put it nicely. Fiercely loyal to their own, and yet, still able to engage in some of the fiercest internal feuds she had ever witnessed. The women especially so, with their tendency to hold rather strong opinions on most everything. Opinions they were not afraid to voice in public.

Loudly.

And often.

That may be have been why she felt right at home with Kuvira and Opal. The sisters she never had.

“Good,” the graying veteran said firmly, displaying that iron rigidness she was so known for. “Tell Kuvira that I have my eye on her. Any funny business on her end and she'll be dealing with me, not some kindhearted old fool, understand?”

“Perfectly, Ma'am.”

“And tell her to stop smoking those damn cheap cigarettes,” her former idol added, almost as an afterthought, despite reaching into her coat and drawing out her pipe, “It's bad enough my sister keeps chewing my head off every time that damn girl runs off.”

“I'll pass that along, Ma'am,” the Avatar promised, knowing perfectly well neither of them expected her to do so.

Turning her attention back to the Minister, Korra gauged his recovery. His ruffled feathers seemed to have smoothed, somewhat. The majesty of the politician in their ability to recover from absolutely everything. Kick them in the head and they compliment you on the quality of your shoes. Burst into their office and they direct their frustration at the help. “Bernard!” Tarrlok snapped, sending daggers at the young man the Inspector had bowled over as he attempted to defend the sanctity of his office.

“I'm sorry, Sir,” the fresh-faced civil-servant apologized as he clambered back to his feet. “I tried to stop her.”

“Why didn't you?” the older woman asked, eyebrow slightly raised.

“Well, she's stronger than me,” he explained, giving her a furtive look and straightening his collar. The admission just made Korra smirk a little more, as well as give the Minister a reason to sigh that would save face.

“I think that's quite enough, Bernard,” he dismissed, waving a beleaguered hand at his assistant. With the situation already going so terribly wrong for him, he seemed in a hurry to paper over the gaffs and move on. “Just, I don't know, take some papers down to Administrative Affairs, or something.”

“But, Sir, I-”

“Now, Bernard,” the more highly ranked official insisted.

“Y-yes, Minister,” Bernard replied, squeezing passed Korra whilst muttering his apologies.

With the closing of the door behind him came the obligatory awkward silence moments like these demanded. Taking the opportunity to read the room, Korra tried to piece together what her two superiors had been discussing. Or rather, what Tarrlok had been preaching while Lin had looked on with stoney-faced disinterest.
A large map of London was splayed across the man's desk, all of his other papers and belongings having been resettled to his chair or elsewhere about his place of work. Suddenly, Korra had a flashback of walking through crisp snow in Regent's Park on the way to meet someone she held in just about as much regard as the man in front of her right now. The similarities didn't tend with the clutter, either, as upon the atlas were many scribbles in tight, hurried handwriting. Names, dates, places.

Murder scenes.

Her murder scenes.

“Are you having me followed, too?” she asked with a tinge of sharpness to her voice. It was with a good deal of effort that she tacked on a “Sir” to the end.

“Pardon?” the Secretary replied, playing the fool. With the acting skill only a seasoned people-pleaser could have garnered, he followed her gaze to his stalking. “What, you mean this?”

*No, I mean the gallon of oil you have in your hair.* “Yes.”

“Well, you see, the Commissioner and I,” he started to explain, earning an eye roll from said woman, “were discussing how to deal with this dreadful business in the East End. Now, we've come up with a few plans and I was hoping to run them by you, seeing that you are the Senior Officer on both of these cases.”

You were hoping you'd get my rubber stamp so you could have a nice headline in the papers, she translated, preparing for the onslaught of idiocy that was to come. “Hah, what d'ya got?”

“Well, to has become rather clear to me that we are currently suffering somewhat of a manpower shortage. As you are no doubt aware, the Prime Minister has recommended cutting the Home Office's budget another five-percent in the next session,” the Minister rambled on, managing to both state the obvious and bore Korra to tears at the same time, “So we've been considering focusing our efforts into one, decisive thrust.”

*Here it comes.*

“I was going to propose that a special task-force be set up to handle this crisis,” the man revealed, seemingly believing this to be some grand achievement. Forgetting the two dozen other committees, sub-committees, vigilance groups, and various other partisan shenanigans that had been set up to do the exact same thing. “Tell me, are you familiar with a man called Sherlock Ho-”

“Holmes,” the Inspector chuckled, unable to contain her amazement. This was, actually, new. For once, in the more than half-a-decade she had known him, Tarrlok Blackwater had managed to surprise her. He'd broken the pattern, stuck to his guns instead of pandering to the powerful.

It was strange, this thing she was feeling for him right now. This, pride. What a shame it was overwhelmed by all this *Unyielding Rage!* “Know him? Oh, I know him alright,” she confirmed, biting into her lip so she didn't start screaming at the top of her lungs.

“Excellent!” he exclaimed, clapping his hands together in preparation for getting down to business. Korra could see in his face, that smug, arrogant face, his victory. The man thought he had won. Outsmarted her and

“Don't you want to know how I know him?” the sleep-starved investigator inquired, narrowing her eyes and taking a few more steps so she stood just across the desk from the man. Now, how badly
did she want to wreck his little circus show? That was the question. Well, in for a penny... “I had him arrested for impersonating an officer and interfering in an investigation on Sunday.”

“Well, that is a shame,” he sighed, displaying no signs of shock. If anything, he only seemed saddened that one of the pawns in his game had been taken from him. “I had heard he was the perfect man for things like this. Either way, I'm sure you and my team can carry on just fine without his assistance.”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“I said, no,” Korra repeated more aggressively than before. The refusal seemed to stun the politician. For once, he was speechless. No preformed, archived reply. No hastily put together objection. Only silence. In the opening this provided, the Avatar took advantage, pressing on as she would in any interrogation. “You don't think I know what you're trying to pull, do you?”

“My Lady, I don't know what you're ta-”

“Shut up! I'm talking, now,” she told him, grabbing a fistful of his map in her trembling hand and pulling. The sharp sound of tearing paper was like music to the Inspector's ears. “Don't try and pass this off as some great, noble effort on your part. All you're trying to do is cover your ass, like always. Gather a bunch of people to use as fodder if things go even more to shit than they already have on your watch.”

“I resent that accusation,” the lean gentleman rumbled, low in his throat.

“And I resent having some flip-flopping, backstabbing, power-hungry jackass in a cheap suit, who switches parties faster than I wake up in the morning every time there's an election brewing, trying to use me as his own private publicity stunt,” the young woman declared with deathly calm in her voice. She matched his glare with one of her own, before cracking a lean smile. “But I'm just weird that way.”

Leaning back, the Avatar crossed her arms and let her head loll a little to one side. Utterly relaxed before his fury. Just to let him know that she was the one in charge of the proceedings.

“Can't say I fault you on that,” Lin puffed around her pipe. That drew both of the verbal jouster's attention. In her concentration on picking at the greasy politician, Korra had all but let the presence of the other woman slip her mind. Although, judging by the way she had begun to absently clean the char out of the vessel, she hadn't seemed to mind her break from Tarrlok's glorious vision.

“Commissioner Beifong, I demand you say something! Talk some sense into her! That's your job, isn't it?” her countryman demanded of the veteran, eyes both pleading and furious.

“Of course it isn't, do I look like an au pair to you?” Lin replied, lip curling into her own grin, “and even if it was, I'm having far too much fun to stop her, now.”

“Thank you, Ma'am,” Korra bid, giving her colleague a cheeky nod. This sort of thing never would have happened when they first met. A polite accord such as this would have been well beyond them, let alone this minor collaboration.

“Why, you,” he simmered, threatening to boil over at any moment. The vein in his neck pulsed, joined by one on his forehead “Insolent little brat! How dare you speak to me like this?! I am a Minister in Her Majesties government, and you are nothing more than an upstart runaway! With the stroke of a pen, I could have you on a boat out of the country by nightfall!”
“Yeah, you could,” the foreigner conceded with a satisfied grin on her lips. Oh, victory. It tasted so sweet, now, after a week of starving herself. He had bluffed too much, just as she thought he would. How sad. And he'd been doing so well. “But you want to know something funny?”

The question hung as Korra watched the schemer fume at his schemes coming unraveled before his eyes. He was trembling. Shaking with rage as she wished to. Let him take a swing at her. Give her a proper reason to vent. Even with the Commissioner so close at hand, Korra could break that flapping jaw of his in a heartbeat. Perhaps that would teach him the lesson he had never managed to learn up til now.

Don't fuck with my work!

“You won’t.” And with that, Korra turned her back on the man, letting his cries fall on deaf ears. Stay away from any lit matches, she wanted to say, only just managing to restrain herself.

A fist slammed into the desk as he continued to bluster and rant at her for disobeying him. “I'll have your badge for this!” the flustered official swore with all the same fire he would use towards his greatest enemy. “Do you hear me? I am not a man to be crossed, Inspector!” He spat the word like it was the foulest insult for the lowest garbage. “COME BACK HERE!”

His threats carried down the hall after her. So many empty words. Take my case away, hah! I'm the only reason you still have a job, and you know it. She gave him his biggest bit of political clout, by far. No matter the controversy, no matter the gaff, he always had his crowning achievement to fall back on.

For now, at least.

Every time she blinked, the over-extended detective pictured the Minister gesticulating wildly, letting his calm exterior fall away to expose the storm within. He wasn't lying about being dangerous for her. Much as his display had been bravado and disdain at being rejected in an effort to threaten her on side, if she wasn't careful, there could be repercussions. Meddling was dangerous in her line of work and none could meddle more than the man at the top.

Deep breaths.

In.

Out.

Calm.

Think.

Despite her hatred of the man, he did pose to her a valid point. This was too big for her to carry any farther on her own. The weight of that letter in her pocket made every footstep feel twice as hard, knees shaking with the strain. The button the stared at every night before she went to sleep haunted both her sleeping and waking mind with two brass letters: H.P.

What she needed was a skull session. A gathering of those she could trust away from prying eyes. The shortlist immediately popped into mind: Mako, Bo, Kuvira, Tenzin. Yes, yes, it was time for a 'Poker Night'.

But that could wait for now, if only just. It was Friday, after all. There was still much for her to do to prepare. Shopping to be done, coffee to be drunk, naps to be had so her eyes didn't look quite so restless when her company came over that evening. And, of course, the most dreaded task of them
all: cooking.

She would suffer through, though. All for her.

Everything must be perfect. It had to be. If her nerve was to hold out, that is. The promise she'd made, that day in the park, as she walked away without her coat. Tonight, Korra would bare everything, for better or for worse.

Asami was her friend and she…

She deserved to know the truth.

As the Avatar wandered out into the flurry, she prayed for herself for the first time in years. That fate be kind to her and that Asami would understand. It might be too much to ask for something more, but 'good enough' wasn't an option anymore.

Still, a tiny, stupid part of her dared to hope. Maybe, just maybe, if she was lucky, things might just keep going her way for a change.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sure that conversation won't come back to bite anyone in the ass. Everything's just gonna come up Korra from here on in.

It's Friday dinner next chapter. That means date night!

Your comments keep me sane and motivated, so tell me what you think.
Dinner With A Friend

Chapter Summary

It's A Date!

Chapter Notes

It has been nearly four months since I started writing this under the foolish assumption I could keep up both the update speed and quality, while balancing plot and fluff like some kind of wizard. Guess that teaches me to temper my ambition a little better next time. Haha!

But seriously, if you've stuck with my madness up to this point (poor Korra, I'm so sorry) this is for you.

And the girls. They've earned it, too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything was going terribly.

“No, no, no, no,” Korra chanted as smoke billowed from her stove. The bread was ruined now. All she'd wanted to do was leave it in long enough to warm up a little and… “Damn it!”

Blackened beyond salvation. She only stepped out for a minute. How could it have happened so fast? Well, it was dog food now, along with her first attempt at the stew, which had ended up so salty she could have pickled with it.

This had been destined for disaster from the start. Korra didn't cook, never even tried. Her breakfasts tended to consist of boiled eggs and stale toast with whatever preserve happened to be in season. Lunch had been a rare luxury until the last few weeks, and when she had managed it, they had been rushed and unsatisfying. And suppers?

The only reason she was still alive was because her cleaner, Ms. Jones, would always leave her something proper cooked and on the stove. Depending on the time she got back from the station, the Inspector often just scarfed it down cold without bothering to think about what it was. A disrespect to such a kind effort, perhaps, but the best thanks she could give was some complimentary words in passing.

Thankfully, after an almost comedic number of mistakes, most of the rest was coming together. The potatoes had taken her a total of three tries, nearly reducing her to tears at one point due to their infuriating ability to move from undercooked to dry as a bone in all of about thirty seconds. The vegetables had been a bit of a mixed bag, as well. Shops and markets were crowded with the coming of the weekend and the snow had made the pickings even slimmer than usual.

Dessert, had actually been the one thing she hadn't manage to balls up, and that was only because she had bartered for it. A bread-and-butter pudding straight from Pema's own kitchen, all for the low price of helping to move some furniture about in preparation for some gathering she had
planned.

A finger dipped into her second go at the broth. “Mmm,” the amateur chef hummed as she brought it to her lips. Not as good as Katara used to make, but still, by far the best thing to come off her hob in years.

That's following the recipe proper, she supposed.

Check the clock. *Ten minutes.*

Heart pounds in her chest. Nervous nausea tickles her gut.

The spare loaf she picked up on the way home is retrieved from the pantry. So much for having a second for breakfast, tomorrow.

Another glance. *Seven minutes.*

Enough time to fix her hair in the mirror in the hall. Steam from the pot had kept it damper than she'd have liked, but it did make it easier to fix the strands that had fallen out of place. *One. Two. Three. Four of them.*

Briefly, she regretted her decision not to wear makeup. Not that she had all that much to begin with. A few things her mother had sent a few months back in a care-package, some paints in the Locked-Room that would flip her stomach, even now, if used for such a trivial thing as dressing up. Even if it was for Asami.

*Could have bought some?* that nagging presence suggested, echoing through her chaotic thoughts as a ripple of calm.

Hah. It probably would have just ended up like last time. The scent of singed hair filled the hurried preparer's nose to join the myriad of flavors wafting through her home, from the triumphant to the mildly tragic. Curse her memory and it's ability to torture her.

Even so, she had done one thing to brighten her appearance. Going so far as to smuggle them out of her office, deep in one of her jacket's more seclude pockets. The blue ivory made her look almost a decade younger. If it weren't for the vaguely haunted look in her eyes and the bags beneath them, she could have passed for that lonely girl who'd jumped ship that day, so very long ago.

The style still suited her, bangs and ponytail reminding her of a happier, if far less fulfilling, time.

**Knock, Knock!**

Ah! She'd waited too long, absorbed in thoughts of things far less important. Muscle, mind, heart screamed at each other about what to do. Heart wanted to melt into a puddle right here, desperate to protect itself. Muscle wished to sprint the short distance to the door, throw it open, and take Asami into a fierce hug. Mind, Korra's greatest ally in situations like this, urged calm. *It's just a door. Open it. What will be, will be.*

Another rap on the door as she reaches it, more hesitant than before. Fingers close on cold metal. *Deep breath. Smile.*

That part would be easy, at least.

A cold blast of wind accompanied the opening of the door, helping to hide the nervous shakes
racking Korra's body. Even dressed for the weather, Asami managed to take her breath away and leave her mind scrambling for words.

“Hi there,” she greeted, taking in the lovely sight whilst simultaneously scolding herself on the lackluster performance of her creative brain. Really? I'm about to… and the best I can come up with is “Hi there”?

A familiar overcoat concealed much of her crush's attire, apart from the very fringes of her (once again red) dress. The hat atop her head was equally known to the detective, having been a common fixture of her outfit on the colder days. Lips and eyes were dressed just a tad more than usual, drawing the eye to them and away from the two bound packages tucked under one arm.

“H-hey,” the beauty shivered, eagerly entering the warm interior of her home after dusting most of the excess flakes off her shoulders. “Sorry I'm late, but I saw this in a shop window on my way here and thought you might like it.”

“Oh, thanks,” Korra accepted, taking the more ambiguously shaped package she was offered with one hand while closing the door with the other. Didn't know they were exchanging presents. Now she felt bad not getting one. And those chocolates had looked so good, too. “You really didn't have to.”

“Consider it a thanks for taking me on that trip,” her guest said, slowly removing her outer layers and hooking them on the rack with the rest. They'd have to worry about how to get her home without freezing to death later. “I needed the time away from work.”

Looked like she wasn't going to be keeping that coat, after all.

The unassuming rectangle was weightier than she expected. Wrapped in plain brown paper and tied with string, the contents were rather obvious just by the look of the thing. A book. A thick book.

“Don't mention it,” the Avatar dismissed with a smile.

“Aren't you going to open it?” Asami asked pointing at the parcel now under Korra's arm.

“Uh?” she looked at the present. Fingertips strummed the string like a guitar, the urge to fidget growing as anxiety set in. The wafting smell of smoke decided for her. “Be right back!”

“Wait, what?” her guest asked as she readied herself to save what little of dinner there was left. Setting her gift carefully on the entry table, the host jogged for the kitchen. “Feel free to take a look around!” she shouted over her shoulder as she came upon the disaster scene that was her kitchen. The fire, she'd forgotten to put the fire out!

Crap, crap, crap! Korra chanted as she wrapped a cloth around her hand to keep from scalding herself. The pot had boiled over, some of the liquid within meeting with orange flame below, unleashing the stench of burning meat and spices. “I can't leave you alone for five minutes, really?” she demanded, staring daggers at the liquid that dared to threaten her plans.

The pot merely bubbled indifferently, giving the Avatar the distinct impression she was going slightly mad.

“Something smells good,” a voice remarked from the hall. Spinning from her frantic damage control, Korra caught sight of Asami poking her head through the door. “Wow! You weren't lying about not cooking very often, were you? This place is a mess.”
It was a habit, one she had been trying to avoid tonight, but the string of muttered grumbles actually helped speed the process of getting things together. Slowly, she mended the supper she had slaved over for close to three hours, enjoying (and sometimes hating) the little tips tossed her way. Winter greens were tossed and mixed, roasted vegetables added to the potatoes for flavor, bread properly warmed.

“You know, if this police thing doesn't work out, you might just have a future as a chef, Princess,” the impatient and gloating heiress said, peaking over the laborer's shoulder to observe the end result of her efforts. Never mind that she was leaning so close. Too close.

Raava, she could probably hear how her heart was about to tear itself out of her chest. Feel the heat of her skin as she glowed bright. Why was she making this so hard?

The presence was gone in an instant. A rush of wind and clacking of heels on hardwood as the taller woman withdrew. Chancing a flick of her eyes, Korra caught a glimpse of pink cheeks and wide eyes.

That did not help things. Rather the adorable look on her face, coupled with her only reasonable assumption as to the cause, led to the Inspector to nearly lay her errant hand directly on the hob. “Hey, uh, this is gonna take a few minutes to get together, so, if you want to, y'know?” she offered again, desperately hoping for her to accept. In the past few moments she had managed to completely forget her game-plan for the night.

“Yeah, sure,” Asami nodded, edging towards the exit. Not for an instant did she take her eyes off Korra's face, particularly her own flush. A flash of something that looked strangely, terrifyingly, like recognition. “I think I should wash up, anyway. Do you mind pointing the way to the bathroom?”

“Take a left, last door on the right.”

“Thanks.”

“Don't mention it.”

Without a sound, she was left to her cooking and her panicked thoughts. A thousand different routes threatened her mind, all ending with some flub or screw up on her part.

_Breath._

It had been days since she had resolved herself to this, was she really going to let herself back out now? Just because the mere sight of her recent acquaintance made her mouth go dry, words turning to dust on her tongue? She was Avatar Korra, damnit! If there was one thing she never did, that was back down from a challenge. People kept telling her it was a problem, for some reason.

All she had to do was follow her mother and Aunt Kya's advice. Be herself, don't over-think things (no matter how hard that might be), and don't give into doubt.

In silence, the impromptu cook made the finishing touches. Garnish was added to each dish, settled carefully in their serving dishes. The nearly unused table in the dining room had already been set in the interim that led to her first loaf of bread being ruined. Glasses, forks, knives, plates, and bowls all obsessively arranged and rearranged so they would be just right.

It all had to be perfect.

“Wow, that looks good,” Asami remarked, once again managing to sneak up on her. Hopefully,
that wouldn't become another one of her habits.

“Thanks,” Korra replied, proud of her accomplishment. The return of her companion proved timely, coinciding perfectly with the finishing touches on her arrangement. “What did you bring to drink?”

The other woman smiled at her deduction, but didn't ask how she managed it. There were only so many things that took the shape of a bottle, after all. Let alone one with such a distinctive shape. “Thought I'd switch it up and brought Spanish,” she revealed, pulling the bottle from it's paper sheath and setting it on the end of the table.

Another full-bodied red, to be expected of her taste. And Korra's, frankly.

Alongside this expected gift, the unexpected one appears again. The book, bedecked in twine, prodding at her curiosity.

As though sensing her thoughts, Asami pushed the item towards her. “Do you have time to open this now?” she asked with a friendly smile.

It took only a moment of thought for her to decide. “Why not?”

The deference the Avatar gave the package was far greater than that she had given the crockery. Like a precious piece of evidence, it was sugar glass in her fingers, a heavy breath may damage the contents within.

Nimble fingers undid the bow in a flash before gently unfolding the paper. Even before the entire cover had been revealed, Korra felt an amused grin start to split her face. All she had needed was half a name to understand the meaning: *Melville. She bought me Moby-Dick*.

“Why, Miss Sato, I do believe I'm being made fun of,” the thoroughly entertained woman said, giving the woman that had terrified her just moment's before her best 'really' look.

“Maybe,” she admitted, shrugging off the accusation, “Just a little.”

A first-edition of the novel had long been one of her most treasured reads growing up. Cover to cover it had been skimmed until the pages were held together more by friction than actual attachment.

“Why did **this** book make you think of me?” the royal inquired, checking the inside of the cover for any message. She found it crammed into one small corner, close to the spine. If she had held her thumb the wrong way she might have covered it. A simple A.S. to K.W. written in tight feminine script.

A soft sigh escaped her friend as her expression took on a more sympathetic, almost pitying look. “I worry about you,” she said, plainly.

A pang of guilt struck her. It hadn't been what she was expecting. This was supposed to be a happy moment. “You don't have to-”

“Korra,” Asami cut off, smile growing thin as her eyes roamed more freely about her face, “you don't look like you've slept since Sunday. Last time you looked like that, one of your friends had died. Are you okay?”

*Put on a brave face. Smile for her. “I've just been a little busy, that's all,” she lied. It wasn't the night for all that.*
To her fortune, her guest appeared to be just as averse to having the conversation head in that direction, choosing, instead, to head in the other direction. “Well, you're not busy now,” the woman that shown in the darkness pointed out, “and I haven't eaten lunch, since my meal ticket was too busy to tear me from my office. So, how about we do something about settling that debt, huh?”

With an empty belly and slightly measured hopes, Korra sat at the table. Butterflies curbed her appetite. Every meeting of their eyes made the prospect of eating a more daunting prospect. A slight dampness around the edge of the cheeks and a fading of the previously exquisitely applied makeup betrayed the reason for her companion's trip to the loo.

Washed her face as well as her hands. A sign of nervousness.

Well, at least she wasn't the only one.

Each took their turn to serve themselves a sampling of what was on offer, neither truly taking full portion of anything. “How was your week?” the investigator asked as she ladled broth over her vegetable mix.

“Pretty busy,” the other woman nodded, giving a light treatment to her greens with the garlic infused oil Pema had recommended. “Getting the new production lines up and running at the new place was a pain, especially since half of the machine tools have managed to go missing, somehow. Three emergency shareholder meetings, which are always fun to sit through. Oh, and I had to pull together a big order for Cabbage Corp at the last minute 'cause dad was out of town, again. Just up and left without telling his secretary or anybody else.”

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“A minute that stretched on forever took hold. In the awkward silence, the Avatar chose to occupy herself with opening the wine sat lonesomely at the end of the table.

And thus, the first gaff of the night began.

Too much pressure on her yank, a slip of the knee, and all of her dinner set was sent flying. A plate crashed into a shower of tiny slivered pottery. Ruined winter greens littered the floor. Tablecloth was stained.

T'was nothing serious, really. Just a minor mishap to be laughed off.

In fact, it helped break the tension. Set a more lively tone for their discussion. Asami teased and laughed, Korra grumbled, before, inevitably, joining in with the fun. This same tone helped the Inspector when she was asked to relay the contents of her week to the eager audience. A highly edited and abridged version, to be sure, but it was consumed with the same vigor of her darker, or more intimate, anecdotes of the past.
Firstly, was her utterly wasted trip to those strange lands across the Thames, going so far as the very edges of Croydon, tracking down all the names and places Mr. Sullivan had divulged unto her. Many of them had proven impossible to find, lost in the Great Wen. It had been worse than H-Division, in many ways, as she had the added disadvantages of a lack of authority and name recognition with being outside her regular beat. Her name and reputation may have been well known to those that read certain 'papers', or those that she had either helped or hunted over the years, but one hadn't go to far afield before interest in her waned, significantly.

Still, Asami's opinions on the excursion had been rather amusing, if not truly relevant to the progression. Every time the storyteller had mentioned a crossroads or landmark a pause was taken to ask if she had stopped in some workshop or another that made some little do dad that had caught her attention as it passed her desk.

That or the rare restaurant recommendation in the more affluent neighborhoods, which Korra did mentally take note of.

The Inspector hadn't an answer for her, other than: “I was working, sorry.”

Her efforts in Whitechapel and Stepney were equally relayed. Breaking down doors in abandoned tenant blocks to no avail, aside from a sore foot at the end of the day. The gentle work of coaxing out information from those that had it and were willing to share, for a price. And the great coup of disrupting a plot to ambush Constables sent to a number of false calls in some of the darker and less friendly corners of H-Division.

Those culprits had eluded her net, seemingly disappearing into the very woodwork of the city once corner. But, they had left her breadcrumbs to follow. Discarded weapons, torn articles of clothing, and a single cracked mask of a similar, though not identical, style as the first message she had been handed.

They laughed, made jokes, flirted a bit. Or rather, Asami did what Korra desperately hoped was flirting while the foreigner blushed and flubbed her responses. One of the stand out exchanges went:

“I like the way you've done your hair. It really brings out how pretty your eyes are,” the heiress said, eyes wandering over her face a little slower than Korra thought she normally did. Not that she kept count. That would be weird.

“Thanks. I remembered you liked them,” the host replied, running her finger along the old bone. Fond memories flooded through her of a kind old woman with white hair and a keen wit. “My teacher made them for me when I was a kid. Kept them with me ever since.”

“Wow,” Asami remarked, setting her spoon down to look a the jewelry a little closer, “I can't imagine keeping anything my teachers gave me. You two must've been pretty close.”

“Yeah,” she agreed, remembering hugging her so tight when she decided to leave. It had been the one time she'd really had to hold back tears. Lying to her parents had been rather easy, honestly, if only so they wouldn't try to stop her. But not her Aamaq. Because Katara knew. She always knew. “I guess she was more like my grandma, than anything.”

“That's really sweet.” And so was her smile.

So much so that everything faded from her mind as she focused on it. Plump lips of ruby-red, brimming with an infective happiness and restraining all that sass that drove the Avatar wild.
What she wouldn't give to feel them against her own, just once.

Wait. How long had she been staring?

Quick, she had to think of a response. Return the compliment. “I like-” *The way your eyes are so stunning that they're the last thing I see when I fall asleep? How you're somehow the smartest, funniest person in the world? When your hips move while you walk in a way that makes me want to melt? “Your necklace. It's really beautiful.”

“Thank you,” Asami accepted with a laugh, before making her much smoother rebound.

And thus it went. Back and forth they traded complements and short snippets of their lives. Asami had been particularly keen on Korra's infrequent assistance of Opal at the theater. Apparently, she had been quite consumer of the craft in her college days, only tailing off as the trials of her employment picked up.

It had been at this point, at the climax of her enjoyment, right when her ego had built itself, that the second mistake of the night was brought to their attention. Smoke billowed into the dining room, caustic smell of fire erupting from the only possible source.

The kitchen.

Thusly, dessert had been ruined in much the same manner as the loaf before it. Forgotten, abandoned to burn in the unforgiving heat of her stove while she enjoyed herself.

Then came the burn to her hand as she tried, desperately, to salvage even a tiny piece of the pudding. Follow that up with the ten minutes she had to spend dressing it, only to run out of bandage and be forced to tie an old towel around her makeshift work.

Worst had been the simple shrug she had gotten while she explained her mistakes. “It's no big deal,” Asami had told her, “I don't think I could eat anymore, anyways.”

It hadn't stopped her from apologizing, again. Even as they retired to the sitting room with drinks in hand, so as to be closer to the roaring fire that had been built there, Korra continued to make offers of a quick trip to grab some manner of replacement, getting turned down every time.

“Korra, I get what you're trying to do, and it's very sweet,” the woman with which the detective had grown so enamored soothed, patting her leg as they sat on the sofa facing the crackling light. “But, you really don't have to do that. It's dark and snowing outside, and don't tell me that you're used to it, just because you're from up North. Dinner was great, honestly, so stop thinking so much about it.”

Stop thinking, she says. An impossible task, if ever there was one.

Each time she'd tried to figure out a way to broach the subject, the words had died in her mouth. Often, never even getting that far. How was she supposed to tell Asami how she felt? Kya had made it sound so simple in her letter. Basically the same, her ass.

_Ugh! Why is this so hard!? “I-I just wanted everything to be perfect,” she grumbled, fists clenching around her pants, pulling the fabric so taught it was a wonder it didn't sheer.

“You keep saying that,” Asami nodded, still with that infuriating smile on her face. So cute, so confident. “That's all you've said for the last five minutes.”

“I know. It's just,” Korra repeated, trying to find the right way of saying what needed to be.
“There's something I need to tell you and I just, ya' know?”

A blush bloomed on the socialite's ears as she swirled the wine in her glass, suddenly very engaged in the way the liquid swished about in it's confines. “Yeah,” she agreed calmly. “I know, alright.”

All through the night, apart from her brief withdrawal in the kitchen, Asami had seemed rather set on something. It was obvious in her face, her voice, everything. Just the tiniest moment's of hesitation between topics. Something, Raava knew what, had been stuck in her head just as firmly as Korra's commitment to herself. But, for whatever reason, she had proven even more unreadable today than usual. The clockwork behind her eyes was all but shrouded, kept hidden away behind lock and key.

“Hey, can you fill my glass for me?” Asami asked, the barest bones of a plan appearing before her. As she reached for the mostly empty bottle, Korra tried to figure out why. Both to pass the time and focus on anything other than her blubbering attempts at a confession. It was closer to her companion by an easy foot, requiring the detective to lean over her legs to reach the vessel.

Not that she really minded that aspect.

Things became clearer as she moved. While one shifted, so did the other and when they returned to the start the pair were but inches apart.

“Um?” the Inspector blushed, stunned by the sudden closeness. “G-glass?"

“Hm?"

“Y-your glass,” she repeated, sloshing the bottle in an ineffective attempt at breaking eye contact. So deep, so happy, with that faintest note of mystery hidden in the depths.

“First, tell me what you want to say.” The smile was audible in her voice. A clever smile from a clever woman. She can almost taste it.

No, not taste. Mouth goes dry, mind goes blank. Words in half a dozen languages suggest themselves: native and foreign. None seemed to stick. “W-well, I wanted to tell you that, I mean, we've been spending a lot of time together.” Spit it out, already. It's not that hard. It took you five seconds with him. “And I wanted you to know that I, uh-"

Asami wasn't him, though. She was warm and kind, untainted by her world. And that sadness behind her eyes. The one she only ever saw when Asami assumed she wasn't looking.

“I wanted to tell you that...”

The obsidian-haired beauty sighed as she trailed off again. Perfect features morphed into a displeased half-grimace. With an eye roll that made the Inspector feel several different emotions in quick succession, the lady set her glass on the table, only adding to the confused morass in a racing mind.

“Christ, I hope this works,” echoed a whisper she wasn't entirely sure she was supposed to hear. Long, lightly calloused fingers gripped her chin, turning and holding her head in a position that...

She couldn't be?

“What are you doing?” her hushed question as she drew near.
Was this a dream?

It had to be. Nothing else made sense.

“Hush.” An order, enforced with a single finger being placed over her mouth. Only to be replaced by something far better.

Soft lips pressed into hers. They tasted of sunshine, cherries, and roses with the faintest hint of the wine they had been enjoying. Breath escaped her lungs in an instant. Thought soon followed, along with worry, doubt, and all the pesky little troubles of the world. The room, her work, Jack, Amon all seemed to melt away like the last snow of spring.

All was bliss.

The world was calm serenity as Korra floated on a castle in the sky, nothing able to harm her.

A sudden gasp broke the air as one of them inhaled but Korra wasn't quite sure which. It felt so good. She was so good, gentle. Softer than sort, warmer than warm. Hope kindled in her chest that this moment would never end.

And then, just as soon as it started, it broke.

*What the fuck!?* Korra screamed inside her skull as the pleasure faded. Neurons fired, thoughts shot around her head like bullets. What had just happened?

“This,” the gorgeous, amazing, infuriating, brilliant woman whose lips were still mere inches away began, the smile audible on her lips, “what were you trying to say?”

Damn it, brain! Work! Make words, now! “ᓇᒡᓕᒋᕙᒋᑦ (asavakkit)” the stunned foreign royal blurted. *Not that word!*

“Huh?”

*Right, English!* “I think I love you!” she repeated in a language both of them could understand.

Seconds ticked by and her friend drew back a little more. Far enough for Korra to get a look at her entire face. Her ruby lips were just slightly smudged, a visible reminder of their kiss. On the other hand, the color had paled completely out of her cheeks, quickly rushing back in as a burning red. Almost as red as she felt. Whether it was due to her own actions or Korra's, the detective really couldn't tell.

Then, like the breaking of dawn, a smile.

What a lovely smile.

“Good,” she giggled, resting a hand atop one of her hosts now relaxed fists. “Because, that would have been really weird if you were going to tell me, basically, anything else.”

The Inspector returned the laugh, although, it lacked the musical quality that Asami's had. Frankly, it was more a stunned response than one of joy. Turning her palm, she let their fingers mingle, slipping right into their natural positions. “So,” she softly reasoned in as measured a voice as she could manage, “I'm guessing, what with the whole kissing me, and not running off into the night screaming 'Pervert!' when I told you that I like you, you like me, too?”

“I think the word you used was 'love','” the genius reminded her with a more teasing grin, before
quickly following with a firm: “Yes, Korra, I do 'like' you.”

“Great!” Raava, damn it, brain! WORK!

More amused laughter from soft crimson lips, followed by a calm sigh. “So, what do we do now?” the raven-haired heiress asked, softly, posing a most interesting query.

“I don't know.”

Korra's chest hurt with the stress of her heartbeat. Heavy thuds as her panic continued to resonate, only slowly allowing itself to unwind. But, with each second that ticked by, life slowed down even more, practically to a crawl.

To her surprise, the snails pace didn't seem to bother her. Her mind tended to crave stimulation, action, a new challenge to overcome. Whether that be a case, a book, breaking a personal record at some minor task, Korra had always felt the urge to push for something more. The next thing to allay her boredom.

But in this moment, sat next to her, she didn't feel that way.

This was enough.

“We should probably figure that out, huh?” Asami pressed, snuggling closer to Korra and letting her eyes drift closed.

With a nod, the Avatar agreed softly, “I guess so.”

A yawn carried itself from her guest, quickly spreading to her own lips. “Can it wait til morning?” the woman chuckled, picking at a loose thread on Korra's shirt. The absent fiddling had a few other, minor effects as fingers inevitably slipped from their mark, brushing against things not the target, but not all that unpleasant, either.

“Sure thing, 'Sami,” the host obliged. Accidental groping aside, she wouldn't mind putting things off for a while longer.

The silence lacked tension. It was opportunity to collect and sort through her thoughts. The errant and unrelated were shuffled to the side, to be examined at a later date. That which she deemed of some import were run through, examined, then dismissed in proper order.

Soon, they had all been removed, leaving only three things truly relevant to the moment: the kiss, to be replayed on repeat for her enjoyment; the relief, of her confession (bungled though it may have been) and at the immediate reciprocation; a gentle flutter in her heart, singing in her ears.

Love. It felt good to know it, again. Wholesome and new. Fresh in her heart.

It was she who broke the silence. A question had forced it's way through the calm sea of she had cultivated, demanding to be answered, even if it ruined the placidity. Reluctantly, the Inspector obliged, if only from habit. “How did you know?”

“Hmm?”

“How did you know what I was going to say?”

“Korra,” she sighed, leaning her head affectionately on the investigator's shoulder, “you are many things: a wonderful storyteller, beautiful, and one of the smartest people I know. But, there’s one
thing you're terrible at.”

“Hmm?” the Avatar hummed, struggling to keep from buzzing at the not so gentle stroking of her ego. And other things.

“Hiding how you feel.”

“Hehehe, yeah,” the chestnut-haired woman agreed, “I've heard that.”

Another pause, only this time without the wine to occupy them. Not that Korra needed it. The soft scent that wafted into her nose with every breath was just as enjoyable an experience. Sweet soap and perfume, the tiniest whiff of oil and grease, and something rather foreign to her. Citrus of some kind. Lemon, maybe?

Curls of hair tickled her nose, the gentle sound of breathing mingling with the sounds of the fire to make a melody so very calming. Normal.

All the anxiety, all the fear and apprehension, was gone.

T'was not as euphoric as that kiss had been. Not charged with surprise and weeks of fantasy and desire.

Still, it had a similar effect. This closeness. This knowing. It was something to anchor to. A single, rocky truth in the rolling sea of uncertainties that had become her life. She did not know Jack or Amon, though her suspicions about the later had firmed somewhat this week, but she knew Asami. Could touch her, wrap her arm around her.

“This is a big deal, isn't it?” the snuggler pointed out, pulling one of Korra's blankets over them, signaling her intent to stay put for the time being. “Two women 'liking' each other.”

“Yeah, it is,” she concurred.

“Doesn't really feel like it, though.”

“Not really. Feels right.” What happened to letting it wait until morning? Lips hesitantly pressed into a pale forehead, simply to see if they could. A tiny part of her still insisted this must be a dream. That she would awaken at any moment and all this would fade into oblivion. “Being with you.”

“It's not like we can just walk around kissing each other in public, though,” the local fretted, starting to fidget almost as much as Korra generally did. “Christ, my father would probably kill me if he ever found out I fell for you. I'm a little surprised, too, if I'm honest. Never really thought about, you know, until you-”

“Accused you of murder?” she offered in an attempt at humor that fell flatter than she'd like.

“Stop it,” the other woman scolded with a light elbow to the side. “Well, what do you think?”

“I already said: I don't know,” the Inspector repeated, mind whirring once again. “Strictly speaking, we won't be doing anything illegal.”

“Well that's comforting,” Asami snorted, pointing out that a trip to court was hardly the most important thing that could happen. “I'm sure that makes it all perfectly fine for them to announce this in The Sun, then. I can see it now: Foreign Royal Corrupts Rogue Heiress Into Illicit Affair! Makes for a pretty catchy headline.”
“Hush,” Korra chided in return. “It’s important.”

“Your ruining the moment, Princess.” Face turned to they were bare inches apart once more. Too beautiful, too close, too hard to resist.

“So’re you,” she pointed out with a smile.

“We should probably do something about that.”

“I think I know just the perfect thing,” Korra suggested, cupping a gossamer soft cheek with her fingers and leaning in.

Another explosion as they met, longer and more passionate this time. A hand clutched the back of her neck, the other ending up on her hip. This was dangerous, she realized, moving so fast when they had just confessed, just met, in all honesty. Such affairs rarely ended with happy ending, to her knowledge. But it felt like she was making up for lost time. Like this was something she had wanted, no, needed for years.

This kiss.

This Woman.

This love.

For there was no other word for this crazy thing she felt for this strange and glorious creature she had been chanced to meet by mutual misfortune. The Spirits had always moved in mysterious ways, though.

“We're so fucked, aren't we?” Asami sighed as they broke apart when the need to breath forced them to.

“Definitely.”

Fucked or not, Korra couldn't feel more content than she did in this moment. As their lips met for the third of what she hoped would be many times, she felt a degree of surety in her belly. This had been a night she would remember for the rest of her life.

It had ended perfectly, and no one could ever take that away from her.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope you enjoyed the pay off to all the mental nonsense I've put Korra through. It's been a long road here, much longer than I intended, but this darn convoluted plot of mine kept getting in the way. Speaking of, it'll be more plot next time. Specifically, what some of H-Division is getting up to while the girls are being happy. How dare they! And yes, I am setting four entire chapters in one day. It wasn't an accident in dating the last chapter, at all. Why do you ask? BTW, is there a tag I should be adding for this chapter? I'm really bad a that.
Mr. Edmund Reid Takes a Walk

Chapter Summary

While the young laugh and play, old dogs fight and long for days of old.

Chapter Notes

Enough of this happy shit. Y'all need some misery in your lives. Also, the first chapter where none of Team Avatar show up. Hope you enjoy, despite that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stretching his legs felt good. Never had taken too kindly to desk work, especially when the pain was acting up.

It had been acting up a lot recently. He'd told his wife it was just the cold. Winter was always a good excuse, both for himself and others. Easier than talking, at least. More than two decades and it was still the first thing people asked him about. The little lady knew enough not to ask, even if she had placed the biggest bet in the office pool on her first day upstairs.

But, on a night like this, he wished for that kind of simple aggravation. Petty and innocent. Quickly dismissed with a few biting words.

The cold, on the other hand, wasn't so easily turned away.

“How do ya' figure that?”

“Because, any sane man would be at home with his wife and children on a night like this,” his loyal companion argued, pointedly, taking a discreet look down an alley as they passed. “Not out roaming the streets like a couple fools half their age.”

A smile creased the Kentish born's cheeks. He had forgotten it was a holiday. “Then I guess we should tell that lot,” he said, nodding his head back at the pack who had taken to tailing them for the last few blocks. Ducking around corners, doubling back, splitting up only to meet back up after a hundred feet. Amateurs. Utter amateurs. About as good at tailing as he was at tailoring. “Unless you want them to suffer along with us?”

“Let the young make their own mistakes,” the Jew hummed like some wise proverb.

The thugs weren't who he was looking for, but hopefully they were following his orders. This 'Lieutenant', his fellow Army man. For he had to be a soldier. The tactics weren't those of a Fish.
Nor the swordplay. Those lads loved their lovely cutlasses, with their slashing blades and deep cuts. Caught up in tradition when the times had clearly passed them by.

Well, it happened to everyone, eventually.

But where was he trying to corral them? Why hadn't his trap sprung?

The answer appeared out of the darkness. One of the group having split off from his comrades to run ahead and cut them off. Better, this was better. A degree of intelligent thought shining through their dullness.

Perhaps, a reward for the effort was warranted?

With a finger, he pointed them down the next turn. “Let's take 'em somewhere private like,” the scruffy-faced northerner instructed.

With a frosty breath, the old breed moved as one. At a decent clip, to be sure, but slow enough to be easily followed. Dead muscle protested the sudden acceleration. Bones that had seen too many years creaked. Oh, to be young again, with all that vim and vigor. When the world still seemed ideal.

Deep into the bowels they would lead them, far from prying eyes. Find themselves a bottleneck. Where numbers would hinder rather than help in case of pitched battle. Fortune willing that would draw their true quarry out from his hiding place. If he was any manner of true tactician he'd be watching the officer's every move, at this point. Hunting. Stalking. Waiting for the most opportune moment to pull tight the snare, when the advantage was all his. Like a wolf amongst the urban sheep.

Too bad for him, Reid was no sheep. He had the thickest hide and sharpest teeth.

Years may have dulled his eyes and aim a tad, but an old War Dog never truly lost it's bite. The Empire's service had seen to that. Drill and training. Experience and time.

“How many of 'em do ya' suppose there are?” he inquired, reaching into his breast for his revolver. It's touch brought back memory, as it always did. Flashes of places he wished to be burned from his mind, people he was loath to recall.

“Three I believe, perhaps four,” his old friend wheezed, already winded. Too much tender care from his wife, making him soft. Not that his Emily was any better for him on that front.

“Think they'll be in the mood ta' talk?” he asked, coming to a stop at a seemingly opportune spot.

The walls were high and windowless on either side, yet they weren't so far from the road that the patrol wouldn't hear them. All they really needed was to last fifteen minutes until the pair of constables would pass, likely ending any true threat that may be imposed by interlopers. Longer than he would like, but perfectly manageable.

“Somehow, I doubt it, Edmund,” Stuart sighed, readying his walking stick.

Among the swirling ice, the thugs arrived. Three of them: one tall, one broad, one hardly a man. In their fists naught but a single blade between them. To use such pitiful decoys...

Had he no honor at all? “Evenin', lads,” he greeted with faux cheer so as to catch them off guard. The hand on his pistol fell to his waist, gripping the handle of his bludgeon. It would make for cleaner work “What can we we do for ya' on such a blustery night?”
“Indeed, gentlemen, I'm sure any business you have with us could be settled back at the station.”

His partner began to swing his staff in that peculiar way he did, even as he tried diplomacy. Both intimidating and entrancing.

“I don't think so, copper,” the tall man coughed, his lungs likely riddled with soot and smog from years plying the street.

“Yeah, ya' see, a bloke paid us a nice bit a' coin ta' get you pair in here,” the broad one agreed, twirling his blade and trying to look more intimidating than he was. He was even shorter than the boy, maybe a few inches shorter than Reid's own not not considerable height. “Didn't say what he wanted us ta' do when we did, but, I think we can guess.”

Sliding his hand down his weapon so the hefty brass handle took the leading edge of his sudden swipe, Steinman made his move. “I sure hope he gave you a hefty sum,” he said as the hammer like metal collided with the blade wielding youngster's jaw, sending up a shower of spittle, blood, and teeth. “Because, I'm really not in the mood to deal with a couple of pissants, like yourselves.”

“Why, you!” the tall man barked raising a fist, only to receive a nasty blow to the throat as a reply. He gasped, falling back while clutching his windpipe. In his stead, a new challenger arose. The whippersnapper returned, with a vengeance. Glinting fairylight danced on his blade as he made wild slashes in the winter air, hitting naught but snowflakes.

“Edmund!”

“On it!” Out came the billy club. A foot and some of hardened oak, baring Her Majesties seal. Perfect for these tight quarters.


Over in an instant.


Another foe dealt with.

What of his partners? One had seemingly fled already, clutching at his throat and struggling to draw breath, no doubt. That left the big talker. Would he attack? Where was his bravado, now?

Not in him, it seemed. Stocky, broad, and not worth his pay. At least he was loyal. Arms hooked under his wounded compatriot's shoulders, hauling him into a somewhat upright posture. The young man's eyes lolled in his head, dazed and unfocused. Quick as they could drag themselves, the bait backtracked to the open street.

The noncombatant swore his profanity laced revenge, shaking a scuff free fist.

“Should we go after them?” the taller of the two old timers wondered, leaning upon his cane, once more, now that their tail had been forced off. Sweat was beaded on his brow. They were getting too old, too slow. Bones and joints protesting at labors that would have seemed trivial just a few years before.

Reid shook his head. Something felt off, he could feel it in his bones a forth set of eyes boring into him from down the alley. Fingers gripped down on his baton white-knuckle tight, other hand reaching for his gun. “Someone's coming.”
Through the darkness, raised voices. A sudden clash of metal. One, solitary scream. A pair of thuds, heavy and wet on fallen snow.

The smell of blood.

Out of the swirling white, he came, sword in hand. Dripping from it's tip, essence of crimson. The lifeblood of the boy and the big man, perhaps even the pencil.

A shift beside him as his old friend resumed his defensive posture. “Am I right to assume you are the one that hired those gentlemen to attack us?” the Sergeant suggested, eyes narrowing in disgust. He had a low opinion of those that turned on their allies, let alone outright attacking them.

“What of it?” the mystery man replied, lifting his head. Now he got a better look at him. Thick mustache, thin nose, narrowed eyes. Not a white man, not entirely. He had a touch of the foreign blood in him. Canton maybe, or Ghurka?

Likely his mother. How many officers had he known, back in the old days, that had local wives or mistresses? Too many of the latter, but he didn't seem the product of such a disgraceful union. There was a pride in the way he held himself. A very British pride.

A very English one. High and haughty, looking down on all those around him like some form of insect. A true gentleman.

But, it was dulled in him. By life or trauma. He had cause to regret, but not dismiss.

This was him. This was… “Evenin', Lieutenant,” Reid bowed, giving deference to his fellow officer. As his father had once told him, it's always best to be polite to a man who's just slit another's throat, lest he slit yours as well. “I see you've come to turn yourself in. I thank you for saving me the trouble of hunting you down.”

“I doubt this is the time for jokes,” his partner softly relayed, tense sweat dripping from his brow. The stick he wielded moved to counter the swaying blade with it's savage cut.


“Hold on there, laddie,” Reid cautioned, raising his revolver so it was leveled at the murderer's chest. “Let's not do somethin' we're all gonna regret, eh?”

Eyes focus on the barrel, cold and calculating. “Put that toy away, Captain,” the man sneered, a thin smile pursing his lips. So, he at least was known to this man. How much of his reputation had been relayed to him was yet to be seen. Even if it was just a cursory, this was a bold man to approach him, backup or no.

“'fraid I can't do that.”

Shift. Step. He launches himself, blade first towards them.

Idiot. He'd die a reckless fool.

Pull. Click!

“Damn!”

Misfire. No time for a second shot. All it was now was a glorified club with all the weight on the wrong end.
Still, metal was metal. Easier to meet steel with steel.

Their weapons meet with a clang. Gun against blade. Step in, don't let him disengage. Keep inside his reach. Limit his movement, eliminate advantage, pressure him onto the back foot. Press. Fight! **Kill!**

With the tip of his club, Reid jabbed up into the base of the man's sternum. Wind puffed out of him in cloud of steam, spraying the Inspector's eyes with spittle. Couldn't see. Could feel, though. Feel the sting as his grip slipped and a sharp edge dug into his fingers and shoulder.

“Raagh!” he fought through the pain, launching his opponent back in hopes of gaining distance. One shot and this was over.

**Click!**

*Shit!*

Again, the blade came down, slicing through the air like it soon would his skull. A dull thunk as it was intercepted by the walking stick. Metal bit deep into the wood. So deep the 'Lieutenant' failed to extricate it immediately. A better chance he might not get. Wheeling back, the Kentish transplant swung his cudgel with all his might, aiming to brain the man would killed so kind a constable. Such a friend for so many of his younger companions.

The young lady may wish for him to suffer under her wrathful gaze, but the old breed had their own form of justice. One he would find so satisfying, in this case.

With a speed almost not human, the man whipped out of the way of what would have been a crushing, debilitating blow. A hand gripped Stuart's wrist, pulling him so he would block the path of the next attack. Reid circled, trying to flank, hoping his partner could keep their would be assassin occupied for just a few seconds.

Fate, it seemed, had other plans. A patch of ice ended up under the foot of his bad leg. Ankle twisted painfully, traction was gone, dead muscle screamed. Then, the knee buckled. Down he fell, pistol clattering away as he shot out a hand to catch himself.

With a cry of triumph, the murderer forced his blade through the rest of Steinman's defense. The arm that flew up to protect him was first to suffer, followed by the shoulder it was attached to. A grunt was all the sign of pain offered, even as cold iron dug all the way down to bone. His partner wasted no time like he had for fancy footwork, smashing his fist into the man's face with all the strength in his body.

The senior detective struggled to regain his footing, reinforcing his grip on his remaining weapon whilst scrambling for another in his pocket. Of all the nights to forget a proper blade.

Just as he managed to get to his feet, he had to sidestep the careening battle as Steinman was forced back. The two crashed into the wall, his friend's skull cracking against brick with a sickening splitting sound that turned Reid's stomach.

Slowly, a limp body slid down the wall, groaning all the way.

He would be next.

There was barely enough time to deflect the first blow leveled at him. Less so the second. The third trust cut deep into the tendons of his right hand. A fair sacrifice to avoid being skewered. So too the loss of his greatest weapon, his heavy club, to land a few heavy blows to arm and chest.
The satisfying snap of bone under his blow drew more memories. Ones that nearly had him lose his dinner on the pavers.

*Begone, demons. Trouble me, no more!*

Still, despite his small successes, every second was wearing him down. He lacked the stamina to keep up with his junior for long. Thusly, a plan began to form.

First, he'd have to get him angry.

“I know tha' look,” the Scotsman man laughed as he switched his blade to his good hand, the other rendered worthless by the last slash to pierce his defenses. Pain, fresh and throbbing, clouded his mind from a dozen slashes. “Tha' look in your eyes.” Cold, empty, unblinking. Just waiting for orders. *March. Yes, Sir. Load. Yes, Sir. Kill. Yes, Sir.* “Yer a real soldier, aren't ya, sonny boy? Not just some pretender to the title. Where was it ya' served, then? Take a look at ya'. Too young for the India 'r Sudan. I'd say Afghanistan, eh? Nasty bit a' work that, I heard.”

The man circled. Closing, pinning, hemming him in further. His one chance was to engage. Force an error.

Talk, talk, and keep talking.

“Right nasty. I wonder what it was fer you. Ta' make you look at me like that,” he pressed, trying to strike a nerve, get a reaction, anything. “Who'd they make you kill ta' turn you into a mad dog that'd slay a man in cold blood on the street.”

“That is none of your concern,” the 'Lieutenant' dismissed, only taking half a step this time. “Even if I told you, you wouldn't understand.”

“Lad, I am tha' only person yer ever gonna meet that understands,” Reid laughed, hearing the sound of lock-step echoing on that accursed plain. The taste of dust in his mouth. Water. He needed water. Why hadn't they brought water? “Let me take a wild guess: you killed a kid, didn't ya'? S'always a kid, innit? They say you can kill fifty men, but the first time you bump off a wee un it drives ya' mad. Makes ya' less human than the rest of us.”

“Be quiet!” the assassin demanded, gripping his sword tighter.

“Tell me somethin': did he cry? It's always worse when they cry.” *Eyes, wide like dinner plates. Blood. Not his blood. Pain. Pain in his leg. Nowhere near as great as the ache in his heart. Was this what dying felt like? Or was it madness?*

“Shut up, pig!”

“Make me,” the wounded man bluffed, desperate for a better weapon. A pen-knife didn't go far for making you feel high and mighty. What he wouldn't give for that Martini with it's wicked bayonet. Then he could make short work of this pup. “Come at me, dog! That's what we are, innit? Just another couple of mad dogs of war, tearing each other apart jus' like they trained us!”

There it was. The charge! Reckless, emotional, full of rage at the world.

Clack, clack, clack! Leather on pavers.

The blade moved in a blur, almost too fast for his aged eyes to track. He couldn't dodge. Didn't intend to. Take the hit straight on, that was his only option. The only thing he wanted. The only way to get close enough.
Steel met flesh, his flesh, parting it like butter. The pain was unbelievable. So he screamed. He screamed loudly.

As it tore through his breast, he struck out with his own knife, jamming it up to the hilt into the man’s flank. Twice, a third time before his murderer retreated. Not enough, it turned out, as the man fled from him, gushing blood from his side in a decent cascade. Too low had he struck, missing the heart.

If he was lucky, the man might bleed to death before he reached help.

Of course he wouldn't. God never let him kill the ones that deserved it. Those ones always got away.

“Fuck.”

It hurt. The hole in his chest. Sucking with every breath. Lungs heavy with the weight of blood.

Was this what he had felt like? The little crying boy in his dusty village.

A moan as his friend's life slipped further away. Fingers scrambled, grasping for salvation. Not for him, his life was beyond that at this point.

_I will no' die like this. No' yet._

“Don't you die,” Reid ordered, a trickle of crimson leaking from his lips. “Ya’ hear me Stewie? You do tha’ and yer Phyllis is gonna track me down in hell, just ta drag me back an' kill me all over again.”

There! The whistle. The last chance for both of them.

Lips pressed around frozen metal. Hard did he blow, like trumpet's sound. His shrill, shrieking cry split the night. A dim beat amongst the crushing silence.

Had they heard it's call?

It would be too late for him, either way.

Light fades.

He feels… cold.

All he sees is darkness…

No. There's something else.

Someone.

“Eddy? Eddy Reid, is tha’ you?” a sassy voice calls at him down the lane, basket of fruit under her arm, “I haven't seen you for years, boy. Where on earth did you get tha’ uniform?”

He knew that voice. It was important to him. Why couldn't he remember?

Ah, yes.

*Emily, with the golden hair. She says it's gone grey now, but all I see is the gold.*
“I'm sorry…” His last breath as strength leaves him.

So, this was how a mad dog died.

What a shame. He'd never gotten to ask his darling the question. The only one he hadn't. The only one that mattered.

“Am I...”

Chapter End Notes

Back to the gang next time as they deal with the fallout. Tell me your opinions of Mr. Reid, as he's become my favorite original creation to ponder on. After all, I live for comments.
Btw, the real Mr. Reid was Kentish, born and bred, so far as I can tell, but his family was Scottish. Hence, the weird descriptors for him.
Waking Up

Chapter Summary

Korra gets the bad news.

Chapter Notes

Hey, sorry this is a day late, but some life stuff happened and I found it really hard to edit this down after I hit a massive case of writers block. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When she had fallen asleep, her world had been bliss. Someone laying beside her for the first time in what felt like forever. Even if it was on the couch. Even if she was sitting up. Even if her feet suck out of the bottom of the blanket because Asami was hogging it all, she was happy.

Her dreams had been a placid lake. No ripple disturbed it's crystal surface as the many fantastically colored beasts pranced and flew about with glee. She'd tried to draw them, once, but found the result lacking the same splendor that her dreams could provide. Below her feet, the reflection, smiling wide with just a touch of red in her cheeks, little smudge of lipstick on her lips. The hollow eyes and tears were gone: she was happy.

The knocking had woken her at half-past two. Sharp on the door. One. Two. Three.

An arm was wrapped around her chest, holding her close like a child held their favorite doll. How she'd held Naga when she was a child. Or Mako, in the beginning. When she'd been happy.

"Whassat?" the sleepy question as that pretty face snuggled tighter into her shoulder.

Many strands of ebony had fallen free to hang like a curtain over her gorgeous skin. Even half asleep she managed to look stunning. What a lovely first sight to see when her eyes opened.

"Probably just someone from work," she whispered back, pressing her lips against her love's forehead. "I'll be back in a minute."

"M'kay." The grip had slackened, even though the arm still lay draped across her.

Carefully, Korra extracted herself. She didn't want to disturb Asami any more than necessary. Not when she had been resting so peacefully. It was hard to tear her eyes away from the woman who had stolen her heart. Being with her made her happy.

Another set of knocks, more insistent than before, drew her from her much needed taste of domesticity. Such impatience. Why were they even here, ruining what had turned into such a perfect evening? She wasn't on call tonight. Had been very sure to tell everyone that. Her instinct was to sober up. Look professional in front of whatever poor sod they'd sent to wake her. After all, if you let the night shift get away with this kind of thing, it would only encourage them to do it
Then, she really would never get any rest.

Unless, of course, this turned out to be actually important. The possibility prodded at her, igniting that familiar foreboding feeling she got whenever anyone came bursting through the door of her office.

Button up her shirt, run some fingers through her hair, wipe the little smudge of red from her lips. Hide the night that had come before. That was their secret. Their lovely secret, but a secret it must be. With all good luck, whomever knocked would never know that the sweet conundrum of her life was ever there.

Calmly walk to the door, taking care with every footfall. Quick glance through the peep hole to make sure it wasn't just some random person, or worse. Kuvira?

Her smile had faltered as she started on the locks, three in all. You could never be too careful, these days.

This was strange. This was bad. This set the hair on the back of her neck on end. Her old partner would never bother her with anything so late at night, unless it was truly dire. If for no other reason than that she wouldn't wish to be troubled in kind. “Hey, Kuv, what's going on?” she asked, even before she'd fully opened the door.

A steely, haunted gaze met her. Like the Constable who had been first to see Miss Kelly. It was the face of trauma. That barely comprehending stare that looked like it went right through you and stretched off into oblivion. Pungent smoke radiated off her skin and clothes like miasma. Choking, thick enough to slice like butter. Maybe it was her hatred for the vile herb, but Korra could practically taste it. “Korra,” she croaked, voice strained and wavering. It sounded as though she had torn through her entire weeks worth of smokes in the past hour. “Reid and Stuart, they were stabbed.”

The bottom threatened to fall out of the world. He had actually done it. The mad bastard had actually gone through with that inane plan of his. Not only that, he'd dragged Steinman into his reckless ploy, as well. Turning himself into bait to catch her quarry.

Instead, he had been caught, himself.

She was falling. Falling into blackness. Despair chipped away at her light. “What happened?” she asked, quietly. Raised voices might truly wake Asami from her blissful dreaming. They may leak out the screams that threatened to unleash themselves from her gut.

Kicking at the fluff beneath her feet, Kuvira relayed the information in an equally hushed tone, though the Inspector thought for different reasons. Faint lines could be seen on her face. Had she cried? Korra couldn't remember seeing her cry in years. “They got ambushed up on the far side of Commerce, 'bout an hour ago. Uniforms heard a whistle, went running, and found them about twenty yards up an alley. Couple of no-names they might have been tailing when it happened got slashed up, too.”

A flash as she blinked. Arm outstretched for his cane, limp hand resting over a flower of blood. Eyes in blank, unseeing peace. Tears of a widow soaking into her shoulder. The sobs of children. A waking nightmare.

Please, Raava, not again.
“Was it?”

“Same guy who got Frenchie, far as I can tell. Big cuts, right through their jackets. Stabs too,” she relayed, through set teeth, “Good news is, he didn't manage to finish the job, this time.”

*Thank the Spirits. “Where are they, now?”*

“In hospital,” Kuvira said, palming at her jacket until she found the pocket she'd stowed her cigarettes in. With fumbling fingers, she'd withdrawn the packet and pulled out the last stick of her stash. “They're banged up something awful. Stewie's got a really bad concussion and they've put about forty stitches in him. But, the old man...” Her hand nearly dropped the rolled paper as it trembled. “There was a lot of blood, Korra. They sent him off, pretty much instantly on the fastest cab they could find, but I've never seen someone live after losing that much. It was everywhere.”

“I see,” she muttered, staying composed for both of them. Her heart hammered in her chest for an entirely different reason than it had only hours before. A thundering drumbeat of fear and anger. *Can't think about them, now. Have to focus on the case. Have to keep from screaming.*

“What's handling the scene?”

“Bo's got it tied down pretty tight,” her fellow Inspector informed, struggling to light a match with her heavy gloves, growing increasingly frustrated with every failure.

After snapping the heads off of two little fire makers, Korra finally intervened. With a single flick of her wrist, a little fire erupted. A few puffs later and the stinging reek of tobacco made her eyes water even harder. So much worse when fresh. “Thanks. He's got the boys fanning out with a fresh description, but mums been the word.”

Ah, yes, the every infuriating tight lipped residents of Whitechapel. How noble they were, not turning on those among them that lied, cheated, and robbed them blind.

“Think you could loosen a few lips?” Korra asked, casting a glance over her shoulder towards the door to the sitting room. She'd have to leave, now. Sink up to her knees it the mire to find those that weren't afraid, apathetic, or themselves corrupted.

“I...” That peaceful face in her shoulder, arm around her middle. The taste of her kiss, still fresh on her lips. Sweet embrace of love on her heart. “Just don't do anything we'll both regret, okay. I'll catch with you up after I check in at the hospital.” It would only be prudent to see whether she would be adding any more murders to the growing list of reasons she despised that man.

“Sounds like a plan,” Kuvira nodded, keeping her teeth clamped on the butt of her cigarette, so to keep it from being lost to the growing wind. “See you back at Leman Street?”

“Yeah, have Bo send what he has my way, when you see him.”
A barely audible hum creases the air between them. Her friend knew the procedure well, even if she was prone to skirt it. The sound of footsteps has both of their heads snapped towards the direction of the sound. Hands shoot for weapons, Kuvira's under her coat, Korra's on the entry table.

Who? Who was it? *Can't see through the snow.*

Black domed hats and thick woolen uniforms appear. The night watch making their rounds. Heavy batons are clutched at the ready. Arms tensed in subtle preparation for the swing The two pair's eyes meet. “Inspectors,” the men said, with little half-effort salutes, relief on their faces. Word must have traveled fast to reach them so far from the scene. Or maybe they had just left the station, fresh with stories of their senior's peril.

“Constables,” the women replied, equally grateful to see friendly faces.

They were all on edge. Always and forever. In her short-lived moment of joy, Korra had allowed herself to forget that.

A part of her wished she could turn back the clock, live only in that moment for the rest of her days. Let Asami keep the monsters at bay. Back when things were better. When her family wasn't under attack, again.

When she was happy.

Taking the roll out of her mouth, Kuvira turned back to her boss. In her eyes, the Avatar could see the same reluctance she felt. What was her moment, she wondered? For what or whom did she long for? Suspicion had always prodded at Korra on that front, but she would never put voice to that theory.

“Right, I'd better get going,” said H-Division's problem child in muted, somber farewell, her eyes flicking over her shoulder to the same spot Korra had glanced at so longingly.

Had she seen something? Was Asami looking to see where she had gone, why she had been away so long? If anyone could dig into her personal life in this city with the tenacity of a starving bear, it was Kuvira Beifong. The woman had a sixth sense for useless office gossip, embarrassing stories, anything she could try to lord over someone for leverage or a favor. That would be a bad thing to have happen, right now.

A very bad thing.

Apparently finding nothing of interest, her fellow Inspector turned on the spot and started wandering down the street without waiting for a reply. Her destination: the nearest cab, nestled in the shadow of one of the taller buildings on the block to give it's horses and driver some slight shelter.

Korra followed her with her gaze until she made it there. Even in her, relatively, peaceful stretch of the highstreet, there was danger to be found around every corner. Thieves, muggers, whores, and peddlers all occasionally found their way into the alley's around her home. Most stayed clear, but those who had been forced out of their usual territory, the truly desperate, would risk the added danger of frequent patrols and her own watchful gaze to make their living.

Then, there was him. His eyes. She could feel them on her, now. Cold and black. Soulless pits that haunted her dreams. Never had she seen them, but their cruel malice was burned into her very soul.

Only when the wheels had started to turn did the shivering woman close her door to the world
outside. The tremors that threatened to wrack her body had nothing to do with the cold, however. Dinner and wine roiled in her stomach as guilt took it's familiar place. It's tendrils writhed and wriggled, pulling her gut taught, dragging her down towards the pit.

She was going to be sick.

_Breath._ Tenzin's calming voice echoed in her mind. The old monk wouldn't let something like this get to him. Not when there was work to be done. _There is always a time to grieve, Korra. It isn't now, though; so, just breath. And think. What do you need to do?_

“Hospital,” she breathed.

Bo could handle the scene proper, for now. At least with some help from his brother, who, no doubt, would be racing in that direction as she pondered. Kuvira would milk anyone who had information dry with great zeal. If Tenzin had been Korra's mentor and guide through her years in H-Division, then Reid was surely hers, imbuing the woman with his own, unique, outlook on their work. No one would be more motivated than her.

_Have to tell Asami._

With footfalls quieter than a cat's, Korra returned to the sitting room. The fire smoldered in it's berth, craving fuel which she silently provided it. Amid the crackling, soft breaths of sleep. She still looked so peaceful. Part of her wanted to leave her like this. Blissfully unaware of what had happened. A selfish wish, but one that would give her some small sliver of joy.

It was obvious, though, that her run of good fortune in that regard had come to an end.

As heat began to build behind her, the Avatar leaned close and pressed her lips to her darling’s cheek. “Hey,” she softly woke.

“Mmn, wha' was it?”

“Work,” she replied as green eyes cracked open. Weary, red, full of sleep, still half in the land of fantasy. “Hey, I'm sorry to do this, but I'm gonna have to go take care of some stuff, real quick. Shouldn't take more than a couple hours. I'll be back before you know it.”

“You're lying,” Asami stated, blinking, lips pursing into a worried grin. Slowly, but steadily, she was waking up. It was the habit of the hard-working early bird. To awaken the instant that rest was torn from them. The gears in that lovely brain of hers were starting to tick faster and faster, pouring steam on the boilers. Hiding things from her would become all but impossible, soon.

Up she sat, pushing hair from her face and the blanket from her chest. She scanned Korra's face, chewing on her lip like she did whenever deep thought or worry took her. It was a cute little quirk, one of her many tells.

“Yeah,” Korra admitted, smiling weakly, taking some small solace in how adorable her love looked in this moment. Hair tussled and unkempt, cheeks free of makeup she didn't need in the first place. If this is what waking up to her would always be like, the Inspector wished it to be so for the rest of eternity. _Next time, _she swore to herself, _next time I'll wake up with you properly. We'll have breakfast with tea, just for you. “I'm sorry. I really don't want to go, but something important's come up.”_

“What happened?”

Of course she'd ask. Curious to a fault, her beloved. The mask must've slipped further than she'd
thought. “I-I don't really know, yet. A couple of other detectives were attacked. Other than that, I'm in the dark. I have to go to the hospital to check on them, and they're going to need me at the station until Tenzin gets there.”

For a moment, Asami just blinked at her host. The expression on her face was unreadable, though not emotionless. It was only, the Avatar couldn't tell which emotions they were.

Exhaustion?

Disappointment?

Sympathy?

Sadness?

Fear?

All of the above?

Maybe it was something else, entirely. Some strange mix Korra's still half-sleeping brain couldn't piece out. But, as lips began to move, she subverted expectation again. “Do you want me to come with you?”

What? Come with her? No, of course not. That was a terrible idea. This wasn't her problem, she shouldn't have to suffer alongside as the Station Inspector dove into the deep end of Whitechapel. Asami should rest, sleep. Be ready for whatever problems her own work would bring on the morrow. Return to that blissful land where no one can hurt you beyond the pale of the material. Like Korra wanted to.

But…

A selfish desire suggested itself.

She didn't want to be alone. Not right now. Not if the worst happened. She didn't want to see another wife weep at the death of her husband. Watch as the youth and innocence of children was ripped away as all the lies their parents told them are shown to be what they were: sweet dreams and sugar-glass.

Let her dream a little longer.

“Yes.”

Before the word even fully formed itself, she regretted it. Such shame welled within her. To be so weak before her fears. To crumble, now, when she needed to be her strongest. Both for the fallen and those noble few they left behind to continue their work.

Again, Asami read her like an open book. A gentle hand cupped her cheek, holding her there until a soft kiss met her lips.

It was sweet, both of taste and of sentiment.

“Thank you,” the Detective said as they broke from this brief, pleasant interruption to her now slowly unraveling cycle of despair.

“You looked like you needed it,” the tinkerer smiled back, brushing the beginnings of tears from
cyan eyes. There was no judgment in her face. Only kindness and concern. "Besides, I like kissing you."

“That's not what I meant,” Korra muttered back, graciously accepting the hug that was offered her.

“I know,” Asami hummed into her ear, a deep sigh of understanding punctuating the words. Slowly, she released her grip so she could hold the Inspector at arms length. The smile on her face was a little firmer. If only Korra could convince her to teach the secret of how to act like that. Opal had never quite succeeded with her methods. “Can you make us some tea? I don't really do well on four hours sleep.”

“Sorry, I only have-”

“Coffee?” her darling finished with a little amusement. “Honestly, how have you lived in this country for so long when you hate tea?”

“Pure willpower.” A joke. She'd made a joke at a time like this. Asami had even given her a little giggle in reward or pity. Her heart fluttered at the little smirk on those ruby lips. It was tired, but still pleased and so very comforting.

“Is that so?” An eyebrow raised. Something unknowable to her played behind those eyes. Just as fast as it appeared, though, it was gone. Sunk back beneath the surface of her impenetrable exterior. “How about you make us something to eat while I freshen up a bit? I didn't expect to be spending the night when I came over.”

“Do you want to borrow something to wear?” the other woman offered, lending a hand in helping her recent bedmate up. “I have a whole bunch of stuff I haven't even tried on that might fit you.”

Asami hummed, brushing a few wrinkles out of her dress. “This'll be fine, I think,” she decided after a little internal debate.

From there, they parted. Asami, to take the time for an abridged version of her morning routine. Korra to prepare for them a breakfast of leftover stew, reheated until palatable, and strong coffee. Both kept their worries to themselves through the five minute meal. Afterwards, they donned their winter gear in equal silence, before stepping out into the dark, snow-swept blizzard, fingers woven with each others.

The Inspector was grateful for that. It let her know, whatever was awaiting her beyond the swirling storm, she wouldn't have to face it alone.

Chapter End Notes

I want to know whether people want to see the hospital scene or just skip to the revenge plotting by Team Avatar. I'll provide the same information, but the progression of events would pick up and help get us to the climax earlier. Either way is fine, and I always love to hear from you. Leave a comment if you have an opinion or just want to give some general thoughts.
Chapter Summary

The gang's all here.

Chapter Notes

Even later than last time, but with better reasons. I've got a beta, now: JMStei has kindly offered their services, so you can thank them for the added polish.

Also, a recap of everyone's relationships: Bolin and Opal are recently married, she and Kuvira are sisters. Kuvira is adopted, but very close to her family. Mako's dated everyone, excluding Opal (yes, I'm counting Asami since they went to the gala as a date).

Get it? Got it? Good. 'Cause I barely do. Haha!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Have you slept at all since I last saw you?” her darling asked from the threshold as soon at the oak that separated them swung out of the way. “You look like something out of a penny-dreadful.”

“Nice to see you, too,” the Inspector smirked, having predicted the jab well before she'd heard the knocks on the door. Stepping aside, she, gratefully, allowed the woman entry into her home. Bags hung heavy under her eyes. The bliss of happy dreams had left her along with those raven locks that smelled of cherry blossoms.

But just the sight of that teasing one-sided smile brought such joy to her heart. No sooner had the click of the catch sounded, did she turn and wrap her arms around the heiress. Her heart hammered as tears threatened the corner of blue eyes.

How she'd longed for this these last three days. The comfort of loving arms, keeping the monsters away.

“You look gorgeous, by the way,” she said once she had gotten her fill, holding Asami at arms length to admire her wardrobe. That long, dull jacket, which might as well belong to her, at this point. Red scarf, crimson dress, pretty necklace made of gold. “I'm gonna need you to give me some tips for the next time I get dragged to one of those fancy gala, deals.”

“I think,” the well-dressed woman replied, reaching up to fix the collar on Korra's shirt, “you look very smart in pants. Though, I wouldn't mind seeing you in an evening gown, either.”

“Never,” the Avatar hummed, getting her own little smile remembering the way she'd looked that night. It seemed so long ago, but the way that dress flowed as her hips swayed with her step was still burned into her mind. They never did that when Korra wore them, hanging flat on her body. Dull and lifeless. Her dearest looked more the princess than she ever had, without even trying.
It may have had something to with never learning all the tricks of the craft since she was a girl. Too busy having a bunch of useless tat crammed between her ears. Spanish, really? When would that ever be useful?

“Suit yourself. I think a bit of blue would really bring out your eyes, though,” Asami sighed, despite rewarding her with a peck on the lips that tasted honey sweet to her tired mind. Taking a further step back, the new arrival peeked her head over Korra's shoulder. “I take it that I'm the first one here with that greeting you gave me.”

“Yeah, I told the others to come by a little later,” she admitted, unable to contain her smile. The darkness faded with every moment. Light crept in, peeking through the cracks in the wall she'd desperately tried to build between herself and the madness of her life.

A more sympathetic look crossed the tycoon's face. “Wanted a little time alone?” the Londoner deduced, correctly. Fingers continued messing with her host's appearance, flicking stray strands of hair into place, wiping a smudge of graphite from where she'd passed out on her desk. Compared to the few last days, it was practical pampering. “What is this stuff on your face?”

“I tried to catch a couple hours sleep before you got here,” the immigrant shyly said, shrinking a little with embarrassment. “Forgot to move my pencil.”

“Mmm,” the other woman hummed, wiping her hand on the arm of Korra's coat. The owner didn't even bat an eye. Poor thing had seen far worse than a bit of carbon in her employ. “Ah, yes, the underclassman's pillow.”

What an interesting, adorable picture that conjured in her mind. Dignified, well-groomed Asami passed out from overwork. She could imagine her, tucked away behind a stack of books in a Cambridge library, desperately catching a few minutes rest between sessions of late night studying. “Sounds like there's a story behind that.”


A light chuckle bubbled in a weary chest. It felt so good, to laugh, again. “Force of habit.”

“Like skipping meals?”

The little question acted as if a spell. Korra's stomach growled, protesting it's prolonged emptiness. Knees felt weak, arms heavy. Her own body betrayed her for lack of calories. *Who's side are you on?* “Look-”

“Don't you 'look' me, Princess,” Asami interrupted, spinning her on the spot with a strength that surprised the martial artist and beginning to push her down the hall. Shock prevented resistance as she found herself maneuvered around her own house like a piece of furniture. “When was the last time you had a proper meal?” A sniff of her nostrils. “Or a bath?”

“Hey, I cleaned up last night,” the Avatar grumbled in protest, futilely trying to extricate herself from the grip on her shoulders.

“Did you eat dinner?”

*No.*

Why was she getting a hard time? They were perfectly happy just a minute ago. So, she'd skipped a couple meals. What was the harm in that when compared to all the progress she had made? Not the
little scrapes she had managed to now. Proper steps. She'd even managed to beat her uncle into looking at that mask they had found. He had become far more cooperative after she'd threatened to fire him. Sometimes, being a living god wasn't so bad.

Who knew?

“I had leftovers,” she mumbled, instead of all that.

Apparently, that wasn't good enough. “Listen to me: I want you to go upstairs, take a proper bath, and change into something you haven't been wearing two days in a row,” came the string of simple, stern orders. A glance over her shoulder at those narrow eyes showed that this was all, very much, non-negotiable. “Then, you're going to come down and eat a hot meal before anyone else gets here, okay?”

*It's not like I can argue, right? You're stubborn enough to lock me in the bathroom 'til I do it. Wait a second?* “Hold on, you can cook? Since when can you cook?”

“Go!”

With a shove, she was sent up the stairs with no further ceremony. Stunned, she finds herself unable to halt her advance, like Asami still forced her onwards. Upon reaching the top, she took the opportunity to check herself with a whiff. “Don't smell that bad,” she whispered in near silent protest. Still, some hot water and a good scrub would only do her some good.

And so it did. Sure, she may have debated locking the door, just in case. (Then been lost, for a moment, in fantasies of what might happen if she didn't.) But the warm embrace of water calmed her nerves nearly as much as the hug had done. It didn't tickle her like the kiss, but it did send a shiver up her spine. Water had always done that. Been her safe place to escape when emotion overwhelmed her. Whether a pool, the tub, or sneaking down to the frigid bay, letting her body be submerged was like coming home.

In the tranquility of this thought, Korra pondered what to do about the night to come. Her invitation to Asami had been spur of the moment. A scribbled letter on a scrap of paper, sent by the services of one of the local boys. Not much planning had been done on the 'how to explain this to everyone' front.

Kuvira hadn't cared. She never really did. So long as there was free drink and food at the end, her friend was up to almost anything.

Explaining things to Bo had been slightly more complicated. It had taken him nearly five minutes to wrap his head around the concept the suspect 'Amy Smith' and his brother's one time plus-one were one and the same. Spirits bless his innocent mind. Let it never change.

Said brother had kept his thoughts on the matter subdued to a single word: “Okay.” The look on his face had hardly even changed. In the moment, it had felt like any of their worst conversations, right at the top of the tailspin of their relationship. Back when they started talking 'at' one another, rather than 'with'.

Now, his offer to split half the cost of beverages for the night, that had been far more interesting. It meant she might manage to get off with the three of them entertaining themselves with cheap whiskey, leaving her precious hoard alone to mature for another day.

It would be best to play the friend, she imagined as she toweled herself off. They had certainly done that for long enough, even to each other. Looking back on it, all of those lunches, the trip to
the country, had all been more courtship than she had ever pursued, before. But they had managed it all as, merely, friends.

One more night wouldn't be too hard, would it?

Back down the stairs to the sound of cooking and…

Conversation?

“I never liked Colts,” an all too recognizable woman's voice said around a mouthful of something or other. “They're so damn heavy. It's like trying to shoot a bloody brick.”

“Smith&Wessons aren't any lighter,” Asami bantered back, making polite smalltalk, despite the odd subject.

“I know,” the elder Beifong groaned, getting into that grove of hers when she really started to defend her brand of choice. If she really got started, there'd be no stopping her 'til she was boozed up enough to either start singing or pass out. “They just sit in the hand better, ya know?”

Sure enough, as the host rounded the corner into her kitchen, she found Kuvira miming a familiar motion of holding her beloved revolver with one hand, while stuffing an oversized bite of food into her mouth with the other. “You're early,” Korra noted as she finished tying back her hair. She'd left it too long between cuts, letting the chestnut strands grow down between her shoulders, unchecked. “And you're eating my food.”

“You said there'd be snacks,” her partner argued, words slurred by meat and bread.

“I didn't say you could raid my kitchen for dinner,” the foreigner pointed out, swiping the other half of the sandwich and taking a sizable chunk for herself.

“Oh!” the fighter protested, desperately swiping for her twice stolen meal, “I haven't eaten anything today and it's your bloody fault!” Turning to where Asami was leaning on the counter while a pot bubbled merrily by her elbow she tried to gain some sympathy. “See what I've gotta deal with, Red? She orders me around like a servant all day, then she tries to starve me to death.”

Oh, the bemused, disbelieving look that crossed those pretty lips was something special to behold. Kuvira had turned to the wrong corner for backup, she just didn't know it, yet. “You poor thing,” she consoled, words tinted with sarcasm. “I guess that's why you had to rush in when I opened the door and track snow all down the hall.” She did what? “You were so hungry, you couldn't even tell me your name until you'd started eating.”

“Uh?” Eyes flicked back and forth between them as the steel magnates daughter tried to gauge who was most likely to take her side between the two.

Neither. The answer was neither. “Just give me the damn sandwich back.”

“Fine.” Her fellow detective had earned it. She hadn't been lying about running herself ragged. Kuvira had been the only one of them not to sleep at all that first night. Nor did she succumb the next day. Only when Mako and Tenzin had practically dragged her to the former's home and tossed her on the couch had she given in to nature. For a grand total of three hours. “It's a shit sandwich, anyway.”

“Inspector, what language!” the heiress scoffed, dramatically, making a show of her distaste for such crude speech.
Like you haven't heard worse come out of my mouth. “Oh, you're gonna tell me off while she mouths off like a sailor?” Korra countered, jerking her head in the direction of her foul mouthed friend, earning a narrow scowl that was only just undercut by the taking of another large bite.

Asami's eyes focused on the famished former orphan and she shrugged. “I'm just glad she's not a burglar. What with how she started tearing through the pantry, like she did.” That narrow, teasing smile grew as she watched shoulders stiffen and temper start to simmer. “It looked like she was trying to find your secret stash of sweets.”

“Someone you think's a burglar breaks into my house and you don't bother to tell me?” Korra bounced back, enjoying how Kuvira's jaw was struggling to chew with how irritated she was getting.

“I think we both know I can handle myself,” Asami argued, with a perfectly straight face, “Especially against someone who's half dead of starvation.”

“You're both making fun of me,” Kuvira grumbled 'round her latest mouthful.

“How ever could you have figured that out?” the heiress asked, cracking the largest grin of the night, so far. For a moment, the two of them stared each other down, not breaking eye contact for a full minute.

Then, at last, a smile cracked Inspector Beifong's face. “I like this one. Where'd you find her?”

“At a murder scene,” the both replied, in tandem.

“Saucy,” Kuvira smirked, looking between them in a way that made Korra's heart clench for a moment. “Did you do it?”

“No, of course not.”

“Damn. Never played poker with a murderer, before.”

Conversation shifted away from her, for a while, with the other woman peeking into the broth that had been made, each making their own additions and corrections. Debating the merits of different spices and herbs, like they knew anything. Korra could imagine cooking like this. If only because it meant spending more time with her dearest. The one that made her hearts smile and her soul sing.

“What's for dinner?” the interruption asked. Even without looking, Korra could hear the sound of scraping chair legs, shifting weight, boots coming off the floor.

“Put your feet on my table and they are,” she warned, shooting a glare back over her shoulder. First you track snow into my house, now you treat my furniture like your own, bloody sitting room. Next thing I know, you'll eat me out of house and home.

“Korra,” her love chided, wrapping her fingers with the spoon.

“What?”

Another few moments passed. Hair on the back of her neck stood on end. The feeling of being watched came over her, setting a familiar rolling sensation in her gut loose. “No, seriously, how the hell do you two know each other?” Kuvira pried, careful to sound as disinterested as possible. “If I tried something like that, you'd shove your boot up my cooch.”

Vivid imagery aside, that was somewhat true. At least with her. Dear Miss Beifong always had a
tendency to push things a little too far. Get just that little bit over excited, a tad too rough. Let her hand end up somewhere it didn't belong.

No more sparring with her. Not after the last time.

“Hey, Kuv?” The Avatar turned to face her friend.

“Yeah?”

Middle finger came springing up from her off hand. “Bite me.”

“Where?”

Asami tensed, just a little, only for a second, and hardly long enough to notice. But, still, it happened. Was she jealous? Or just irritated by the antics? Korra knew which option she preferred.

“Have you two known each other long?” she asked, despite that. Her lilt was the perfect example of civility. Like the idle chit chat you made at a party, even as you edged closer to the door. Only, Asami managed to introduce an actual degree of interest into the question.

“Our Nanas knew each other when they were kids,” the latest guest related, dismissively. “We sent a couple letters, but didn't really 'meet' 'til Korra moved to London. Tenzin scooped her up and gave her a job after she skipped out on Med school, I'd already started at the Met a few months ahead of her, and we got paired up 'cause no one else wanted to work with a chick.”

“I guess that changed,” the businesswoman noted, removing the soup from the heat so it would reach an edible temperature.

_Eh, kinda._ Neither detective corrected her on that. Getting into the nitty-gritty of department politics was never fun for anyone. Nobody like to talk about how, outside of H-Division, the pair were seen as little more than novelties. Their work reduced, by some, to be primarily due to the efforts of their male peers.

It had gotten better. Tenzin had a lot to do with that. Some others, as well. The less traditional, more forward thinking generation of Superintendents working their way up the ranks. The numbers of women in the force had swelled in the last two years, from three to twelve.

Baby steps.

“Yeah, sure,” the daughter of an architect pseudo-agreed. “We also ended up hitching it to the same guy, for a while, so that helped with the whole bonding process.”

“You and Mako?” Asami said, seemingly shocked. Emerald turned on her, accusingly.

'Later,' the Inspector mouthed. That was a long story. A very long, very complicated, somewhat trying story to tell. One that required preparation and liberal consumption of alcohol to tell without feeling worn out and awful by the end.

She didn't want that tonight. Not on poker night.

“Yeah,” Kuvira chuckled, apparently unsurprised by the other woman's knowledge of the royals involvement with the undercover man. It wasn't, exactly, an unknown fact, she supposed, but still. At least a raised eyebrow. “I was kinda his ‘in between’ girl, for about, what would you say, eight years?” Korra nodded. That sounded about right, since they were just separated when Korra had met him. “Yeah, so, whenever he got himself dumped, he'd come crawling back to me, then move
on once I'd put him back together, again. Got pretty good at it after the first couple times.”

Blinking. Lips opening and closing as the genius tried to process the statement. “That, uh, that seems like an...” Brief pause as that clever mind attempted to find a way to express her opinion without coming off as rude. “Odd thing for you to agree to.”

Inspector Beifong just shrugged. “Sounds a lot scummier than it actually was. More of it was on my end, really,” she admitted, actually getting a little uncomfortable for the first time. “I mean, you met him, right? Guy's pretty much perfect. Don't get me wrong, he'll beat you to death with that stick up his ass, if you let him. But, when he's not trying to be the moral center of the fucking universe, he's sweet, charming, and hot enough to fry an egg on,” a little of that swagger came back as she waggled her eyebrows. “Not to mention, the sex was fucking dynamite, eh, Korra?”

Kill me, please. “No comment.”

“I'd appreciate some comment,” dearest Asami requested, not batting an eye while rolling with the flow, effortlessly.

Yeah, that didn't help things. Did not help, at all. This was awkward. Really, fucking awkward. She really didn't want to talk about sex with her ex while Asami was here to listen in, whatever the result might be.

And dynamite, her ass. Everything else might have been true, but the only time she could ever remember enjoying herself with Mako was when he didn't rush straight to the end.

Which he did.


“I'll fill you in if the boys don't get here too soon,” Kuv promised, cheekily.

Like hell, you will. “You back on that good 'a terms, already?” Korra suggested, pointedly. Two could play at this game, and she was perfectly willing to twist the knife. “Here I'd thought you were just sleeping on his couch. What'll Lin think if she finds out you two have hopped back into bed together.”

Message sent.

Fingers move to rub temples, pinch the brow of her nose. A shudder runs up her spine, then down again. The tint of her skin started to look distinctly green. “Please don't imply that I'm banging the in-law,” her fellow investigator pleaded, burying her face in her hand, hiding whether blush was forming on her cheeks, “Christ, Mom already sends me half-a-dozen letters a week trying to figure out 'what's wrong'. You start talking like that and I'll get tossed in a convent.”

“Hmm, wouldn't that be a shame?” Message received.

A trio of knocks on the door announced the arrival of another member of the party. There was little debate as to who it would be in the host's mind.

He always liked to be on time.

Leaving her lover and her headache to discuss whatever non-lewd subject they would stumble on, Korra made her way to the door. The clock on the wall read just at the hour, each tick of the second pushing it past seven. Hand gripped the knob and turns.
A weary, bearded face greets her on the other side. At least he'd managed a trim before he came. Though, that might have robbed him of her luxury of a stolen hour's sleep. “Hey,” he greeted, slightly more stiffly than she expected. Under his arm he cradled three brown bottles, brimming with amber liquid. “Brought the booze.”

“Thanks,” she replied, taking them as he passed them through the frame like an offering. Stepping aside, the acting head of CID allowed the man in out of the cold. Flakes swirled in behind him, melting quickly under the influence of warm air. “Any idea when your brother's gonna get here?”

“He said something about stopping by the house for dinner,” Mako shrugged, struggling out of his heavy overcoat and hanging it from the already groaning rack. “You know Op's not gonna let him leave again without a fight.”

*I certainly hope not. It'll make things a lot harder if she does.* “I thought there was a show, tonight?”

“Got called off. There's been some kind of drama down there, I don't know,” the man relayed, throwing up his hands. “Ask him when he gets here. You know how these things go. Opal drones on about it to him, he does it to us, before long half the East End knows about the company's dirty laundry. It's why they make good sales.”

Korra sighs in agreement. What a wonderful business model Opal's theater company had. Everyone hates each other, tells everyone else about it, sell out the house with people only there in the hopes of seeing an actual murder during Hamlet. Easy profit.

So long as no one actually was murdered.

“I guess so.”

As the pair made their way back towards the kitchen, laughter emanated down the hall towards them. Friend and more than friend appeared to be getting along nicely. That was nice. With her rough around the edges aspects and, frankly, vulgar sense of humor, Kuvira had been the one Korra was most concerned about Asami liking. But, it seemed her mouth had been tamed by threat of blackmail.

Or so she had thought.

“Really?” the heiress asked, chipper voice muffled by walls. Context was lost to the Avatar. If only it had stayed that way.

“Oh yeah,” Kuvira confirmed whatever statement or anecdote had come before. “Turns to putty if you do that. And he does this thing with his mouth that's just to die for.”

*AAAAAAAaaahhhhh! I will kill you!*

“Hey, Kuvira,” the plain-clothed officer greeted in a nearly emotionless deadpan. Rather than flustered, he seemed distinctly unimpressed by the attempt to rile him. “Have you told her everything about our sex life, yet? Or have you glazed over the part where you liked it when I called you B-”

“One more word and I will kill you,” Kuvira threatened, eyes going steely as daggers. Her fingers clenched at the edge of the table, knuckles gone white with the pressure.

Always great at doing the poking, not so much at getting poked, that one.
Still, disaster seemed to be averted. With the way Asami's bemused gaze seemed to be directed mostly at Mako, only occasionally flicking Korra's way, her fellow detective mustn't have had enough time to get back around to embarrassing her. Good. That was good. Not like she wasn't going to end up doing that enough on her own, eventually.

Once Kuvira had calmed, slightly, at the promise of liquor, reintroductions were made. Apologies, as well.

The man really laid it on thick, turning up the charm to the max. Oh, she saw that look in his eye. A little watery to gain sympathy, playing the puppy dog. Then smooth and confident, chest puffed out a little, more subtle swagger in his words. Even after that stunt he pulled, after the actual ass kicking she had given him for it, bastard was still trying the same tricks he had always done.

With her girl.

Didn't matter to Korra if he was unaware of that fact. Never would.

Luckily, Asami seemed to be of the same mind, deflecting his advances, expertly. All of that experience in college paying off, she supposed. Turning her on him back to serve soup in the middle of one of his strongest efforts, directing her statements evenly between the rest of her company, not once falling into the traps he set for her.

She was disinterested, and she showed him that. They'd had their one date, he'd mucked it up. End of story.

Mako wasn't an idiot. After, maybe, ten minutes of subtle (and sometimes not too subtle) flirting, he relaxed. Settling into an old routine of sharing details of the week outside his successful venture in tracking down a date and time. A place for this small cabal of hers to turn the tables. Make hunters into prey.

But those were thoughts for another time. This was a rare time to unwind. Get their heads on straight. Laugh and drink until the smiles stuck.

If only for a little while.

The girls enjoyed the warming broth as they spoke. Savory flavor flowing in their veins as antidote to the cold. Mako recused himself, instead popping the cork on the first bottle of spirits.

Generous portions were poured for all of them, even those that held such a beverage in lower esteem than others. They cheered and drank. Told jokes and waited for the last of their party to arrive. And maybe, Korra hoped, one more who was unexpected.

Asami melded right into the dynamic, leveling clever comments and subtle observations to balance out the more rowdy and outspoken of them. Like a second Mako, only one who'd not the world weariness his past and occupation burdened him with. To be honest, she shared many of the best qualities Korra's other friends. Kuvira's tongue and wit, a bit of Tenzin's wisdom, her mother and Opal's kindness, Bolin's endless optimism, Mako and her father's strong convictions and protectiveness, all cut by some of Korra's curiosity and love of puzzles.

What a beautiful mind.

Perfect for such a beautiful woman.

More knocks on the door stirred her from her fantasy before it could encroach on the dangerous, thank Raava. Last thing she needed was to get hot and bothered before money was even on the
“Go get that,’’ she told Kuvira as she knocked back her third glass of the night, already, even as Korra and Asami still nursed their first and Mako was just pouring his second.

“Why me?’’ the other woman protested, slamming her glass down with a force that made her boss’s eye twitch.

“Because, you're eating my food, gonna be drinking my wine, and probably gonna pass out at my table,’’ Korra insisted, not betraying her motives. There was a good reason Bo had shown up late, despite living quite a bit closer than the others. The canceled play had certainly improved the chances of her scheme succeeding, but she'd felt the likelihood to be high, regardless. It was time for a family reunion. “And I don't want you getting drunk before I have the chance to bleed you dry, now go.’’

“Yes, fine!’’ Up she got, making sure to scowl extra sternly at her host. That and grab a big handful of nuts from the bowl the Avatar had prepared (bought) earlier. Popping a few in her mouth, she said, “I do this under protest.’’

“You do everything under protest,’’ the plotter hummed, dismissing the possibility. She was about have a far bigger problem than getting off her ass.

All Korra had to do was wait, let the dominoes fall, and enjoy the fallout. Her ears strained to count the footsteps to the door. It took twenty, be her count. Double if you dragged your feet. That Kuvira would do, prolonging her suffering, whilst making those outside suffer alongside her.

The hammering on the Inspector's front door resumed, harder, more aggressively than before. The rattling of window panes sounded as Korra leaned back against the counter and smiled for the upcoming fireworks.

Kuvira cursed, hurling obscenities at those unknown to her. The response came in what the homeowner strongly suspected was a kick to the hard-panel oak, shaking it's iron mounts and sending a shudder through the entire house that threatened to dislodge everything not nailed down.

Mako sighed, having realized the only person who would be so strongly trying to gain entry. He set his own drink down on the table and followed his current leech into the hall, likely hoping to minimize the damage to persons and property. Not that Korra would mind replacing a picture frame or two. Redecorating would be a small price to pay, quite literally, for what she would be more than willing to buy a ticket for.

This was going to be glorious revenge for all the shit her old friend had put her through over the years.

Simply, glorious.

Scooting closer, Asami leaned in close to her ear and asked, “Why are you smiling?’’

“Hm?’’

“Don't you 'hm' me,’’ she scolded, lightly tapping her palm to the back of Korra's head. “What did you do? It sounds like a bear is trying to tear your front door down.’’

Turning her own face so their lips were mere inches apart, the Avatar replied with her own question, “How do you know what a bear sounds like? And how do you know they tear down doors? Honestly, you're not making any sense, kuluk.’’
“Stop it,” Asami insisted with flick to her forehead. “Answer the question.”

Hmm? How best to let her in on the gag? “You remember Bolin, yeah?” The woman nodded. “Well, his wife is Kuvira's younger sister. Really nice, but she's kind of protective of big sis, since she always manages to get herself into more trouble than she can handle.”

“And Kuvira's in trouble for coming over to play poker?”

“No, no,” the Inspector laughed, softly, enjoying the idea that a game of cards would remotely be the most mischief her former partner would get into on an average day. “Long story short: she got in a bit of hot water at the station, back in June, and disappeared for a while. Done it before, no big deal, just needed some time to cool off. But, what she forgot to do was tell her family she's be dropping off the face of the earth before she did it.”

“Oh, I see,” her darling realized, turning to the door, suddenly smothering the transplant in a curtain of sweet smelling hair. “So, the one banging on the door is...”

“Little sister Opal, come to tear Kuvira a new one.”

“You're terrible,” Asami scolded, despite the grin that was spreading on her lips. “I love it.”

“Thought you would. Now, hush.”

After shushing her secret girlfriend, Korra tuned back into the proceedings just as the latch on the front door faintly clicked in the distance. Raised voices could immediately be heard, echoing off the walls until they reached her ears.

“Jesus Christ, calm the fuck down, you moron,” the elder sister snapped at who she assumed was Bolin, but most certainly wasn't. “It's not that cold out...”

With every word the volume faded. The exhausted investigator could picture exactly how the Iron Lady's eyes would be going wide, bulging in their sockets as the little spitfire on the other end of her abuse was revealed. A scuffle immediately ensued as Kuvira likely tried to slam the door in her sister's face to hide from the wrath that lay in wait.

Not that it would save her, even if she managed to secure the lock.

All it would gain the soon to be victim was a repair bill for the splintered remains of the front door that would result now that Opal was sure she was hiding inside. Speaking of...

“There you are!” the younger Beifong shouted over the protests of her husband, throwing her weight against the door with a surprisingly heavy thud. A sound of boots scraping on floorboards, desperate scrambling to hold the line “You let me in, or I swear to god, I'll break this door down!”

*Yep. Figures. I wonder how soon I can get a new one.*

“Fucking hell, calm down!” the elder requested in a near panic, scrambling for the deadbolt.

There were three people in this world Korra was completely sure her friend was afraid of, when angered. One was a teacher who used to smack her with a ruler whenever she did anything remotely 'unladylike' as a child. Second, was her mother, which was a rare experience, but, apparently, rather volcanically impressive to see unfold. And the third, well, she was currently trying to batter down the front of the townhouse.

“You let me in, this instant, or murder is will be the last thing you have to worry about!” Opal
threatened, giving the divider between them another mighty blow.

“Fine!”

A great crashing sound as the door was flung wide, smashing into the wall beyond. They would be face to face, now, respective brothers forced to do little more than watch on and wait to step in, in case of a brawl.

“Where have you been?!”

“Why do you care?”

“T'm your sister!”

“So, what? Mom didn't make this into a big, fucking deal.”

“Mom didn't know where you were,” Opal snarled, stepping over the threshold, by the sound of it, Bolin following just behind, perhaps holding her back with his arm. “Neither did I, or dad, or Bataar, or the twins. You didn't tell anybody. Just up and vanished one morning.”

“Don't pretend I haven't done it before,” Kuvira dismissed, voice a little louder, but due to proximity, not extra effort.

“Yeah, for a couple of days,” the newlywed agreed, sarcastically, “But, you weren't gone for a long weekend while you binged, a little. You were gone for FOUR MONTHS!”

“Fucking hell, stop screaming!”

“No!” she refused, literally putting her foot down with enough force to shake the cabinets, “not until you've apologized.”

“What for?”

“For scaring me half to death!” the little sister screamed with genuine hurt in her voice. It would start, now. Their healing. Hopefully. There was a less than nil chance that this could just blow up in her face, but Korra had a feeling sisterly bond would win out. In a softer voice, she continued, “I looked everywhere for you. Even started to think you really weren't going to come back, this time.”

“Op, I...”

“I was scared, Kuvira,” Opal said, plainly, no embellishment or flowery words needed. “I even tried to get Bo to put out a missing persons on you, but he said you were fine. Wouldn't tell me how he knew, why he knew, even if. Just said you needed some time to think about things.”

There was a pause as both sisters fell silent. If patterns repeated themselves Opal's face would have softened, while Kuvira would be showing something that, on another, would look remarkably like shame. Her gaze would have fallen to her feet, jaw set, teeth grinding, tears that would never fall prickling the corner of her eyes.

Out of the lull, Bolin finally got a word in, “Yeah, probably should have handled that a little differently, now that I think about it. Just figured you wanted to let off a bit of steam after-”

“Look, we all messed up,” Mako interrupted before his brother had the chance to open any more old wounds. Going policy was to try and keep details about Kuvira's errs tightly under wraps, so as to minimize the familial backlash. Bo forgot that, sometimes. Love, good intentions, and all that.
“But she's back, she's safe, and there's no reason to break any more of Korra's stuff, right?”

Damn it! What did they break this time?

A low chorus of affirmations as everyone climbed down from their pedestals. “I'm sorry, kid,” the older sister apologized, just loudly enough to carry down the hall. “I should have told you I was going.”

“Yes, you should,” Opal agreed, over the sound of softer footsteps. “And I'm still angry with you for leaving. I'm just glad you're okay, now.”

There was a groan of discomfort. The sound of someone desperately pretending not to enjoy a hug when they most certainly did. “Cut it out,” she protested, weakly, likely struggling not to return the gesture to keep up appearances. “How many times do I have to tell you I don't like this lovey, dovey crap?”

“Shut up and hug me.”

“Fine, crybaby.”

“Ballerina.”

“Bed-wetter.”

“Prima donna.”

“Aw, that's sweet,” the most junior of the detectives sighed, warmly, “Don't you both feel better now?”

“Fuck you, Bo,” Kuvira retorted, instantly, but without the harshness those words demanded.

The plan had gone off without a hitch. Well, apart from whatever useless wall fixture had been crushed by the door. So long as it wasn't one of the gas lights, it would be easy to replace.

“So, what do you think of the gang?” Korra asked of her beloved, smiling at the sounds of reconciliation emanating from the sisters. A good deed had been done, she felt, even if one of them would never tell her so.

“Well, I haven't, exactly, met them all, yet. But, they're lively, I'll give them that,” Asami chuckled, turning to look deep into sea-blue eyes. Her smile was broad and beautiful, with one side just the little bit higher than the other. Mischief on blew on the breeze. Something played behind those eyes as cogs whirred. “But I think, I like you more.”

In a move that equal parts surprised, terrified, and delighted Korra, lips surged forwards to capture hers in a soft embrace. It was quick, but set her heart hammering like a marching drum.

“Why did you do that?!” the Inspector hissed, throwing her horrified gaze at the door for a moment before throwing it back to the instigator of her panic.

“Because, I wanted to,” she smirked back, using her thumb to quickly remove the evidence she had left, as well as making sure her own lips weren't smudged. “That and you were looking a little too confident for my liking. Can't have you going into the game all level-headed, now can I? I might lose.”

A laugh bubbled in Korra's belly at that. “You kissed me, because you thought it would throw off
me poker game? You little vixen.”

“Hey, I came to win,” Asami said with the same narrow-eyed look she had when they had their shootout. Pure determination was etched in her features. She would use any trick, no matter how dirty, to eek out a victory tonight. “Besides, I like making you squirm, Princess. Kissing you just means I get to get something out of it, too.”

*Oh, just you wait. I'll do more than just make you squirm.*

A flush started creeping up the Inspector's neck. Embarrassment scolded her, only to be beaten down by her desire to settle the score between them. Extending her hand, she accepted challenge. “Then, may the best woman win.”

Asami took her hand and shook. “Woman? Confident the boys won't edge out a win?”

“I forgot, you're new here.”

It was going to be a three way fight between them and Opal, if she decided to play. But Korra was determined, she was going to win tonight. And she knew exactly what her prize would be.

“Love you,” she whispered, softest of all.

“Love you, too,” came the equally low reply, barely a breath.

Yes, she knew just the thing.

Chapter End Notes

I'll be taking a break from Whitechapel next week to gear up for the big plot stuff in the next chapters. Might post the hospital scene out of order, as it was nearly finish before I wrote this. May also finish that smutty work that's been sitting around on my hard-drive for half a year. Who knows?

As always, leave a comment so you can feed my fragile, neurotic ego. Haha! Not really, but I love to hear from you guys.

Ciao, Humble
Out of the swirling flakes of ice rose the solemn edifice of London Hospital. High walls of limestone brick jutting above the rundown flats on either side. The abortive doctor had sensed its approach for far longer than she had been able to gaze upon its solid exterior, however. Not by any counting of paces or time from her home, but by the smell.

Death clung to this place like a cloak. The neighborhood, the hospital, the mortuary. All stank with the miasma of death in its many forms.

Blood.

Decay.

Filth.

All the dark trappings the mortal shell left behind when it released the soul within and the chemicals used to preserve the husk until family could mourn over that which had no further value.

Before coming to Whitechapel, she had never imagined a place such as this. For it was not a true place of healing, but a training ground for the next generation of British butchers. Standards lagged behind her homeland's in every category by at least a decade-and-a-half, and not by choice. Funding was almost nonexistent. To be short-staffed on every ward was commonplace, if not the norm. Sanitation was abysmal. The ill and the injured were mingled with no thought of infection, simply for lack of rooms to put them. Use of medicine was sparing, lack of supply frequently critical, and often little more than experimental in dosage.

It even functioned as a sort of attraction, at times, as some of the less scrupulous (or underpaid) members of staff would charge for tickets to see one of the patients: a Mr. Joseph Merrick, who had been deemed the ‘Elephant Man’ in the tabloids. Only when his devoted friend and carer, Dr. Treves, was there could they be kept at bay.

The very existence of London Hospital had put the final nail in the coffin of her desire to become a healer. For if she should end up working in such a place, she would surely go insane. Or, at least,
more insane than she already was.

Apprehension waxed and waned like the tide, Tui and La dancing in her belly. Only the comforting presence of the one by her side kept her from shaking. She felt like a child, again. Clutching at her mother's hand as she was led into the temple to be proclaimed by the Angakok as Avatar. Only, then she had known the outcome. Now, all she had was a dreadful uncertainty, this fear of the unknown that even cold logic couldn't quell.

Her mind had whirred the entire way here, picturing dozens of scenarios. Who followed whom? What time? Which alley? How bad? How badly were they injured?

How much blood?

Neither of her colleagues, friends, would have gone down without a fight, but Old Man Reid was like a stray dog. Once he had his teeth sunk into someone, he didn't let go easily. You'd have to kill him to shake him off.

Kill…

Dead.

Another comrade lost.

The compulsion to wretch began to build again. Her mouth was watering, stomach heaving. She could feel the blood draining from her face.

Fingers met hers, weaving into them. Something to hold onto. Kind words filtered into her ears, somehow making it through the maelstrom of thoughts and fears bombarding her sanity.

“Everything will be okay, Korra,” the heiress soothed her, looking at her with a confident hope in her eyes. “I know you'll figure this out.”

What the Inspector wouldn't give to feel like that, right now? To be sure, despite all the uncertainty.

Even so, being with her helped. Weak smile formed, shaky, but still there. “Thank you,” she whispered, shakily, unable to rid herself of this persistent chill. It crept into her bones, her skull. Icy fingers on everything, clenching on her organs. Her heart hurt, squeezing tight with every beat as regret sounded through her very soul. But, Asami made it bearable. “I just don't like sitting around like this.”

“I can tell,” she hummed, scooting a little bit closer on the little bench they shared.

It had been an hour since they arrived. Sixty minutes of idleness, of wasted time. Spent sitting in this hall while others rushed about like ants. No one had told her anything, save the very basics.

Reid was in surgery, had been since his abrupt arrival. Pneumothorax of the left lung, slashed tendons and nicked vessels in both arms, internal bleeding on a massive scale. If he were to live the night, it would be a miracle. That he had survived as long as he had was a minor one, already. Even the best case scenario was grim, as the damage to his hands would likely ruin them forever.

The kindly Sergeant Steinman had fared, relatively, better. While gruesome to behold, none of his injuries were an overt threat to his life, save one. A blow to his head had knocked him through a loop. His level of consciousness was fluid. Lucidity, as well.

One moment he would be dazed, but alert. The next, fading until it was a struggle to wake him.
They wouldn't let her see him, let alone ask him any questions.

She felt so impotent, so helpless. Her realm was questions, evidence. Tangible things she could hold in her hand, motivations she could untangle. They made sense. She could figure them out. Put each piece of the puzzle together until the final picture formed, truth revealing itself unto her as revelation.

Not this. This waiting. Relying on the competence of those she did not know, to save the lives of those she cared for.

It was beyond her ability to bear.

“Do you want to talk about something to pass the time?” Asami asked, innocently. Turning, she saw the look in her eyes. A little flash of that old fear that dwelt so deep inside her, buried under cheer and humor. “Anything? Doesn't have to be about work. We could talk about the weather, if you like?”

Not the weather. That would be worse than silence. Empty, hollow. Like her heart.

Not work. That would drive her mad with anxiety.

Not them. This moment would tarnish her joy even more, turn her love into something foul and festering. Another black blot on this once perfect evening.

“I-I don't know,” she said, dazed, hurt, but speaking the truth. Korra simply didn't know, anymore. Nothing made sense. Thoughts and ideas threw themselves at her, half-formed, lacking structure, order. Things she needed them to be.

“That's okay,” Asami told her, words laced with an empathy that made the Avatar's seizing heart unclench, just a fraction. “I'll be right here, if you do.”

It struck Korra that this likely wasn't the first time Asami had sat like this. Waiting for news, hoping, praying. They hadn't ever talked about it, really. Her mother's death. Other than the knowledge that it had happened when she had been very young, the detective knew almost nothing knew almost nothing.

Perhaps it was better that way.

Best not to dig up old wounds.

“Thank you,” she repeated, swallowing the lump in her throat, “For coming with me, I mean.”

There. That smile that lit up the world. Brighter than any fire, outshining even the sun. Yes, it's light made even Malina's life giving rays feel as pale and hollow as her brother Anningan's reflections.

“You'd do the same for me, in a heartbeat,” her love spoke with love and wisdom. After a subtle glance around, a soft hand reached up and a thumb brushed at the corners of her eyes. It came away wet and Korra realized she had been crying. Or about to cry, she couldn't tell. She just couldn't tell anymore. “Stay strong for them, Inspector, they're counting on you,” her girlfriend counseled, calling on her sense of duty, “and so am I.”

Of course, yes, they needed her now. No time to cry. Later, there would be. And there would be arms to hold her as the sobs took hold.
How much she owed this woman, already. How could she ever repay her debt?

Out of the corner of her eye, Korra caught sight of a familiar head of hair. Pure gold, like she had once admired so greatly, but streaked with bands of silver. Between those locks, a face that would easily have been the most beautiful in her village, if not county, some decades ago. It still would be hard to challenge, now. Even after years of marriage and motherhood had etched lines upon it, there was still a girlish charm about her. A little twinkle in her eye.

*Emily. Mrs. Emily Reid.*

Her eyes were tearless, thin smile on her face. What news had she, that Korra not?

Out of instinct and knowing nothing better to do, she stood, with Asami following suit. The connection between them was broken as the older woman approached them.

“Korra, is tha' you, dear?” the woman asked, smile growing even brighter at the sight of her junior.

“Yes, Ma'am.”

“No need ta' be so formal, hon,” the mother told her, with her typical affection. “Yer as good as family, you are.”

Arms opened to draw her into a motherly hug. If she closed her eyes, the Avatar could almost imagine that it was her own mother, crossed seas to be here and hold her. “Sorry I missed the girls' birthdays,” she said, unable to pull from her mind any words of comfort to offer.

“S'no problem, love,” Emily hummed, letting go of her embrace and stepping back a pace. “They missed not getting ta' braid yer hair, I think, but they know what tha life is like. Lord knows their father's put 'em through enough, over tha' years.”

Years that might have come to an end.

“Have you heard anything?” the detective asked, voice low and respectful. Had to keep it from trembling.

“Nah, I haven't,” Emily admitted with a calm air that took the Avatar by surprise. Mrs. Reid was a woman of passions, much to the consternation of her browbeaten husband. Always a cause for her to support, some social evil to be undone. Never had she been afraid to laugh or cry, regardless of what company she had or what their opinion might be. To see her so level was concerning, and yet, strangely comforting. “But I'm no' too worried about 'im. My Eddy's been through far worse than this and pulled through, just fine.”

Worse than getting run through? Not much beyond that in terms of violence. Getting shot, she supposed, though Reid showed little signs of such. Save, perhaps, for the limp that troubled him so.

“I've heard he's a very good man,” Asami said, filling the blank air she left as her mind latched onto any puzzle she could find. Anything to keep her mind off what was, what might be, and what may come to pass.

“Tha he is, though he does fergit it, at times,” Mrs. Reid agreed, turning to Korra's companion with mild curiosity. Eyes of a mother looked her up and down. In a few years, she suspected any potential suitors at her front door would “Fergive me, lass, but A’ can't seem ta place your face. Are you one of the new ones down at tha station?”

“Um, no, ma'am,” the mechanic denied, offering her hand to the woman in her traditional fashion,
“I'm a friend of Korra's.”

“Does this friend have a name?” the bearer of the mane of gold asked, returning the offer and briefly shaking her junior's hand. Her eyes did flick between them, searching, peering, hunting for something, then relenting into a more neutral gaze.

“It's Asami, Mrs. Reid.”

“A pleasure, lass. May I sit?”

“Of course, ma'am.”

And thus, the wife joined them on their vigil. Saying little, waiting much. Stiff upper lip, straight back, and dry eyes as she waited for news of her husband. If it weren't for the crucifix held tightly in her grip, Korra would have taken her for being as seemingly calm as Asami.

How the Reid's had stayed married as long as they had, Korra would never know. He had lost his god many years ago, or, at the very least, shunned his worship. The only time he ever invoked the name of the 'Lord' was in a curse upon the world. She went to church each Sunday, a small-town preacher's daughter of Irish roots. While her speech may, at times, have been profane, never had she stooped to using the name of her savior in any way, other than praise.

Their love was different than her parent's, or Tenzin and Pema's. Causal arguments abounded in public. Never had they presented a united front to her or any other. To the extent that the only thing they seemed to agree on anything was their daughters’ needs, on whom they doted endlessly.

But, between the bickering, there was tenderness. A deep, sometimes turbulent, occasionally even strained love existed between the two.

Reid never missed a family meal, if he could help it. He'd bow his head in prayer as his wife said grace, never once interrupting her sermon. For her part, Emily would bring him a hot meal should he ever have need to extend his tour after sundown, sitting with him in his office until he finished.

Edmund's daughters loved him, were proud of him. The oldest, Elizabeth, had even started talk of joining Jinora in applying to the Met when they were old enough. An idea that half of the family greatly disapproved of, even as the other did not. While the younger girl, dear Margaret, was still too young for such talk, she was of an age to brag to her friend's about how her daddy 'caught the bad men'.

Now a bad man had caught him.

Vaguely, the Avatar remembered seeing a light at the end of this tunnel. A time when she had hope. Back when mistakes and failures weren't snowballing on top of each other, making every scratch of progress seem pointless, in the end.

Despair.

Entropy.

A hand on hers.

Hold on tight. Don't let go. Don't ever let go.

“Hey, let's go outside for a bit,” Asami urged softly in her ear. Without waiting for an answer, she raised herself up, pulling the Inspector along with her. They made their apologies, then left.
Down and out the way they came. Passing empty wheelchairs, open wards with moaning patients. Nurses and orderlies with just as much hopeless weariness in their eyes as she felt ignored them as they passed. Doctors plied their craft, desperately and ineffectively trying to hold back the tide of human misery, whilst trying to keep their students on a tight leash.

The doors looked like a portal to another world, snow fluttering down on the other side, pure and white.

Cold air filled her lungs, a shock to the system she desperately needed. A wonderful mental reset. Close her eyes and she was miles away, far from problems and stormy clouds. It was like coming up for air after being caught in an eddy. Her body felt lighter, her soul less crushed by pain.

*Deep breaths.*

*Breath.*

*Just breathe.*

A look around showed that the street was empty, save for a pair of cabs loitering around half a block away. Even the usual collection of beggars and homeless had fled from the drifts of powdery white that had climbed even higher whilst they had been in the confines of those maddening walls.

“Do you need to cry?” her kuluk asked, skipping straight passed the tiptoeing stage and getting right to the point.

*Yes.*

“No.” Not true, not nearly true. But, it had been almost a full year since she allowed herself the luxury. Right after she had ended her last love affair tears had flowed for a day, or so, quickly fading as sorrow turned to bitterness.

“Okay,” Asami hummed, lips creasing into something other than a kind smile for the first time this morning. “Do you want to go back in?”

Turn to look at the high walls once more. Cold. Cold dread at the sight of them. The doors both call out for her and make her want to run away. Run and hide. Go back to her home and pretend the last hours didn't happen.

“No,” she decided. Nothing for her in there. Naught but pointless conjecture without form or substance. “I'll come back when they wake up.” For they would wake up. Part of her seemed to know it. Maybe the change of scenery had given her a little more of a glimmer of belief. Or, just as likely, if not more, some of Asami's magic had finally taken hold. Never could fight that smile. “I think I'll head off to the station. Folks'll be turning up, by now, and we'll need to start the search while the trail's hot.”

At last, something in those emeralds softened. Some little wafer of concern dissipated as Korra's own confidence began to build, her instincts kicking in, at last. “Is this the part where I'm supposed to wish you happy hunting?” she mused, coking her head a little to one side. “Maybe 'good luck' is a better way to put it?”

Korra nearly laughed, taking the first step down the stairs towards the street. “I like the first one,” the Inspector told her, smiling despite herself. Not with giddiness, but determination. She knew that she would win. “It makes it seem more dramatic.”

“And you're looking for more drama in your life, why exactly?” her 'girlfriend', she supposed,
asked with a cheeky little glint in her eye. Just can't pass up the chance to tease.

“I'm sorry I dragged you along,” the foreigner apologized as they slowed to a stop upon the edge of the cobble, taking the jab in stride. It actually helped, if she was honest. Made the world seem less bleak and dire.

Just as good humored as ever, Asami merely shrugged. “It's not how I wanted to wake up, but I can live with it,” she replied with a slightly more comforting smile. “Besides, this just means I get to drag you along someplace in the middle of the night, later, so look forward to that. No complaints allowed.”

“Deal,” the Avatar agreed, taking the woman's other hand in hers, as well, as they faced each other, snowflakes dancing in the space between, “and, thank you, again.”

“You're welcome, Princess,” the reply, and for once Korra didn't feel peeved at the use of the word. Fondness was now etched into it when issued from these lips. Not a title, but a little pet name, like lovers had for one another. Keen eyes scanned their surroundings, before lips rushed forwards to catch hers, briefly.

Heat immediately rose in both of their cheeks. Being so bold, even so late at night, in so dim a street felt layered in risk. So much so that they both took a step back and smiled like love shy schoolgirls half their age.

“Guess you'll be working for the rest of the night, huh?” Asami thought aloud, finally kicking the conversation along.

“Yeah.”

Not that she wanted to. Right now, the prize jewel of Scotland Yard wanted nothing more than to return to her couch and curl up with those arms around her again. For that injustice, she would make up for. A night where nothing went wrong, where it was just the two of them, together and happy.

A real couple.

“Want to catch lunch, later, or will you be too busy?”

Likely, it would be the later. But saying no just didn't feel right. “We'll play it by ear,” the detective shrugged, blush only now starting to fade. Thank the Spirits no one was watching them. Her heart could barely take it, as it was.

“Well, in that case, you take care of yourself, Inspector.”

“I will.”

“Korra,” Asami insisted, putting an extra edge on her words, “I mean it, this time. Don't do anything reckless, please.”

“I promise,” Korra swore, fully intent on keeping her word. “Nothing stupid, nothing reckless, no running into burning buildings or jumping off rooftops until I can give you a proper night together.”

“We just had a proper night a few hours ago,” her companion pointed out in a lower tone.

“You know what I mean. A full one. No work, just us.”
They stood like that for a while, slowly letting the air sap the heat from them. Neither wanted to be the first to say 'goodbye'. But, eventually, one of them did. They hugged, tight. Whispered those three words that would keep Korra going until they saw each other next.

“I love you.”

There, they parted. The heiress into her hackney, the officer back to her beat, much the same as they had many times before. Only now, amid the swirling morass of emotions, facts, assumptions, deductions, fears, and hope, there stood a rock. Upon it a lighthouse, a beacon showing her the way home.

She was adrift in the current, no longer.

Her work had purpose, she remembered. To protect. To avenge. To keep that smile shining bright.

Much to her distaste, Jack would have to wait a few days. He would have his time, no doubt, to feel her boot on his neck. But while he had taunted her, gained both her ire and contempt, this one and his keeper would know her wrath. It wasn't proper to get overly invested, to take a case personally, but she had never been any good at all that.

Especially when her friends, her family, were involved.

Prison and the noose were too good for him and his ilk. No, it was time for something far more British than she tended to care for. Pulled straight out of the pages of those dusty old tomes that had fed her mind with endless fantasies as a child.

As well as nightmares.

Heads.

Spikes.

Walls.

*I'm coming for you, Amon. And your little dog, too. Sleep well, tonight, because when I find you I will teach you**fear**."

Chapter End Notes

A return to form (I hope, fingers crossed) for Anon, some angst for Tsuba, and a kiss for Turnkey. Hope that hits the bases for all of you. Next chapter's going well atm, see you when it's done.

JMStei here. I was asked to say ‘hi’ in the notes, so I am now going to do it in as many languages as I can off the top of my head. Dag, oi, hoi, hola, cześć, salve, bonjour, hei, hallo. Ok, with that now out of the way, I want to thank Humble for letting me beta this amazing work. It really is a pleasure to be doing this. And in addition to this work, I’ll be editing Patience is a Virtue, also by the amazing HumbleCommoner.

Humble: Yeah, when I ever get around to it. Haha!
The Equalist Society of London

Chapter Summary

Heads Will Roll.

Chapter Notes

I've had to change up Amon's message quite a bit, since, you know, no benders. I'll elaborate more on his motives, beyond the preachy, sales-pitch stuff next chapter. Get into the nitty gritty ideology that makes my head hurt and has probably put me on half a dozen government watchlists for researching.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was late.

Approaching midnight, according to her watch. Snow was piled high against walls, on roofs, in the street itself. A bitter chill was in the air, wind coming off the Thames with all the foulness that provided her nostrils.

Yet, still, the docks were crowded. Sailors just come ashore after days or weeks at sea. Longshoremen tired and thirsty after a long day's work, not quite ready to return home to their families. They drank deeply at pubs and gin-joints up and down the waterfront. Off-key singing and the clanking of their bottles, glasses, and tankards echoed down the street to meet her ears. Some even perused the darker side of nightlife, making friendly at the opium dens and brothels that added a uniquely sour taste to the air to make the stomach roil.

Sex and poppy. Such a unique combination.

Regardless, whichever vice they chose to partake in or avoid, very few would avoid being bled dry of every last copper in their pockets by morning's light.

And, as per usual, some would inevitably attempt to woo passing Police Inspectors with work far more pressing than breaking wayward fingers.

Not that either of them minded taking the time. Almost half-an-hour was left until the work at hand would begin. But after the third slug to a greasy face, blasted alabaster by driving salt and spray, even this couldn't keep Korra's jitters in check.

“Time?” her partner asked, lighting the third smoke out of her second pack so far this night.

Check and see. “Seven after,” the Inspector mumbled back, scanning the crowd for anyone with too keen an interest in them. One set of informed or curious eyes could turn her plot to nothing. She held her hand out, expectantly, fingers shaking slightly, despite the numbness of the cold. “Give me one.”
Kuvira puffed deeply, ember illuminating the dark look in her eyes. Out another stick came, settled in her mouth for lighting. The Avatar received the older of the two for her nerves while Miss Beifong kept the fresh. “What's it been since you smoked last? Five years?”

“Something like that,” she hummed back, welcoming the foul smoke into her body with a shudder. It felt violating. Vile and caustic. With every wisp she could feel a few minutes of her life shrivel up and fall away.

She needed it, though. The numbing smoke, the oral fixation, a thing to occupy her mind, other than the rage that boiled in her belly.

An old theater sat across the alley from them, dilapidated and crumbling. The exterior showed the telltale signs of immolation. Black scorch marks on the melted or busted out windows, charred paneling on the sides. While the warehouses on either side had been either repaired or replaced since the blaze this one structure appeared unmended by caring hands.

What an excellent cover.

As the boys approached them from the other direction, Korra marveled at the simplicity of it. No constable would have readily checked an old firetrap, some small amount of red tape away from being condemned, for a gathering of such size as they were expecting.

Despite the danger, dozens, possibly even over a hundred of the most downtrodden, most disenfranchised would soon gather in those walls. Waiting, with eager ears and open mind, to hear the words of a man they assumed would lead them unto a glorious future. Honestly, it was a rather appealing message, from a certain point of view. Take back your city, take back your lives, change the world to suit your needs.

The message of every two-bit, cut-and-paste revolutionary: stand up for the little guy, by sticking it to the big guys.

What twist to the formula had this one made? This 'Equalist'.

“Ready to go?” Mako asked, tipping his hat down as a gaggle of particularly shady characters passed. Just a glance showed him and his brother were just as prepared for a fight as the ladies. Light leather gloves instead of wool, just the barest sliver of linen wrap showing between them and the cuffs of their jacket.

Ready for a dust up, just like the old days. “Waiting on the clock,” Kuvira hummed, offering him his own smoke. Part of Korra was mildly peeved that he got a whole while she only the leftovers, but the burn in her throat set her straight rather quick.

“Anyone got a pack of cards?” Bolin asked, taking a spot on the wall to lean. His eyes seemed less harsh than theirs, more muted and apprehensive than vengeful.

“Already ready to lose all your cash, again?” his brother prodded, lighting up and joining him against the brick. “Here I thought your coffers would be all tapped out after the Avatar worked her magic on you.”

“S'not my fault I got screwed over,” the youngest protested, gesticulating in a way that wasn't, exactly, helpful in the whole 'covert surveillance' part of the plan. “I mean, who calls an all-in on pocket Jacks with four, five suited!”

“Someone with a straight and a flush draw?” Kuvira posited, rotating smokes again at an alarming rate. How was she not hacking up a lung? How could she breathe? Could someone really get that
used to the taste and smell, or was it just that her fix was so demanding now that this was the only way to sate it?

“It was bullshit and you know it,” he grumbled, shoving his hands into his now much lighter pockets, “That pot was mine.”

“And yet...” the other three said as one.

With every word a puff of smoke and steam, swirling off into the night to be caught on an errant breeze and carried off to Spirits knew where. They caught Korra's eye as she waited, stirring in her a longing for such freedom. If only they could follow, floating on the wind until the earth fell away beneath their feet.

Someday.

Yes, someday.

_Time?_

Yes, time to go, push off and move forwards. The Webley felt comforting on her side as she led the quartet towards the stage on which they would perform. Even more was the spare rounds jingling in her pocket like change, bouncing off the butt of her backup. Before loading, she'd checked every round and had the others do the same. Check for the same tampering that had undone Reid.

Such a clever forgery they had been, the duds that had replaced the original. Primer carefully removed by skillful hands, powder removed and placed with sand. After that, an empty cap takes the live one's place.

Same weight, same balance, barely a tool mark in sight.

None in the chain of supply had spilled the beans as to the perpetrator, all claiming ignorance and horror. Nor had any of them the skill to make such a convincing replica. But, if she was the betting kind of woman, which she was, Korra would wager that there was one in those walls that could.

Nothing a bit of cold steel couldn't get around, in a pinch.

Through the doors she went, making sure to balance herself with the right amount of purpose and trepidation. Look like you're meant to be there, but like you're not entirely sure what's going on. Get passed the guards, big brawny men with clubs in hand. They'd pose no trouble, even if her face was recognized on the way in. She was faster, angrier, and damn-well knew she could hit harder than some over-muscled street thugs with a couple sticks. Even without the extra bodies her fellow officers provided.

Unfortunately, good as it might feel to let off some steam early, raising the alarm wouldn't be helpful. The targets would flee, disappearing into the night, ruining an opportunity and wasting many favors to earn noninterference.

Mako peeled off at the door, as per the plan. Being that he had the most experience in the field of undercover work, his presence there would be less noticeable. Lack of notoriety was his friend. Not in years had his name crossed a barrister's desk or been spoken in a courtroom. Evidence of his was always written and ascribed to a rotating line-up of other officers.

In Whitechapel, he was a ghost. Outside it's confines, he might as well not even exist.

It would be up to the remaining three of them to attend to the event, proper. Korra wanted to hear
this speech. See what mad drivel had led to the death of one of her closest friends and the maiming of her predecessors in the field. What cause gave them the right?

Burnt char filled her nose as she pondered that, overpowering the lingering rank of her cigarette. Mingling in was the unmistakable perfusion of wet-rot. Decaying wood, mold and mildew, the taste of termites on the air.

Three-months. That was all this building had, at max, before it crumbled under its own weight.

What a place to gather. If the crowd inside got rowdy enough, Spirits, even made enough noise, the roof might just come down around their ears, burying them along with their hopes.

And noise they made. Senseless, excited chatter. A clattering of nervous teeth as the assembled awaited the arrival of their savior, her prey. Subdued, babbling, meaningless speculation amid the ruins of a once raucous establishment.

From her position, the Inspector looked over them. Thirty, forty, fifty, more coming every few minutes. Mostly men, mostly young. All gathered into little cliques where the seats used to be, each shuffle of their feet sending up spores and ash to sting her eyes and nose. Their presence would make her life difficult, no matter their reaction to hers. Fight, run, cower, any option would slow her down. Impede her in her chase.

Violence wouldn't be her first choice of resolutions, this time, even if she definitely wasn't averse to the idea. On her desk sat his file, sent across the great sea by telegraph only a day ago. The record was lengthy and detailed, taking the better part of two hours to send. Nearly half that to read.

Her man was not one to be trifled with. Nor underestimated.

Gradually, as the last of the spectators filtered in, the three of them took up positions near the remains of the stage. The platform showed signs of recent repair work. Boards hastily hammered down where holes once where, debris and rubbish pushed off to one side. Someone had even seen to hanging up a curtain. Vibrant red amid the browns and blacks and grays of decay.

_Pretentious. Thinks much of himself. Elsewise, fond of theatrics._

Bolin nudged her with his shoulder, tipping his hat down low. Without a word, she knew what he meant: “We're too close.”

Back they went, just a few rows. Far enough to blend in with the crowd, but not far enough to keep them from rushing through, if needs be. That is, if the crowd hadn't thickened in anticipation. Pressing closer, breath on her neck, stank of sweat and beer in her nose. Wrong kind of breath, sour, not sweet. Wrong kind of sweat, anxiety, not passion.

Never liked crowds. All eyes on her, not enough room, not enough air.

Hard to breath.

“You good?” Kuvira hummed, not tearing her predatory gaze from the curtains. Darting, this way and that, searching for her first glance of the men that had gained all her focus and bile.

“Fine,” the senior Inspector replied softly, pulling herself together. Mild demophobia be damned.

A cockney pushed between them, elbowing his way to the front, apologizing all the way. His arm thrust her aside, digging the sheath of her blade into her side. Had he noticed? His eyes turned to meet hers. Tips his hat, “Apologies, Ma'am.”
His face. Something about his face. Something familiar.

And his voice...

No time to think about that, now. A hush rolled over the crowd. Rustling of the billowing crimson sheet. It parts, and a man walks through.

Tall. Closer to six-feet than to her, by Korra's guess. Broad, square shoulders, rigid upper half, arms held behind him like a lecturer or nobleman. Hooded cloak of a blue so dark it was nearly black. Baggy clothes to hide his physique. Make him look either larger or less threatening, depending on the need. Beady, dark eyes peering through a stark-white mask etched with golden-yellow patterns edged with royal blue wisps, centered around a single red globe. A mask she recognized, though others assembled wouldn't.

Teeth ground in the Avatar's jaw as she took in his craftsmanship. Or rather, forgery. Wan Shi Tong's eye, the eye of knowledge, reserved for those of the greatest learning. And Raava's image, her image. Her mark.

Defamed.

Bastardized.

Defiled.

Beyond taboo, the voice in her head told her, growling with the rage she felt, now honed to a fine edge. Spirits of peace, Spirits of enlightenment, used to spread his hate, and to those ignorant of their meaning. Smash it and any others. Nevermore to see the light of day.

And then, he spoke: “My friends, I'm glad so many of you have gathered, today.” Starting off humble. He was no preacher on a mount, just a friend, begging for your ear. “Trust me when I say, it won't take long to spread unto you our call.”

He tapped his foot in a small puddle of melted snow that had leaked in through the roof, sound echoing in the silence of his audience. What a showman. “London is sick,” he said with much more gravity than before, “This nation is sick. The world is sick.” Simple words, simple statements. Easy to wrap your head around. What you would take home with you, even if you forgot everything else. “And the Law, as it exists, is the sickness.”

A murmur of accent from many. Much nodding of heads, to boot.

“Gangs roam the streets without fear, robbing, raping, extorting as they please,” he told them, words firm and commanding respect. “Murderers walk free, not a care in their hearts. So bold are they, that they send letters to the papers, bragging of their exploits, and taking trophies of every kill.”

Korra's stomach roiled at that. Another dig sent her way.

Then, the pin dropped. Provided, the problem was. Not by him, but by the listener. With simple prompts he'd sunk the hook in, letting minds go wild with further examples of urban societies decay. Now, all he had to do was reel them along.

“And, what of the Police, you ask? Sworn defenders of the people, so noble and just. Where are they when our homes are burgled, our children beaten and robbed, our shops vandalized, women harassed, men mugged and crimped?” He let the questions hang, allowing for the muttering to rise in volume, let the rowdiness grow under his narrow gaze. “Why, they're evicting us after the
robber-barons milk us for every pence in rent. Forcing us into workhouses to labor for thin porridge and a rotten cot. Tormenting us as we strive to work for wages that can feed our children. I ask you: is this fair?"

“No!” the crowd answered together. The din had grown more and more with every word. Rowdy became raucous, agreement turned to righteous anger.

“And as they enforce the law, they ignore it! Bursting into our homes at every hour, breaking strikes while breaking bones—" I'll start by breaking your teeth. "-They claim to protect, while forcing those who need them most to cower in fear.”

It was the turn of the women gathered to be the loudest, crying offense on behalf of brothers, husbands, and sons. How many tears had she seen fall from their faces as the hurled insults at her like stones? “He's a good boy,” they'd always say, even if his hands were literally drenched in blood.

“Meanwhile, the ones that rob us, really rob us, sit cozily in their homes. Roaring fires, high walls, the very world at their fingertips. Safe in the knowledge, that with a little coin, the scratch of a pen, and a friendly smile, all their transgressions will disappear like mist in the breeze.” There, something in his eyes had changed. A flash of emotion. She was too far away to see it clear enough to read, but it had been there. Her countryman hid something from his flock. “I tell you now what you already know: their justice isn't just.”

Whoops and hollers deafen her as voices raise to a thunderous roar.

“I don't like this guy,” the sergeant hummed in her ear, miming his agreement so they wouldn't stand out. Korra clapped slowly, Kuvira stared so hard that the fact Amon didn't combust under the intensity was remarkable.

“Join the fucking club,” his in-law growled, popping her knuckles, one-by-one. Just the restraint she'd shown so far in not blowing his head off was impressive, in its own right.

They grew up so fast.

“-take back this city! Take back your streets. Take back your lives. Take back the very laws themselves!” he continued to the adulation of all assembled. Even through her stewing anger, Korra could not help but notice the man's charisma. His voice was confident and melodic. Words flowed from his forked tongue as well as any statesman she had met. Better, even, than most. Charming and disarming. Forceful, yet not off-putting. Weaving his message into her ears like thread.

The Devil in the Garden, to borrow a phrase.

From behind his back, his arms appear, reaching up as though to cradle the world in them. As he did, his sleeve fell, slightly, drawing the Inspector's eye and, therefore, attention.

What was that? The device on his arm. Strange and so familiar. A glove, but not like any she had ever seen. Brass or copper plates lined the palm and fingers. Wires wound up the sleeve. It looked like some kind of gadget Asami would meddle with endlessly to pass the time.

Why did it tickle her mind so? Where had she-

Someone tapped her shoulder. Fingers shoot for her gun, then knife. Close quarters like this called for a blade and bludgeon.
Maybe her blackjack would be better still?

“We have a problem,” her ex whispered in her ear, sending a cold shiver down her spine. *How the fuck does he do that?!*

“What?”

“Feng is here.”

She jerked around, letting the speech, temporarily, pass from her mind as she scanned the remains of the top row. Sure enough, the man himself stood, practically screaming he was a bobbie. No subtlety, nor finesse about him. Barking orders at his minions, the great brutes of the Special Irish Division, twirlable mustache puffing with every snap.

And there, besides him, were a pair she knew too well. Rounding belly and thick arms, bowler hat and soup trap. Lithe, almost emaciated frame and widows peak, just poking out from under a battered deerskin. The duo that had tailed her these last weeks, together or alone. Hiding in the shadows, simply passing by. A street vagrant, a nut vendor, and at least one cab she’d taken (though she suspected several more).

“She？” she growled, drawing the ear of her less bloodthirsty comrade and a few that were uninvolved. The name would spread like wildfire, if it weren't already. “Koh, Itsuluit!”

“What do we do?” Mako asked, nodding her back towards the stage.

The curtain was being slowly, jerkily drawn back to expose the stage beyond. Amon had turned his back on them and was approaching a trio bathed in darkness. One struggling on a chair, held firm by those on either side.

“Get them out of here!” she hissed, trying to push through the impenetrable wall of people between her and them. As the light had risen in the dark she'd caught sight of a terrified face. One she knew very well, whether twisted into the smuggest smile or sniveling at her feet after spilling on his fellows.

“This man,” Amon addressed, pointing at Tahno with the hand not clad in the strange device whose purpose had just clicked in Korra's mind, “is a criminal. A thief, extortionist, pimp, and opium peddler. He claims to have killed three men for crossing him, and yet, he still walks free, despite his name and face being well known in by those noble officers of Scotland Yard. As such, I believe he will make for a fine example.”

Too thick. She couldn't force her way through. Rather, Korra seemingly found herself pushed farther from the stage with every second as more of the crowd turned to shove her back.

Had to stop this.

Had to break through.

*He's not a thug,* she thought, growing ever more desperate in her struggle, though not as much as the man on stage, *He's harmless. Just an idiot who thinks he's tough.*

Even as the Inspector willed for stalled time, her mole granted her such. With dexterity she thought beyond him, Tahno forced the bundle of hemp from his mouth that had acted as his gag. In typical fashion, he began to blubber and plead. “Please,” he begged, straining so hard against his captors that his arms bent at a horrible angle, “Please, don't do this! I have a family! I've never hurt anyone, I swear! It was all lies, I tell you!”
His words did not sway Amon, but his tone and tears did have an effect on the crowd. For once, a bit of humanity leaked out from amidst their righteous anger as they started to feel a spark of empathy. It let the Avatar surge, bursting through to the edge of the stage where strong hands grabbed at her, roughly.

“God, please,” the officer heard as she spun to smash the man who had grabbed her in the face with a heavy punch. One of the guards from the door, hand turned to fists in her jacket. “I don't want to die!”

Baying for blood turned to protest in a heartbeat as the crowd began to turn. Women wailed, men hurled curses. Humanity became a roiling sea.

A loud thumping crack as Kuvira brought the weight of her truncheon down on the Equalist's head, dropping him to the floor like a sack of potatoes. From there the violence spread, like a ripple in a pond. People shoved and pulled. A riot was starting to form. Soon, reaching the sacrifice in time would be the least of her problems.

Hauling herself up, Korra's fingers clawed for purchase on rotten wood, half charcoal/half dust under her frantic fingers. No other option, she barked an order of her own, sliding into her mother tongue in hopes to shock the man, even if only for a moment: “Stop!”

Every second counted.

Behind her, another man shouted. Holmes, shock and anger in his single word. “NO!”

CRACK!

A shot rang out. No telling who fired it, let alone where it ended up. No time to check. The room was pandemonium to her rear, but her world was forward. All forward.

Sounds of panic, her fellow officers, Holmes and Watson, even her own heartbeat pounding in her ears, faded to nothing as her senses were overwhelmed by a low hum. A new smell in the air. More potent than the cornucopia of others. Like the whiff of lightning amid a thunderstorm's howling wind. The hair on her arm prickled. Her neck too.

Tears dripped from Tahno's eyes as he grew too afraid to struggle. Doom was approaching. The end was nigh. His last words were breathy, pleading. “Someone, help me.”

“Pathetic. At least face your end with dignity,” Amon said, coolly. Every step was measured, deliberate, even as Korra got her feet under her, starting to sprint towards them, “Even if you had none in life.”

Revolver out. Shoot him. Shoot him now!

Caught on her coat. Tear it free. Don't break the action.

The whole theater falls silent, for an instant. Arcs of light appear, jumping from finger to finger. Electricity hummed and chirped like ten-thousand birds in the eerie silence of Korra's mind as she realizes the awful truth. She's too late.

Hand makes contact.

Then, screaming. Loud and pained. Twisted, horrified, juddering.

Paralyzed. Can't move. Only watch as a man she once pitied as much as despised eyes bulge in
terror, then grow dark before her own.

She couldn't save him.

So close, but no.

Silence echoes.

Dead.

Because of her.

Cooked flesh wafted her way. Vomit built in the Avatar's throat. Sick. She was going to be sick.

Laughter. Cruel, cruel laughter. It cut her horror with burning rage. White hot and murderous. All her brain and body wanted was to wrap her fingers around the source of that laughter and squeeze until she felt it stop. Watch as the light left his eyes, as well.

“Equality must be fought for. And no battle this grand can be won without sacrifice,” the murderer recited like scripture. Because it was. A saying of her past self, twisted and deformed like everything else this monster touched. “Isn't that right,” he turned to face her, mean glint in his eye, “'Inspector Waters?’”

He spat the words like insults. As though the very act of forming them offended his tongue. But Korra had her own venom to hurl his way.

“ I'll kill you for that, ” she stated with trembling anger, leveling her gun at his head and making sure to aim right between his eyes. “ Wander forever in the Sea of Lost Souls, Noatak. ” Pull the trigger. End him!

Beneath his mask, she saw a smile. “Hm, it's been a long time since I heard that name.”

Chapter End Notes

I know you guys hate cliffhangers, and so do I. Unfortunately, there's been a bit of a minor emergency on my end. It's been raining for about two weeks straight where I live, and I woke up on Thursday to ankle deep water in the house. It has since receded, but more heavy rain is in the forecast, so I'll be fortifying the homestead and heading to higher ground. This'll obviously, put another delay on the next chapter as I deal with insurance and such.

Very sorry about all this, but I hope you enjoyed Part 1 of Korra's (attempted?) revenge. Comments will really help improve my mood this week, and I'd love to hear what you think of Amon, so far.

'Til drier pastures, Humble

JMStei here. I am not flooded out of my home.

Humble: Very funny.
Chapter Summary

Picking up where we left off.

Chapter Notes

I powered through and wrote this over the weekend in my little free time, so I'm sorry if the quality isn't up to scratch. But, what can I say? I like you guys and don't want you to have to suffer because of me.

Hope you enjoy, regardless.

Life stuff update: The homestead is currently being stripped of drywall (like, as I'm writing this) so my head is pounding. Luckily, insurance will cover most everything, so that has lowered stress levels, a ton. That and we're getting a new project in restoration that has had me smiling since I got the email.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Don't blink.

Don't flinch.

Just squeeze the trigger and watch him die.

Finger trembles on the sliver of metal. Why can't she do it? Why does her hair stand on end? Just do it!

Something about his smile, the little of it she can see, terrifies her. No fear. No regret. Nothing. Only cause and purpose. Glad to die for either. To be a martyr for his revolution. Be the beacon his followers would rally round as they watched the world burn.

“What's the matter, Avatar?” he asked in their native tongue, taking a bold step towards her and the chaos of the crowd. Sparks crackled from his gauntlet, ozone permeated the air. He would kill her, too, if she let him get close enough. “Where is all that fire from a few moments ago?”

“Don't move!” the Inspector ordered in English, zeroing in on a spot sure to snuff out his light with the slightest twitch.

“Don't tell me you've never done it before?” Amon questioned, taking further steps, forcing Korra back towards the edge. “Tough little runaway, never taken a life. Too busy playing hero.”

“No, you've been too busy playing savior,” she spat back, pulling the trigger in one smooth motion. Two loud bangs echoed, less than a second apart. Teeth gritted as something like a hammer blow struck her wrist. Hard not to scream as the heavy pistol is torn from her grasp. Watch as her shot
goes just wide, splintering the mask, tearing into the soft flesh of cheek and ear instead of bone and brain.

“ITEQ!”

Amon spun on his heel and fled, stage left. Another shot from stage right skims her nose as she tries to follow. Hot lead passes so close she can smell it. Her left hand springs for her backup, drawing the Bulldog up to snap a shot the man's way. Direct hit, center mass. A further trio of shots join hers in felling the gunman. As she followed the eloquent speaker who slew her informant, Korra strained her neck to see who had fired them.

Top of the incline, just visible through a momentary parting of the crowd. Dr. Watson, walking stick poised over Feng's throat as he stood immobile, forced against the wall by the man's strong arms. In both his hand and that of his most vexing companion were snub nosed revolvers like her own, smoke issuing from their barrels.

A flash of curtain, and they're gone. Now, the pursuit begins.

Through the crumbling structure. Beams rotten and exposed from under burnt out slat boards. Someone hurriedly tried to slam the door in front of her. Lowering her shoulder, Korra barreled through, sending the man flying into a wall that collapsed around him, burying him in termite food.

The whole building shook. Ash rained from the ceiling, stinging her eyes nearly as much as cigarette smoke had done. At least she'd have some time to flee if the roof caved in. It was a straight shot out the back. Former walls were as bony skeletons, flesh licked and chewed away by the fire. It made for an eerie, otherworldly scene as men rushed about, frantically, gathering crates and weapons and tossing them in the back of carriages and flat carts. Like an eldritch forest from her darkest nightmares.

Her assessment might have been generous as to the theater's integrity. With every step they took, ever box they hefted and rifle they slung, the charred ribs swayed like grass in a breeze in the aftermath of a wildfire.

One back stood out amongst them. Dark blue betraying him among the swarm of tan and grey ants. He barked orders. Horses reared and galloped off. Cargo, unsecured by rope or netting, bounced free, shattering upon the ground. Straw and stocks scattered on stone, making men hop and dance to avoid them.

“Amon!” Korra screamed in a white rage, snapping a second shot for his skull. It missed, by the barest inch, slamming into one of his underling's shoulder instead. “Get back here, you coward!”

Stop running! Let me kill you!

To her surprise, he stopped. The others don't, but she doesn't care about the chaff. One of them draws a pistol to challenge her advance as she leaps over the banister to the low stairs between her and them. “Drop it!” the Inspector warned, shifting her aim, “Drop it, right now!”

He didn't.

She didn't think about it, even if it would haunt her later. Face etched into her psyche, forever. Just pull the trigger, watch him fall. Blood spurted from his neck like a fountain, for just a second, before his body crumpled like an accordion. No hand goes to clutch the wound. Limbs, limp and lifeless as they fell. Good fortune for both of them, or the best she could hope for. His spine must've been severed by her shot. Death would be painless, if not pleasant.
Others scattered like startled quail, taking flight out the open air back. Likely, this had been the center point of the conflagration. Only six struts remained to hold the weight above, turning it into a makeshift warehouse they could take advantage of while other workers stayed clear.

No one wanted to get buried.

As his flock fled, the shepherd stood, resolute. The hum resumed. Lighting crackled in his palm, giving the policewoman pause. Her heels dug into charcoal floor, bringing her to a halt ten good paces from him. Either way he went, she could gun him down, in cold blood or defense. Which would she have to deal with, she wondered?

Which would sit better in her conscious?

Vengeance or self-preservation?

Honestly, she wasn't sure. Nothing to do but find out. “Finally decided to stop running?” Korra asked, running her sights up and down his torso, picking where the killing blow would land. Heart for swiftness and surety? Bowel for pain and lingering? Or liver, for a balance of the two?

“I simply thought we could have a civil discussion,” the man replied, stripping the shattered remains of his blasphemy from his face. Blood oozed from his wound. A steady trickle, crimson streaks on chocolate skin.

“I have nothing to 'discuss' with you!” the Inspector shot at him, finger quivering.

“Oh, I think you do,” he hummed, pulling a shard of whalebone from his cheek and casually flicking it to the side. “Just look at you. Embodiment of justice in two of the world's leading empires.” With the same hand, he massaged his neck, relieving whatever stiffness there might be in it. His voice was a gentle balance of serious and slightly mocking, dispassionate eyes boring into her own. “I wonder what that must be like for you?”

Teeth scraped like fingernails on a chalkboard. “You murdered my friend,” the woman growled, deciding that she'd really love to see what color a sociopaths brain was, “I am not having a deep dive into my conflicts of interest with you.”

For the first time, he betrayed surprise. “Just one? Hmm, that's news to me.”

“I see someone reads The Sun,” the Detective chuckled, enjoying the thrill having even this little amount of power over this man. Well, apart from being the one holding the gun. That certainly felt good, as well. “Hasn't anyone ever told you not to believe what you read in the tabloids? Your little pet assassin failed, Noatak. Reid and Steinman are going to be just fine.” Not entirely true. Edmund would have to learn to write with his left hand after his right had been so thoroughly shredded and Stew was still slurring the occasional word. Life, at least, was likely to stay with them for the long haul.

“So, that was the other one's name,” the Equalist remarked, lips twitching into a brief smirk, “I'm afraid I had quite forgotten it.”

“Yeah, that's his name,” Korra said, nodding. With a flick of her eyes, she checked a spot he kept flicking to. Just a blank spot of wall. Maybe an escape panel of some kind. “Now, be a good little maniac and turn off the-” What to call it? “glove and put it on the ground. It's over.”

If he didn't, it would prove a perfect excuse. Just cause for violence.

Right?
Blink. See green eyes, such fondness in them. What would she think?

“I'm afraid, I can't do that, Inspector Waters. There's still so much work to be done before I can lay down my arms,” Amon told her, lowering his palm so it wasn't in so immediately threatening a position. “And, I would tell you, My Lady, that I am perfectly sane. There are no voices in my head.”

How did he know?

Never mind.

Just messing with her. Fishing for a reaction.

“Oh, really,” Korra countered, not letting her guard slip and inch. “You're trying to tell me the man that's been trying to make the East End explode for the last month, is right in the head?”

“You, better than anyone, knows that London has been a powder keg for years,” her fellow Inuit pointed out. “All I've done is light the fuse.”

Despite herself, she couldn't deny what he said was true. Anyone with eyes could see that the city she had come to love was creaking as two forces sheared against each other. Progresses ever increasing force ramming itself against the immovable inertia of the established order. “Sorry to dump a bucket of water on that.”

“On the contrary. That little display of your comrade's will be an excellent rallying cry to gather 'round,” said the revolutionary, taking up a defensive posture to counter any rush of hers. Not that she wanted to get anywhere near that crackling hand of harnessed lighting. “Firing into a crowd of helpless people. Imagine the reaction in the papers? You've just gone and proved my point for me. The law that you enforce is so consumed with its own enforcement that you never stop to think of the human cost of doing so. Tell me, how many ruined lives have you left in your wake? How many hundreds rot in cells in our homeland for violating laws enforced in your name and that of you predecessors?”

She didn't know. Never let herself think about it. The darker side of being Avatar. Every horrid act that occurred, whether lawful or no, used to weigh heavy on her conscience. One too many sleepless nights spent rocking in her bed had forced her to move on. If only to make the nightmares stop clawing at her neon dreams.

“Like you haven't,” she spat, offended by his pretense. Only just holding back the urge to shoot, she shoved her hand into her pocket, withdrawing the picture of a happy family ripped asunder. Mother, father, smiling children. Crumpled, much folded, tear-stains still dotting it. “That Constable you had killed, this is him.” Her finger tapped his face. “His name was Gerard, and this is his wife, Susan.” Face, round and beautiful, now twisted with grief and mourning. “And his little boys: Claude, Mason, and Teddy. They don't have a father, because of you!”

“Regrettable.”

One word.

All the sympathy he could be bothered to spare.

“You being alive while he isn't is 'regrettable'!”

The man nodded. “From your point of view, I suppose it is,” he said just as calmly as before. But, with every motion of his mouth, his eye twitched. Pain. Fresh blood with every pull of muscle and
But, what is that English saying? 'You must break a few eggs to make an omelet', I think?"

Breath.

It would be so easy to kill him, right now.

Breath.

*Just proved my point for me.*

Gunning him down without a trial would inflame his followers. Reinforce their convictions. Make them feel oppressed, not manipulated. Lost forever to reason and reintegration. They'd lash out. Violently. At her, her friends. Asami.

She switched to English, storing her anger deep within her. Not like him. Better. Have to be better. “You are under arrest for the murder of Tahno Saiga,” the Inspector informed him, taking aim at his glove. Hopefully a well placed shot would disable it. The wire bundle at the wrist looked promising. “You do not have to say anything, but anything you do say may be taken down and used as evidence. You have the right to-”

“You disappoint me, Avatar Korra,” Noatak interrupted, suddenly far less civil than before. “Even now, you cling to these old traditions like a safety line. Why? Did they help you save that boy I killed?” No. “Or did they hold you back, keep you from doing what was necessary to save his life?” Yes.

Stop it! Get out of My head!

Without a word, he gathered her response. “As I thought. You see the system failing, yet you perpetuate it. In fact, you deny to everyone, including yourself, that there's a problem to begin with. You're worse than complicit in that man's death, you might as well have slew him with you own hand.”

No. “No. You killed him, Noatak,” Korra denied, shaking her head at him. “And you're going to the Old Bailey, one way or another. Alive, or in a casket, your choice.”

“And, still you insist,” sighed Amon, plucking more bone from his face. He seemed bored, now. Disinterested in the threat she posed. “Afraid of taking the steps that must be in order for progress to be made.”

“What steps?”

“To change the way the world sees the law, from it's very foundation.” A bold task. And an immense one. Eliminate two-thousand years of Mediterranean legal tradition. “The entire legal code of this country, and ours, is built on a broken, unequal system. The rich pay for their freedom with teams of lawyers, while the poor languish in prison, waiting to be tried under a convoluted framework they can't even hope to understand. The same is true of everything: education, housing, employment, all of it determined by a roll of the dice at birth. The gap between them makes the scales imbalanced from the outset.”

“You said that, already.” Went on about it on that stage of his, crowd hanging on every word.

“Indeed, I have. It riled up the plebs something wonderful, though their resolve was, sadly, lacking,” he hummed, wiping the growing trickle down his face. “Luckily, I already have more than enough soldiers to enact my plan, in this city, at least. We'll seize the government and topple the hegemony, in one fell swoop. Then, as a sign of good faith, eliminate the prosecutors, abolish
the courts, erase all debts on the ledger, and level the playing field between accuser and accused. Returning the law and society to its rightful rulers, the people.”

“You're mad,” Korra scoffed. *And why are you telling me this?*

“I thought we'd been over this?” He shifted his hand. Likely saw what she was trying to do.

“What your talking about is insane!” she called, trying to get him to see reason. All those guns. Dozens, hundreds of them. Enough for a small army. He was going to try and wage a war against the entire British Empire from right at its heart. “You can't win, you have to realize that. Hundreds of people will die. And even if you do pull it off, you'll replace it with, what? Mob rule? Anarchy?”

Her mind switched back. Too dangerous to be left alive. A charismatic leader was more dangerous than a martyr. Cut off the head of the snake. Vengeance over justice.

Death to the murderer.

*Death to the heretic*, the vile voice commanded.

Madness tempted her. It clawed away at her with its allies: fear and exhaustion. Succumb to it and there would be no going back. Never would she be able to look her beloved in the eye again. Talk to Tenzin, mourn her friend.

“Have you ever read Rousseau?” Amon inquired, taking a bold step towards her.

Whether intended or not, his question drew her back. It was a puzzle. Something to solve. Joyous quandary and deduction.

But where? Where was that name familiar from? A book, definitely. One she’d been forced to read, rather than enjoyed. Philosophy, then. French, judging by the name, maybe Belgian. Revolutions. The 'Enlightenment'. *The Social Contract.* “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,” the Inspector quoted from deep in her memory. Society creates evil, the anarchists rallying cry.

“Ah, so you have read it.” He seemed pleased. His first real smile creased his face. Then, just as quickly, his face fell as his eyes flicked to the same spot on the wall. “What a shame we won't have time to discuss his work further.”

A cacophony of noises met her ears in a rush. A rapid exchange of gunfire from behind her, bullets whizzing passed her ears, kicking up plumes of floor. Shouted voices of her friends, Kuvira's loudest of all, barking orders to run or freeze. Then, all of it is drowned out by an almighty roar from her left. Korra had just enough time to turn her eyes and see the only solid wall in the place erupt into a chaotic, blinding flame, before she's lifted off her feet by the blast.

Concussion hit her like a charging bull. Her body was thrown like a leaf in the wind, landing awkwardly on her side.Something cracked. Several somethings.

Ribs.

Three ribs.

Can't stop.

Can't feel pain.
She'd been played. He'd taken advantage of her fractured mind and warring desires. To see him in chains, to see him bleed. To seek vengeance, to sleep at night. Placated her with a drip feed of information. Played off her curiosity with his monologue. Wound her up and kept her talking. Too stressed to think straight, not angry enough to end him.

Made her fail again. Turned her into his marionette, dancing on his strings. Part of his little show.

She was his fool, and never knew. Never had a chance.

“Get back here,” she wheezed over the pain in her side, rolling on her blindingly painful side to find him, walking calmly through falling beams. “Get back here! FIGHT ME YOU COWARD!”

“Until next time, Inspector,” the man replied, waving the still sparking gauntlet in goodbye. With all the concern of a man on a Sunday stroll, he clambered into a black, private carriage that had just rolled up. “You have proven far more entertaining than I had imagined. Even for a failure of an Avatar.”

As the door swung wide, light from the fiery remains of gunpowder shown into the interior, revealing the face of the last person she had expected to see, tonight.

Mr. Sato?

He stared straight at her. Eyes cold with chilled malice, freezing the blood in her veins.

Things started to click and whir in her head as she lifted her pistol to… It was gone. Flung from her hand by the bomb. Couldn't even get one, last, desperate shot off to relieve some of the hate and self-loathing that she felt in her aching belly.

Arms tucked under hers, dragging her back to firmer ground. Farther from her quarry.

“Come on!” Bolin growled, hauling her up to her feet. “We've got to move!”

Kuvira came screaming past, dodging chunks of roof with reckless abandon. As she escaped ahead of them, she fired shot after shot down the backstreet from her precious Smith&Wesson. When that ran dry, she flung it aside like Korra had never seen before, drawing her Bulldog and equally emptying it, hurling curses along with hot lead. Fire belched from her muzzle, spewing hot death.

As she finally got her feet under her, another set of arms pulled at her, dragging the two of them out of the way of a sheet of board and shingle. It exploded in a shower of splinters and nails. Thankfully, the partial collapse appeared to have crushed and blown out the fire before it could take hold.

Her foot caught on something. Something that screamed in pain as she tumbled over it.

Oh, yes. The man she'd shot. He'd been so quiet, or perhaps she'd been so distracted, that his very existence had faded from her mind.

What a shameful thing to happen. Add it to the list of scars to her patchwork pride this day had wrought upon her. Still, his wound would need to be tended to. So would hers, if the throbbing in her chest was any indication. “The fuck took you you guys so long?” she coughed, pushing Bo away so he wouldn't accidentally collapse her lung.

“We ran into an old friend,” Mako informed, lifting his arm to show a slash through coat and shirt stained cherry red.
“That and you started a fucking riot charging the stage like that, fucking moron!” the other woman berated, chucking her department issue revolver down the path so it skittered down the smoothed stones. “The fuck did you do that for?! We had a plan! Your goddamn plan! And you fucked it up the ass like a cheap whore!”

“He killed Tahno,” Korra replied, blinking at the sheer rage on her friend's face.

“So what!” she screamed, shaking, trembling with her anger. “I've wanted to kill that, greasy slimeball for years! Ever since he felt my ass up in that pub, but no!” The elder Beifong directed her ire at their mutual ex. “I got told off for breaking his arm!”

“Kuv, just calm down,” Mako began, stepping between them to try and defuse things. While her siblings and parents had various ways of matching her fury to the point of battering her down or driving her off, he had always been the only one able to bring her down once she got worked up to a froth. “That wasn't Korra's fault, and you know it. Feng fired the shot, people panicked, that's all that happened.”

“Great, can I kill him, then?!” the furious woman demanded, smashing her foot into the ground over and over so hard she might have been breaking toes. “Cause somebody's gonna fucking die for what happened to Reid and Frenchie! You told me it can't be that fucker back there!” she jammed her finger in the direction of the stage, then off down the alley, “Can't be that asshole 'cause she didn't kneecap him for me! Maybe it should be you, huh?! What do you say we finally work out shit between us, huh?!”

“Kuv-”

The woman held up her hand, stopping the words before they started. A shuddering, rage filled breath. In. Out. The color faded slightly from her cheeks. Eyes cloudy and wet when she looked up. “Don't even start with me, Pretty Boy,” she sighed, shaking her head, voice suddenly low and tired. “Fuck you all, I'm going to get wasted. I don't want to hear from you shit stains until tomorrow.” A finger points at the tallest detective. “Unless you suddenly decide to grow a pair and come get the real thing, instead of wanking it to walking in on me in the bath. Fucking prick.”

With that, she disappeared, wandering off in the opposite direction that their quarry had fled, leaving her fellows to the cleanup.

After dusting off Korra's jacket, Bo shrugged. “Would it surprise you if I said this went better than I expected?” he asked, surveying the scene of devastation that had nearly crushed them all.

A final chunk of roof fell upon the latest pile of debris to punctuate his words. “No,” both his fellows responded.

Mako turned to her, eying her closely.

She didn't like it when he did that. His gaze judged her, never comforted. All the kindness stripped from them. Years of work, just like her, only with less fortune in life outside. So pitiable was his life, it was almost humorous.

That's why he was cold.

“What happened?” he asked, barely softening the edge of his question.

Might as well had come out and said it: how did you screw this up? Never would he be so blunt as his Beeswing, but the words hurt even more coming from him. How could she ever explain to him? How the words had worked into her skull like little tendrils, plucking at things she'd never said, but
often thought? Niggling little thoughts at the back of her mind.

Hard to breath. For so many reasons.

Labored breaths did nothing to calm her nerves as thoughts spun like pinwheels. Had to secure the scene. Fill out reports. Turn in her weapon. Steal documents. Tenzin would force her on leave, again.

Why? Why was he here?

It made no sense! No motive for his acts suggested itself to her. An upstanding citizen who gave generously to her own retirement fund.

But the clues were there. The bullets from his factories littering that corpse garden, access to military grade weapons and the ability to manufacture them with ease. Chances were, if she checked every rifle and pistol that had been left behind, most if not all would bear his FI mark. Overloading her schedule on the eve of Amon's campaign, growing concerned she was peeking a little too deeply into his facilities and finances.

How far down did the rabbit hole go? Was he a willing or unwilling partner?

No. Not with that look he'd given her.

*I have to tell Asami.* Soon. Lunch, at the latest. Get her away from him. Somewhere safe.

“Misfire,” she lied. The great serpent of guilt coiled in her stomach, it's venom coursing through her veins.

Mako hummed, Bolin stayed silent. Neither believed her.

Didn't matter, either way. Her clock was ticking. Two hours, tops, until Tenzin would arrive. Less than one, more likely. They still had a long night ahead of them. Whistles blew in the night. Men would soon swarm her scene, disrupting whatever evidence hadn't been torn to shreds or scattered in with burn debris. Her only bit of fortune had been the beams holding firm. And…

A murderer to question. A man whose mind she could flay in return for hers being toyed with.

“Where is he?”

Chapter End Notes

Well that was Amon. I was going for a bit of an anarcho-socialist, anti-establishment thing with him. Don't think I did a great job of representing that here, so I'll try to flush it out further, later down the line.

I think I'll post something different next week. Take a little break from the doom and gloom and mystery for a different kind of story.

P.S. Would anyone like to read why Mako and Kuvira are so close/antagonistic/volatile? I know why, just wondering if you want to.

JMStei here. I would like to read that.
In The Papers

Chapter Summary

Asami is livid, Korra is exhausted and in pain, the Papers are speculating.

Chapter Notes

It's back, with more angst! And a little bit of fluff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bang, bang, bang!

Someone hammered on her door.

Eyes that had just eased themselves closed cracked open. Turn her head to look at the clock. Just past seven. Only one person it could be. One person who would rush halfway across the city in the wee hours of the morning to give her a piece of their mind. Or rather, only one person who hadn't already done so.

Just her darling remained.

The one conversation she had truly been dreading, taking up every spare moment of thought.

Roll, carefully, to put her feet under her. Chest throbbed with every terrible pull and brush. Floating ribs with nothing keeping them in place but sinew. Just hope there isn't another crack. Always worst when they grind.

Brush hair out of her face, pat her clothes to lessen the wrinkles. Might take some of the edge off the berating she would receive. Who knew, maybe the Inspector looked so pitiful that all she would get was a light scolding and some tender care? Could use with a kiss, right now. No hugs. Hugs might kill her.

Yes, the fantasy of the ideal. Cling to that as motivation.

Everything hurt. Each footfall was a new lesson in agony. Her wrist throbbed in it's splint, sprain reminding her she would be left-handed for a while. What abuse the poor limb had suffered through, swollen half again in size after inadvertently catching her fall, compounding having her pistol torn from it's grip. To top things off, muscles still steamed from adrenal overload, burnt out with exertion. Mind foggy, legs heavy.

Bang, bang, bang!

“I know you're in there, Korra!” her love shouted at the door, making it rattle far worse than Opal had. A picture fell from the wall, glass shattering in a shower of crystal. “I have a key!”

So much for that dream. “I'm coming,” the injured woman moaned, too tired to think about where
Asami had gotten a key from. Must've taken one of her spares after poker night. Not like they were hidden. Just had them hanging by the door, after all. By the end of the night, she had been so happy she might have said anything. “Just give me a minute, please.”

Fiddle with the locks, just a little longer than necessary. Close her eyes and breath deep.

The door swung open to a gust of cold. Asami was there, in Korra's coat, and a mishmash of other garments. Hair was uncharacteristically wild under her thin sunhat. Probably the first she could get her hands on. Tall wellingtons to guard her feet against the slush and snow poked out from under her robe and nightdress. Poor thing shivered like a leaf as a waft of cold air lifted the hem and traveled up her leg.

But there was fire plenty in her eyes. A roaring, angry flame. The kind she had likely treated Amon to on the night prior. “You were blown up by a bomb!?” the woman trumpeted as soon as her eyes caught sight of Korra's face. In her hands she clutched her morning paper, pages worn by fret and frustration.

“Come inside,” the Inspector insisted, watching a team of men working there way slowly by with suspicion. “You'll catch a cold.”

“You were blown up by a BOMB!” the engineer repeated on the threshold, even louder than before. One of the passers by tossed a glance over their way for a moment, shrugging when his companion turned to speak with him.

With a grip far looser than she wanted to hold her darling, Korra pulled Asami inside, shutting the door behind them. Lock it tight, double bolted to the solid frame. “I'm sorry-”

The whispered apology was immediately overwhelmed by the other woman's frantic attention. “You said you'd be careful,” the beauty chattered, teeth clacking with frost and fear. Soft fingers turn her face this way and that, taking in the fresh scratches and bruises the detective's rather sudden introduction to the ground had left her with. “I nearly had a heart-attack, Korra. You said you wouldn't do anything stupid. You promised me.”

“I know I did. I'm sorry.” Tears welled in flawless green gems. Hugs were needed. Both of them needed someone to hold onto. She'd have to stand the pain. “Be gentle, please,” Korra requested as she drew her girlfriend close. “Broke my ribs.”

“God dammit,” the under-dressed socialite half-sobbed/half-sighed. She was careful, keeping her arms to the royal's lower back. Nose tucked into the crook of her neck, breathing her in, hiding tears. Reciprocate with her hair, let it tickle her cheek, scent proof that she was safe. Lilac with the cherry this time. “God dammit, Princess. You have to stop doing this. I didn't get a minute's sleep last night worrying about you. I love you but I-I-I just can't. You can't keep doing this.”

Salty, wet tears on the acorn skin of her neck, burning her like fire, making her feel the worst guilt, yet. “I know,” she cradled, only just holding her own weeping at bay, rocking them back and forth, “I'm so sorry, kuluk.” For more than you know.

Squeeze. “What does that mean?” Question whispered in her ear. Pulled back to look each other in the eye. Long streaks from puffy lids. A kiss each to banish them.

“Sweetheart,” Korra hummed in a rough translation. It was baby talk, really. Pain. The effort to hold in her sobs caused wince worthy pangs in her side. You're safe. Thank the Spirits. Didn't mean she could call off the surveillance detail she had hurriedly set up as she was being dragged off by Tenzin, but it would be one fewer thing for them to worry about. Saved her from the consequences
of going after her, kicking down the door if necessary.

“I like it.”

“I like it when you call me Princess,” she replied, in kind.

A sad hum, tiny smile.

Arms length, now. Feel herself being looked up and down. She looked a mess, felt more of one.
“You stupid idiot,” her love said, a little of her temper returning. “Stupid, beautiful woman.” Eyes bug in her head. “Is that blood?!”

Red stain on the side of her shirt. A rough bandage itched at it's mention. A shard of wood had lodged itself in her flank, unknown to her until it had been pointed out, her other side so blinding. Doctor Watson had seen to it, along with all of her other injuries. She'd had to stop him short of binding her ribs. Much as the pressure might have eased her inflammation and agony, the long term effects and risk of pneumonia outweighed that short-term boon.

“Not mine, mostly.”

The Lieutenant had tried to end himself with a hidden knife. Even between the two of them working together, it had been close. Missed the artery by the breadth of skin. Blood had still poured from the wound, his thrashing required a body for every limb and a double dose of sedatives.

“What do you mean, ‘mostly’?! Lift up your shirt!” An order. One Asami seemed intent on her following, even if refused. Fingers tugged at her clothing, yanking at her side and ribs.

Pop!

Death. I want to die.

Grab her hands, tight. Tight enough to stay her, not hard enough to hurt. Delicate balance as her teeth ground and eyes watered. “I said be careful,” the detective hissed through her row of bared fangs. Every muscle quivered. Knees wobbled as strength faded. “Please...”

Gasp for breath. Short, quick, tear filled sucks of air.

Blink. Blink. “Is it really that bad?”

Shrink from the question. Don't know how to answer. Don't know how to tell her.

One step at a time.

“Yes.”

A kinder touch this time. On her arm, tugging at her sleeve. Lift her hand to hold her love's. Even that small movement hurt. “Let's get you cleaned up,” the businesswoman said, giving a weak smile.

“Asami, there's something I need to tell you,” Korra insisted as her stomach clenched.

“It can wait until you've had a bath.” Statement, no counterpoint would be accepted. There was still a sternness about her smile. A firm lilt to the turn of her lips. When she spoke, it was firm, if her eyes lingered too long on a cut or bruise, tears would threaten to return. “Then, you are going to eat breakfast and tell everything that happened last night. No excuses, no 'it's an open case', nothing. You. Will. Tell. Me.”
How could she argue with just a just demand? Had she even the right. It just wasn't fair what she would have to say.

“Hah,” breathe out to steel herself, “Yes, dear.”

“Come on,” Asami urged, pulling her down the hall to the stairs. Not how she'd hoped this would happen for the first time. Kisses and hands on everything. Instead, tense clouds hung over the moment, seizing in her chest as panic started to build to frenzy.

Her darling ran the water for her, steaming and roiling. Helped her out of her clothes, as well. Eyes lingered on every injury that her shirt revealed as it was stripped, and a few other things. Banished after that with a quick, quiet thanks. Nothing else needed to cloud her thoughts. Lust least needed of all.

Lower herself into the water. She cringed as it passed over the hole in her skin, sighed as it hit her ribs. It hurt, it soothed. It burned, it relaxed. Scrubbing was horrific, it was delightful. Steam helped her breath deep, too deep. It made her tired, a big, warm, wet blanket on everything. Tempted her to close her eyes. Push off the bottom and float, for just a second. Weightlessness. An empty place for her mind to float, as well. Untethered by want and worry.

Brief bliss that couldn't last.

No sooner had her rear rested back on the bottom of the tub did the cogs start whirring again. “Can't hide it from her, can't sugar coat it,” the Inspector decided, making sure to stick to Kalaallisut so any potential flies on the wall would be left out of the loop until proper explanation could be provided.

Somehow, getting out is even worse than getting in. Gravity clawed at her creaking bones. The weakness in her body became all too apparent.

Pulling on her clothes was just the wrong side of blinding. Grit her teeth and bear it. Swim between consciousness and blacking out, again, if only until her story could be told, warning given. Swallow down the bubbling bile. Pop a double dose of the asprin the Doctor had given her. Internal bleeding be damned. If that didn't work there was always the morphine in her little first aid pouch, tucked under bed.

So long as it hadn't gone off, that is. It had been a while since she'd touched the case, at all. Months even, since she'd had to patch herself up last.

Medicated herself.

Didn't trust herself to do so. To not just numb the anxiety away. The voices, the nightmares, the failures. The blood on her hands. Numb the everything. Scared her to even think about that. Become like Holmes, or worse.

Not the problem at the moment. They would return with sleep, save if someone laid beside her, invading her dreams with the same bliss as that first kiss.

Pain.

That was the pain talking. Messing with her head. Making her feel far worse than before.

Open the door, down the stairs. Cling to the banister like the lifeline it was. Smell of food. Type unknown, but it smelled warm and filling. Meat, sizzling fat. Asami's leaned over the stove top, sweat dripping from her brow as she stirred something in the pan. “Sit,” she ordered without
looking up. “And talk.”

Warm mug sat at her assigned spot. Tea. Warm, soothing, taste of mint and a hint of honey.

And so she began, relaying the tale in sometimes painful detail. The plan they'd laid, their approach, the speech and it's hypnotic effect on the crowd, on her. Her failure, first failure that is. Death scream of a condemned man, one she could have, should have, saved. Left out the goriest details. Scent of charred flesh, much like the bacon frying on the hob. Sickeningly similar. Screeching crackle of electricity. Little arcs of light.

But, the sudden, horrified hush of the crowd. How they had gone from willful accomplices to staunch protesters at the drop of a pin. How haunting that had seemed. Disturbing ripple of sudden humanity. That she had relayed.

Skip straight to mistake number two: letting him live. Hand trembling. The shot that tore her Webley from her grasp.

Her darling gasped, demanding to see her wrist. Luckily, her brief soak in hot water had soothed the swelling, somewhat, though not enough to prevent a hasty gathering of ice from the windowsill, wrapped in a dishcloth and added to her splint. During this undertaking, the builder asked questions: Were you scared? Why did you follow him? Had she killed before?

Yes. It was her duty. Yes.


No. That wouldn't do. There could be no secrets today. Not with the bombshell she was sitting on.

“I wanted to kill him,” she said, gnawing on a particularly tough bit of fat. Reminded her of pemmican. Push the food away. What few bites she had taken weren't sitting well in her belly. “For what he did. Tahno wasn't a great guy, but he didn't deserve that. Didn't deserve to die.”

But he did. Amon did. The words unspoken but intention clear.

Truth. The truth hurt, both of them. Asami sighed. And then she shrugged, casually taking the admission in stride. Said she didn't know what that felt like. To hate someone that much. Farthest she had ever gone was hoping someone's career fell to ash around them, life crumbling to dust as she watched on. Not the same, but the sympathy helped a tad.

“What happened next?”

Told her that, too. Her brief pursuit. The shot she missed, the one she didn't. Described his face to the tiniest detail. Like she was in a trance. Replaying his last moments over and over on an endless loop.

Scattered tears dripped from her face.

Kiss on her lips.

“Go on.”

Shaking with rage, finger twitching on the trigger. Words worming into her ears. Guiding her thoughts, expertly. Believe him. Driving her mad with anger and grief and indecision. Plucking at her like an instrument, toying with her for simple amusement. Feeling helpless, despite holding over him the power life and death. That smug smile, secure in his safety and her docile impotence.
Like a master staring down their snarling pet.

Not being able to tell people. Scared to admit how much Amon had gotten to her. The one person she would've being too overwhelmed to spare the time to consult or console.

Asami filled the roll, again, in as capable a way as she was able. Being her rock. Letting her cry silent tears of sadness and empty rage without judgment. Promised to be there if she was needed. To help if she could. Smiled when she was told that just being there was enough, for now. Agreed to talk later, when the emotion of the moment was lessened by rest and healing.

Boom!

Being thrown through the air, utterly helpless. The impact, feeling bone shatter against the floor. From imposed paralysis to actual powerlessness.

Building crumbling 'round her ears. Being dragged to her feet, hauled outside where she wouldn't be crushed by slabs of roof tile. Kuvira's eruption, the brother's distrust. Her redirected anger towards the man who'd killed her friend, overwriting that for his master.

The source of the blood. Warm crimson spurting through her fingers. Pulsing liquid life, slowly slipping away.

All the while she watched the heiresses face closely as it grew tighter. An impartial mask over her thoughts, only showing a slight downturn of her lips as a tell. To what was beyond her, as always. She asked more questions, gave time when needed, refilled their tea multiple times, waited until Korra drank before allowing her to continue. A more compassionate interview she could not have hoped for.

For nearly an hour she danced around the subject, waiting until all other distractions were passed them. The ice had turned to water, dripping into a puddle at Korra's feet. Food was also cold, slightly more having found home in her gullet as time demanded refuge from words.

“You said he left in a carriage?” Asami inquired, checking her wrist and frowning at the angry bruising that had started to replace the swelling. “Did you recognize it? A cab company?”

_Here we go._ “Asami, can you sit down, please?” She had risen to do the dishes. Busy work, most likely. Occupy her hands so she could focus on more than just the heavy stuff. There had been a lot of heavy stuff.

“Um, sure,” the still shivering woman obliged, turning on the spot. Carefully she sets a half scrubbed plate in the sink, takes extra time to dry her hands.

When she did, Korra clicked herself into work mode. Or as far into it as brain and pain would allow. Laced her fingers together, lean forward to rest on her elbows. Don't break eye contact. Stare straight down the barrel of those precious green gems. Don't blink. “Have you noticed anything strange going on with your father, lately?”

“What?”

“Going out at strange hours, new people coming around you haven't seen before, abnormal travel schedule, talking about money troubles? Anything at all?”

“No, nothing like that,” she replied in a daze. “Why are you-”

“Asami, I need to know,” the detective cut off, leaning even closer than before. Let it hang. Let her
decide whether to tell or not. Watch as the war raged in her eyes. Wait for just the right time to pull the trigger, even if it might shoot their fresh relationship in the head as well. “He was there last night. In the carriage. No, I didn't confuse him with someone else. No, it wasn't a trick of the light. I saw him, plain as I'm seeing you, right now.” Take her hand and squeeze. “I need to know. Everything.”

Her darling sighed. Tired, shuddering. “You're sure,” she whispered, more tears threatening. “Absolutely 100%, positively sure you saw him.”

“Yes.” Confirm her fears. Whatever suspicions she might have been holding. Bottled up inside in hopes they were simply innocent fallacies of her understanding. Children would go a long way in ignoring the sins of their parents, they same in reverse. “Do you trust me?”

She laughed. A single, barking, “Ha!” The genius leaned back in her chair, looked the Inspector up and down. “I clearly can't trust you to take care of yourself.”

A strong jab. One that hurt almost as much as her fractured ribs, and Asami could tell. “I-I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that,” she instantly apologized, regret heavy and sincere in her voice. Her face turned down, avoiding Korra's now less professional gaze. A hand slid across the distance between them, quickly scooped up into the host's. “It's just...”

“You can't believe it?”

“No. No, it's not that,” Asami groaned, turning back to look at her with resignation. “It's more like I don't want to, you know?”

“Yeah, I know,” the foreigner nodded, giving her hand a squeeze and a sympathetic smile. Comforting her also comforted herself. Gave the Inspector something else to focus on. A swift change of gears and focus. A more important task than sifting for information: helping the woman she loved. “What happened?”

Shifting uncomfortably, the engineer began. “He's been getting angry.”

“People get angry,” Korra shrugged, not entirely sure why she would brush off this observation so easily. “Do you mean, angrier than usual?”

“No, just angry,” the black haired woman reaffirmed. Running her free hand through her locks, she continued. “I know you haven't known him for long, but he's probably the most levelheaded person I've ever met. Never lets things get to him.” That sounded about right, from what she had seen of the man. A consummate British professional. “But, he's been getting angry about the stupidest stuff. Paperwork half an hour late, shipments not running exactly on time, quotas off by less than a half-percent.”

“Okay.” Show interest. Give her hand another reassuring squeeze.

“And... He's been lying to me. To you,” she admitted, eyes growing hard, a single tear breaking free.

Lift her hand to the detective's lips. Soft kiss. Short, unimposing. “About the fire?”

“Yeah,” Asami said, more blank than hurt. Just relaying facts in a stream. “I knew the propellant from you telling me about what you’d found, even guessed what mix they-he'd used-from the papers we gave you. Mako figured it out with some grainy photographs, and my dad expected me to believe, with all the people he had combing over that place, after taking all the same courses as me, that the idea of aluminium oxide never popped into his head.”
Aluminum oxide. Had to remember that.

“Why would he do that?” the investigator asked, gently as she could. “Burn down his own building?”

“The building was worthless. Thing was crumbling for years. Rotten beams, worn out plaster, shoddy brickwork,” the engineer listed, rising to pour more tea both of them. Her hands trembled, but her eyes were clear. Better at handling herself than Korra ever had been. Must've been that stiff upper lip the English were always going on about.

That still didn't explain it. “And people still worked there?”

“God, no. It was a health and safety nightmare,” Miss Sato rejected outright. Once she'd doctored both their cups to her liking, she continued. “Even if we hadn't closed it down, the workers would have stopped coming. Almost all the machinery had been moved a couple weeks before. Nice new place by the Thames. Closer to where most people worked, too. About the only thing left was the insurance policy.”

“How much?”

A snort of stunned disbelief. “About five times what the building was worth, with all the tat in it,” Asami sighed, seemingly flabbergasted with herself for overlooking such a massive sum. The benefits and downsides to hindsight. “I should have known. Should have...”

“Hey there,” Korra interjected again, rubbing a small circle on the back of Asami's hand with her thumb. “Don't go thinking like that.”

Hypocrite. The nasty voice returned, berating her as it had all last night. Digging its claws into her insecurities and pulling. Do it all the time. Doing it now. Always second guessing, always doubling back on yourself. Just a few steps behind. Maybe more. Failure of an officer. Failure of a princess.

A different voice took over the chorus. Deep and superior.

Eyes on her. Those eyes. Staring her down, staring into her soul, digging around in her subconscious.

Failure of an Avatar.

A sudden wave of nausea had her mouth watering.

She swallowed it down, and flashed a smile. “I didn't see it either, and it's my job,” the Inspector comforted, holding on tight. “You saw the best in him and that's a good thing. He's your father and love him, there's nothing wrong with that, Asami.”

“I know.”

“Good.”

Even as she said it, the wheels turned. Burn down the building, collect the payout. Doctor the books so some, maybe most, of the cash just disappeared into the ether. Funnel it to Amon, or others, through a series of shell companies or third parties. Use the cash to purchase weapons. Those that weren't provided for them.

Late shipments.
A crate here, two there. Enough to build and arsenal over time, small enough to be seen as a math error by anyone above ground level. Perhaps grease a few hands to keep even this small inconvenience at bay.

If the shipments weren't on time, any illicit activity would be harder to organize. The wider the window, the more eyes one would have to divert.

But why? What would turn a man so bitter?

Sadness.

Sad eyes. Sad in little flashes. When she remembered something.

Or someone?

“You said your mother died,” Korra inquired in the kindest way she could. Soft and respectful. “Was she murdered?”

Eyes flash, despair. Scars on a young woman's mind. “Yes.”

Nothing more was offered, but she had to know. “Was anyone ever charged, arrested?” It hurt to ask. Hurt to watch the woman she cared for, so open and cheerful, retreat into a dark corner of her mind. Forced to relive the worst possible thing for a child to endure.

“No.”

Vengeance. Bubbling, brewing vengeance. Revenge upon the system that failed a beloved wife and mother. Motivation enough for anyone.

“Okay,” the detective breathed, kissing Asami lightly on the cheek. “Okay, I want you to stay here. I'm going to have an officer go 'round to your place to pick him up.” Or ten. Having seen the firepower on display, even that might prove insufficient. Full squad with firearms would prove useless under a barrage of rifles. “Do you think he'd fight back? Is there a gun in the house?”

“No, no,” the daughter shook her head, lips pursing taught. Lips moved, breathing life into silent words. “Korra, how did the man last night die? Tahno?”

Why does she want to know? Should I tell her? It seemed a pittance to withhold at this point. “Electrocution,” she answered after a second’s internal debate. Wrist rolled to encourage her to continue. “Amon had, like, a glove. It had copper plates on the palm, wires coming out the back.”

The Inspector mimed what she had seen to paint a better picture. “Why?”

Anger flared, just for a moment. It burned away the despair and anguish and concern. “Just asking.”

Back to placidity. Calm and level. She knew something. Exactly what, Korra was too tired, too pained to search for. She'd dig later, when Hiroshi was safely in custody, once the medicine had kicked in. Probably knew where the glove was from. Not important. Not right now.

“Are you okay?” Asami asked, leaning close to feel her forehead.

“Just tired,” Korra whispered, stealing a brief kiss. It brought back a little smile to both of their lips. Affection amid miserable circumstances.

“You have a fever, Korra,” her girlfriend argued back, flipping her pal round to check again. Cloth
soaked damp with cool, almost frigid water was pressed to a bruised face. “Come on, let's go lay down for a bit.”

“Hold on,” she sighed, struggling to her feet to hobble to the door. Blow of her whistle to summon a Constable. Wrote out for him strict instructions, basic sketch of the floor plan, and sent him on his way. Off to do her work for her, cemented in her position as a backbencher.

Hand grabs hers, pulling the detective inside.

There was no fever, the Avatar noted as she was, once again, led around her own home like a child. Just an excuse to get her to sleep. Not that she minded.

Warm sheets, crackling fire, and the arms of the woman she loved to look forward to.

That and sweet dreams. Sweeter than she'd earned.

When they woke, they could talk more. She could apologize, again. Asami would scold her properly, and the royal would smile and take it. A little touch of the domestic was just what she needed. Proper relationship woes. Something she knew she could work through, a problem within her power to fix.

That would be the best thing her love could give her right now.

And she was sure to provide.

Chapter End Notes

So, I think it's safe to call the new thing a moderate success. Nobody's just out and called it bad, at least, which is good in my books. Honestly, though, it feels good to have a new project so I don't keep bashing my head against the wall when I get frustrated with writing sad Korra.

We're in the home stretch, now. Resolution is fast approaching, so please, hang in there just a little while longer.

JMStei: Sorry that this chapter was pretty deep. But it’s going to be only up from here
Packing

Chapter Summary

Asami gathers up her things and has a friendly chat with dad.

Chapter Notes

Another Asami point of view chapter. Picking up after nap time and snuggles were over.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hurry.

Hurry.

*Hurry!*

Time ticked by as her hands moved in a blur. Tossed things into her bag fast as she could get her fingers on them. No extra effort to pick out matching styles, gather sets. This wasn't a trip to the country home. Just a couple items from every drawer would suffice. Dresses, coats, shoes and pants. Not time taken to fold or organize. Just close it and toss it on top of the other.

All that was left were her papers. Official volumes: financials, sketchbook, work notes. Personal documents: her diary, second smaller sketchpad, some charcoal pencils. The picture of her mother, wrapped carefully in a towel to protect the frame.

Knock, knock, knock on the door to her room.

Soft and crisp.

Tense. Hand flew to the bulge in her borrowed, now practically stolen, coat. The little pocket pistol Korra had insisted she take along. It's weight was heavy on her, despite it's diminutive size, but she wouldn't be afraid to use it, if needs be. On an Equalist, on one of her father's idiotic, over-educated, remarkably easy to trick guards. Even on the man himself.

Her 'father'.

Calling him that disgusted her, now. The mere idea of being related was repulsive. For so many reasons, on so many levels.

Professional and personal, morally and philosophically. Not that parent and child had ever really seen eye-to-eye on those counts. He had always been a doting man, but after the untimely death of her mother, well… things had escalated, rather quickly.

Every minute that hadn't been spent at work, was spent schooling her in his ways. The 'Sato Family Creed'. It wasn't much of a tradition, though. They were still new money, when it got right down to
She was just the third generation since their not so humble origin story. One of the many things she was force to learn. In addition to all the tutors and au pairs and governesses trying to force upon her what it meant to be a 'British Woman in this day and age'.

It had been fun to subvert his expectations. Exceed them in other ways.

Now, she dreaded seeing his face. “Come in,” Asami said, gripping tight to her only weapon. Brush the hammer with her thumb, ready to cock it at a moment’s notice.

“Excuse me, Miss, but are you decent?” the voice of the butler asked from a paper thin crack in the door. Always the gentleman was he. “I have the books you requested. Shall I leave them in the hall for you?”

“Just bring them in, Wan,” the de facto lady of the house told him, brushing a wrinkle from her replacement dress.

“Of course, Miss,” the manservant said, pushing the entryway fully open. His eyes darted over to the pile of disordered bags, narrowing slightly at the nature of the pile. The engineer supposed that must come from years of cleaning up other people's messes. Namely, hers. “Are these ready to be taken out, or are you still preparing?”

What a question.

With a nostalgic gaze, she looks around the room she'd lived in for all but five years of her life. So many memories, good and bad.

“No,” decided the woman, turning her back on everything she hadn't packed away. There was nothing left for her here. “That should be everything. Thank you, so much, for helping me with all this.”

A rare smile creased the man's face. “It is my pleasure to serve, Miss,” the butler professed, lifting Asami's bags with ease, carefully balancing the bundle of twine wrapped books on the top edge of the larger case. “I'll take these to the carriage for you. Is there anything else I might do for you?”

Think. Wrack her brain for anything she might have forgotten.


But, then, curiosity struck her. As it often did. Sneaking suspicion, a nagging thought, whispers in her ear. She had to know. Exactly how far did his betrayal “Would you go on ahead, I have to get a couple things from my father's office?”

“Of course,” the man nodded, taking his leave. On his face, concern.

Wan had always been a protective type. Not as much as her family's patriarch. While pater familias hovered around her, constantly, the butler had kept his concerns to a more reasonable level. Insisting she only steal one cookie from the jar each night, making sure she ate all her vegetables, finished her sums.

Asami had always likened him to an uncle. Lord knew, he was close enough to be. No family of his own, or, at least, none he had ever spoken of. The only member of staff to have spent every Christmas in their home. One of only two domestics to have served the family for her entire life. As much a fixture of her childhood was his mild chiding and careful direction of his fellows, as family dinners and lonely nights with no one to talk to.
She waited a couple minutes, absently kicking at a particularly worn part of the rug. The board underneath had been loose for years, but she didn't mind. Back in the day it had made for a convenient place to store things that would have been considered contraband.

Unladylike things, mostly. Rounders ball, couple pairs of trousers, one of her father's engineering books.

Eventually, though, she'd stopped going to the trouble of hiding them. Right around the first time boarding school had become an option on the table. Right around when she'd started putting her foot down about things, started forging her own options for herself. Worrying about making herself proud, her mother proud, instead of trekking the beaten path.

And Daddy Dearest had been there all the way, saying just how proud her was for everything she did. Even as he held open all the doors open. Made it all as easy as he could, took all the challenge, the accomplishment out of things.

But, now, it seemed, he had taken something without asking, rather than the opposite.

Something that made her seethe with quiet rage.

The steps in the hall swiftly faded into the distance, granting her the desired solitude for her task. Soft as Korra's lips, she slipped from her room, into the hall. Clutched tight, the most precious of her things. The only one she outright refused to trust to anyone else.

Footsteps padded on the cold floor of the wall. Weaving through the maze-like passages, filled with memories of getting turned around and lost as a child. No one had ever explained to her satisfactorily why the building was like this. All she'd ever determined was that the higher you went, the worse it got. Almost to the point she left for uni Asami had still found herself occasionally stumbling into a room she had never seen before and couldn't divine the purpose of.

Left, left, down the stairs, right, another left.

Finally, reach the right door, opposite end of the same corridor as her workshop. There's a spot, just below the handle, worn bare of varnish. Hard to see from above, and even harder to notice. It was where she used to knock, when she was small. Hard. So hard her knuckles sometimes bled afterwards.

When she was scared. When the nightmares had come for her, late at night and all alone. Hiding in the closet, only half-awake, but still frozen in fear, as the most horrible sounds came through the door.

Key slipped into the lock. Another added to her ring of slipped door openers. Who knew that two would come into such great use in one day?

Click, clack of the tumblers. Rotate the knob and push it open.

Some small, juvenile part of her brain half-expected to be told off for coming in without being asked first. After shaking that off, Asami scanned her father's most private room. More off-limits than his bedchamber by leaps and bounds. This was where the magic happened. Where all his business ventures were truly spawned and coordinated from. Far from any board meetings or prying eyes. Just him and his beloved financial figures.

It was also home to the family safe, resting place of his most secure documents, some of her most secret designs. And an abandoned prototype that had looked so promising, until it turned on her.
Now, it seemed to have done the same all over again.

Quickly, quietly run to the large, black iron rectangle, set firmly into the wall. Combination summoned itself from the swirling speculation. The little excuses she always made for him. A reflex. As automatic as eating or breathing was. To make the man who had raised her, tried to raise her, claimed to have raised her, look the best in light of day.

Paper over the little cracks. Ignore the tiny lies. Focus on the good.

Pop this lock, as well.

Heavy door swung open. And it was…

Not there.

Not exactly sure what she expected to find. That the gadget had been magically returned to its place. That a thick layer of dust would believe that it had never left in the first place. That Korra had been hallucinating when she had seen such a distinctive piece of kit.

Only a few places something like that could have come from, and Asami highly doubted that either Edison's lab or Tesla had the inclination to veer into such territory. Not that they would be incapable of making such a novel device. Far from it, they were more than capable of creating her glove. (Or, stealing it, as the case may be.)

But, they wouldn't. Hadn't.

She had.

Only told a few people about it, in fact. Some of her team, her secretary, an old friend from Cambridge. And her father. The only person who'd ever seen the device. Held it, helped her tinker with it.

Stolen it.

“Asami,” his voice called from the open doorway she had left in her wake. The sound startled her like it never had before. A flash of fear ran down her spine, quickly turning into hateful spite as she span, saw his face. Eyes slightly raised out of surprise, morning paper under his arm. Picture of innocence. “What are you doing in here?”

Suppress the snarl she wanted to send his way. Keep her composure, at all costs. Keep her hand gripped on that little revolver, just in case. “You know exactly why I'm here,” the younger Sato said, rising to her feet.

For a brief moment they stared each other down, neither giving the smallest fraction of an inch. It was he who relented, running his hand through his salt-and-pepper hair and giving her that look he always did when he thought she hadn't understood something. Little did he know that she understood perfectly. “I suppose you've been speaking to that Inspector Waters? Such a pestersome woman,” he sighed, taking a step into the room that had Asami drawing the pistol half out of her pocket. “Ha, did she give you that? Tell you some story about me being an evil mastermind and send you here to snoop for her?”

“No,” Asami growled, taking note of the way he'd said 'woman' like it was an insult. “She actually asked me not to come here at all.”

“Hmm, is that so?” her father hummed, eyes resting on the dull silver of the weapon in her hand.
No fear, just recognition. Scanning the situation in a cold, mechanical way. As his eyes rested on her for longer, she shuddered. “That seems rather unlike her, don't you think? She is so curious, after all.”

The implication was plain. “Too curious. Like me.”

“In a way,” the middle-aged man agreed. With a slowly raised finger, he pointed at the open safe. “I'll ask again: why are you in there?”

Grit her teeth at his pretense. “Don't play your stupid games with me, dad. I know what you did,” the engineer informed him, taking a sideways shuffle into more open ground. Give her more options if he tried something.

“And what is that, exactly?”

“You gave it to him!” she spat, narrowing her eyes at the one person she was supposed to trust most. “You gave my prototype to that maniac, and he killed someone with it. An innocent man.”

Light laughter dripped from his lying lips. “That man was hardly innocent, dear.”

“Don't call me that!” Asami shot, sliding the pistol the rest of the way out of her pocket to preempt his second step into the room. “You don't have the right to call me that after what you did. Gave my invention to a murderer! Supplied him with weapons and money and god knows what else!”

Holding his hands up, Hiroshi let his false smile return. Or maybe it was genuine, she really didn't care. “I've supplied plenty of weapons to far worse people, in the past,” he argued, gentle lowering his arms until they hung at his side. “You didn't seem to have a problem with that before now. What, exactly, has changed? All I've done is started giving them to people who might do a bit of good with the damn things.”

A bit of good. Is he insane? “You gave them machine guns! I checked the registry, myself!” Eleven Maxim-guns were missing. A terrible amount of firepower. She had seen what one of the weapons were capable of on a range, once. She'd been ill for the next three days.

“Yes,” her father nodded, seeming not to grasp her point, “I also sold them to the Army. What have they done with them?” He let the question hang for just a few seconds before answering it for himself. “Let's see, they've killed Sudanese Mahdist's, Burmese 'Imperials', Tibetans, and Indian peasant farmers. At least Amon promises to use them against someone who deserves to die, instead of some random gaggle of colonial subjects.”

That was easier than I thought, she marveled, surprised by his ready admission. Weren't those sort of things supposed to take time and training to work out of people? And yet, he'd freely supplied it to her without the need for any of that.

“And killing the police is 'good work' in your mind?” she asked, keeping close eyes on both his face and hands.

Again, he sighed, face growing more patronizing by the second. It was starting to kindle in her the same fire those fierce arguments of her mid-teen years, insisting she be allowed to join her first shooting club. “Asami, you just don't understand,” the man continued, digging that hole for himself even deeper. “If you would just put the gun down, we could talk about this.”

Talk. “Talk,” the heiress scoffed, shifting even further from the wall. Suddenly, she had cause to wish that there was a second door for her to flee through, a balcony that connected to another room.
Any path that wasn't through him. “You want to talk,” she gave a scathing, disbelieving look, “about this? What, are you going to tell me you did all of this because of mom? That you're honoring her memory, somehow? ’Cause if you are, don't. Just don't.”

“Asami...” the elder Sato tried again, getting a hand held up to silence him.

The hand then dipped to lift her precious bag, drawing her eyes away for just a second. A flash of motion caught her eye. Swift, sweeping, unique motion.

Revolvers snapped to, leveling at each others owners. Near mirrors of each other in style, though his had a slightly longer barrel. “Get out of the way,” the daughter ordered in her best impression of her girlfriend. The same firmness and confidence she showed in her best moments.

“Or what?” Hiroshi asked, flashing a smile she'd never seen before. Cold and menacing. So cold her blood turned to ice in her veins. “Are you going to shoot me if I don't?”

Would she?

**Could** she?

Well, no better time to find out. Hopefully, she wouldn't have to find out what patricide felt like. “I will, if I have to,” the tinkerer threatened, aiming down the sights of her borrowed weapon. What was it Korra had told her? *Don't think about it. Just run on instinct. Breathe. And shoot.* “Now, step aside, and let me through.”

“I think not,” the man hummed, cocking the hammer on his pistol.

The next few seconds moved so fast they were barely a blur. Around the corner came a charging figure, bowling her father over and sending the crack of his shot well wide as his body clenched from the impact with body and ground. A grunt from both involved as momentum carried her savior her father's prone form. They landed in a painful heap, each hitting the ground hard and awkward. Boyish face and wide green eyes were revealed as his hat came tumbling off.

*Bolin?*

Barely has she time to register the man did a scramble ensue for the lost weapon. Punches and kicks were thrown as Asami threw herself at the weapon, too. If she tried to shoot now she might end up hitting the wrong person, and she really didn't want that conversation with Opal.

*Hey, there, I've got some bad news.*

*Oh?*

*I shot your husband. It was an accident, sorry.*

*I'll kill you!*

As fortune had it, the decision was taken for her by the next comer. Another man, unknown to her, rushed through the door and immediately grabbed her father in a tight bear hug. He was big and burly, thick mustache on his face, narrow look of angered determination on his face.

“How dare you!?” the stranger growled, not even fazed as a skull smashed into his nose. Blood fountained from the large man's nostrils as he bodied his smaller opponent like a child, hurling him into a bookshelf, sending it's contents cascading down upon a graying head.
Just as Bolin managed to spin to help, having flung the pistol across the room with a swift flick of the wrist, their battle ended. A single right cross to the jaw, knocked him silly.

“What a miserable excuse of a man,” the victor wheezed, staunching his dripping crimson with a sleeve. His face, when she saw it fully, was rounded and handsome, thick mustache on his upper lip stained red from the bleed. Still, this did not keep him from cracking into cheerful smile when he turned to address the shaken engineer. “I apologize, profusely, for the commotion, Miss Sato. Are you alright?”

“Uh...” Heart had just started to hammer, thundering against ribs, threatening to tear itself from her chest. She had to sit down. “Yes. Yes, I'm fine.” Asami said, carefully setting the bulldog on the lip of nearest shelf.

“Hey, Doc, can you give me a hand real quick?” Bolin asked, having quickly taken over the task of securing the man who'd tried to kill her.

He tried to kill me...

Nausea rose in her throat, only just getting tamped down before it spilled onto the floor. Eyes grew teary, but she wiped them away, stayed further by deep breaths and staring at a spot against the wall opposite. Don't look at him. Don't look at his lying face, his smug smile, his cold eyes.

Then, a fortuitous avenue of thought provided itself.

Doctor...

Dr. Watson. Korra had mentioned him, she remembered. A friend of that Holmes fellow that her dear detested, so much.

The private detective must've had him follow her home, for whatever reason. Probably thought she was going to tip off her father. The junior CID man likely bumped into him while doing the same on the official side of things.

They muttered to each other as cuffs were applied, voices hushed, but high enough to hear.

“Do you need to, like, give him anything after that spill?” the newlywed asked, looking at a quickly growing black eye marring pater familias’s face.

A more gentle hand than before tilted his head this way and that. “I imagine he has a concussion,” the medical man hummed, brushing back his hairline to inspect the little cut there from a falling book. “But, I won't be entirely certain until he wakes up.”

“How long do you think that'll be?”

“Hmm, I don't know.”

“Why?”

“I hit him rather hard, you see.”

A little chuckle between them as they complimented each other's performance. More muttering. At last, once they had agreed upon who would watch over him, Watson rose himself up and checked his nose again. Stopped, for now, as luck would have it. “Brandy?” he asked, reaching into his coat with his unbloodied hand.
“No, thank you.” Doesn't feel like drinking. Never understood the reasoning behind people offering in the first place.

“Do you mind if I?” the doctor asked, withdrawing his flask, anyways.

“Help yourself.”

Popping the top, he whispered his thanks, taking a swift gulp. After that he added a handkerchief to his arsenal and dampened it with the fortified beverage. Gingerly, the stranger wiped his face and hands clean of blood.

He tried for conversation, but Asami found herself disinterested in engaging. The irony of the situation was not lost on her. Being on the other side of the equation was, actually, somewhat humorous to her. Even now she could see the look she was going to get. Fear, mingled with righteous anger, and once that was through, smug satisfaction. *She's gonna have sooo much fun with this.*

Finally, footsteps in the hallway, rushed running in tandem. Korra's arrival was just as swift as expected. Lock and step with the winded butler. Her hand clutched at her wounded side, eyes wide and wild.

Hacking coughs as she searched for Asami's face, causing her knees to nearly buckle.

“Dr. Watson?” she said when she saw the slightly portly savior and attempted conversationalist at her side.

“Hello, Inspector,” the doctor saluted, offering her the brandy that she snatched out his hand like the last bottle of water in the world, guzzling it down in three big gulps. “Holmes sends his regards, by the way. Also, he says that his debt to your uncle is now paid in full, and asks that you pass that message along for him.”

Korra's eyes narrowed at that. The wheels turned as she tried to figure out what that comment had meant. “I doubt my uncle will see it that way.”

“Are you not close?”

Muttering in her native tongue, voice low and tinged with hostility. Even without the translation, the designer could gather the meaning of the words. A couple of key words she inquired about on their walks lending her aid in that regard. *Yeah, that's putting it fucking lightly.*

Something to that effect, she thought. Could always ask, later.

“Are you okay?” her love asked, turning her attention more fully in her direction. Eyes flitted over her, stern and pained at the same time.

“Mnhm,” she nodded, again, wishing only to wrap her arms around the woman and pull her into a tight hug. Alas, the eyes on them postponed that eventuality, for the moment. “I'm fine, Korra. He missed.”

“He shot at you!”

*Oh, wonderful. Now, I have to keep her from strangling him.*

“Korra, please...” An arm shot out to grab her as the Inspector turned on her heel, look in her eyes turning murderous in an instant.
God bless him, Bolin was the one to intervene on her behalf. “Not so fast,” he said, fixing his coat as Wan took over observation duties. “Check his gun.” Blue eyes flew to the weapon, quickly picking it out on the floor. They peaked, before settling back into their more level expression form before, anger levels falling from ten to a high six. “I'm betting the hammer just jarred loose when I tackled him. Heard it bounce off the ground.”

“You sure?”

“Pretty sure.”

“What are you talking about?” Asami asked, having swiftly lost the plot.

It was the youngest of them that took up the task of explanation, jogging over to scoop up the discarded pistol. “You see,” he said, moving over to join them while popping the cylinder and shaking the rounds in it out, “these little American numbers have a real hair trigger on them once you have them cocked.” He demonstrated by pulling back on the cocking piece. “Bang ’em around hard enough and—”

He tossed the gun in a short arc, landing roughly equally between them. **Snap!** The pin fell on the empty chamber in a dry-fire.

“They'll go off,” he shrugged, gathering the foreign revolver up and tucking it in his pocket. The look on his face was as proud as Asami’d ever seen there. Around ten-times that of his sole victory during their poker game.

That explanation out of the way, and the almost victim allowed herself to relax. Korra quietly tucked her Bulldog into her pocket, shuffling them outside as more and more people came pouring in. First, a couple of the maids, followed by a gaggle of officers of the Met. Bo's voice could be heard, ordering to do this and that, while a number of them were sent off to get something to haul Hiroshi away on.

It was quickly becoming chaos, all the graduate had to hold onto was her precious bag. That is, until a hand rested on her shoulder.

Fingers laced together as she was pulled into a quiet side passage. The question was repeated, although the context appeared to have changed: “Are you okay?”

“Not really.” Not yet. She still needed time to process, herself, before she went off and tried to explain how she felt to others. A sudden flash of empathy struck her, as she again noted the role-reversal that had taken place. “A little too freaked out to do that, at the moment.”

An understanding nod. A thin, but genuine, smile. “Okay.” Quick look around. Even quicker kiss. “I'll be here when you're ready.”

“Thanks,” she smiled back, humorlessly, but feeling slightly better for the kindness.

A little growth in the smile on the Inspectors face. “I think they'll be a little busy for a while,” the woman hummed, a little mischief in her smile, “and I'm pretty sure I'm qualified to do take down your statement. What do you say we go grab a bite to eat?”

A laugh. First laugh she'd had all day. “Only you could be thinking about food, right now,” Asami giggled, brushing the stray hair from her eyes.

“Garibaldi’s?” Korra asked, ignoring the playful jab. “My treat?”
“Are you actually going to eat anything, this time, or are you just going to drink five pots of coffee, again?”

It was the Inspector's turn to laugh, this time, quickly halting as she held her broken ribs. “Please don't make me laugh,” she requested, tears in her eyes. “It really hurts to laugh.”

With a sigh, Asami relented to her. The least they'd earned was for someone else to cook their meal for them. A nice salad, a big plate of pasta, and a bottle of the finest Neapolitan vino to share sounded just about perfect, right now. The heavy stuff could wait until they were home.

_Ha,_ Asami inwardly laughed as they weaved their way to the stairs, _I'm moving in with my girlfriend after knowing her for about a month. Dad's gonna be sooo pissed when he finds out about this._

_I wonder if he'll take it better or worse than the tattoo?_

Oh, who was she kidding? It would be worse. Definitely, worse.

Shame she couldn't tell him.

Chapter End Notes

So, another tick off the tally of the badguys, and another brain for Korra to pick. I'd say that was a pretty good day for her, considering. And she's got herself a live-in girlfriend, now, so that's nice. Someone to talk to. And other things, once her ribs heal up.

As always, comments keep me going (and make me smile).

JMStei: Keep an eye out for a collab coming from us soon! Probably when this story is finished. But Humble and I are both really excited about what we have concocted so far.

Humble: Shhhh! It's a secret.
The Interrogation

Chapter Summary

Korra, finally, gets some one-on-one time with the Lieutenant.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so, this was a bit of a slog, for me. I apologize if you don't find it up to standard, but my time management was even more off this week than usual. But, that's what I get for getting all enthused for the new thing before I wrap up what I've already got going.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ribs stung with every deep breath she took at the door. Hard to catch her breath. Heart hammered in her chest, in her ears. The other side of this panel of oak and iron sat the man she hated second only to perhaps two in this entire world. Murderer and assassin. Unrepentant low-life, not worth the air he breathed. Vilest kind of scum.

She'd been searched.

Twice.

They'd taken her gun before she entered the floor. Everything else soon after.

Not just weapons, either. Everything sharp and hard on her body was stripped. Pencils, watch, knife and blackjack all piled neatly at the stairway checkpoint. It had been a fight to keep her boots.

Tenzin taking extra care.

No one was allowed to be in the room with the man alone. Two of the Superintendent's most trusted men were posted at the door, day and night. They, themselves, were watched by an ever changing cast of third-parties, outsiders, and Yard men. His food was tasted and checked for poisons and contraband, multiple times. What little mail he received, triple checked, referred first to her desk, then Tenzin's, before finally being passed onto him with his midday meal.

All that precaution would come to naught, should Korra feel like it, though. Perfectly capable, was she, of killing an unarmed, shackled man in the time it took to open the clumsy lock on the door.

But, she'd promised not to.

To her immediate superior. Or rather, his wife. Reid was still sleeping most of the day and night away, only able to stand a manner of minutes of speech at a time.

To her mentor. The most concerned when it came to her behavior. And health, if she was honest. Asami hadn't the knowledge the man did of her medical history, however, so that match up wasn't entirely fair.
To the powers that be at Scotland Yard. Commissioner Beifong had sent some rather terse correspondence regarding the matter. Something to the effect of “We don't need any more shit being stirred, right now.” That, they most certainly didn't. Most certainly as the Special Irish Division were, as an entire body, currently on administrative leave, many of its members present that gory day imprisoned at central lockup.

Joining them was the Home Secretary, himself. Facing charges of bribery, attempted bribery, and the issuance of illegal orders. Along with a smattering of others to do with misappropriating government funds, much to the Inspector's amusement.

After all, how could he not have done with how lavishly his office was decorated?

And, to her darling back at home. Perhaps the most insistent that she find answers. Find out just how deeply her family's honor had been stained.

Remember the tears that had flowed down her face as she wept, late into the night. Confessed her small part of the whole affair, erupting almost as soon as they returned from lunch. Innocent invention turned mystery murder weapon. Abandoned and mostly forgotten after a near tragic mishap. Stricken off as a noble failure, to be revisited when technology advanced enough to make the concept a reality.

Told her it wasn't her fault. Because it was what she needed to hear. And, because it was true.

No way for her to control his actions. No reason for her to feel guilt.

But, feel it, she did.

Comfort she received. They'd held each other, tight as the pain allowed. Rocked side-to-side in the hall. Held hands, all through dinner. The cooking, the eating, the cleaning. Her emotions waxed and waned throughout the day. Some moments, almost normal, the next, a quivering mass of raw nerves, practically inconsolable.

They had kissed, many times. Oh, so many. Touch of soft lips still fresh on hers as she touched them.

Sad kisses.

Pained kisses.

To be remembered, just as vividly as the first.

Taste of tears mingling with them. Sobs breaking and reuniting them mid-act. Having to hold back her own tears, her own pain. Be the rock, this time. Her turn to be the immovable one. Repay the favor, and the love. To give back what she had been given.

*I'll do it. I'll do it for you.*

*For Reid and Steinman.*

*For Tahno.*

*For Gerard and his family.*

“How long's it been?” Mako asked, stirring her from her wandering mind.

“Don't know.”
They'd taken her watch, after all.

“It's been a while,” he mused, patting at the empty pocket where his smokes tended to lay. Five already, this morning. Eyes flicking out the window every few minutes to check for Kuvira's arrival. “Think Bo will be able to crack him?”

Iktswarpok. “I doubt it,” the senior Inspector hummed back, closing her eyes and leaning against the wall. A part of Korra regretted not joining the fighter on her rounds. Kicking in doors was so much more enjoyable than all this milling about. If she'd done that, however, she would have lost valuable seconds of time she could use to pick the man's brain for all he held within. “But, he has surprised me before.”

Finger rapped on the file in her hand. All she had about the man in the interrogation room. Tentative birth date, name and family history, redacted army record.

Not much. Certainly not as much as she would have wanted. But, it was enough. Enough to get the measure of the man. Get a little glimpse into how his mind worked. The way the gears fit together, how the mechanisms ticked.

Knock, knock, from inside the room.

It seemed his time was up.

Jingle, jangle of keys on the ring. Scrape of metal on metal as key is slid into hole. Ker-clunk of the tumbler. Shunk of the bolt.

After all that, at last, the man came. The look on his face, not disappointed, but still defeated. His methods hadn't panned out as he'd hoped. The Lieutenant seeing past his friendly advances, garnering the intentions behind them. Suspicion winning out over that most human desire for companionship and conversation.

When his eyes fell upon them, the youngest detective shrugged off his failure. “Well, that was a waste of time,” he lamented, tucking the little stub he'd been allowed behind his ear. “Hour-and-a-half of my life I'm never getting back.”

“Nothing at all?” the elder brother asked, making room for his junior to take some room on the wall.

“Found out he really hates Fortnum & Mason's tea,” shrugged Bolin, with a bit of a smile. His eyes yawned, even if his mouth didn't. Poor guy had taken up the slack while his bosses were out, performing admirably, despite the workload. “What was it he said… 'Over-priced, rancid-tasting, rubbish', I think?”

Can't fault him there.

The remaining two looked between each other, silently testing wills to see would give the next effort. Both had their reasons not to back down, and others to keep the other proceeding them.

“Coin flip?”

“Fair enough.”

Dig deep in her pockets for a coin. One of her homeland's being best. None of this heads-tails nonsense.
Alas, Mako succeeded, first.

Nothing for it but to pick her lot, let fate decide. Watch the disk tumble through the air in a whirring spin. Face and seal but a blur until they landed in his outstretched palm. “It's heads,” he reported, little twitch of his face betraying his disappointment.

“Guess that means it's me, then,” Korra hummed, hiding her little smile with a scratch of her nose. The feeling faded almost as quickly, though, as her fellows all turn to her. Not just the detectives, either. All of them, eyes on her. Disconcerting sense of déjà vu. Of sitting on a pedestal as revelers worshiped her appointment.

Not the same, but still uncomfortable. Their expectations, hopes, and desires on her shoulders. 

Shake it off. Breathe.


Squeeze it and close her eyes.

Breathe.

I can do this.

I have hope, again.

“So, what's the plan?” Bolin asked, flipping back through his notes and doodles from this interrogation and all the others he'd done of late.

“Nothing.” The men around her all narrowed their eyes at her, as though they had misheard. Then, one by one, they went wide with disbelief. That she, master of over-thinking, hadn't planned out the entire course of events, down to the last mote of dust in the air. Quite where they'd gotten that idea from eluded her.

“You mean you're just going in blind,” the elder brother deadpanned, clearly lamenting his loss even more, now.

With a shake of her head, she prepared herself, leafing through her file one final time. Pictures, dates, evidence numbers, and crime-scene details. Deeds of distant past and recent note to splay before him, and herself. “No,” the Inspector refuted, nodding to the man with the keys, “I'm just going to tell him a story and he'll tell me everything I need to know.”

“You're joking...” their voices all chorused as one.

Kinda. Just don't want to make you feel too bad. “Just wait and see,” she said, gripping the handle and letting herself in.

The room was small. Fitting, in her opinion. Fittingly intimate for the activity that took place within it. One, small window, set high on the wall opposite. About as big as her torso, if she squeezed herself as tight as possible, with five iron bars run through it, anchored into the solid brick. Furnishings consisted of two chairs and a table, all nailed to the floor. A small cot had been added for the prisoner's benefit, as well, shunted to the corner with a flat pillow and thin blanket as its only dressings.
But the most singular fixture was the man, himself. Lean and tall, likely with a sinewy strength his slim frame belayed. Long mustache on his face, and a ratty-brown head of hair. Not quite handsome, by her standards, but she could see him seen as such in another's eye.

Of course, her standards had shifted, rather drastically, in that regard, of late. So she might not be the best judge.

Bandages, on the other hand, she was an expert in. His arms were covered in them, as was a decent chunk of his face, right eye included. If memory served, which it most likely did, his chest was almost a bad off as hers, as well. Kicks from Kuvira could do that to you, though. The fault lay on him for not surrendering when he could.

“Ah, another dog to come snarling, then,” he smiled, bright teeth just starting to yellow. On his face, a look that tried so hard to capture that quality of his superior. Aloof, intimidating, a step above the rabble. A visionary.

Instead, he looked like a stray puppy that had lost sight of its mother.

Afraid.

Alone.

Ready to lash out and bite any hand that came too near.

Single scoff from the Sergeant by the door. Not amused, just impressed. Few men, or women, had the gall to keep up such a charade once the walls start closing in. When inevitability struck home as the cell door slammed closed.

Some people just needed reminding. “Your name is Batsa Crichton?” she asked, taking her seat opposite him.

Just a smile in reply.

*I'll take that as a 'yes'.* “You currently reside at 23 Preston Way, correct?” the Inspector continued, not making a move for her own little stub of a pencil. Didn't need to take notes of what she already knew. “Along with a Miss Margaret Collins?”

“Is that supposed to impress me?” the bound man asked with a snarling lisp to his words. Bark, bark, bark, the snarling pup.

“No,” Korra replied, without emotion or inflection.

It was a talent she wasn't particular good at, most of the time. A fact that many people had pointed out, over the years. From the holy men at the temple, to her parents at their many elaborate functions, aunt and uncle whenever they met, and grandmother as she was sent off. And her darling, of course. A favorite target of her teasing.

But, under the right conditions, with enough preparations, she could just about pull it off.

The man across from her seemed to have fallen for it. Not seen the bubbling, cold hate behind her eyes as she pictured every way she knew how of breaking him, body and spirit.

His posture softened a tad, growing less defensive by the second. Becoming the soft target she required for the technique she had chosen. It was a gamble of one, to be sure, but anyone willing to slit their own wrist wasn't going to be beaten down, no matter how loud she yelled.
A softer touch, that was what was required. “Do you want some water?” the Inspector asked, watching his response. Lips, dry and parched, part and close. Empty swallow.

“Are you trying to get that other man out of the room, Inspector?” the Lieutenant accused, flicking his narrowed gaze at the man for the barest of seconds. “That isn't the most subtle way of having us end up alone, is it?”

Ignore his suggestion, and the eye-roll inducing groan of the guard. Keep eye contact as she opened the file and spread it's contents onto the table. It had taken time, but she'd managed to arrange things in a concrete chronological order. From childhood to hours ago. Everything about his past was spread out in front of both of them. A spotty timeline of his life. Even so, his brain would fill in the gaps. Show him the steps that led him to this.

This room.

The shackles on his wrists and ankles.

Wounds all over his body.

Let him mull, eyes lingering on some choice pictures. The gorier ones, namely. Of the crimes he had performed. Along with each she'd placed a second photo of the victim, if possible. One with friends or family. Children, if she could find them.

Not everyone had such convenient devices to use, but she'd found enough to humanize the victims as a whole. Make him feel just a shred of guilt.

_There_. Just as his face passed over Gerard's face. Mirrored in duality in black and white. Empty, staring eyes, hand over his chest. Wide smile, wife on his arm, children clutching at his coattails. A happy family, torn asunder by a killer's blade. By him.

“Why are you showing me these things?” he asked, lifting his eyes from the last photo. That of the carnage at the pub. Scattered bullet casings on the floor, blood soaking into the floor. Another flash on the body of the barkeep. Second innocent on his conscience, perhaps. “You do realize you are wasting your time here, Inspector Waters. I will never give you anything. My lips are sealed, and there's nothing you can do to change that.”

Wait for the beat, the pause. One, two, three. **Now.**

“You're going to die, Mr. Crichton,” Korra told him, flat as the bay. Midway through, a decision, to mirror his resolve. Turn his stalwart words against him. “And there's nothing you can say to me that will change that.”

Another beat. Two. Then, laughter. Genuine mirth from the man. Not just an amused snicker, but a full blown belly-laugh. “Is that so?” the murderer guffawed, smiling in the face of her indifference. Despite that, he couldn't conceal the flash of fear that came to the fore of his eyes. “Let me tell you something, Miss Waters: it is going to take a whole lot more than a few empty threats to make me abandon my cause.”

“It isn't a threat,” Korra replied, pulling out the list of charges that had been leveled, so far, by the higher ups in her chain. By every one that carried a capital sentence, she'd marked a helpful X. “And it isn't empty.”

Watch him try to resist the urge. To see his fate in scribbled ink. See him fail, inexorably drawn to the document. He reads each one, silently, to himself, only looking up when the last word had been absorbed. Another dry swallow. Skin, a little paler, now. A bit of the bluster kicked out of him.
His silence prompted her voice. “Would you like me to tell you a story?” she asked, right hand moving to the oldest set of documents she had found. “Stop me if you've heard it before.”

“Thirty-six years ago, a baby was born in Kathmandu to a British military attaché and his Nepali mistress. The officer's wife had died some years before, but as he was courting the young daughter of a General, at the time, his relationship with the woman and the child was kept secret,” Korra related, watching for any twitch or inkling that she might have gotten something wrong, or pressed a nerve that should be avoided. None leaping to the fore, she continued, “His pursuit successful, the officer, now just promoted to Major, moved his new family to the capital of Calcutta, so he might provide his bride with the luxuries she was accustomed to.”

A bit of lip chewing on his part. Eyes lingering on a faded stack of papers that leaped ahead in his life a great number of years. A point she would now rush to reach.

“The boy and his mother moved with them, with the mistress taking up the role of companion for the lady of the house. He was a bright child, beloved by all around him, including his father and his wife. They showered the boy with gifts, having no children of their own at this time, and saw to it that he was educated as well as any British child.” An involuntary smile, now, appeared on his face, as he remembered the good times. Quickly followed by a frown as he realized what came next. “It was about this time the boy's mother died, from consumption.”

“Malaria,” the man corrected, as though a reflex. When he looked up, his eyes were hollow. Echoing the loss he had suffered, all those years ago. The pain of a child losing his parent. “Forgive me, Inspector, if I say, I don't quite see the importance of this charade.”

The investigator looks him back, squarely. She watched as the anger and defensiveness swiftly tried to build themselves up, again. Fortifying him from her roundabout assault. Squashing vulnerability and replacing it with what had driven him for years. “I do,” her response. “May I continue?”

“If you must.”

Oh, yes, she must. “After that, the boy was swiftly adopted by his father, though he didn't officially acknowledge him as his own. The woman of the house quickly adapted to the role of caregiver, ignoring, or perhaps accepting, the child's likely parentage.” Judging by his subtle reactions, the later seemed the more likely. A fondness as he gazed at a family picture, seized from his residence the day before. “The two were close, their bond strong, only growing upon the birth of a new baby girl.”

“Life was good, upbringing normal. Apart, perhaps, for the frequent moves the family made as the Major, now a Lieutenant-Colonel, chased promotion and advancement.” A twinge at that. Of anger towards his father's ambition. Best skirt that, for now. “Whatever teasing that he received was brushed off by the loving household that sheltered him from the worse abuses thrown upon mixed-raced children of British officers.”

A finger tapped on the next set of papers. Formal military records, a favor from George, at the expense of attending the New Year's celebration at the Palace. Hopefully, they'd prove their worth. “Right out of school, you-” A slip. One he noticed, eyes perking up for the first time since his story began. Continuing with it may just help her cause. “-were commissioned into the Army, with the help of your father's contacts. Reports called you a respectful, but unmotivated, officer. Very good at following orders, but unwilling to give them when unprompted. Thrice reprimanded and twice transferred for unprofessional conduct with enlisted personnel, and repeatedly passed over for promotion, by your own request.”
She paused on that. Perhaps the most telling thing she had found about his personality during her research. A team-player and a poor leader. Much more eager to belong with the group, than stand at it's head.

He was perfectly suited, it seemed, for the role he had been allotted by Amon. To be his snarling attack dog. Doing the dirty work so that the man at the top might keep up the appearance, until the last second, of keeping his hands clean. As well as providing a useful scapegoat for the potential failure of the entire scheme.

The public face of fear, separate from the noble cause by just enough to matter.

“All true so far,” the man hummed, having regained some of his footing. “But, I am confused. Is your intention merely to bore me into a confession? A rather novel tactic, I must say.”

_Time to bring the hammer down._ “Tell me about killing your father,” she sprung, after letting him enjoy his moment of comeback.

For some reason, he seemed surprised. As if the possibility had been so unlikely to him that its broaching was like a slap to the face. A fortunate turn of events for the Inspector. Opponents that were pushed that far onto the back foot rarely ever recovered enough to make a decent parry.

“It was right after you'd come back from Afghanistan, wasn't it?” the woman pressed, drawing renewed interest from the Sergeant by the door. He seemed to have lapsed during her tale, only returning when the topic of crime returned. “I read the reports. You took personal leave after the uprising in Kabul, didn't you?” Another twitch. One she would exploit, this time. “I found it interesting that a good chunk of that file has been redacted, after the fact. Any idea why that might be?”

“No.” His tone was biting and final. Discomfort, maybe even a touch of deep-seated remorse, leaked out around the edges.

The policewoman merely hummed, disbelievingly, before carrying on. “I also found it interesting that, two days before you left your unit, your adopted mother was found dead in your father's study.” Once again, the anger built behind his eyes. An old anger, this time. Shadow of what it must have been, at the time. “I suppose, there wouldn't have been time for a letter to be sent to you. Meaning, you either received a wire while in transit, or you learned about it only once you got there. Care to tell me which?”

“No.”

_After you got there, then._

“Suit yourself,” she shrugged, feigning even further indifference than before. This riled him. Not quite to the point of outburst, but close. Oh, so very close.

“The local Magistrate charged one of the Indian man-servants, didn't they? Something of a rushed trial, even for a colonial court.” Pretending to marvel at the expediency of this tragic miscarriage of justice made her stomach clench. And, she imagined it likely had the same effect on a younger Batsa Crichton. “Eleven days for a murder conviction, and without a confession. Doesn't really seem possible. It takes me more than eleven days to present evidence in one of my cases.”

A growl across the table. Aggressive and ill-tempered. The puppy had its tail stepped on, it seemed.

“You killed him for it, didn't you?” she asked in a slightly softer tone, showing the man empathy
he didn't deserve. “My guess is, he started drinking once his career stalled. And I can't imagine he stopped sleeping around once your mother died.”

Eyes averted from her, hollowing out, again. All the confirmation she needed.

“What happened?” the woman pressed. If she could get him to confess this, an act he had already been cleared of, the rest would be so much easier.

Clicking of teeth tapping together. Grinding of his jaw. Something changed inside him as he turned, decision seemingly made. “If I tell you, will you leave me the hell alone?” he responded in what he likely hoped was a hard response. But it came out slightly choked, hoarse. Bitter, for lack of a better word.

“No promises.”

Another bit of pondering, but it was inevitable what his choice would be. “She confronted him with a knife,” he said, darkly, a heavy gloom in his every word. “At least, that's what he told me. Accused him of sleeping with one of the laundry girls.”

“Was he?”

Tick, tock as he considered answering. Striking up an actual report with his interrogator.

“Probably,” the murderer admitted, with only the slightest hesitance. “He was rather stuck in his ways.”

“And he defended himself?” Of course not. A man, even one as old as the, by that time, Colonel, still had enough military experience to defend himself against a woman who'd likely never been in a fight in her entire life. Knife or no, the dead man's story held about as much water as a sieve.

“Ha!” the Lieutenant laughed, dark mirth taken from the ludicrous question. “Mother would never have held a knife at him. She was too kind a soul.”

His use of the word 'Mother' to describe the woman took the detective by mild surprise. She wasn't entirely sure why, but it still did. Perhaps it was that it gave him the same glimmer of humanity that she had tried to give his victims. Made him seem less the tragic monster, and more just tragic. Someone who had lost his way and never been able to find the right path, again.

“He had been drinking,” he continued, with a harder note, once again. “Always had been an angry man when he drank. Like a beast was let out when he had a bottle in his hands. Mother had just picked the wrong time, and she paid for it.”

And then you made him pay.

“Hit her over the head with paperweight, hard as he could.” Finger tapped the spot where the blow must've fallen. A spot just above the left temple. She'd seen the like, before. No telling if she had died quickly without examining for herself. But, at the very least, she was likely knocked unconscious by the blow, if the Spirits had been kind enough to ease her passing. “That's how they found her. Him cradling her head, weeping and begging her to wake up.”

“So, you fought him when he told you,” Korra picked up, already having pieced together a likely chain of events. “Your gun went off, and he was killed.”

The man nodded once. “Accidental death, they called it.”

“It wasn't.”
“No,” the disgraced former officer confirmed, with only a hint of remorse. “I did what had to be
done, because no one else was going to.”

“And that's what you're still doing?” the Inspector asked, now reaching the turning point. If the ball
kept rolling here, Noatak's entire house of cards could come tumbling down. On the other hand, if
loyalty and stubbornness won the day, she would have wasted two days of behind the scenes
efforts, the vast overtime hours of almost a dozen fellow Met officers, and a valuable favor from
her Royal contact.

Not a small price tag, but the reward seemed more than worth it.

“Yes.”

Raava, I thank you for your gracious blessing. “And you really think that Amon is going to build a
better world, if he, somehow, succeeds?”

“When,” the man confirmed with a surety that would be truly admirable, were it not so woefully
misplaced. The mention of his string puller, and hers, seemed to galvanize the swordsman's spirit.
A certain kind of pride in his eyes that only those with rose-tinted glasses had. “And yes, Inspector,
I do believe him. As much as I believe the sky is blue and the grass is green.”

“Hmm,” the foreigner hummed, shifting the many stacks of documents she had crammed into her
tiny folder until she found the stack she needed. Her family's seal was stamped at the top, along
with that of the Ministry of Justice's. “Then, I think you should read this.”

His eyes were drawn to the stack as she plopped them directly in front of him. Easily the largest
stack she had brought with her, and the one she'd poured over the most. “What is this?”

“Amon's criminal record,” she said with a return to the flat inflection she had started with. “Or,
should I call him Noatak? Which would you prefer?” Confusion on his face as he looked between
the document and her, several times. “Oh, did he not tell you that?” Inspector Waters asked, with a
mild case of mock shock. “Well, I guess it wasn't the only thing he hid from you, I suppose. Feel
free to look for yourself, I've gone to the liberty of having them translated for you.”

There were many reactions that Korra had prepared for, from a total silence, to an attempt to leap
the table. But, the one he chose disappointed her more than any of the others would have: denial.

“Please, Miss Waters, do you actually expect me to trust anything that you give me?” he chuckled,
in a total circle to his prior brashness and cocky swagger. “You could have give me anyone's record
and claim it's his. Hell, these could just be forgeries. Something you had mocked up to try and
shock me.”

Reaching over, she flipped to the third page for him. “I suppose that's why I have a charge here
from ten years ago for 'Sale of Forged Religious Artifacts', while he was enrolled as an apprentice
angakkuk in Kuujjuaq.”

There was brief description of the evidence photos, and a list of items confiscated. Ceremonial
daggers and spears, totems and charms, and, most interestingly, masks.

“That means priest, by the way,” the policewoman, informed him, letting the document fall closed.
“He was expelled from his temple for it. Lucky for him, he could take up the family business.”

Now, her ball was rolling, slowly gathering momentum to break down his walls. “You see, his
father, Yakone, was one of the pillars of organized crime in Nunatsiavut. Put sonny boy in charge
of a group of enforcers in the extortion racket. Didn't seem to suit him though, since most of what I
have after that is him going after other underworld types. He and his crew are suspects in the murder of about two dozen traffickers and pimps, so I guess that started early.”

Leaning her elbows on the table, Korra rested her chin on her thumbs. Their talk had dragged on longer than she had expected, and her chest felt like fire. “Of course, the long arm of the law caught up to his old man. Ended up getting killed in a shootout with the local police after one of his underlings turned him in.” One, two, three. “A guy called 'Amon’.”

Wonder if he saw the odd reversal, there. The utter opposition of their origins. One takes the father's life for the failure of the system. The other despised his father enough to use the system for murder.

“After that, he went and started a gang war,” the Inspector carried on, once that last bit had time to sink in. “The police cracked down, hard.” Twitch of her own face, now. “Too hard.” Deep breath, close her eyes and force herself to remember it wasn't her fault. That she couldn't have stopped it. “ Forced curfews, random stops, armed raids of anywhere even suspected of being affiliated with a gang. By the time martial law was declared around two-hundred people were dead, and about ten-times that arrested.”

And now, the question. “Tell me, does that sound like a man you want to follow?”

He breathed deep, fingers drummed on the table. Shoulders rolled, neck stiffened, jaw clenched. “I don't believe you.”

“Yes you do,” Korra rejected, looking him dead on. “I may not like you, tiaavuluk, I hate you, but you still have more integrity and honor than he does. That man you hold in such high esteem is perfectly willing to plunge this city into chaos to get what he wants. Back then, it was two-hundred. This time, it will be thousands.”

The argument that had failed with the revolutionary seemed to resonate with the soldier. Clearly, the value they placed on innocent life was leagues apart.

“So, are you going to what has to be done? Help me stop the man that is going to kill dozens of people just like your mother? People like this man,” her finger tapped on Gerard's face, “my friend, who risked his life every day trying to catch people like your father. Or are you going to keep protecting the monster that made you kill him, sent you after my boss, a more honorable man there is not on the face of this earth, and didn't even bother telling you there was a bomb in that theater?”

That last comment was her greatest gamble. Given what she knew of the coldness of the man, though, her suspicions were that Amon hadn't told his assassin of the device. Perhaps hoping to bury him in the rubble, along with Korra and her compatriots.

Lieutenant Crichton mulled the option in his head.

She could see it happening, honor and his both his mother's kindness doing battle with his righteous anger and the lies and indoctrination he had been fed. Opportunity of a new world, or the weight of his sins.

“What would your mother do?” Which one didn't matter to her. All she needed was that last bit to potentially push him over the hump.

Crack...

Tears rolled down his face as his resolve crumbled. No violent sobs, just silent droplets as his mind was made up. Which effort had actually broken him was a mystery, but his trip down memory lane
had certainly helped more than her usual bluntness. “What do you want to know, Inspector?” he asked, voice as solid as it had ever been.

_ I did it._

“Well who switched out the bullets?”

Chapter End Notes

_Soooooo...._  
Was the payoff worth all the setup I've done? You'll have to tell me, 'cause I'm not really sure myself. Next up is Hiroshi, I think.
As always, comments are what keeps me going. Have mercy on my fragile ego, please. Haha!
Til next time.
Hiroshi Sato

Chapter Summary

Our dear Inspector has a few choice words to give her beloved's father.

Chapter Notes

Again, apologies for the last chapter. Hope this makes up for that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ah, central lockup. Such a cheery place.

Whether it was the peeling walls, crumbling plaster, the catcalls and attempted grab-assery, screaming cries of the despondent or insane, or something else she couldn't quite put her finger on, there was just an aura about the place the Avatar couldn't help but love.

Oh, wait…

No, actually, it was the exact opposite of all that.

In fact, the only place Korra despised more than British hospitals, for the mental fuckery they did to her, was their prisons. Cold, inhuman places. Absent of humor and light.

Still, better than Broadmoor.

Been there twice on business and each had traumatized her. The screams, not wails of crushing sadness and lost hope, but of pain and shattered minds. It was her opinion that one need not be mad to be committed to the place. They need only stay there long enough and the insanity would wear off on them.

Speaking of mad…

“Mr. Holmes, do I even have to ask why you're here?” the rather fed up royal called down the corridor to the lanky man. “Or should I be asking who let you in?”

Narrowed eyes fell upon the rather skittish looking guard hiding behind the private 'detective'. He seemed to be a likely bet, what with how he seemed to be trying his hardest to blend himself into the stonework of the wall. Honestly, she wasn't even mad at the man. After all, who wouldn't bow to a request by the great Sherlock Holmes, finest investigator in all the Empire? And one so small as opening a few doors?

“Waiting for you, Inspector Waters,” the sharp-nosed country yeoman pandered, giving he another flamboyant bow. When he returned to his standing position he wore a beaming smile just like that of their first meeting. Broad and cheerful, despite circumstance. “Honestly, my dear, it has been far too long.
“And yet,” the policewoman parlayed, taking his offered hand firmly in her, “somehow, not nearly long enough.”

A little laugh, a noise she’d have thought him incapable. “This wanton hostility is unbecoming of you, my good lady,” he said, lips curling up even more toward his deerskin. Movement briefly drew her eye, southwards, as did a flash of light. The silver flash of a shilling, being tumbled between the man’s fingers. “It doesn’t suit your intelligence or your talents. Both of which I am rather impressed with, might I say.”

Blink at him in unimpressed silence. Mull whether his compliment was genuine or just an attempt to get her to tolerate his presence. Judging by his previous actions, the later was more probable than the former. But, she’d been surprised more than once these past few days.

“So,” he declared, clapping his hands together, causing the startled guard to jump about a foot into the air, “shall we begin the interrogation, then?”

“No, Mr. Holmes,” she denied, grinding her teeth in her jaw at the amateur’s joyous insistence, “I am going to conduct the interview. You are going to turn around,” finger moves to point down the ratty corridor towards the exit, “walk out of this jailhouse, get in a cab, and go back to pestering Ms. Hudson with your antics. She has the time to deal with them, I do not.”

No moves are made on his part. The smile on his face remains in place, stance unchanged, whippy arms remaining by his side, only the coin continuing to dance at his manipulation. “Inspector, let us not continue to pretend this will end up any other way than one,” the addict softly reasoned after a moment’s exchange of shifting looks. “You may, of course, have me escorted from the premises by this fine young man, here.” Free hand gestured to the guard, who returned a look that made it seem his mention was the last thing he wanted. “But there is no guarantee, rather there is a certainty, that I shall return at a later time and conduct my own investigation. What good would the effort do either of us?”

“I could ban you from the building,” Korra countered, already tired of the man who had popped up so frequently when he was neither wanted, nor needed.

Little twitch of amusement on his face. “You could, most certainly, try.”

All of my hate!

Well, not quite all, but certainly more than anyone who hadn't murdered, or attempted to murder, someone had ever earned from, lately. Save for that one special place on her shitlist. The one she'd reserved for years for that one person who'd irked her as no other.

“Come, Inspector, we mustn't doddle,” her annoyance beckoned, turning down the side path and waving for her to follow. “There is important work to be done.”

Important work, indeed. Her important work. The work she didn't want this interloping, swaggering, sure of himself, meddler involving his person with, lest he cause another near catastrophe. It didn't take a genius to figure out that the illustrious private detective had been the one to lead the SID into the middle of her operation. The lads in that particular department were better known for their ability to wield a cudgel than ask meaningful questions of a witness.

Nor was it particularly had to guess who'd financed his employment in the first place. Tarrlok Blackwater had outdone himself with that one. Not only had he defied George's request, he’d gone behind her back, as well. Although, the heir apparent doubted rather highly that this was some clever scheme on his part. More likely spite, revenge for her treatment of him.
Maybe he's in here, too, somewhere. I should ask once I'm done. Go pay him a visit.

With a great sigh, Korra resigned herself to the unpleasant company. Not that she had to enjoy it, of course. Disposing of the irritant would simply be more trouble than it was worth.

“No Dr. Watson? I thought the two of you were joined at the hip,” she remarked as they walked along the lines of cells. An occasional arm poked through the bars, solicitation offered. Whistling, singing, and crying would occasionally rise from the eerie silence the stone walls emitted as they somehow swallowed sound and joy, alike.

A slight dig with a serious question.

The level of her distress upon their last meeting had been too high for her to properly thank the man. Just couldn't wait to leave the smell of powder behind. Get herself and her love as far away from the man she now found herself marching towards as humanly possible.

To save them both the sight of her breaking him, bone by bone.

While Bolin's observations had done well to calm her initial fury, it hadn't lasted. Just the idea anyone, let alone her own father, had pulled a gun on Asami was near maddening.

“Not today, no,” the arrow nosed 'gentleman' hummed, falling into step with her. His eyes were fixed ahead, glassy as he thought in that most peculiar way of the obsessive. When the whole world fell away and there was only 'the problem', all else left to automata. “I took the liberty of asking he watch over the young Miss Sato, while you were away. We both thought you might appreciate she have some manner of company in this most trying time for her.”

Gratitude, despite herself, welled in her heart. Both for the soothing company and protection the good Doctor would provide. His mild innocence and sweet nature would also, likely, keep him from asking too many questions about her sudden move.

“Thank you,” she whispered, hoping to the Spirits that he, and no other, heard the words. “Again.”

“It was, I believe, the very least I could do after the trouble I've caused you,” Holmes accepted, tipping his hat respectfully. “How is your,” his eyes flicked to her with a half-knowing/half-mischievous glimmer to them, now, “friend, might I ask? She has gone through rather a great deal in such a short time.”

*Stow your fake empathy, you ass,* the Detective wished to growl. “Fine,” she replied, instead, pretending not to catch his little fishing expedition. “How's Miss Adler?”

An involuntary narrowing of his expression, slight change in his breathing. Not as much as her first mention, no total reversal or withdrawal. Just a little hiccup in his face. “Doing well, from what little I hear of her,” he hummed, reaching into his far pocket and drawing out his pipe. Cleaned and polished til it shown like new, but still reverently tapped against the wall to get even the smallest trace of lint out as they walked.

“R-right here, Ma'am,” the guard cut in, coming to a halt in front of one of the single occupant cells.

The normal iron bars of the temporary holding blocks found themselves replaced with thick timber doors. Solid, sturdy, thick enough to hold even the hardest man, but still gave that slightly homey touch to keep insanity at bay during long hours of confinement.

Well, maybe that was going a bit too far. But, the inspector imagined that, after a while, even the
slight change of texture between wood and stone might make a difference in one's mood.

“I do the talking,” Korra instructed as the skittish young man went about searching his overfilled keyring for the proper opener. Her most unwanted accompaniment held his hand up for the man to pause, then nodded for her to continue. “This is my case, we will work it my way. No wild, tangential questions. No spontaneous, baseless epiphanies.” The man's lips quirked, again. “This is an informal interview, not an interrogation. You have a question, it goes through me first. I don't want to give his lawyers any grounds to have him released, understand?”

“I Inspector,” Holmes said, hand on heart, “I promise on Queen, and Country, and all I find holy—” So, yourself, then. “-that I will be on my utmost behavior.”

“That is what I am worried about.”

With a mutual gesture, the opening of the door was recommenced. A, by now, all too familiar tumbling of locks followed heavy hammering on the door, and an order to “Stand back!” Creak of the hinges, yawning of the gaping maw, ready to swallow them both up.

“Visitors!”

From inside, a soft grumbling, as though the occupant had been roused from a good book. Or an equally good nap.

They didn't dare to linger, ushered inside as they were by the nervous warden's beckoning hand. Scent of mildew persisted in the air. Damp unpleasantness distilled into a whiff, accompanied by the potpourri of unwashed humanity, and the faint lingering of waste. A rather impressive step down, yet, still, not enough to satisfy a part of her. The part that felt there was no dark, claustrophobic hole in this world uncomfortable enough to stuff Hiroshi Sato in.

For pulling a gun on her girl. There was no punishment harsh enough, no sentence long enough. Death would be a mercy, so far as she was concerned.

“Ah, Inspector Waters,” the slightly pudgy man welcomed her, with all the usual hospitality. Asami's 'father' swiftly rose himself from his cot, brushing wrinkles from the same garments he had been wearing on the day of his incarceration. “Please excuse the mess. I've asked them to move me to less inhospitable accommodations, but there has been some reluctance to do so, on their part.”

Clenching her fists at her side, Korra smiled as she responded. “You know what, I actually think the place suits you. Outside finally matching the in, know what I mean?”

“Agreed,” the interloper agreed, taking a brief look around, before joining in gazing at the prisoner. Well, in the Inspector's case, glaring would, perhaps, be the better descriptor. Most especially when he opened his mouth for whatever polite, yet mildly cutting retort had popped into his head. “I suppose we are all entitled to our opinions,” the businessman reasoned, smile shifting into something horrible. The kind that sent shivers up your spine just being in the same room with. Cruel and cold, yet burning with hatred. The same hate she had caught glimpse of in the back of that carriage as it trundled away.

Suddenly, Korra was struck with the most powerful urge to back slowly to the door, not taking her eyes off the man for a moment. Like he was more beast than man under the surface, and his true form would devour her alive should her eye contact be broken for just a second.
“So, tell me, My Lady,” the man inquired, likely picking the term to annoy her, “is this a social visit, or a professional one? Because, in the one case, I would rather like to exercise my right to counsel.”

Returning his now benign smile with an equal amount of genuineness, Korra shook her head. “I’m afraid it’s both and neither, Mr. Sato.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah, sorry ‘bout that. No overpaid, suit-wearing, briefcase-wielding, wall of lawyers allowed today. Just you, me, and Mr. Holmes here,” she apologized, with not a shred of remorse to be found. A hand moved to slip in her coat aide, making sure to keep the man in at least the periphery of her vision. “That and I’ve brought your mail.”

Two envelopes: one fat, one thin. The first stamped with the Future Industries watermark, second addressed in a tight, curling style Korra had come to know in little notes to herself.

With a toss she landed them on his bed to read later. Something to pass the time until the hanging judges got their hands on him. It was better than the man deserved, but a promise was a promise. That and she’d get to see the look on his face when he found out all of his money and legacy had gone up in smoke.

“Well, I thank you for that,” the executive said, turning to examine the reading material. “Still, I’m surprised you were the one to deliver them. I would have figured you’d still be running around, hopelessly searching in all the wrong places.”

Holmes hummed at his words. Something he had noticed and she hadn't, perhaps. Or maybe he'd also been led on a wild goose chase or two. It would make a certain sense.

The man had a tendency to… meddle.

“I'll admit, you had me wound pretty tight for a while, there,” the policewoman replied, tucking hands in pockets so the urge to punch the man would be harder to pull off. Such an impressive man to remain so despicable and pitiable whilst covered in three days of his own filth. “Tell me, was it your idea to burn down your own factory, or his? It seems to be more along your avenue of things, white-collar crime and all that.”

A single clap, followed by a slow procession of follow-ups. “Well done,” the filicidal parent praised, like she'd just solved a tough math problem. “You finally put two and two together, Korra. Or was it my daughter that did it for you, if we're asking questions?”

She let him enjoy himself, burn the image of this happy face in her mind. If only to make the contrast when he stood upon the gallows all the more striking when it happened. *I wonder if he'll go pale,* she thought, tilting her head slightly to one side for a different angle, *or if he'll stay just like this to the end?* Crichton would probably cry, beg forgiveness for his sins and apologize to his victims. Amon, well, he'd give a speech, of course. Use his last moments to spread the word of his message, preach against the evils of society.

But what of the man driven mad by grief? What would his last words be? Of whom would he think?

Asami?
His belated bride?
Or himself?

She'd have to wait and see.

“I respond to your question with one of my own,” Holmes voiced in reply, lasting much longer than expected. “Have you always been such a pathetic, detestable waste of humanity, or is that a more recent development of your character?”

“It seems you can speak, after all, Mr. Holmes,” Hiroshi noted, turning from the foreigner with one last flash of contempt in his eyes, “And you use the opportunity to insult me? That isn't anything like what I've heard of you through the grapevine. I had been led to believe you were a man above such petty things.”

“You've not heard wrong, Sir, though I feel you have earned not the respect of the title,” said the private man with more genuine emotion in his inflection than Korra had ever heard from him. “However, I am sure you must also have heard that I am a man want to speak his mind on things on which I have some interest, and I feel I must speak, now.” A fire kindled in the words as he worked himself to a tempest. The princess had a feeling that, were he a conductor, this would be the crescendo of the orchestral piece, and he had only just begun.

“Mr. Sato, I have had the great displeasure of making the acquaintance of some of the vilest individuals in all Her Majesty's Empire,” the addict stressed, putting the extra effort into every syllable, “Murderers and fiends of all stripes and walks of life. But, amongst them all, I can think of only one who has so stoked a hatred in me, thus far, as you have done.”

Interest briefly peaked in the shorter man's face, to the Inspector's surprise. He seemed to take some pride from the statement, before the moment swiftly passed. “And who might that be?” he thought to ask, swallowing dryly and pick at a spot as his daughter did.

“A man by the name of Roylott. A great brute and prone to acts of violence, was he,” Sherlock related with greatest revulsion at the man's memory. Indeed, his face grew red and his fist clenched so hard 'round his coin that the knuckles went white. “But that is not why I so despise you, no. For you seem, to me, a man whose sadism goes beyond that which could be clenched by taking life yourself, and has moved on to letting others do your killing for you.”

That caught Korra's ear more than any other.

Moved on? What does he mean, 'moved on'?

Looking at him, even through all of her hate, all of her shattered preconceptions, the detective still couldn't bring herself to see the man taking a life. Sure, she knew he could threaten it. His actions had proven such. But the thought he had done even that before that moment seemed out of his character.

Maybe he was just such a good chameleon. Perhaps Holmes really did know something she didn't.

“My ire is stoked by the target you so chose, for I hold none in this world on lower a rung than those who would raise a hand against their own child. Rest assured that I shall do all within my power to ensure you are never to see the light of day again,” the wiry pipe-smoker and addict punctuated with finality, letting his storm settle once more.

The silence spread to all those present, either taken aback by the ferocity of his display, or exhausted by it. If a pin were to drop to the solid stone floor, the little ping would be deafening to
the ears.

Korra, for her part, looked at the man with a new light. She had just seen, she thought, a glimpse of something all too familiar to her.

A drive. One singular drive. To right the wrongs that crossed your path, and not rest until the task was done. Whether that lead to sleepless nights, or an empty bed to come home to. Nothing mattered but the case and the people that were involve. Both victim and victimizer. The satisfaction or a job well done, and the crushing pain of those who could not be saved.

Who was his ghost, she wondered. What voice gave light to the inner doubts and fears, inside? Late at night, all alone. But still, they whisper. All around and nowhere. Real and also not.

Shake her head at almost the same moment as the prisoner. Both ridding themselves of whatever thoughts his words had stirred.

“Well, Mr. Holmes, I think it would be safe to say your opinion of me has been voiced for all to hear,” the yet-to-be condemned man said, just a little quieter and less confidently than before. “Is there anything else you would like to say to me, Inspector, or has that stepped on whatever long-winded, high-minded sermon you had prepared?”

With a firmer shake of her head, she declined, “That just about covered it, I think. Unless you want to go on your rant about how you're taking revenge for your wife's murder? I'm sure you must have one stored up in there, since Asami didn't want to hear it.”

A deep breath later and Hiroshi Sato let his facade slip into a scowl. Not nearly as menacing as his smile had been, but still giving off an aura that made Korra's stomach turn. Bells went off inside her head as he stared at her with such rage he looked to be killing her in his mind. “While I would love to explain myself and my reasons to an impudent little do-gooder, like yourself, I have neither the time or the patience. And I'm sure you must be full-handed with poisoning my daughter against me and keeping the blood in the streets flowing.”

“I'm pretty sure you did all the poisoning when you pointed a gun at her,” the policewoman spat, only just keeping her tone level.

“Only because you made her think she wasn't safe in her own home!” Hiroshi shot back, raising his voice for the first time. He shook, with anger and intent. “People like you. It's people like you that I hate the most. So blinded by your ideals you don't bother to see the world around you. People who make promise after promise, only to fail every time, just to promise they'll do better the next time.”

Funny, you're not the first person to say something like that to me, lately.

“Mr. Sato, I don't know who handled your wife's case. I don't know that I could have done any better than them. But I do know that most of the officers I know lose sleep at night for every case they don't solve,” Korra retorted, not letting, not allowing, herself to be pushed onto the back foot by the same arguments, again. “I lost my rose-colored glasses years ago. The work I do, it isn't nice, it isn't pretty. Every day, I walk the line between going too far and not going far enough.”

“And I hate it,” she shuddered with the truth of it. “I hate that some people get off easy because they spill on bigger fish. I hate that some officers abuse their badge and the power it gives them to oppress the people we are supposed to protect. I hate this broken system, I hate the red tape, I hate that people like you,” a finger pointed dead at his face, “exist in the first place. But I wake up every day and fight the good fight the only way I know how: one case, one lead, one victim at a
“One day, maybe, things will change. Get better. Until then, I'll keep working my ass off, so people like your daughter can sleep safely in their bed at night.” That last sentence conjured an image in her head. Of raven-head splayed out on her pillow, chest rising with each soft breath.

That is what she protected, she realized. Asami and the others like her. Hard-working, good, honest people. There was nothing more she needed, and she had nothing, at all, to prove.

She watched, with determination, as a slight smile returned to Hiroshi Sato's face. As the rage was replaced with banal amusement. “So, you did have a speech, after all,” the robber-baron laughed, softly and without humor. “No wonder the Lieutenant found you so moving. He always was a sucker for a good story.” His smile grew as she realized word had already spread of his comrades turn. “I'm afraid the rest of what you have to say will have to wait of my attorneys, however.”

Her turn to smile again. Safe in knowledge he did not possess. “Good luck finding one without any money to pay them with,” Korra told him, wrapping on the door with her knuckles, “You should have thought twice before adding Asami to all of your accounts. Took her all day, yesterday, but you're just as broke as a beggar. I told her it was going too far, but she is annoyingly stubborn, after all.”

Return of the anger as key reentered the lock, set to free them from his confines.

“This is robbery!” the man exploded, taking a bold step forward, “This was your idea, I'm sure of it. Mark my words, Waters: you'll pay for this!”

“Maybe,” the Inspector shrugged as the door swung open to the world beyond. “But not today, I won't.”

“You filthy, heathenous bitch!” the former head of Future Industries roared, shaking his fist and staring daggers. “I'll make you pay. I'll make you all pay for what you've done to me. This is not the end, Waters! I am not a man to be crossed!”

Where have I heard that line before?

A flick of motion and a flash of silver. “Catch,” Holmes called, prompting the business man to swipe the coin from the air. With a little nod of his head, he bid, “For the legal fees.”

With a whiz and a ping the currency was hurled back at the man, bouncing off the wall just over his left shoulder. It was left where it fell, as the private detective followed the genuine article out the door and back into the hall. All the way they were berated by hollow insults and increasingly uncreative curses. Not once did he try to close the distance, the most devastating blow he landed being a short foray into questioning the Inspector's virtue.

Slam, ker-clunk. The cell was resecured, shouts immediately deadened by the heavy oak.

Turning to her previous annoyance with a good deal more respect for him that before, she asked, “What did you do that for?” Surely he hadn't just provoked in such an obvious way to rile the financier of the Equalists and their cause. Their mere presence had done for that.

“Just a little experiment, my dear Inspector,” the man hummed, innocently, returning to his more irritating ways. “And what, pray tell, did we observe of the results?”

Quickly, she thought back to the swift series of events. “He's left-handed?” she shrugged, remembering how, what would have been her off-hand, shot up with a precision that she could
never have managed without training, as mere reflex. “So what? Plenty of people are left-handed. My boss is left-handed, so are two of my detectives.”

“And yet, he writes with his right,” Holmes pointed out, no doubt relying upon the wear pattern upon that one of the man's cuffs. Fabric worn slightly shiny and taut against the surface of his desk with the repetition of the task. “Meaning?”

“Ambidextrous, so's Asami.” She recoiled, slightly, at the way the man's smile took on a different character, again. Don't you start with me. Not when I'm starting to like you. “Your point?”

“Nothing, at the moment,” he admitted. Truthfully, or so she believed. “Just a theory.”

Excellent. Now he's having theories.

With a roll of her neck and a clutching of her ribs, Korra concluded that was all she could stand, for the day. It would be desk work and delegation for the rest. Then, an early retirement to work on dinner before Asami returned from what were likely to be a grueling day of meetings. Transferring control of a company was likely to be a bone-crushing-

Ow.

Task to perform.

“Well, you go work on that, and I'll start tracking down Amon, deal?” the Inspector offered, extending her hand to the man in offer of partnership. Spirits help her.

“A pact, then?” Holmes replied, taking hers in his and shaking once.

“A truce,” she corrected, not letting the man get ahead of himself. But, seeing as she didn't seem to be able to rid herself of him, he might as well be put to some kind of use. He had proven himself to be rather resourceful, if nothing else.

“Acceptable.”

“Yeah.”

Spinning upon his well walked heel, the consultant made his separate way out. With a wave of his hand he bid her farewell in the most aggravating way he possibly could have. “We should meet up on the 'morrow and share our findings,” he said, in perfect, if accented, Kalaallisut, “Until then, Inspector, may Raava's light guide your way.”

“And yours,” she growled back, nearly as miffed as before. But, despite that, she couldn't help the little smile on her face.

It looked like it was going to be another long day.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that was better, I think. Hope you think the same.

No update next week, as I will be taking a much needed vacation and this work takes a bit too much out of me to be vacation compatible. I hope to return refreshed and ready
to finish off on a high. Many thanks to those of you who have read, kudosed, and especially commented over the weeks and months. It is you who kept me from abandoning this work the many times I have considered doing so.

JMStei: Humble isn’t kidding either. Told me a few times that they considered dropping it. Leaving a comment really helps us keep going.

Humble: Is this the Imperial 'us', or have you been slipping a secret second story in with mine?
Under the Looking Glass

Chapter Summary

Korra and Asami have an unwanted houseguest to review what the Inspector has to go on. It all comes down to this, and the ticking of the clock.

Chapter Notes

With the conclusion to this journey rapidly approaching, I hope you all have your spreadsheets ready. You're gonna need them. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Papers, papers, lovely papers, towering in their piles. Old and yellowed, new and crisp. Bound, unbound. Handwritten, typed. Personal letters, dossier files, financials, bank statements, cargo manifests, building plans, inventories, the entire contents of Hiroshi's office spread out atop her coffee table.

Fire crackled in the hearth, blanket draped over her aching legs. Pacing, endless pacing. All day yesterday, well into the morning of the next. Around her office, down the street, up and down the endless stairs.

Smoke swirled up the floe, dancing like the odd creatures in Korra's dreams. Swirling, whirling ethereal shapes. Faces, hands, memories, predictions, assumptions all played out in the floating heat and ash. Some things she was sure of, the past repeated in perfect detail. Others, less clear, hazy. Best guesses, friendly input, and what was known of all the players coming together in the most likely of scenarios, working their way out from there.

“You've got that look on your face, again,” Asami hummed, taking back her place next to the detective. Cup of tea and saucer were balanced on a less precarious of stacks.

Eyebrow quirked at her insistence, turning to meet their eyes. “What look?”

“That look,” her darling explained, tapping her on the nose with a finger. There's a smile on her lips. Fond, with just a hint of mischief. The reason soon presents itself as she steals a quick kiss, almost giggling as they broke. “The one you get every time you're stuck on something.”

“I have a look for that?” Korra inquired, surprised by the revelation, in her mind, she'd always assumed she'd stayed somewhere between blank and passive while she thought. To learn any different was more than a little interesting for her for her whirring mind.

A nod. Little twitch of the smile. “Sure do. Your eyes kind of zone out,” she said, whilst demonstrating. Brows knit together, pupils dilated, gaze going unfocused and distant. “And you sort of lean forward, and start rubbing your hands.” Blink, blink, and the impersonation is gone, returned to the previous smiling visage. “Honestly, it's really adorable, sweetie. Just wish you wouldn't drop so much stuff when you did it.”
“Huh?”

Green eyes flick downwards to the floor, quickly followed by blue. There, the latest folder to have been skimmed. Mostly copies of previous information, only ordered slightly differently.

“Whoops!” the homeowner exclaimed, dipping to collect the bundle and set it carefully in its place amid the clutter.

“Now,” Asami said, lifting her own cup to her lips and testing the contents, giving it a sigh of approval, “Are you making supper tonight, or am I? ’Cause if I’m doing it, I’m gonna have to pick up a few things at the market.”

Supper? “What are you talking about, it’s-” she turns to the clock for confirmation “-half-past six? When did that happen?”

“You've been sitting here, reading, for almost two-hours,” her dearest noted, taking another sip. This one seemed good enough for her eyes to drift closed, hand moving to steal some of the covers for herself. “Find anything new, or did you record it all in that pretty little head of yours last time you dug through them all.”

“You're teasing me again, aren't you?” the royal accused, taking up her own cup before to contents grew cold.

Cock of the head, little twitch of the smile. Sadness, same sadness as before. Only, instead of being buried deep, it was rawer, closer to the surface. “Well, you know what they say, Princess,” the corporate woman excused herself, “everyone needs a hobby.”

A hum as they both tap little sips. Light, tinge of mint in the herbal mix, smell of something sweet. Rosemary, maybe? Or marigold? Something like that. “So, I take it tormenting me is your new hobby, then? Did you just get tired of the whole ‘taking over the third floor’ thing, already?” Korra kidded, wincing at the elbow that grazed her side as a retort. Even if it was the opposite side, the mind still recoiled at the thought. “’Cause, if so, could you get that junk out my study? It makes a hell of a racket when you're working on it.”

“You hush,” the retort as the guest swiftly finished her warming drink and balanced it's empty vessel on a stack of her father's documents. “So, dinner?”

Think on that, long and hard. Let her mouth water at the prospect of Asami's generally rich, heavy English style of cooking. Better than hers, she had to admit. Especially the meat. It was the beef and pork, that had to be the problem. All fat, no flavor. She'd been taught on leaner game, that was it.

But, on the other hand, she could use to rest her eyes and work her hands on less frustrating task. Something that didn't make her eye twitch. That gave her more satisfaction than the sensation of trying to break down a wall with nothing but her forehead.

“I'll take care of it,” she sighed, good arm bracing itself on the cushion between them to help her tired feet take the first of her weight.

Groan, lightly, as pain rippled as things settled differently with her shifting. Bit her lip to keep the worst of it within. Resist the urge to clutch her blackened, bruised side. Or her itching scab on the other. Shift the bandage around the hole that Asami had insisted upon after it had resumed bleeding, midway through the night. She’d been discovered in the process of staunching the slow leak, but the way her love had paled made her feel it to be a geyser.
On that sort of thing, she'd already learned not to argue. The woman took better care of her health than Korra had in years.

Even as she walked to the kitchen the Inspector had to wave off offers of assistance. “I'm fine,” she insisted, picking up the pace in a vain attempt to outrun her girlfriend. “How many times do I have to tell you, I'm fine?”

“I don't know,” the green-eyed beauty shrugged, keeping easy just a pair of paces behind, despite her much more awkward garment. If Korra ever tried running in a dress, of any kind, she'd probably end up knocking all her teeth out on the floor after about ten feet. “Depends, how many times are you going to tell me you'll be careful, only to come back covered in bandages, looking like you've just come off on the bad end of a bear attack?”

_Hmmm, don't know how to respond to that._

Pause in the middle of retrieving the largest of her pots for her eventual reply. “Touche.” What else was there to say, really?

They chatted while she cooked, as usual of these last few days. Just a part of the routine. Something it felt nice to have, again. Comforting. Warm hugs and happy smiles to look forward every day. A person to talk to, share with, have things shared. Make the house feel less empty.

Empty chatter to fill the air. Ward off stillness, loneliness. Her worst enemy, right after the demons of her mind. Nightmares and the hallucinations they drove her to when kept awake too long.

Too long…

Faces in the crowd. Ones that shouldn't be there. That doctor's assistant, for one. Seen him more and more these past few days. Ten minutes out the corner of her eye, if that. On the way to Asami's, that first time. Passing down the street, after that. Then, turning 'round street corners, every once in awhile. Not noticed in the moment, only in those following. Sometimes an hour or more.

A day.

Two.

Hiroshi, too. Places he wouldn't dare to tread. Or simply couldn't. At the heart of Leman Street. Sometimes with Asami in tow. Younger, happier even than she was now. Faceless woman with them.

Blink her eye, shake her head, the apparitions would vanish like smoke.

Like smoke…

__Why is there smoke?__

“Shit, shit, shit!” she chanted, beginning salvaging procedure for the night's stew, dousing the fire and shifting pots to cooler hobs.

“Well, maybe Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson like charred vegetables?” Asami laughed with more mirth than she'd had since moving in. At least she'd gotten to here that wonderful music out of this near disaster. “Do you need some help?”

“No, no, it should be fine,” the Inspector mumbled, digging hard with her spoon to dislodge that
which had become stuck to the bottom of the iron bowl. Then, a stirring in her heart. Eyes flicked to her face, already a more sullen tint to the smile she found. “Speaking of, how are you doing? I know we haven't really talked much about—”

A hand was held up to silence her inquiry, hint of tiredness showing in her loves features. “Korra,” she began, letting the hand fall, “I feel just the same as I did when you asked me two hours ago, and this morning, and last night.” Great, so, no backsliding. No forward progress, but, I'll take what I can get. “I'm angry, at myself, at him. I'm sad. I'm scared. I'm confused.” Deep breath. “My entire world has been turned on its head, in about a week. I need more time to think things out, before I can tell you how I feel. Okay?”

“Okay,” the concerned woman conceded, returning to her cooking.

No need to tell her the rest. That she would be there, ready and open, when the right time came. To repay what had been given. If she needed to cry, again. Or to vent frustration to someone other than the void.

The patter of light footsteps behind her. Lips press into her cheek. “Thank you, Princess.”

Smile.

Smile wide.

For the word she used to hate. In every voice, in every tongue. For the way it labeled her. Guided destiny from her hand, setting it stone.

Now, not so bad. Affection behind what, only weeks ago, had been a goading tease. Worth the rest to hear her say that. How it made her heart hammer. Brought a smile to her lips. Only to be torn away by that most dreaded sound.

Knock.

Knock.

Knock.

Knuckles on the door. Arrival of her reluctant guest.

“Could you go get that?” the night's chef asked, checking for flavor and consistency. Not as good as she'd hoped for, but it was easy enough to blame the burning for that.

A swift nod and gathering of her dress later and Asami sped from the room, sharing a final kiss as she went. Pat, pat, pat of her feet upon the floor, muffled by thick slippers. It had taken some insisting, but Korra'd finally managed to convince the socially minded Englishwoman that there was no need to dress up. Be damned the man had made the papers, so had she.

More times, in fact, for more varied reasons.

Sure, about half of those articles were in the tabloids, or smear pieces in the Opinions pages, but she'd still won on volume. She'd checked.

Rattle of the lock, muffled and faded, followed by jubilant exaltation on the part of the sharp-browed meddler. “A good evening to you, my dear. I don't believe that we have met,” the man introduced himself, probably extending his hand for hers upon the mantle. “My name is Holmes, a pleasure, Miss Sato.”
“The pleasure is all mine,” Asami parlayed, most likely returning the gesture with her typical grace. A dash of daintiness to her motion. A little flitting, crisp and smooth. Nothing like her proper elegance, but more appropriate for the fashion of the times. “Do come in.”

“My thanks, my thanks, young lady,” the yeoman thanked, sound of his boots clipping the hardwood. Flat bottomed, leather. Cast her mind back to his dingy, cluttered, smoked-choked flat. Yes, she remembered the pair. High sides for waterproofing. Would have to check his feet to be sure, but he’d likely been plying the Thames or its tributaries for some reason. “It is so terribly dreadful this time of year. First snow, then sleet, now snow, again. Poor Dr. Watson has taken ill, thanks to it.”

“Oh, so he won’t be joining us?” the impromptu lady of the house inquired, genuine concern in her voice.

Above the sound of the shutting door, he replied, “No, I'm afraid he won't. Fear not, though. Mrs. Hudson will have him mended well before this whole affair is brought to its end, I'm sure of it.”

“That's good to hear,” her reaction, before offering to take his coat.

Idle chat as they approached, condolences given and accepted. Assurances, too. The same as she'd received from Korra and the rest these last few days.

“I must say, something smells wonderful,” Holmes complimented as he was led into the kitchen. Widows peak proud upon his head, dusting of quickly melting snow in his hair. In his mouth, already, his trusty smoking pipe. “Ah, Inspector. I hope you won't mind me saying, I never pictured you as the type to slave away over the stove.”

*Mmmmn, you promised. You promised to be civil. One night and the towels will never end up on the floor, again.*

“Tell you the truth, neither did I,” Korra accepted, nailing her smile in place.

Seeing the tenseness in her face, Asami swiftly diverted attention back upon herself. A sacrifice she was sure to be thanked for upon his booting from their abode. “Would you care for some tea while you wait, Mr. Holmes? We have Camomile and Earl Grey.”

“Some Earl Grey, if it isn't too much trouble for either of you,” he requested with utmost politeness. Hands were degloved, rubbed vigorously together, breath blown between him as his body soaked in her homes heat. With equal graciousness, a display that took the Inspector by even greater surprise than his outburst, he accepted his cup once the kettle sounded off. “Yes, my thanks, again, young Miss. I'm afraid I don't handle the cold near as good as I used to.”

“It's probably because you've kept the same coat the entire time,” Korra suggested, testing the previous days broth for taste, again. Hearty, rich, ready for the final touches. “Might be time to trade it for a new one.”

A scoff, quiet but knowing from both of the natives. Clearly there was some joke she wasn't in on being share. “Shall I tell her, or shall you?”

“Oh, feel free,” Asami bequeathed, bowing out to pour her own cup.

Turning back to her, Holmes gave her a forgiving smile. “I'd expected you to have learned, by now, Miss Waters, but I suppose there is no time like the present to do so,” he mused, swirling tea in porcelain. “Learn this now and learn this well, my friend: never, in the history of our great nation, has an Englishman traded his nostalgia for comfort. As a shopkeep holds dear his first shilling, so
“What did I tell you? Man's a nutter,” Korra addressed to her dearest, perched across the man on her usual seat.

With a laugh her insult was dismissed, the two Brits descending into banter as food was ladled into bowls. They spoke of things she only cursorily gave a care for, those most British of topics. Queen, country, and weather.

For the Queen, dear, beloved Vicki, she held little more than contempt. They had met, several times. To say those encounters had gone poorly, well... they didn't start a war, so that was something. Someday, she'd have to tell those stories to her love. Dispel this inane notion she had about her monarch being some delightful, old mourner.

The country held slightly more interest, but little for her to contribute. Despite her tenure, her trips outside Greater London had been brief and mostly to her little slice of paradise in the wide open fields. She could find her way around the East End with her eyes closed, navigate the main thoroughfares elsewhere with ease, but if you dropped her in Brighton she might as well have been on the moon.

And weather, ha! This little thing? A cold snap.

In the mail she'd gotten in the last week, her mother had relayed an eight inch deep drift on every sill. Called it, “A mild inconvenience.” The trains were still running on time, for Raava's sake.

Sometimes she suspected her English colleagues secretly loved when the weather turned from perfection. Gave them something to moan about.

And how they loved to moan.

Not Asami, though. She laughed at his mild gripes, trying to drag her in on the fun. They ate in the presence of a born entertainer, carefully guiding the conversation around their most pressing purpose. No talking shop while food was on the table. When Holmes troubled them with a request for something other than tea, she became a flurry of motion, producing a hidden copy of the key for Korra's wine cabinet.

Where she'd gotten it, “I'll never tell.”

Upon her return with the refreshment of her choice, the topic switched to the bottle and its contents. The private investigator attempted to unravel where it had come from, what journey and effort had been given to bring it to the table.

Korra, for her part, tried her hardest to lead him down the wrong path, time and again.

Back and forth the two went. His queries, her lies. It was fun, the way she made his brow sweat, the little twitch of his lip when he thought some revelation had slipped from tight lips.

Asami was riveted to them both. Poking fun at his wild guesses, poking holes in her lies. The only motive that the Inspector could pin on her chest was an effort to break the ice between them. Lift both detectives into high spirits so communication between them would flow easily as wine and tea.

Flow it did, laughter slowly seeping into each exchange. But, there was a tenseness that remained. Something about the man didn't let the Inspector relax, entirely.
An outsider.

An interloper.

A meddler.

The only one she hadn't bounced ideas off. Who had a clear enough head to do so. Kuvira was irate at everyone and everything. Bolin was overworked to the point of sleeplessness. Mako, her least desired. but most effective, conversationalist, seemed to be just this side of a mental breakdown.

“It seems we have lost your interest, Inspector,” Holmes noted, having given up on the wine some time ago. “Shall we move on to the task at hand?”

Look to her girlfriend, silently ask for approval. See her smile shift, from amused to accepting. Nod in her direction, rising to give her excuses, just as smoothly as her leading them by the nose. “Sherry, Mr. Holmes?” she asked, popping the cork back into the bottle.

“Oh, I couldn't,” he refused, with kind and weary eyes.

In this moment, the Inuit could see the Englishman's years weighing on him, body and soul. Same look Reid had last time they spoke, laid up in hospital bed, barely able to move lips enough to form words. Too much pain, too many bad memories. Lives lost and mistakes that kept them up at night.

She would look like that, one day. Sooner than later, way things were going. Earn her thousand-yard stare, seeing stacked bodies while she woke, as well as slept.

“Delightful, simply delightful,” the man commented as Asami left them to their work. Barely had the hem of her dress disappeared 'round the corner did he turn to the host with a certain kind of nostalgia on his sharp features. A kind that softened them. Made him look more human, somehow. “I think,” he declared, giving one final toast, “you would do well to keep her close, Inspector. There are few women like her in this world, feel lucky you have found one.”

Son of a-

And I was just starting to like you. “I have no idea what you're talking about,” Korra lied, hiding her face behind her own glass, face swiftly trying to match the crimson liquid held within in shade. “She's just-” my everything “a friend.”

“Hmm, of course. Forgive me my impudence,” the middle-aged glory hog asked of her, nodding his head, smiling confidently all the way. “Anyways, this most troublesome business we find ourselves entangled in, how might we go about resolving it?”

“Troublesome?” she scoffed, glad for the swift change of subjects, “That's what you're calling this? Troublesome?”

A puzzled look. “What would you call it, if not troublesome?”

“Oh, I don't know?” the woman shrugged, lifting her eyebrow, swirling her dregs. “My boss has been stabbed, the Home Secretary is in prison awaiting trial, and I just wrote a letter to the Prince of Wales basically begging him to keep his nana from sending in the Army. All-in-all, I'd say that's a little bit more than 'troublesome'."

Holmes bows to her angry logic, conceding his mistake. “Perhaps you are right. That still leaves us with the problem of what to do about these 'Equalists'?”
Easiest question of the night. “Cut of the head of the snake—”

“And the body withers, yes,” he completed, rising from his chair to pace aimlessly about the dining room. “But, how do we find the vile serpent?”

“No idea,” Korra sighed, taking palms to her eyes. Rub them hard, try to force ideas out of them and into her blank mind. “I've been over half this fucking city and we haven't found the bastard.” An eyebrow quirked at her language, near as much disapproval she gave those who smoked in her home. “Good news is, we've about run out of holes for him to be hiding in. Bad news, I've run out of holes to look in.”

His fingers weave together as he turns to pace back, thumbs twiddling nervously. “Yes, we appear to have both hit the same stumbling block,” Sherlock muttered, narrow grimace on his face. “Tell me, how many of the conspirators have you managed to collect? Seven?”

“Thirteen,” the correction, “Caught a big batch of them outside Bromley's on Ashford.”

“None of them have been forthcoming?”

“No”

A manicness consumed her guest as he came a flurry of motion. Spinning on the spot, hands flying, first to his hair, then to tug on his jacket. “We must assume that the whole group, or most of it, will be gathered together. Their plans will have been forced to accelerate now that their attack dog has turned upon them. You say there is close to a hundred core members, total?”

“Something like that.”

“And fifteen safely behind bars?”

“That leave a little more than eighty,” she confirmed, again desiring for different company. And for acrid sweet smoke to fill her lung. Foul and soothing. “Where do you hide eighty people and all their gear in the middle of London, every pair of honest eyes looking for you?”

“The Sato Manor?”

“Been over it with a fine tooth comb,” Korra said, slightly offended on behalf of her love. She had more cause than anyone to bring this ordeal to an end. “Asami showed us all the nooks.”

“Hotels, perhaps,” the 'detective' suggested, rolling his hands over each other, nervously. “Any warehouses or factories that Hiroshi Sato would have had access to, but his daughter wouldn't have cause to visit. Ships docked in the harbor. The sewers and cisterns. Abandoned buildings, as well. Perhaps the theater wasn't the only vacant structure to have been appropriated?”

A shrug. “Wouldn't surprise me. But we're right back to the same problem. There's a hundred vacant structures in my jurisdiction, alone. Probably twenty times that, easy, in the whole city.”

“We can discount anyplace where vagrants gather,” Holmes said, hopefully, “This Amon seems the type to avoid prying eyes.”

“Could be in the Triad's territory,” Korra added, pushing her plate aside to lay out the map she had been working with, earlier. It was crisscrossed with lines of pencil and ink. Circles and crosses. Little notes crammed into the margins. Whole sections gridded off and with broad lines through them. Everywhere within five blocks of a station, two from a main road. They would be far from the primary patrol routes, too. More excluded ground. Still leaving them with vast swaths of
industrial structures and tenant flats. “But, I'd imagine we'd've heard about that, by now.”

“Most likely,” the man who hovered somewhere around forty reasoned, finger drawing lines of their own. “I wonder, I wonder...”

*Ugh, not this shit, again.* “Wonder what? Use your words, man!”

Finger dragged along a row of houses she had ruled out, names in tight boxes inside. McGrady, Crawford, Simmons, Johnson. *Johnson*... The Constable whose eyes were wide with fear when she first saw them, face that sickly mixture of pale and green. Just the same as Kuvira had dragged him from his flat, wife screaming at them, beside herself with tears.

A broken man. An empty man. One who had lost his way. Lost touch.

With himself, with his duty, and seemingly with reality. Babbling about a demon. The devil having come to him with a task. Handed him a box, eyes empty as a doll, smile that set your skin to ice.

When asked why, just four words of reply. Over and over and over. “He told me to. He told me to! HETOLDMETO!”

Tears after that. Long sobs as he rocked himself, begging that his wife be protected. Only after such assurance had he sign a confession, in presence of his council. Career, and life of freedom, thrown away with a single act. One break of madness in what his sergeant called a fine career. Mary Reed had broken him, she felt.

Another casualty of the Ripper.

“Forgive me for the suggestion,” he requested before his next suggestion, “but could your man have had a hand in hiding them?

Shake of her head. Idea as ridiculous as any she'd heard from herself. So much for fresh ideas to sift through. “Not unless he has another place we don't know about,” she chuckled, darkly, again resigned to the fact she would have to remain reactive.

“We must be missing something. There has to be something we're overlooking,” he insisted, both hands on the table, staring at the map with equal intensity as she. Some little thing. That's all either of them needed, Korra was sure of it. “Tiny as a mote of dust. You are sure the Lieutenant said nothing of import, Inspector? Absolutely certain?”

“He said that he knew they were about to move,” she repeated, exhausted by the mere prospect of repeating what she had already sent him, “but had no idea where.”

He hummed, shot out several more ideas, which she wiped clean just as fast. And he did the same for hers. One up, one down. Line them in a row to be disassembled, piece-by-piece. Block by block, building by building, they went across Whitechapel, yet not a single winner could they find.

After revisiting the same old suspects for the third time, resignation. “It has to be here,” said Holmes.

“What are we missing,” asked the Inspector.

A third voice answered. “Basements?”

The duo turned to the source of the interruption, framed in the dining room door. Asami stood, sherries in hand, blinking at them oblivious to their torment. To her it must have been a queer sight.
Sweat dripping from brows, great doodles on a flattened London.

She looked between them as she took back her seat, handing the digestive to her girlfriend. “Sorry if that's not what you were hoping for,” the woman apologized, slightly wilting under their withering eyes, suddenly gone wide with astonishment. “It's just, well, you kept talking about all these places above ground. Plenty of people have cellars though: pubs, banks, bakers, grocers… Why are you both looking at me like that?”

Try to tell her with her eyes, almost a tear in the corner of each. If he wasn't here, I would kiss you, right now.

“My dear Miss Sato,” Holmes began, smile returned with a beaming glow, “I thank you for your insight. Which basement should we choose to peer within, though? There are more than a few to pick between.”

Scan the field, again, searching her memory all the way. For little shreds of useless tat, throw away comments. The Baker. The Lieutenant. The Ringleader. The Financier.

A click.

Two unrelated things happen to float passed at the same time. Why would he ask me to investigate the factory? It made no sense, logically. Sure, it managed to divide her time. Kept her up an extra couple of hours each night. But it also exposed him. The paper trail was cleverly hidden, sure, but not that cleverly. He must’ve known she’d dig it up, eventually. Certainly after she and Asami started to spend time together.

Holmes quizzed her on her theory, bouncing ideas off her like he had with her. More like he did with the good Doctor, really. Using her as a filter.

But the Avatar had hers locked in. All she needed was confirmation.

“Asami, is there a basement in the factory?” she asked, cutting off the amateur mid-sentence. It was her turn to be blinked at, this time. Dumbfounded looks tossed her way as she pressed on. “The one your dad burned down, did it have a basement? Any kind of one: big, small, doesn't matter.”

“I-uh-I think it did,” the engineer hummed, face going all adorable as she cast her mind back. “Yes. They used it to store spare parts, unused cloth, stuff like that.”

Eyes scramble for the spot on the map. Right down the road from the fire house, but right to the end of the patrol routes. No one circled the place, unless they decide to wander of their track. Security was handled by Future Industries, owner: Hiroshi Sato. If he told them, Spirits, just sent a letter saying to let in a group of men to make repairs, no one would bat an eye. Some clever scheduling and after shift change there would be nobody to count if the same number of heads left as came.

“Sewer line runs right through the street, here,” Holmes commented, running a pencil down the thoroughfare.

“Dig through the wall and the have access to the whole city,” Korra bantered back.

“No one to be the wiser,” said the man whose smile now seemed almost dangerously wide. The elation was shared between them, practically a buzz in the air. A toast was lifted, empty glass to sherry. “I do believe we've cracked the case, Inspector.”

Only one reply could be made to that as glasses clinked together.
“Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for the hunt.”

Chapter End Notes

I think I'm going to switch to a bi-monthly schedule for this story to finish it off. The extra week working on something else really helped me unwind and bullet point a lot more. That and I think it'll give new readers a chance to catch up and longtime people the chance to go back and figure out what I'm on about. (Bet you didn't remember Johnson, did you? That's some chapter one callback for you, right there.)

JMStei: Contrary to popular belief, I am still alive. I think. But does anybody else get a AC Syndicate vibe off of this story?

Humble: I don't. I've never played the game. That might be why, if I'm honest.
Reaching the Crescendo

Chapter Summary

Korra makes her way to the showdown, and someone is very intent to tag along.

Chapter Notes

As we reach these final chapters I wish to reminisce with you on all the good times the girls have shared. What do you mean there's only been a couple of them? Oh dear...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“No.”

“No, I don't,” the policewoman denied, working the lever with a wince. Despite her careful regime and Asami's tender care, her ribs still pained her to the point of tears, at times. Shifting her arm, slightly, she tried again, with far less agony. “And I'm trained to do this. You're not.”

“No, I don't,” the heiress prodded, swiftly loading the Bulldog she'd been gifted.

With a growl, Korra looked up from her long-arm to glare at the green-eyed beauty. Not with anger, really. Just irritation. They had been at this since waking up this morning. An argument that simply refused to go away. Each were firm in their stance, neither had budged an inch. Civil, but annoying would be the best way to describe it. The sheer verbal acrobatics that she had had to navigate alone had been enough for her to consider locking herself in a room so she could finish in something resembling a silent peace.

As if it wasn't enough for her heart to be hammering out her chest, skin crawling with anxiety, she must also battle her girlfriend into remaining someplace safe.

“I was trained just fine, dear,” she said through gritted teeth. Time to load each round. Careful and slowly. Treat the weapon with respect and it would do the same. Cycle it and flip the safety, laying
the weapon were the dangerous end faced naught but wall. “You, on the other hand, were not. As I've already told you.”

A hum of disbelief at her statement. “Hmm, if you were trained so well, how about you raise your arm above your shoulder?” Asami suggested, nodding to her damaged side. “Go on then, show off that training of yours.”

**Why are you so damn stubborn? I love it, but why?**

“I can't,” the Inspector conceded for the umpteenth time today, “I have broken ribs. But that's not the point.”

“No, it is precisely the point,” argued the engineer, pointing a wicked finger her way. Aggressive and accusing at the same time. “Every time I've let you out of my sight for the last month you've ended up coming back either traumatized or covered in injuries. Forgive me if I'm not keen on the idea of doing it, again. Especially when my wake up call was you screaming as you rolled over out of bed.”

Ah, yes. There it was. That misplaced concern for her health. Well, maybe not misplaced. Overblown, that was the right word. “Asami...” How to tell her this? Was there even a way to do it in English? “If you come with me, and you get hurt, I would **never** be able to forgive myself. **Please**, don't fight me on this.”

A silence.

It was the first they had managed in this early morn. A stressed, tense break in their voices. No banter, nor words of affection. Nary a jab or dispute laid to bear upon the other.

Just... nothing.

Korra knew why. Hated the reason, even without saying it aloud. Much as it pained her to even consider, had kept her up at night, regretting all the things she hadn't said, every minute she had wasted, this might be the end. The last conversation, last breakfast, last morning together. And they looked to be going out on a low. Bickering like they never had, bags under their eyes. No sleep for fear of nightmares. Words scratching at her dreams.

“Korra,” her dearest said with less fire and that unique kindness which branded her words as much as cadence or tenor, “you do realize that's how I feel every time you walk out the door?”

The Inspector sighed, setting all the various bits aside to gift all her attention to the woman who made her heart skip beats each time she came in a room. “I know,” her response, all else failing to leave her lips. “I know...”

“And you're going to do it to me again?”

Her turn to smile. “Would you believe me if I told you it'll be that last time?”

“Hahaha! Of course I won't,” Asami jingled, sad mirth from the pretty little lie. Tucking the weapon in right her pocket and spare rounds in the other, the woman joined her at the table. Hands meet, fingers mingle, the most natural thing in the world. To touch her, to love her. So maddeningly, frustratingly easy to do these things. But so hard to say goodbye. “I wish you weren't so stubborn,” she said, thumb brushing away some grime on her hand. “You know I'm not gonna drop this.”

“I know.”
“Why are you fighting me, then?”

Lift her hand to lay a gentle kiss upon her skin. Taste of gun oil and honey. Soft and warm, just like the rest of her. “Because I love you, Asami,” she said, soaking in these last moments of domestic bliss, even if they weren't the most blissful. “And I don't want to lose anyone else. I lost Gerard, one of my oldest friends; I lost Mako when we broke up; I almost lost two of my mentors; and I'm probably going to lose Kuvira when she decides to run off, again.”

“And you don't want to lose me, too,” the woman muttered, rubbing at her eyes to banish weariness. Soft eyes. Kind eyes.

With a nod, the Detective confirmed. “Something like that.”

The way Asami's lids drooped for a moment as she looked up, so tired. Had she slept at all? Perhaps she had unwittingly joined in nervous tossing, turning, squirming on her bed? “Look, the way I see it, you're about to trespass on my property with a whole lot of very angry men with lots of guns. Consider it—” she searched her mind for the right words—“protecting my investment.”

“Is that what I am?” Korra giggled at her wrap around logic, while also seeking to inject mirth again. “How very Imperial of you.”

“Knock it off.”

“No.”

“I mean it!”

“What're you going to do?” she teased, leaning across the gap to steal a quick kiss.

A playful smack to her cheek after they broke, both with renewed smiles. Just hard enough to make a sound, but not hard enough to even sting. With a shift Korra raised her good hand to cup a rosy cheek of her own. Even now, with her head full of terrible futures, she couldn't put up a good fight against that face.

“I'm coming with you,” Asami told her, a confident firmness to her words. “It's my property, my guards, my father. You're not doing this without me, and that's final.”

With resolve of her own, the CID woman let her line be pushed as far as she would be willing to let it. “You can come with me to the station,” she allowed, holding up a hand to stay the immediate retort. “You can come with us as far as the perimeter. I'd rather not have to deal with your security men, on top of everything else. Talk them down, and wait outside.”

“Korra—”

“Wait outside,” Inspector Waters repeated, utter finality resonating off the walls as she spoke. Eyes hardened to steel, brows lowered, lips thin. “That is final.”

A nod.

All she needed.

Of all the people in the world, Asami seemed the only one she could trust in full upon this momentous day. A day of reckoning this would prove, for her and the Met. They would do their duty, of that she could be sure. Some would do even more than that most basic of tasks.
For this day demanded more than duty. It was the stick by which they would be measured from this moment and into the far flung future. To days some, or all, of them may never see. Bright times, when the world saw these streets as more than slums. Saw them as she did. Beautiful, in every way. Both overt and concealed.


Beautiful streets, beautiful people.

Something to protect.

If only so she could show Asami all the little beauties of Whitechapel, without the grime and the horror. Save them from a man gone mad. Men gone mad, way lost in the fog of uncertain life.

For some she would be lighthouse, to others rocky shore. But this was home. And home needed saving.

“Alright, Princess,” the engineer smiled, relenting, at last. “We'll do it your way.”

A single laugh, full of happiness and triumph. “There, was that so hard?” she said, smiling a little more smugly than she should have, perhaps, given the task of the day. As her eyes lingered, however, a thought leaped to mind. One that made her fight the urge to blush. “Um, before we go, you should probably change.”

Blink.

Blink, blink. Blink.

“Why would I change?”

“N-no reason, just—”

A knowing smile. A teasing smile. On lips that tasted of cherries, full and lush, even without dressing. “You were looking at my bum, weren't you?” Asami accused, reaching across the table to poke at an arm. “Weren't you?”

“I-I was not,” the very professional officer of Her Majesty's law enforcement rebuked, definitely not going redder by the second. And she was most certainly not thinking of certain things when her eyes closed as she blinked. She was not. No. She was somber and professional, befitting the task at hand. “I have no idea what you're talking about.”

“Yes, you do,” the taunter hummed, poking a little harder tempting the detective to turn her way, once more. “You don't want anyone else to see me wearing this, do you?”

Clear her throat, fight the rising heat. Be serious. You have to be serious. “You know what, just forget it,” Korra coughed, gathering up her weapons and tucking them into their various receptacles. Pistol in holster, blackjack in pocket, rifle in case. “Let's go.”

“Hmm?”

“Stop making that face and get your coat.”

A laugh later and the woman she loved walked out the door, derriere drawing the eye as she went. “Yes, dear.”
As if this day couldn't get any more stressful…

Some Time Later…

It was cold, even for her.

Breath of the many gathered officers made a living fog as they assembled. Columns of steam soon swallowed by the falling sleet. It stuck to their uniforms, hats and hair. Had they not been moving, the entire force would have been in danger of becoming living statues. Frozen guardians. Human gargoyles.

They huddled for warmth. Asami was pressed close to her side, teeth chattering like a typewriter. “So cold,” she moaned, shifting in her borrowed boots.

“You got that right,” Kuvira agreed from a few bodies down. Bundled to the maximum was she, tight against the man she had the most frantic of relationships with. Hate and love stewed together in a big pot, so thoroughly mixed that separating them would be a miracle. “F-fuck whoever thought it was a good idea to do this in the middle of a goddamn storm.”

With a bristling of his mustache, Tenzin spoke up. “I believe that would be me, Inspector. If there is anything you would like to say, speak up?”

“With all due respect, Sir, fuck you,” the trouble-maker of H-Division said, rubbing her hands together to keep warm.

“I second that,” her keeper agreed, wrapping his arm around her shoulder. For a tense moment it was touch and go whether she would turn her revolver on him for the act. Dispatch Mako on the way to raising hell. But when the wind blew flush down the street the eldest Beifong daughter became too overwhelmed with shivering to care. “How you hanging in, Bo?”

A heavy puff of steam prefixed his answer. “Oh, well, you know,” his sibling replied, rapping the barrel of his gun on his knuckles to shock some feeling into them, “My fingers went numb about five minutes ago. Other than that, pretty good, Bro. You?”

“Cold,” everyone chorused as the standoff continued.

Maybe ten paces away was a picket-line of Future Industries security men. Most wore civilian clothes, all had on matching black hats.

Both sides refused to budge.

Fingers twitched on triggers. Fists clenched batons. Eyes stared daggers, mouths said little, other than to complain about the cold. Her side hand a laundry list of warrants, their side had their jobs on the line. Waiting for word from on high.

Not even Asami had been able to disperse them. Only word from the Chief of Security had the weight to sway them, either way.

“Honestly, Holmes, why did you drag me here to stand in this awful weather?” the good Doctor chimed in, faring better than the rest of his countrymen. Perhaps he was made of heartier stuff, or maybe he was just better at hiding his discomfort. “At the very least, we could have passed the time in a cafe until they reached a decision. There is no sense in all of us freezing to death while we wait. Surely a hot cup of tea would do us all some good, wouldn't you say Inspector?”

Who is he talking to? There's fucking half-a-dozen of us.
“And miss out on this camaraderie?” the pest laughed, in truly the highest of spirits, “Not for the world, my dear Watson. Not for all the tea in India.”

“China, Holmes,” Dr. Watson corrected, with his first shiver. “All the tea in China.”

“Yes… quite right, old boy. Quite right.”

Asami whimpered as the gust picked up. Ice in her raven hair. Like little stars. Crystals of light against the dark. *This must be what angels are supposed to look like*, the head of CID marveled, leaning close to her ear to whisper. “Bet you're wishing you changed now, huh?”

“F-fuck you...”

A warm laugh to thaw her brain.

Make her think.

Strategize a way to break the deadlock. Every minute, every second, was one that her foes could use to flee or fortify. Time, precious time, ticking away as she was left to fret. More opportunity for someone to do something reckless, something stupid. Lives could be slipping through her fingers as grains of sand on the placid bay of her childhood.

As her love shuffled closer, she made another count of head. Eleven beefy men, far more intimidating that those she had encountered at the manor. Five guns between them: two shotguns, three pistols.

They easily quadrupled the number, and had ten times the firepower.

But the possibility of bloodshed made her heart shudder. Even a minor scrum could end in tragedy on this slick ground. One slip and that was it. Another empty spot in a bed, another sheet to pull over a head, eyes grey and blank. For what, effectively, amounted to nothing. Not even getting in the front door.

So, they waited. Increasingly cold. Increasingly anxious. Frustrated, but alive. Ready to spring as soon as the moment comes.

It was Kuvira who tested the tension, because, of course it was. “To hell with this!” her friend shouted through clacking teeth. Without moving from her spot of relative comfort, she lifted her weapon to a more threatening position. “Show of hands, who says we knock some heads and get this over with?!”

A clamor of accent from those on the periphery of the formation. The youngest and coldest of their fellows in kind raising voice to all's secret desire. End this torture, get the blood flowing.

“Easy girl,” Mako cautioned, forcing her arm down as the guards shifted, nervously.

“Gentlemen,” Holmes pleaded, for not the first time, “While we all admire your sense of duty, surely you can see that justice is on our side of this affair? Why do you insist on this display in the face of those who wish only to do Queen and God's work? Stand aside, that we may search the premisses, and we will be on our way.”

This time none even bothered to respond to him. Not their own impassioned plea for patience, no jeering snickers, only silence.

Carried to her on the breeze, the Doctor's soft consol. “There, there, old boy. I thought it was a
good speech.”

Another shiver, then a shifting of Asami's body as she stepped out of line into the no-man's lands between them. Eyes went sharp and hawkish. Finger snapped to her trigger, ready to send a shot at anyone that even flinched in the woman's direction.

However, even with this laser focus, and the chilling cold, nervous sweat dripped from her brow. They hadn't talked about this ahead of time. No contingency for the eventuality that confronted them. Only the confidence brought on by the tempting, intoxicating scent of victory and a return to peace.

Or, what passed for peace in Whitechapel.

A heavy puff of smoke and ash floated down the lane. Thick with creosote and coal soot. It fell upon the pristine snow, staining it black.

An omen, perhaps.

Not a good one, if so.

“Alright, listen up!” the opposition's de-facto boss announced with a volume usually reserved for shouting at Korra. Even now it made her shrink, just a tad. “Seeing that it is a festive season, and that I'm pretty sure we'd all rather be somewhere, I have an announcement to make.” Ears perked up at that, several of her men shuffling closer to better hear. “In thanks for your dedicated service to the company, everyone gathered here today is getting an early Christmas bonus.”

Well, that's got them interested…

Digging in her pocket, Asami withdrew a wad of bills that made eyes on either side bulge. Notes within notes. More currency in one set of fingers than most had seen in their entire lives.

“You can all split this among yourselves,” she lead by the nose, shaking the bundle for her audience. “Provided—” Ah, there she goes. “—you do so someplace else. Any takers?” Muttering speech from across the divide, but none moved to accept the bribe. That is, until the caveat. “Also, anyone still here when I'm done counting to ten will be suspended, without pay.”

That had them moving. With their only options being a payday or no income, at all, the choice was clear. Scattering to the wind like the frozen drizzle, the men who had made up the last and only line of opposition begged their apologies in turn.

With a surge, they descended, forcing the makeshift gates open in an instant. Groups split off at varying speed for the shelter of the hollow, ghostly, blackened shell. Cracked masonry and split mortar around ribs of charred oak and pine. Not a building, the corpse of one. Rended open by tongues of lashing flame hot flame. Like a Ripper victim on a grand scale, violated and maimed, then put on display.

As the found themselves, began to search, Korra found her woman kicking through a pile of twisted, molten scraps of metal. So deformed that the original devise was a mystery.

“Did you really just commit bribery and extortion in front of fifty policemen?” the Inspector inquired playfully, lent close so no ears would be able to pry into her words. Let them guess, if they weren't searching. “That's bold, even for you.”

“Is it really bribery if they're my employees?” Asami posed, putting a little more effort into to her digging when some bits didn't move with ease.
“Yes. Yes, it is.”

“The more you know, I guess,” she hummed, stooping to lift the remains of a workstation. With a silent twitch of her head, assistance was asked for and swiftly received. There was purpose to her shifting. Something ticking in that beautiful brain of hers. Knowledge tucked away from something seen or heard in the past. “It should be here...”

“What?”

“The stairs to the basement,” the engineer snapped in a slightly sleep-starved mania. Her hair was frizzed out from where her hands had run through it on the way over. Ice slowly melted on those ebony strands as fingers searched cracks in charcoal floorboards, only just spared form the blaze.

Joining in, the officer's fingers started digging through ash and snow for a hatch, a handle, whatever she was meant to be finding. “Are you sure?” she asked, reducing herself to one arm so the other could clutch her side.

“Positive,” Miss Sato replied, distractedly prying at the seam between some boards.

More had gathered round them, sensing that they had stumbled upon something. More hands, more feet, tearing up whatever track may have led them to the right spot. The Doctor, Kuvira, Mako, Bolin all made their own efforts with their own methods and means. Palming, knocking, kicking, cursing, listening.

But one sound stood out. A sharp one, rather evenly spaced, interspersed with footsteps crunching in the ice and snow.

Step, step, TAP.

Step, step, TAP.

Step, step, creak. A break in the pattern. Looking up, she saw Holmes, wandering in an open space some yards away. The area was clear of debris, mostly. Clear of snow, as well, tucked up in the corner, as it was. Also clear of footsteps, apart from those the amateurs left.

Thunk, thunk, thunk. A hollow echoing sound as his walking stick tested the boundaries of the opening under his feet. “I seem to have found it,” said he, beaming with triumph.

And, judging by the sound of heavy footfall from the depths below, he had.

That, and the way he was knocked off his feet as the hatch was lifted under him, belching forth a sudden gout of flame, followed by a crack that split the winter air and sent everyone scrambling for cover or for their weapons.

Swiftly leveling her sights, Korra slams a shot straight back, followed an instant later by a dozen more.

*Let the hunt begin...*

Chapter End Notes

It's been a long road, a bumpy road, and full of twists and turns, but the end is fast
approaching. Hope you enjoyed this one. I've already got a pretty good idea how the confrontation will shape up, but it may take some extra time to get right. Expect a long one. Perhaps even long for me.

JMStei: Looks like the end is nigh.

Humble: That it is, that it is.
Into the Lion's Den

Chapter Summary

Down, down, into the depths they go, marching side-by-side. The final battle is before them, pray they all survive.

Chapter Notes

It has been a long, emotional, difficult road to get here, my friends. This is it, the grand confrontation. As promised, it's a long one, and I hope you find it worth the wait.

The trap door falls as quickly as it rose. Splinters fly and an abundance of lead pierce the surface, missing the amateur by barest inches. He shoots, swift anger in his voice, rising as a wave, despite the toppling of his frame upon the charred ground.

Ignored by all by the faithful Doctor Watson, he rose just as quickly, whipping out his own revolver. As officers and detectives swarm the opening, the man cocks the hammer and blasts two shots at an angle through the shattered wood. Clearing the stairs of any friends the one who knocked him off his feet.

"I would ask for some restraint!" Holmes barked, turning his fierce gaze to Korra as she arrived first to his side.

Showing none of that particular quality, the Inspector shoved him to the side. With a toe hooked in a rough seam, she kicked up the trapdoor. A blast of hot air makes a cloud of steam in her face, obscuring all into a blur. Movement catches her eyes, slow and staggered. Pained gasps of a dying man. That awful sucking sound of air being pulled through flesh. The familiar, haunting whines that most everyone had in the last moments.

Turning fast, she yelled at two officers, their names unknown to a racing mind. “Keep her here!” she ordered, gesturing definitively towards a swiftly approaching Asami. “I don't care what she tells you, chain her to a post if you have to! She! Stays! Here!”

Protest began, immediately. Furious, frantic protests, full of that raging fire in her love's belly. Threats, pointed right at her, worming into the Detective's ears as she flashed back an apologetic smile.

Blood had spilled.

More would, soon. In ounces, pints, or liters, Korra knew not. Whatever the amount, Asami need not see it.

Let her live in peace, one more day. Dream dreams that weren't full of haunting faces. Hands clawing at her, dragging her deeper. Deeper into cold, black, empty waters. A place of despair that
no light could reach, save one. Those dreams, those waking nightmares were Korra's to bear, not hers.

It was selfish, the Inspector knew, but, she needed her light to shine a little longer.

Mouthing the silent words, “I love you,” she looks back down the incline. The man who had fired the shot had stilled in the bare seconds since last observed. Even from this distance, the signs were clear. There was a slump in his features, a lifeless loll to his head.

Still, the weight of her rifle was reassuring in her grip. The way it grafted to her shoulder, familiar. It helped to stave off the sense of dread that bubbled like hot tar inside the gut. Nausea would follow, soon. An almost uncrushable desire to empty herself with every cautious step. Each, creak, creak of stair under her weight sounded a thousand drums of war. Scent of death, and oil, and steam, and steel hot in shuddering breaths.

“Want me up front?” a voice offered in her ear. Mako, with Kuvira close behind. In his hands he cradled a rifle much like her, but in a lighter load, she, a shotgun.

A nod sends him up, covering the corner like a hawk. More follow them down the way, spacing themselves on the narrow path. All take the care to step with care over the corpse in the way, the single, silent gatekeeper. Even if he had been the only soul on watch, others had surely heard his demise.

Rallying to arms. Manning the defenses.

It was the switchback that worried her. An excellent place for an ambush. Or a trap.

Asami's voice still reached this far, ordering them back, now. It sounded hoarse, like her lungs had already wearied of the frozen air. That or she had come to terms with her denial, stopped pushing her luck by inches.

It almost covered the sound of footsteps through the divide. Fast and heavy, getting closer. Someone with more bravery than sense.

Luckily for Korra, the Met had someone like that, too

Kuvira turned to her left, angling her shortened weapon to about mid-calf and fired down, into the wall. Twin bangs of belching fire, followed a split second later by the sound of shot splintering boards.

Shouts ring from both sides of the staircase, the woman's ex and current landlord loudest of all. “What the hell is wrong with you?!?” he demanded, tearing his attention from the panicked shouting just around the corner from him. The level of his anger is shocking, likely built up over days or more, only just releasing itself with this violent outburst. “You had no idea what was in there, you could have shot us!”

“Maybe, next time, I'll just take your pretty head off! How does that sound?!” the shotgun wielding woman shouted back, reloading in record time.

Pushing her friends aside, it was the Avatar who took the lead, swinging around the corner with sights set on stunned foes. One raised a matching firearm, and dropped it as a bullet tore through his chest and into the body behind. Both fell, writhing, clutching at holes the size of shillings.

Another swallow at the gore. Blinking tears from her eyes, the head of CID bellowed her demands of the remaining. “Metropolitan Police, drop your weapons!” It hurt! So bad. Ripping at ribs and
The urge to cough. To wretch, double over, and scream.

Legs wobble and the wall is the only thing to stop a fall, propping her weight against it as backup swarmed passed, overwhelming the defenders with speed and heavy blows.

_Thank the Spirits_, the lame duck prayed, grateful for her comrades quick action. It saved her from the fate of a short stand, followed on by a sudden death. It was they who saved her, toppled gunmen in their path and made them so many harmless dolls. Wee children whining loudly at the injustice of being trod upon, even as they trod upon the fallen.

It was here the Doctor left them. She heard his voice as the decent continued. A healer's voice, calm and compassionate, even in the face of pain and fury.

Hopefully, they wouldn't need his talents further.

Down, down, down.

Deeper into the gaping maw of the writhing beast. Racing each other to be the one to put the collar on the mad dogs of Whitechapel. Feet pound on steps, heart pounds in her ear. Further, faster. Storm the stronghold, seize the initiative, bust down the rickety barricade barring the path with the shoulders of her aggressive, bickering subordinates.

Into an open space. A vast area, near the size of the factory floor above, if the misty distance didn't lie. Stone roof overhead, dripping with condensation. Steam shoots from crisscrossing lines of hastily installed pipes, making a fine mist in the place, swirling with movement. Lots of movement. Tall dark figures darted from box to box. Some with weapons clutched in hand, others simply running for cover.

It's a mad dash. She slid to her side behind a bit of cover. A crate, just as those that had scattered themselves on the cobble when a bomb wrended the night apart.

Others join her. A score, perhaps.

More every second.

They were gaining the advantage with every body. Even with those that had been sidetracked with gathering and carting off the initial force, H-Division somehow managed to have more men under arms than the Equalists.

A miracle, surely. Their God or her many Spirits smiled down upon them.

Korra counted swirling shapes. _Eight, ten, twelve_. There had to be more, somewhere. Already hidden, already fled. Carrying out the plot of their mastermind at some other location.

It mattered not which. They weren't here, they weren't her problem. Only the loose wall of fanatics. Honor guard to a liar and a madman. Murderers and conspirators. Men with lives and families. Homes to return to at the end of the day, same as her. Whitechapel natives, same as them, but still determined to walk a different path. Unquiet souls, swept along in the current of life, clinging to purpose with white-knuckled hands.

“Listen here!” Tenzin shouted, holding his hand above the bit of machinery that hid him from sight. Bolin and the Desk Sergeant flanked him, cautiously peeking from either side of cover with sights leveled. “Gentlemen, there is no need for any more bloodshed. Surrender yourselves and I
promise you a fair trial and fair treatment.”

“No deal, Copper!” a voice shouted back, farther to the left that the Inspector had scanned.

Somewhere she couldn't see.

_Have to move_, Korra thought, darting from her spot as a Constable slid in to replace her. There's a retort of rifle fire, a crack past her ear, so close she can feel it pass. Her hat is thrown by the force of her hitting the ground, almost screaming as ribs meet stone. Is burns to breathe, but she found herself better off to keep them from being outflanked.

Those she left had risen to her defense, though. Several sent volleys of withering gunfire at the one who had made the attempt, sound deafening in the confined space.

“Hold fire, hold fire!” the older officer's shouted, calls falling on unhearing ears.

It was too late, now. The die had been cast, and there was no way to stop its fall. Only to suffer the consequences of whichever side faced the sky when momentum faded and dust settled. So much dust, and powder. Choking taste of whizzing death. Bullets kicking up plumes of rock and mortar behind her, tearing splinters to her fore. Orders were shouted for those in the entrance to retreat, cutting them off from reinforcement and retreat, alike.

_Have to fight_, her brain insists, despite instinct telling her to stay as low and small as possible. _PROTECT!_

The Inspector whipped up, taking careful aim at the nearest gunman. He's dropping down as she took the shot. It slammed into the meaty part of the shoulder, spinning him around and sending his gun flying into open space.

A safe shot. Not lethal if he was tended to fast enough, but sure enough to put him down for good.

The next one much the same, taking his leg just below the knee as it stuck out from his crumbling crate. A horrid shriek as he fell into danger, a sure end flashing before his eyes. Lucky for him, a fellow Equalist launched out, gripped a hand firm, and dragged him to safety. What little of it there was of it, at least.

Another's bullets tagged this hero, once for each arm. Even through the pain he finished his task, saved his friend.

Admirable loyalty. Good man on the wrong path.

The fire was dwindling, now. Less withering and more well-aimed sniping of the vulnerable. Both sides had taken to reloading what they had, gathering what they didn't. Taking off the dead and wounded.

Enemy had the advantage in this. Theirs was a force of symmetry. To Amon's credit, his followers all bore the same weapons, same cartridges. It was easy to cobble together that which one member lacked from the kit of cohorts. All he had to do, when it really came down to it, was cannibalize the surroundings. The box he crouched behind may carry just what the situation called for.

Her side, on the other had, was much more haphazard. A motley collection of Met kit, old Army stock, and personal arms.

They also had the benefit of having fared rather well through the initial barrage, likely due to their being the progenitors of much of it. By the time the retort had sounded, many had already returned
to safety.

A few exceptions were to be seen, from what Korra could see. The man who had taken her place sported a bloodied ear and a mangled hand, but still held firm.

Behind him was a less fortunate. One of the new lads, a year on the force, if that, was missing the top half of his head. That which should have been inside no longer restrained itself. Grey and red mingled on the cold, lifeless floor, mixed with bits of his hat. Where the rest of that had gone was beyond her. Perhaps it had disintegrated with the killing blow, sent scattered to the breeze with his spirit.

Voices cried from each side of the gap. Of pain and last, pleading gasps. But, most of all, to friends.

“You okay, Korra?” Mako asked from the swirl of smoke and steam.

“Still here,” she replied, keeping watch for movement. A runner entered her sights and she followed him. But his was a panicked gate. One of flight, not aggression. No arms were in his hands, only balled fists as he dashed right to left across her field. “How about you?”

While she listened, eyes followed the man, no longer with finger hovering over a trigger. He made a beeline for something. Another exit, maybe?

Amon…

That's where he would be. A man who wanted to watch the world burn wouldn't think twice to let his subordinates die whilst he survived.

Just so long as his glorious vision for a better world lived on with him.

“Doing fine,” her ex shouted back, punctuated by a shot and cry of pain. Aim as sharp as ever, it seemed. Some flying shrapnel cut off her immediate response as a fresh cut opened up on her cheek. Taking advantage, it was he who continued the distant conversation. “Kuvira got winged, pretty good. She'll be fine, though.”

A different kind of crack split the air. The sound of fist on flesh. A certain, tender part of the male anatomy, if the pained squeak were to be trusted. “I'll show you winged good, you piece of shit!”

Deafening shotgun blasts tear the air asunder. Two, then four, six after that. Just seconds between them as the firing picked up, once more. It was utter chaos, gunshots ringing off the walls in a deadly chorus. The bells of hell as a portal to purgatory opened up to swallow souls and claim skulls. Korra joined in, making her sacrifices to Akycha, slamming shot after shot at every muzzle flash and shifting shadow she could pin down.

It was painfully dull, as much as it was terrifying, this stationary shootout. Every moment Amon seemed to grow farther away. His footsteps echoed in the Inspector's ears, words clawed at her mind.

Tempting wafts of charismatic insanity.

“*Have to stop him*,” she whispered under her breath, dropping down to reload as her safety was chipped away with each reply.

A man rushed into view. Just appeared out of the chaos, making Korra jump. Hand leaped to the revolver in its holster on her front, drawing it to point up into his face. Just as her finger twitched
against the trigger, a familiar, if not overly fond, face came into focus.

Holmes crouched like a cat beside her. Sweat dripped from his face, a pair of holes poking through his coat. “Hello, Inspector. I hope I didn't startle you,” the man said with a cheerful, if stressed demeanor. His deerskin had been lost, much as Korra's hat had been, thinning mousy hair free to wander over his considerable forehead.

“Just a bit,” she replied, letting her sidearm fall as he took up position beside her.

For a moment he seemed content to just rest. Catch his breath in the shadow of what appeared to be an assortment of machine parts, if the little gaps forming in the crumbling casing told her anything.

Then, once that had bored him, he took to reloading his revolver, simply ignoring the battle raging around him. No haste in his actions, just a steady resolve. A very British expression on his face as rounds clang on the last metal bulwark between them and oblivion. Like those dealing hot death in his general direction were no more than a rowdy table at his favorite restaurant.

“I must say, my dear,” said he, though he truly must'n't, “I find this all, really, quite distasteful.”

“I suppose you would prefer to be sitting in front of your fireplace, rattling on about how you're so much better than the rest of us plebeians,” Korra deduced, doing much the same with her Winchester. The action was smooth under her touch, flowing like Asami's hair in her fingers.

The amateur looked at her, the consummate English gentleman. “Well, you have to admit, it is a much more civilized way to spend a morning.”

Honestly, at this very moment, Korra would've taken it. Sure, six, even two months ago and the opportunity to tear down some of the rot that tarnished the name of her precious Whitechapel would've had her smiling broader than the mouth of the Thames. Now, it was all she could do to catch a breath and keep her head clear. Every moment she wasn't looking down the sights and drilling shots down range was occupied with figuring a way past the deadlock, without having to kill every member of the opposition. That or dreading whatever punishment her love would subject her to when all was done.

It was a little early to go deaf.

“Any ideas?” she asked of Holmes. If he was good for anything, that most irritating of men, it was having a half-decent mind to pick. Full of a wild logic that saw the world in interesting ways, according to her copies of The Strand.

Brows knit together as the cogs behind his eyes whirred. He scanned the room, what little they could see, even dipping out to measure the level of the conflict's ebb and flow. Even as her friend's edged closer, ducking and dodging all the way, he thought. Pondered whatever bizarre thoughts passed for profound in the mind of the addled.

The arrived in staggered time. Bolin was short a coat and a shoe, his brother waddling, a pained look in his eyes. Last to make the dash to a nearby position was Kuvira, face pale and an arm stained red.

They were a ragtag lot. Haggard and out of breath.

“We have to move,” Mako said, half-supporting Inspector Beifong on his shoulder. His eyes were as desperate for an end as his superior felt. Of course, his reasons were likely more medical than charitable. “What's the plan here?”
“Yeah, do we have a Plan B for all out gun battle?” Bolin tacked on, spinning on his heel to take a snapshot at a man desperately trying to feed rounds into a Maxim-gun.

If that monster, or any of its kin, came to life every single officer in this basement would be dead men walking. This charred husk, this hidden hell-hole of a hide out would become their tomb. A mass grave of Met officers, if it hadn't become that. Already. Anything to avoid that prospect. But any sacrifice to get her man.

Again, the Spirits answered her.

A gap formed in the wall of powder-smoke. Just about the size of a man. It was a corridor, straight shot to the far side of the chasm they were trapped in. And after that, it just kept going.

*Oh generous Spirit of Life, I have seen your Light and my faith is renewed.*

“Follow me!” Korra shouted, rising to run without checking anything else. Not if anyone followed, nor how many had started flinging a hail in her direction. A good number, the zipping and buzzing around her ears sounded like a swarm of angry hornets, buzzing after their nest was kicked.

The only option was to carry on. Ignore everything but her goal.

Unless someone was unfortunate enough to get in her way. He was crouched in the path, hands fidgeting with the open breach of his rifle. Footsteps must've stirred him, as he spun around with pistol in hand.

Korra's boot caught the barrel, jerking it to the side as he fired. The shot resonated in her foot, even as she planted the other to stop her momentum.

The look on the man's face as her leg straightened, sending her heel ever closer to knocking his head of, was pure comedy. Anger, confusion, fear, and a final flinch of expectation. Every bit of it wiped away as her sole collided with flesh, sending a ripple out like a pebble in a placid pond.

Her kick sent him flying back. Somehow, the thud of his back on the ground was louder than all the gunfire in the world.

*Where is the gunfire?*

All was silent. The guns had gone quiet.

A tense, frightening calm had descended. No words or actions broke it, but for her own. The dripping of water from the ceiling. A hiss of steam.

No movement.

No life.

No time to be worried.

Feet smack on now sodden ground. Little drops fly up, dancing like fireflies in the timid light. So many fly as she takes flight, hitting the entrance to the corridor at a run.

Soon as she does, a foul stench reached up and tickled at the Inspector's nostrils. Refuse and sewage, rot and putrefaction. Humanities excrement, distilled into a single breath. Enough to make the hardest stomachs gag, have hers doing backflips.

A pair of heavy doors, hastily set in a quickly erected wall, stood open before her. The edges were
lined with thick padding, likely to filter out this vile miasma.

Holmes had been right about the sewer. A line of filth, right through the heart of London, running straight out to the Thames, and, from there, the sea. It was a practical, if entirely unimaginative way to deal with the issue. Trouble being, it was a stinking, flooded, utterly dark tunnel with two choices as to a direction to follow.

Left, against the flow, deeper into London. Perhaps to stumble on the exit to a second secret, hideout.

Unlikely.

This one cellar had likely taken weeks to fit and construct to the extent it became livable. A small group, even with the endless funding of Hiroshi, would struggle to divide itself any further than necessary.

Waste makes want, and all that.

To the right it was, then. Docks, dumping, and the Port of London. A perfect place to slip away, or slip into. Amid the throngs of thousands of worker, vagrants, travelers, and traders, one man in a mask would stand out as much as a coat in a tailor's. He could come and go as he pleased from there, provided her never slipped into the quagmire of shite that oozed by, bubbling and festering.

Lead with the gun.

No telling what might come screaming out at her from the inky black. Rare glimmers through grates and manholes were all that she had to keep sure footing.

She slid, slipped, and stumbled, but never fell. The tale of her life, recently.

Behind her, the sound of speedy footsteps. Smacking on the same wetness as hers had, in the same treads of stinking muck. Friend or foe, they were gaining ground as a larger opening appeared in the distance, light opening up from the ceiling.

A t-junction, the offshoot firing off into the far off lands of who knows were. No matter, as dead ahead, bathed in eery light from a crumbling roof, stood Amon.

To Korra's mild surprise, he wasn't running. No, far from it.

Hands were crossed behind his back, phony mask upon his face, eyes glowing in the darkness. “I'm glad you finally managed to catch up, Inspector,” he greeted, the same cadence in his voice that normal people would use to greet a luncheon guest at the door. “We never managed to finish our talk, last time.”

The way he said it, something about it, just set the hair on the back of her neck on end. Memories of leaping fire, blinding light, a sensation like getting kicked by a horse.

“Show me your hands!” Korra demanded, rather than directly address his statement.

He's not getting under my skin, again, she told herself, slowly sliding around the side of the passage. It left her open, possibly, to anyone skulking in the darkness of the third rout, bu an instinct told her she was alone with him.

“Really, Inspector, there is no need for that kind of talk,” said the man whose confident smile shone right through his mask. Even now, just as the last, he felt himself in total control of her and
the world. She was not a person in his eyes. Just a puppet on his strings. *Dance, little girl, dance.*

“How are we to have a proper conversation when one of us is armed? Has not a shred of these people's decency rubbed off on you?”

“It clearly hasn't on you, so I don't know why I should bother.”

A laugh. Cold and humorless. Banal amusement towards his little toy. A cat, that's what he was. She, the mouse.

“Very well, then,” the man named Noatak hummed, taking a step closer to her and farther from escape. “Tell me, why do you put up with this facade of yours, Avatar? I understand lying to your colleagues, and your superiors, even your little *friends*.” Something about that last word, in particular, made Korra want to squirm. As though he, like Holmes, knew something he shouldn't. “But why lie to yourself? It seems to go against your very nature?”

After checking the corner with a flick of her eyes, the Avatar joined her countryman, her subject, in their native tongue. “The hell are you talking about, now? Why don't you just show me those hands, save your preaching for the gallows?”

“There! That's it, right there! The hypocrisy of your broken system,” he exclaimed, going back to English. “You want me dead. I can see it in your eyes. But you expect me to think that, after every horrible thing I've done, to you, and others, that you want me to have my day in court.” With a shake of his head, and a genuine laugh, he stared her down with mad, empty eyes. “Your trouble is, morality tells you that killing me is wrong, unless the law tells you it isn't. I'm guilty, you know I'm guilty. But your system demands that I have the chance to argue my case, my side of the story, to a group of ignorants who could never know the truth like you or I.”

A kernel of truth was there, again. Enough to make her finger twitch on the hair-trigger of her long-gun. It came back just as fast, but the charisma to make her act like that was still impressive.

Relaxing, the law-woman took the time to unpack his argument. “So, you're telling me it would be better to, what? Shoot you in the head like a rabid dog?” she quizzed him, noting how his eyes never left the barrel of her gun. A man without any morals but his own, afraid to die by his own rules. How pitiful.

“That's somehow better because it's easier, is it?” the woman said, having spent far more time devoted to philosophy in the last few days than ever in the rest of her life. “We should just go around killing whoever we feel like, just because we think they're wrong?”

“Somehow, I feel like we're retreading ground, here.” Amon sighed, stopping just short of the corner. Off hand raises to lift his hood, letting it fall limply behind his neck. Tousled hair revealed itself, same shade as hers. An off black that caught the light when held a certain way. “Let me pose a question to you, Avatar Korra: would you enforce a law that you knew was unjust? Say, if there was a law that the neighbor of anyone convicted of a crime had to suffer the same sentence?”

Watch him. Watch his hidden hand. Feel that creeping suspicion of what adorned it.


“Of course not,” Korra spat at his, almost amused by the ridiculousness of his example. “That kind of thing would never happen. Points for creativity, though. Bet that one went down really during
your little speeches.”

“Quite. Perhaps it goes a leap too far, for you.” he chuckled, vicious menace in his words. Threat exuded from him. An aura of murderous intent, all focused on her. “How about this one, then: what if a man could be imprisoned, forced into back-breaking labor, earning no pay, and with only two skim meals a day, for no other crime than lacking employment? What manner of world would we live in if such a thing were to exist?”

Ah, yes, the squalled workhouse. Symbol of oppression to many, and of a good idea gone wrong to others. Including herself.

Sad excuses of urban progress, were they, in her eye. Just a half-assed scheme to brush all the 'undesirables' under the rug. Like the debtor's prisons before them, penal colonies before that. Those with always sought to do away with those without.

Once out of sight and out of mind, their suffering could be ignored. And thus, it didn't exist.

“Not the best,” the Inspector admitted under her breath. Footfalls come closer with every heartbeat. Smacking on the nauseating stew. “But it's the one we have.”

A satisfied hum from under the mask. “Exactly what I would expect from someone like you,” the revolutionary stated, more confident in his convictions than Korra had ever heard. “Avatar Korra, bringer of balance. First of your kind from the House of Kashechewan in two centuries. Prodigal daughter, child of prophecy, and our Divine ruler. Hallowed be your name.”

Bile churns in the Inspector's stomach. Nothing to do with the sewage just a foot away. All the things that she had run away from came running back.

High walls of a secluded palace. Smiles plastered on faces, every face, every face she ever saw. Mad, insane, ear-to-toe grins as lifeless as the gifts she was showered with, empty as her constant praising. Surrounded by 'happy' people, but always lonely.

Lonely…

So lonely…

Were you alone, too?

“While we're asking questions, mind if I ask you one of my own?” the reluctant Princess responded, hitting on what she thought to be a winner. “Let's say, for the sake of argument, you escape, today. Kill me, trick me, get me on your side, whatever, it doesn't really matter. Then you go on to hoist whatever flag you choose over Downing Street, or Parliament, or Buckingham Palace, and the rest of the Empire and Europe don't come crashing down like a ton of bricks to ruin the victory party. What happens next?”

The question actually made the man pause. As though he hadn't thought that far ahead, yet. Or, whatever plan he had devised merely escaped him, at the moment.

Pressure did such miserable things to memory, after all.

“We will have won,” he answered, simply.

Mako came around the corner, just as Amon said this, instantly leveling his rifle at the chest swathed in off-black fabric. A hand jumped up to stay him. She wanted to see this thing through, now. Watch to see if his resolve faltered as his Lieutenant's had.
“Really? Well… good for you, then!” the Avatar exclaimed, giving him the same smile her Nana used to give when she brought a homemade present. *Well done, child. Well done.*

The look through the mask, almost audible sound of teeth grinding together. Displeasure.

Not enough. Anger. She needed anger. “No, I mean it,” the woman pressed, still not taking her eyes of either hand or face, splitting equal time between them. “You've won, saved us all from crushing tyranny. Congratulations! What are your policies, once that's all done with? Who's going to pave the roads after society has crumbled? Which of us is going to arrest the criminals that pop out of the woodwork once the Met is gone, Scotland Yard a smoking cinder, eh? Have you thought of that?”

“The people will make their own justice,” Amon explained, growing more irritated with every word. His loose hand had tucked itself in a pocket. Clutching some other device to either help him escape or make a last, desperate stab.

“Now who's going in circles?”

Fingers start to draw out of the pocket as the Equalist drew himself away from the confrontation. Sound of racking lever sounded in the deep dark.

“Whatever you've got in there, leave it,” Mako warned, shifting to take a hand right off, if needs be. He's twitchy, agitated, voice slightly higher than usual from the friendly fire to his family jewels. A wild-card she did not need. “Let's see both of those hands, real slow. One wrong move and I'll blow you away.”

*And so the cycle repeats itself.*

Cycle?

“Mako, back!”

A thunderous boom sounds, reverberating through the Avatar's very soul. Lives, many lives, flash before her eyes. Memory and illusion, the whole world goes white.

*Flash bomb!*

Hope it is, at least. A good bet as she doesn't feel limb torn from limb, or shrapnel tear into her body. Of course, that could just be because she had died, already. She, had never died before. No reference for what it felt like, but it was a tad wet and smelly for her liking, either way.

Spots dance before her eyes as she tried to blink them clear. A fine mist of runoff and shit had been kicked up by the blast. From above, it had to be. Hidden in plain sight, while the puppet master acted as decoy.

Amon was gone.

Vanished in the disorienting blast of loose powder. Down the corridor to the shore. With no shot, she had to follow. Leap the corner and skid to the opening.

Nothing to be seen. Only heard.

His footsteps fading faster than she could manage in her state. But, no one could outrun bullets.

Aiming low, she fired, then again, again. Seven shots, walking up this side of the drain, sure to hit
something. Her fellow officer did much the same on the other side, raking it with flying lead, though he was less specific where his rounds were sent.

“Tell me, Waters,” the fleeing man goaded, only illuminated as a silhouette by muzzle blasts. “How much would it take? Who has to die for you to see?”

Another chase. One Korra felt she would end up the worse for. Every breath stung, then burned, finally screamed as her ribs wept. It was all her will to carry on. Put one foot in front of the other. Carry on to finish this. Put this nightmare of a chapter behind her. Let the restless shades be at rest, journey to the other side.

The man who had been her friend, partner, and lover kept pace on the other side. Letting his haste slacken so she would remain at his side. Grim determination on his face, but also restraint, so like him. To put his feelings to the side for a job.

So like her.

A light appeared, faint and growing in the distance. The man they hunted wasn't framed in the open grate. His flight must've already carried him past the opening and out into the world beyond.

They follow suit. Flung onto a narrow ledge above the frothing Thames. Walkways extend in each direction, spattered with mud and muck, but only her side had a ladder for them to scale. It lent against the side of a dock, bustling with people. Some turned to look at the pair of detectives as they raced their way, others attention had been caught by something else.

Never had Korra climbed so fast, leaping up so her fingers caught the edge of the platform, leaving her long-gun behind. She screamed as she hauled her body up, pain of a thousand knives in her side. This did not stop her. Didn't even slow her down. Blood pounded in her ears, eyes darted through the crowd. Searching, plying, peaking at every confused stranger for the slightest glimpse of familiarity.

What she didn't expect was a boot to come screaming at her face. It came down by her ear, just saved by momentum's grace.

A few inches to the side and her skull would have cracked under the weight of the heavy blow. Dead, in an instant. Nevermore to come home to a loving smile and some cutting, truthful words. Eat and drink hearty with good friends. Never showing Asami the placid bay that stretched on forever.

With that in mind, the Inspector launched herself into a tackle. Not the most graceful tactic in her arsenal, but as effective as any, under the circumstances.

Using her good side as a battering ram, Korra jammed herself into her attacker's gut sending both tumbling to the ground. Fists slammed into faces, hers cracking a second mask, same side as the first. Another blow to really grind in the shards, cut open knuckles so little drops of red flew. The other side was twice as desperate, gripping the arm that threatened to come to life any moment.

They rolled. Came apart in a confused mess. Coat caught on something, an errant nail. Discard it to take up a proper stance. Guard against another sudden lunge, to dodge a certain death blow.

“Tell me, how many will you fail before you do what must be done?” the masked man hummed, seemingly unfazed by the blood dripping from his face. Drip, drip, drip, with eyes still fixed on his opponent. A blade slid from his left sleeve, caught in nimble fingers. “How many will die before you stop insisting on this farce? You came so close, the last time. So close to seeing.”
A shot, skimming so close to knock his hair to the side. New hands to bring him down, still on three limbs, but aiming near true with the fourth.

Unfortunately, Amon's was far more so. The blade, glinting in the sun's diminished ray, slashed through ice and wind. It caught the edge of Mako's thumb, slicing deep, tumbling to catch him across the nose.

Such a torrent was unleashed. Blossoming from both wounds, though her friend barely even blinked. It cascaded, a crimson waterfall of quick freezing life. All three of them bled into the river, below. Offering sacrifice to whatever strange spirits held sway, here. They seemed displeased by the mediocre tribute, sending greater swirl and biting cold. Fresh blizzard seemed on its way, swallowing onlookers behind a wall of frozen drops and flake.

Voices, though, peaked out from the veil. Fearful chattering, exclaims of recognition. Her name and the man's mingle from frosty breaths.

Some berate her, others praise the criminal.

And he smiles.

From behind his broken mask, a smug grin. His outer, most restrictive layer is thrown to the wind, catching it and vanishing into the gray. Next is his mask, which he tossed into the flowing river like the garbage it was. No further need were either of them.

He turned on the undercover man. They were closer, he was stunned, and Korra just too far away to interfere.

Inspector Lee gave his best attempt, rising into a set of swift jabs that his fellow Inspector would have found difficult to overcome. But, down one hand and with eyes watering, it was easy for Amon to block the weakened assault. Knife hand caught Mako's good by the wrist and twisted. A sickening crack and barely muffled cry of pain follow, even as her friend goes for the same blow inflicted upon him by his troublesome charge.

Amon snarled, cursing in their tongue. And his other met the officer's face with open palm. Head and neck are pressed back, meeting the wooden rail with a second crack.

Everything just goes, limp.

Mako slumped, arms falling to the side, his weight supported by a single arm on his face and the rail that had struck him. “I always hate when someone interrupts, don't you?”

“Put him down!” Korra ordered, ripping gun from holster and leveling it at the ringleader's head. Right between his eyes. Not even a flinch. “Put him down, Noatak! Do it, right now, or I'll-”

“You'll what, exactly?” he cut off, hefting the unconscious, hopefully, man a little higher, so he was held from falling over be his iron grip. Blood dripped from his scarred, almost impartial face. Flesh of his cheek, deformed and shredded scar tissue. “Shoot me? I think not.” arm extended, threatening to cast Mako into a fall that would, like as not, end with him in the frigid water. “If you were going to do that, you would've, already. Just now, in the sewer, in that theater. Instead, you scream and order like you hold all the power.”

“It's over! Give up!”

He laughed, ginning down at her and her gun. “I think it is,” Amon agreed, lifting his other hand to rest atop the first. Wires dangle, threatening and full of menace. “It makes no difference to me if I
end up in prison, today, Your Majesty. I have escaped before, and I would again. The onus is on you whether I go, or not.”

A standoff, with matching ultimatum. How dramatic of the man. Such a showman, right to the end.

“Do what's needed, kill me, and the boy goes free,” he offered, first, all eyes flicking to the now rising body. Breath had returned, stronger by the second. He would live, with a fresh scar or two, and a headache to match, or perhaps only rival, his others. “Failing that, let me kill him, and I will go with you, willingly. The choice is yours, Inspector. Conscience or justice, letter or spirit?”

No options. None but to wait for an opening, backup, assistance of any kind. Stall, she had to stall. “You have the right to say silent, but anything you do say will be taken down and used as evidence. You have the right to legal counsel. If you cannot afford counsel, the court shall provide for your defense.”

“Such a disappointment,” Noatak sighed, an almost genuine sadness in the words. That his message hadn't reached her.

Fingers start to loosen. Korra's mind filled with images of another broken body. Another name on her list, person she had failed, shade to haunt her. Only, dread had never been so loud, before. Voices, so many voices. Angry, hateful, fearful. Tears of weeping women, threats of angry men. But not at her.

They appear as a wall, the people of London. Fists raised and hands clasped. They begged for mercy, promised swiftest retribution. Vox Populi boomed united for a man they knew not.

Whitechapel rose. Flung rocks, bricks, bottles and other detritus. They pelted the man who would change the world with insults and worse, careful to dodge the hostage in his grip. Where they hurled insults, he hurled them back. Berated the 'sheep' for not saving themselves, living so squalled a life by choice.

“Don't you get it?!” Amon roared as a bottle struck him dead in the face, crashing in a shower of razors. Gripping hand pulled and released, letting fallen friend drop to the ice strewn floor. “They have no power over you! This is your chance! Throw them off, rise up! RISE UP!”

“Shut it!” a large man with even larger arms shouted, sending a rock the size of a fist hurtling through the air like a baseball. It hit hard, drawing full attention, just like Korra needed. “I kno' who you ar'! Yer' tha' one that had all those lads killed o'er Stepney way! We don't need yer lot round here!”

“Trouble, that's what you are, trouble!”

“Liar!”

“Murderer!”

A riot bloomed as Korra kicked off. Her Webley had fallen to the wayside, replaced by blackjack and cuffs. Had to get control of his hands, fast. Before he could lay it upon anyone in the crowd.

Her footstep catch the ear, he turns. Swing as he steps, just hitting his nose. Listen to it snap as the Inspector folded her forearm to let it have its turn.

Jump back, skid.
Block left, parry right. Make a swipe for his leg, feign a strike at his ribs.

Satisfying sound of a cuff clicking on his left wrist. Now, if he managed to catch her, they would both go down together. Frying with the same sickly smell as the weeping boy. Light flickering between them through hard iron.

“Oof!”

With the chain of her cuffs Amon had pulled her onto the palm of the glove. It slammed into her sternum, pressing every gasp of air out of her.

Fingers slipped, just a bit.

Just enough.

In a blink, it was gone, and she was vulnerable. Try to push off, get away, but slip on a bad patch of sleet. Stumble, slide.

Sparks of light.

“Farewell, Avatar.”

Just time for a final thought. Last one ever.

Only one that leaped to the fore.

_I love you, Asami…_ 

And the world became pain. Not like that in her ribs, or the sting of a cut, but a burning, numbing, indescribable pain. Vaguely, Korra thought she might of heard something. A loud call of some kind. It hurt too much to really listen. To do much of anything. Think, speak, even breathe or let her heartbeat.

Nothing but the pain.

Then, she was falling. Or, it felt like that for a moment. But her feet caught on something strange. A texture she had only felt in dream.

_Looking around, the dock had gone. So had the people._

_Her feet were upon a lake of aquamarine, impossibly flat, impossibly beautiful. Tall trees on the distant shore, rising high into the clouds. Leaves of green and red and purple, broad as her chest, whipping in the calm, as though blown by her breath._

_Strange creatures prance among them. Deer that weren’t, shades of orange, with antlers that flowed like horses manes. Birds of four wings, butterfly flowers._

_A sun of electric blue beat down from overhead. Clouds like rings of pipesmoke._

Is this the afterlife, _the Avatar wondered, blinking at the scene._

_“Perhaps,” a man said. A man that had appeared from nowhere. No boat had carried him, no building hid him. He had just popped out of thin air to join her on the lake. Tall. Taller than her, at least. Thinly trimmed beard clung to his chin, the only hair other than his brows. Instead, his head was smooth, tattooed with a single blue arrow, ending just at his forehead. “Or, perhaps this is where life comes from?”_
Blinking, Korra couldn't help but recognize the man. She knew him from somewhere, she was sure of it. Each blink stirred faint memories that might have been dreams, so fuzzy were they. “Who are you?”

“I'm you,” said the man, stepping forwards so he was about arms length away from her. “Who you used to be.”

“Aang?”

The man, the last Avatar, smiled broadly at her. A smile she remembered, if nothing else. “I'm sorry we haven't managed to speak, before, Korra,” he apologized, taking a seat upon the water's surface and gesturing for her to do the same. “I understand you find sitting still rather difficult, so it's only natural you'd have trouble meditating.”

Korra sat, or, rather, found herself sitting, no memory of performing the act. Meditating? “I'm dead, aren't I?”

Why else would she be here? Why else would he be here? The hero of her people she couldn't help but hear about. Every day.

Savior.

Saint.

A man she was compared to, constantly. Forced to live up to, despite never meeting. Just because she had been one of thousands. The one child to be the next idol of worship and praise of an entire nation, no choice in the matter.

“Do you feel dead?”

“T-I don't know,” she stammered, suddenly terrified at the idea. Never gave much thought to dying. Not a thing the mind tended to dwell on for any length of time. But now, it was all she could think about. Pain, deep in her chest, radiating everywhere. Screaming. Screaming until her lungs felt like they were tearing themselves apart.

Falling.

One name in her mind. Everything.

“Asami...”

“You want to go back?” Aang asked, diplomatically, sipping tea from a cup he hadn't had before. A wafting smell of jasmine, always her favorite, for some reason. When she nodded, her predecessor smiled. “Then you aren't dead. Just visiting.”

His words caught her mind, grabbing that inquisitive side of her and making her ask questions. “So, this is the afterlife?”

A hum issued from his lips, part enjoyment, part contemplation. “I suppose the best way to describe it is that this is what you think the afterlife looks like, so it does. Make sense?”

“No really.”

“Not really the point, either,” the man hummed, setting the cup upon the crystal surface, sending the first ripples out from where the base touched. When he looked up, he was a changed man,
serious and commanding look in his eye. “The real question you should be asking is: why am I here?”

Korra laughed, dry and humorless. “I fucked up, didn’t I?”

The monk didn’t seem to be amused with her answer. “How?”

“I-I hesitated,” she tried to explain, making no dent in his expression. “When we were in the theater, I should have shot him. He’s right. Amon is too dangerous to be left alive. I-I should’ve put a bullet in his fucking head, just like, just like-”

“The man on the stairs, today? The man you killed on your way to him? The burglar? The rapist? The wife-beater?” Aang listed off, going farther back with every example. Each one conjured a face in her mind, right at the moment of death. Frozen, forever, in her nightmares. “You think, just because he might have been a threat, you should have treated him as such?”

“He killed Tahno!” Korra roared, finding herself standing, once more. The shout took life of its own, sweeping great waves upon the shore, buffeting trees and beasts. “I-I could have saved him...”

Tears fell. So many tears. Enough to make the lake flow over, flood the world.

Still, Aang sipped his tea. Just watched as she wept. Mourned every life she had ever failed to save. Tahno, Gerard, St.Claire, Kelly, Eddowes, Stride, Chapman, Nichols, so many names. So many tears. Like rain. Real rain, beating down on her head from a now cloudy sky. Whipping the lake into a sea of ripples.

“No, you couldn’t,” Aang stated bluntly. The words hit as hard as the bomb had. Harder still were the ones that followed. “Part of being the Avatar is learning that you can’t save everyone. Some things are beyond anyone’s control, Korra, and we have to live with that.”

“I know that!” the woman, about half the monk’s age, shouted back, anger mixing with her grief, bringing back the monsoon winds. “And you should know that I’m a shit Avatar! You seem to know everything else about me, how the hell haven’t you figured that out, huh!?“ Korra demanded of him, pointing a dagger finger in his direction. “Why else do you think I ran away? I was tired of everyone coming to me for everything. Asking me to solve their problems, when I don’t even know how to solve mine. I was tired of it! I just wanted to be alone, help people, do something with my life!”

If she had expected anything of the man dressed in robes of orange, silence wasn’t it. A quiet, compassionate silence as she worked through her tantrum.

Only when the storm had settled, when the Princess found herself seated, again, did he speak. “Korra, I am going to give you some of the best advice I was ever given, so please listen to it,” the monk told her, sipping from a fresh cup of tea. “Try to be a good person, first. Being a good Avatar will come naturally, after that.”

“What?”

“I’m trying to say, don’t try to do everything at once. You have people that love you, people that want to help you,” he advised, smiling warmly, just like a certain Superintendent she knew. “Let them. Love them. Help them, when they need it. Live a good life. Do what you think is right, nothing more, nothing less.”
They were standing, again. Many people were standing with them. Dozens, hundreds of faces she found familiar. An old man, all in red, white hair done up in ornate gold, mischievous smile on his lips. A woman, face of alabaster, cheeks rouged a deep red, eyes like Asami's, but a marshal sternness in her features. Wild man, inches taller than the rest, tattoos on his arms, and laughter on his face.

Her, and not her. Ancestors and predecessors.

Avatars, all.

“Do you know what to do?” Aang asked, laying his hand upon her shoulder, just as those she knew to be Roku and Kyoshi did the same to him.

“I think so,” she whispered, a single tear falling from her cheek. The girl under her smiled, a little nervously. She was surrounded by friends and family for the first time, one woman's hand held in hers. Everyone she had ever loved and lost. “Thank you, Aang.”

“Until next time, Avatar Korra,” the monk bid her, never letting his smile fade. “May Raava's light guide your way.”

“And yours.”

She woke with a gasp. Breath returned to her lungs in a single gulp. Something smelled burnt. Like meat left on the fire too long. In the back of her mind, Korra knew it to be her. Singed parts of her own body, partially cooked by the glove's charge.

It sparked no more as a hand gripped it, tight. The other came down, open palmed, on the man's elbow. Pop!

Fresh screams as Noatak tried to pull away, only aggravating the dislocation. His leg kicked desperately at hers, stamping her foot onto the dock's wooden planks, over and over again. One or two of the Inspector's toes might have broken under the onslaught, but she didn't release her grip.

Hooking her battered calf under the larger man's, she pulled. Slowly, but also incredibly swiftly, his balance faltered. They fell, she on top of him. When he tried to strike with his free arm, it was caught by the shackle, brought round to meet the other.

Not ideal, but good enough, was the sound of the second cuff slamming home.

More hands, many hands, added themselves to hers. Crowd members took over the role of restraint as the policewoman was dragged off her subdued quarry.

Ropes appeared to bind the revolutionary more firmly, wrapped quickly and firmly by the trained hands of angry sailors, hurling further abuses, as they had stones. A woman hurriedly threw a shawl over the wound in Korra's chest. Cloth must have burned away to reveal something indecent. Oh, the horror. A bit of breast.

Spirits, the Brits were such prudes, sometimes.

A doctor was needed, not a clothier. Certainly if this growing pain in her chest was to be dealt with, adequately.

Morphine.

A nice, big dose of morphine.
Defeated, bloodied, and broken, 'Amon' looked up at her with silent contempt. As those gathered berated him for his methods and conduct, the only one who he show any interest in was her. “I’d appreciate it if you gave Lieutenant Crichton the benefit of your testimony,” Korra request, the hate she’d felt for the man fading away now that he was no more a threat than a screaming child. All of them were the same, weren't they, going on about how unfair the world was, how everything they did was unforgivable. “I've got a feeling, he'll need all the help he can get.”

Death didn't suit that man, at least. A hefty prison term, maybe, but not death. Too final, too thieving. Of all the sorrow he would feel. The remorse he already did.

Given time, and enough penance, he might be a good man, again.

One his mothers would be proud of.

Noatak didn't seem to think so, just smiling at her with that wicked grin, neutered by the foot pressed into his side by the large dockhand from earlier. This world might not be just and fair, but his one would not come to pass. Not this day, nor any other.

“Are you okay?” Mako asked her, grave concern upon his face. He wobbled, as though on a boat. Concussion was written all over his face. As was quickly clotting, or perhaps freezing, blood.

“Do I look okay?” she chuckled back, feeling wobbly herself, all of a sudden.

*You know, it's kind of a miracle I'm still- Oh, no, there it goes!*

Knees give out. No outside force needed, just her own battered body letting go. Eyes flutter closed as darkness rushes in as fast as the ground was rushing up.

Just as she neared the ground, Korra heard a voice calling out. A sweet voice like summer honey, more musical than any symphony. It called to her, carried on legs hugged too tight by choice of trousers. “Korra?! KORRA!!”

*I see you broke that pole they cuffed you to...*

**Blackness...**

Chapter End Notes

One more proper chapter after this, and that history of the world I promised. There will be epilogues following that, irregularly, the first of which being the girls much earned consummation of their love (if your interested in that), followed by Jack stuff, Amon and his brother, and the Kuvira/Mako stories(which are actually prequels, but will be put at the end).

Until next time...
A somewhat happy ending. Stepping stone to a happier one.

I've delayed posting this for a little while, trying to think up something special to say to whoever reads it. So far, I'm stumped. Kinda.

This experience, this work, has been fun and agonizing, entertaining and trying, a learning experience and an endless test of patience. I've had sleepless nights, fretting over a single paragraph, sometimes just a single sentence. And I wouldn't do it any different. The process, that is, not the chapters. I feel, if I had it all to do again, there would be some changes. More than a few. Quality of life stuff to smooth things out and some story points that went places I didn't intend at the time.

Overall, I feel like I'm a better writer, and a 'slightly' better person, for the days and hours spent. I've bonded with the world and characters I've crafted. My little Victorian world. Even made a friend.

Many thanks to those who have read and kudosed along the way. It helped more than you know to wake up to that email, at times. Most of all, I thank the many of you who have graced me with a comment, or two. The ones who took the time out of your day to send me a smile, make me think, and even irk me a tad (you know who you are).

And, finally, I hope you enjoy.

It's a smell that woke her. Light, but drifting into her dreams, all the same. Sweet, but subtle. Just enough to drag her, irresistibly, to consciousness. The sound of turning pages as she stirred. A soft fluttering as fingers peel paper apart. Humming music, like a distant lullaby, reached ears still pounding with blood.

So beautiful.

Haunting and sad.

Groans tore her parched throat as she tried to move. Lips felt red and raw. Her chest stung, still. Like she had made the mistake of kicking closed the door to a wood stove. But with a far more tender part of her skin.

"Water..." the Inspector wheezed, tongue almost stuck to her mouth by how dry it was.

What felt like seconds, or maybe days, later, a cool metal rim touches her lips. Even cooler liquid
tempts entry, cascading into the crack.

A cough sends it right back out, a fine mist and shower falling to cool her skin.

“Drink,” a soft, but firm voice commands, repeating the earlier process. Metal on skin, water in her mouth. Clean and crisp. The most delicious thing that Korra had ever drunk. “Here, have some more.”

I know that voice…

I love that voice…

Only one person sounded like that. “Asami?” she asked, trying to pull her lids open. Her mind would not believe until she saw that face. Made sure this wasn't another dream. That it all hadn't been. Some wicked mix between dream and nightmare, elation and pain. A month of fantasy while she lay.

“It's me,” the woman, her love, confirmed.

A hand lifts what felt like a rag from her forehead. Moments later and it returned, equally cool as the cup had been.

It felt lovely, as did the hand that brushed her cheek. Soft, caring. A tender caress that soothed soul and body, alike. Just what she needed as conscious thought brought on the advent of all the pain her body could offer up.

Sore, everywhere. Muscles weeping despite however much rest they had been given after her collapse. Tired to the bone. Fire burns her chest, even hotter, now. Even the slight brushing of cloth upon her skin was enough to make breathing difficult. Chaffing on the stinging sensation of bloated blisters, only just subdued by pressing bandages and oily ointment soaking the wound in numbness.

There was another sensation. The floating of poppy. Like a haze over a new dawn, everything was a little fuzzy around the edges.

“How long?”

Words barely a croak as eyes open to the world. Lights are low, flickering gas. Scent of ammonia on her tongue, filling her sinuses. Pungent and potent smell of the harsh cleanliness that houses of healing demanded, were they of any quality. First thing she saw was the off-white paint of the ceiling, a fresh glossiness still lingering to the coating. Quality unbecoming any hospital she had been to in Greater London.

“A little over two days,” Asami answers, leaning so she filled the right half of the world. “You're in London Hospital. Private room.”

The Inspector nodded, hearing the words, but not understanding them to be true. Might this be another dream? Like the one on the lake? Her mind filling in the blanks of that black time between sleeping and wakefulness.

The first words she can think to say, whether this was real, or not, remained the same. “I'm sorry.”

“For which part?” the voice of the mildly miffed engineer inquired. “The part where you had me chained to a poll in the freezing cold, screaming my lungs out at you? Or for running off half-cocked without someone to help you? Maybe you're sorry for, and this is absolutely my favorite
part, by the way, almost dying. Again.”

Blinking slowly, Korra thought for a second. “All of it.”

“Lovely.”

She could feel the anger, the hurt in every word, even under the great effort spent to hide it. Crystal emeralds just on the edge of tears, glistening in the light.

“I'm so sorry, Asami,” the prone woman professed, trying to raise her hand to brush away any tears that might fall. It didn't answer, merely falling back after lifting half a foot. No good when she tried again, just earning the same result. “I'm so sorry.”

With a great sigh, one the foreigner already knew well, the woman accepted. “You should be, making me worry about you, like this. What is it, three times you've almost died since we've known each other?” Was it that many? It felt like more, if the detective was honest with herself. “One of these days, I'm going to be the one making you worry. Then we'll see how quick you are to do stupid stunts like letting your heart stop.”

Stopped?

I died?

So, maybe it was real…

“How?”

“Dr. Watson,” Asami answered, bluntly. There was more anger in her voice, but also a relief that shone through the gloom. “Even he was surprised, I think. He said it was impossible that you had been standing, let alone fighting, in the state you were in.”

Nothing jumped to mind after hearing that. Responses eluded her as she tried to put things into order in her mind. The morphine pumping through her system was no help with that, clouding everything, past and present, with a veil of confusion. Time seemed fluid in those last minutes. Each time she thought back, a few things transposed themselves. Minor things, at first. Footsteps not making sense. A few words, here and there.

“Impossible,” the Inuit hummed in her native tongue. “I wanted to come back.”

A man had told her that. She had done, the one she used to be. He who was dead and reborn in her. Doer of impossible things. Legend and myth made life, like the heroes of the oldest days of spoken memory, carried by the ancestors.

He had come back, the stories told. Returned from the Spirit World, having charmed Pana. Friend of Anguta, gatherer of the dead, free to journey with them from life to death, and back again. Foe of Koh, stealer of faces and tormentor of the grieving. Husband to her Aanak, cherished friend of her family.

Just stories, she had been told. Rumors, overblown with time, until they took on a life of their own. Maybe not.

Maybe not…

“Are you feeling okay?” Asami asked, softly, a look of worry on her face.
Staring off into space as she thought of that which she knew nothing of must've made Korra look quite the odd creature. A deer caught in the hunter's sights. Caught in her own mind. Caught in the impossible.

“I don't think so,” the Avatar answered turning her head and smiling. “Everything hurts, and you've been crying.”

“How do you know that, Inspector?”

The smile grows as her heart filled with warmth for the one she came back for, endured for. “Because, you're here,” she says, hand finally with enough strength to move. It doesn't make it all the way, but it does go far enough to take her darling's. “Because, your eyes are red, and your handkerchief is sticking out of your blouse. Because, I know you, and I know you care. That you worry about me being reckless. Doing stupid things.” The beauty smiles a pretty smile, brighter than the first glimpse of sun after the long winter ended. “And, because, I love you.”

Her breath hitches a little on the next inhale, lips struggling to form words of response. “I love you, too, you beautiful idiot,” she sighed, finally, leaning to press her lips on the little sliver of skin between hairline and cloth. “And you are an idiot, Princess.”

“I'll take it,” the policewoman chuckled, regretting it as her blistered chest pulled on frayed nerves. Fear tickled the addled mind. Her pain, the feeling of so much energy singing her flesh. Where it had landed. A spot that may mar her for life in a place she could never hide.

Not if certain things were to happen between them.

Intimate moments.

Licking her lips, the wounded woman bullied up the courage to ask the difficult question. “Did, um...” Her voice paused as her mind filled with all kinds of awful pictures. Hideous images that refused to be shewed away. “Did the doctor's say anything about scars?”

“Not really,” the engineer hummed, going back to her nursing. More water was ladled to thirsty lips, quenching the endless thirst, bit by bit. “Why?”

“No reason.”

A lie, and a blatant one, at that.

One that was picked up on immediately. “I bet it feels a lot worse than it looks,” the caring tender said in her most soothing voice. When that didn't quite do the trick, she carried on downplaying the damage, even further. “Dr. Watson said that you were healing as fast as anyone he's ever seen, given how banged up you were. I think he spent more time on your head than anywhere else. You hit the ground pretty hard.”

“Did I?”

She didn't remember that, at all. Only falling. Hearing Asami call out to her. Mako speaking just before that. Cold, vicious eyes full of hate and malice for the world.

“You sure did,” the woman confirmed, patting her hand. “Put a nice dent in that dock.”
A groan emitted itself as she tried to move, shift a little. Being sedentary had played hell with every part of her that wasn't externally bruised and burned. “I feel like it hit back,” Korra complained, at last shifting onto her side. Instantly, it became easier to draw breath. Ribs and blisters pointed skyward, pressure mercifully removed. “How's your wrist?”

“Sore,” Asami smiled, displaying a ring of fading purple and blue.

With a smile, the Inspector pulled the hand close and brushed her lips on it. “You know, if you weren’t so stubborn about things, you wouldn’t have this,” she teased, eying the discoloration closely. There were some scrapes down the thumb on one side, a chipped nail on her pinkie. 

*Pulled it right out, didn't you? Clever girl.*

“Are we really going to talk about stubborn, right now?” her love asked, likely readying the tirade she was more than due, at this point. “Because, I think I have a mirror somewhere.”

Laughter bubbles in her belly, working its way up and out in its own time. Tugging, pulling, stretching all those things that begged not to be. It hurt, but it felt so good to do. To feel joy, enjoy a joke at her own expense. It gave the whole world a gentle breeze to blow the clouds away. The shade of gray that had hovered over every moment for weeks.

“Fair's fair, I guess,” the woman hummed, licking her lips, once more.

They felt fuller, less parched, already. Her brain was the part of her that still seemed a little dry. Slowly, the timeline was fixing itself. Puzzle pieces fell into place in a, more or less, cohesive manner.

Cracking sound of Mako's head against the rail, dangled over the edge. Waiting for opportunity, earning it as London rebuffed its would be savior. Failure, pain, and searing light, scent of her body being cooked alive. Standing on water. Speaking to Aang in a place she wasn't entirely sure existed. The Avatars of the past, great heroes and statesmen. Being with them, witnessing them, supporting her.

All the pain inside. Emotional baggage clung onto as the only thing she had besides work and friends. Crying the tears she had refused herself for so long.

Feeling the angst, not just experiencing it.

Letting it all out.

Friendly advice from the great man of legend. “*You have people that love you, people that want to help you.*” his words echoed in the mist, still as clear as when she first heard them. “*Let them. Love them. Help them, when they need it. Live a good life.*”

“Is everyone else okay?” the Inspector asked, remembering the almost ghostly pale of of Kuvira's face, the blinking stupor of her ex as he fought through a swimming head.

The smile faltered, just a little. Not all the way, so that showed promise. “Kuvira and Mako are a few rooms down. She lost a lot of blood, ended up passing out coming after you.” Sounded like her. Eager for a fight until you put on the ground and kicked it out of her. Even then she was like to try and snap your ankle off. “Mako has a pretty big bump on his head. Couple stitches, hear and there.”

“Good, good,” the officer coughs, wincing as a mote of dust tore her fragile chest apart. It was agony, just assuaged by a rushed request for more water. “Have they tried to kill each other, yet?”
“Arguing like an old married couple, last time I saw them.”

“Sounds about right.”

An expression on Asami’s face that the Inuit couldn’t read proceeded a note she had made more than a few times herself. “It’s hard to believe they were ever together, to be honest. They go together like oil and water.”

All she had for that was a hum. Something was being hid from her, she knew. A certain flightiness in the woman’s actions and words. Careful to keep things moving a particular way, at the precise pace she wanted it to go. Probably that there had been a death. More than the one she had witnessed.

“How many?”

Lashes flutter as she feigns being stunned, taken off guard by a vague question from nowhere. There’s even a little, “Hm?” to help sell the act.

“Asami, I’d rather find out from you, now, than a paper tomorrow,” Korra said, giving her best squeeze to the hand holding hers. Still, nothing was given to her, other than a creeping sadness into the edges of the woman’s eyes, a pursing to her lips.


“Yes.”

Better than I thought it would be.

“A few more than that of my father's people,” the engineer continued, shrinking at the rather deliberate association on her part. Shame for Hiroshi's sins still dwelt within his daughter's thoughts, it seemed. It would take time for that to fade. Time and patience and lots of talking. Maybe some more tears, much as it tore at the Inspector's heart. When she spoke again, it was a little shaky, much quieter. “They gave up a little after you ran off, I think. No one would tell me what happened, really, but, I think Mr. Tenzin and Mr. Holmes were involved.”

Korra hummed, “He has a way with words. Both of them do.”

“Yeah...”

Grunting, instantly regretting, but knowing it to be more than necessary, the wounded woman raised her hand to cup a feather soft cheek. “Hey, look at me,” she coaxed, earning back the eyes that looked off into the distance and only inward, at the same time, “It's not your fault, okay? I told you, he made his choice, you made yours. He made the wrong one, you didn't.”

“I know,” Asami smiled, light quickly returning to her smile. “And, it isn't your fault, either.”

Nodding, the Avatar let her hand fall back to the bed, impressed how much the simple motion had taken out of her. Wakefulness was fading by the second, but, she had so much yet to be said. Each as important as the next. Priority, however, would be key in the time that was left.

“Listen, I am sorry. For all of this. Ending up all banged up, again; your dad being caught up in all this; not being around, sometimes; missing meals; being home late. And, I'm not going to promise that I won't end up here in worse shape than I am, now. I'll miss more meals, I'll miss dates, and there's going to be some late nights when I'm working,” Scotland Yard's jewel confessed, looking up as her love processed the onslaught. Her reaction, thus far, had been subdued. Limited to a
couple of nods and a slight grimace. “But, I need you to know, I love you. As much as I've loved anyone. Probably more. I know it's only been a few weeks, and I know it's been rough on both of us, but I really want to know where things go from here. So, if you can put up with all the crap, me being a stubborn idiot, and some more bad cooking—”

A finger pressed to her lips before she could make her grand finally. The smile on those cherry lips had grown as she babbled, amusement, love and mirth playing in it. “I'm going to stop you right there, Princess,” Asami said, lifting her finger to tap the Inspector on the nose. “Much as I love hearing you ramble on, I think your lungs could use the rest.”

“You're teasing me, again, aren't you?”

“Just a bit,” the woman giggled, softly patting her head. They smiled, just looking at each other, for a moment, until Miss Sato saw fit to reply. “You have a dangerous job, I can live with that. I knew that when we met, when we had lunch the first time, when we went to the country club. Doesn't mean I won't worry, of course.” A laugh from each, less humor than usual it the sound. “And, you aren't the only one who has a busy schedule, Korra. I have a whole company to run, and that's going to eat into a lot of time.”

“I know.”

“Good.”

“You don't get shot at, though.”

With a snort, Asami gave her a more than amused look. “My family is one of the richest in the world. I've probably got as many death threats in my life as you, I'd imagine.”

“Not as comforting as I think you meant that to be, 'Sami.”

Shrug of the shoulders later and she continued on. “What I'm try to say is: I'm not leaving you any time soon. It’s not going to be easy, and sneaking around won't be fun, I imagine. But, I think you're more than worth the minor inconvenience of prying reporters and some sleepless nights. Besides, we've already got some practice with all that.”

That they did, if only by accident.

“So, you’ll be sticking around?” Korra asked, more than a little hope in the question. “At the house, I mean, not here. Cause, if you are, we're going to have to go shopping for storage. I’ve not seen your closet, but I’m pretty sure it’s bigger than my bedroom.”

Chuckling, the heiress, now owner, restored her finger to the Avatar’s lips. “Enough,” she insisted, giving the hand in hers another squeeze. “The nurse will be here any minute. Do you need anything?”

“A sandwich?”

“Always food with you,” Asami tutted, smiling all the while. It was a nice thing, a happy thing. Lovely to look at. Even better when it brushed against hers. “Get some rest. I'll see what I can do.”

Settling down was easy. Merely tucking her head a little deeper into the pillow was enough to bring on the waiting drowsiness.

But, there was a memory that tugged her back. One that needed to be shared, she thought.
“I saw something,” Korra said, reaching up to grab a fleeing wrist, gently. Best she could do, really, as her grip faded, almost instantly. “When Amon—” She shifted her free hand to hover over the spot on her chest.

A part of her, a timid, frightened part, refused to put the act into words. Hand seemed to grip her throat and squeeze, just thinking about it. Hair tickled the back of her neck, like breath was tickling it, someone stood just behind staring down on her, oppressively.

Mild confusion crept into the features of her carer. “What was it?”

How to say it? Condense hundreds of years of tradition into a brief bundle of sentences? “Heaven, I think you’d call it,” she pondered in a voice that desperately wanted rest, already. Eyes widened, ever so slightly, despite trying to remain as soothing as possible. A little nod nudged her on, drawing a further, muted explanation. “The most beautiful place I’ve ever seen. I was standing on a lake, and there were trees that touched beyond the sky. And, a man talked to me.”

“Who was he?” the question walked the thin line between interest and just humoring her.

With a little smile, full of fondness and nostalgia the Avatar wasn’t quite sure was all her own, she whispered some final words before drifting off to sleep, “A old friend.”

They could talk more, later.

And, there would always be tomorrow. So many tomorrows.

Chapter End Notes

The first epilogue will be the girls first time together, in the sexual sense. It will probably take a while. Compared to writing the rather gruesome things I’ve put to pixels here, smut is about ten-times harder for me to write. Have patience, I beg you.

JMStei: So here marks the end of Whitechapel. It’s been a rollercoaster for Humble and I. We have grown, as both writer and editor. I have a lot to thank Humble for in this story, as because of it, I found a friend. We have been working together almost nonstop since September to bring you’re our next story. Gone Questing. As well as a whole bunch of other stories that we have planned for future releases. I do believe that there will be an epilogue or two coming up for this story. So see you all on the next story!

Humble: the thing after this is an alternate history me and JMStei put together. Don't take it too seriously. It's just a drabble, not anywhere close to being properly researched.
Chapter Summary

Just what it says in the title. Not a chapter.

Chapter Notes

This isn't meant to be taken seriously. There are a lot of leaps made, here. So many that this is probably the only alternate universe Brian Cox and Neil deGrasse Tyson would look at and go, "You're taking the piss, right?"

It also, isn't finished, yet. But, I wanted to put it up once I got to Columbus, and add to it as the days go by. Check back when the epilogues start coming out and it should be in a more finished state.

Notes: Important divergences from our own timeline are marked with an asterix *

Approximately 18-16,000 BCE: first humans cross the Bering Land Bridge

≈13,000 BCE: complete settlement of the entire landmass. Clovis culture.

≈7-5,000 BCE: Andean cultures domesticate potatoes, llamas, coca, and beans

≈5-4,000 BCE: domestication of maize in Mesoamerican cultures, sunflowers and little barley in eastern North America

≈4-2,000 BCE: spread of agriculture, proliferation of cities in South and Central America

*≈1,000 BCE: Olmec Bronze Age, gradual spread of metalworking to other civilisations follows

750-500 BCE: birth and rise of the Mayans

≈200 BCE: arrival of the first proto-Inuit peoples across the ice sheets of the Bering Sea.

*Reintroduction of horses to the Americas.

≈200 BCE-200 CE: spread of Inuit peoples across tundra and taiga areas of North America, conflict with existing hunter-gatherer societies

*200 BCE-400 CE: spread of horses across the continents

*≈1 CE: domestication of caribou in the far north and of the American Bison on the Great Plains in small numbers. These animals would go on to be the primary beasts of burden for future North American civilizations.

*≈400 CE: moderate adoption of agriculture by some Inuit tribes. These groups settle in the more temperate areas of their cultures territory, founding small villages that grow into towns over
succeeding generations. Andean Iron Age.

*400-600 CE: proliferation of city-states along the southern, eastern, and western coast of North America and the Mississippi river valley. Mostly small (under 20,000 people in total area controlled) and vulnerable to raids by hunter-gatherer and herder tribes that surround them. Reliable trading networks are established in the coming centuries, with resources, technology, and culture flowing freely between shifting coalitions of cities, nomads, and semi-settled groups.

*747 CE: Kashechewan founded. Avatar Wan is born. During his life Avatar Wan leads his people through their many trials, helping to ensure that his people’s community thrives for many years to come, as well as forging alliances with two larger towns further inland. His many great deeds, as well as the timing of his birth during a meteor shower, lead to his being considered an incarnation of the goddess of life and light Raava. Subsequent Avatar’s have been chosen for various reasons, with most showing affinity for belongings of their previous incarnation.

*820-843 CE: Great Mayan War: a devastating conflict that nearly destroys Mayan civilization. Brought about by strain caused by a near decade long drought, two confederations of city-states wage a war of annihilation upon each other for the scarce resources still available to be plundered. The conflict is immensely destructive, both to people and land. Many cities are either sacked and raised, or have themselves rendered uninhabitable when their soil is pilfered.

*800-1200 CE: continued expansion of the system of alliances in the far north. Kashechewan becomes the center of the largest and most prosperous of said groups, sending colonies out to far shores like Greenland and even Iceland. There they reunite with the local tribes, still largely subsisting off fish and marine mammals. This period is a great cultural renaissance for the Inuit, with many of their lost customs and traditions being reintroduced after falling by the wayside.

*982 CE: Erik the Red lands in Greenland. But to his surprise, he finds the desolate land already inhabited by the Inuit peoples. They have roughly the same technology level as the Norsemen, and a brief and one sided naval battle is waged after Erik and his party are driven from the shore. After the skirmish, Erik limps back to Iceland telling tales of the naval prowess of the peoples to the North.

*1237-1247 CE: the Nunavut-Nehiyaw War: after tension built up over many years over borders, wandering herds, and traditional hunting grounds, the two regional powerhouses of Kashechewan led Nunavut and the Nehiyaw(Cree) Confederacy boiled over into open war. The first phase of the conflict (1237-mid 1240) is characterized by traditional border raiding with mostly local tribal forces. As the conflict dragged on, however, both unions centralized their respective militaries, leading to larger, costlier battles. Hudson Bay becomes a battleground with Inuit forces taking advantage of superior seamanship to seize its transportation and food resources. On land the Cree are more dominant, their superior numbers gradually winning out in a war of attrition. Only during winter do the Inuit forces have the opportunity to make up lost ground.

Fearing a possible repetition of the conflicts of the still recovering Mayans, the then Avatar, Suluk, embarks on a great journey to the de-facto capital of the Nehiyaw to request peace talks. They travel the vast distance on foot, and are attacked by both friendly and enemy forces along the way, but eschews violence entirely. The display humbles the Council of Elders, as he presents himself to them in the same tattered parka he had left in. His speech moves them, as it had done his friend, the young Chief of Kashechewan. A ceasefire is declared soon after and the two alliances declare an act of friendship in the Avatar’s honor, he having passed from the exertion of his journey only a week after its conclusion.
≈1300 CE formal foundation of the Aztec Empire. Expansion period follows.

≈1250-1400 CE last non-Amazonian nomadic peoples settle, either establishing new cities and towns or being absorbed into existing ones.

Incan Empire rises from the Kingdom of Cusco, quickly becoming the dominant force in South America. Infrequent fighting between the former plains cultures (Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, etc.).

Revolution in the Aztec Empire as cities under the control of Tenochtitlan grow increasingly restless under the rule of their overlords. A coalition of territories unite under the banner of people’s rule, overthrowing the tyrannical god-kings and electing representatives from each city to govern all equally. A proto-parliamentary system is put in place.

Increasing intermingling of the Cree and Inuit, with the alliances becoming closer and more interdependent over successive generations. While their cultures remain mostly distinct, old grudges gradually die, with certain aspects of each-other’s society being adopted by the other. The Avatar slowly gains the same prestige, if not religious reverence, with the Southern Algonquins as the Northern Inuit.

Consolidation of the east coast into several major blocks: Ojibwe, Iroquois, Choctaw, and Seminole being the most prominent.

1401-1492 CE:
≈1410-1470: Infrequent private-funded, royally-sanctioned trade missions from Iceland and Norway reach as far as Greenland, sailors drawn by legends of a people far to the west whose skill with sail and oars match their own. These trips are rare, given the danger of traveling uncharted seas for the sake of chasing legends. Most European products on offer are merely purchased with provisions for the return journey, but some are exchanged for gold from the Aztecs; silver from the Inca; bison horn, tobacco, and cotton from the Great Plains and southeast, and pearls, furs, walrus ivory, and jade from Nunavut, all in small amounts. Received are wine, silk, maps, amber, and small consignments of gunpowder and firearms. Rumors leak out and into the larger empires of Europe of vast riches to be claimed beyond the horizon.

1458, 1461 and 1469: Plagues ravage the outlying territories of Nunavut, spreading to the interior and beyond via trade. Links with Europe severed. All further trade missions either sent back without making port or sunk.

1462: Formalization of political union between Nunavut and Nehiyaw confederacies after a series of succession crisis to the south due to disease and infighting among an increasingly fractured elite. While a majority of domestic policy remained under the control of elected councils for each individual tribe, foreign and military matters are assumed by the Crown of Kashechewan and it's subsidiaries. They adopt the name: The Confederation of Nunangat

1463, 1467-8: Plagues strike Oslo and Copenhagen, disseminating through central and western Europe.

1480-1484 and 1487-1490: The Iroquois Wars: in response to the aggressive expansion of the Iroquois, including the displacement of several small, unaffiliated tribes from their ancestral lands, an alliance of regional powers assembled to check their ambition. Huron, Inuit/Nehiyaw, Ojibwe, Shawnee, and Delaware forces rally to the defense of their smaller neighbors (if only to preserve the buffer regions between them.)
The Iroquois are left mostly toothless after the conflict, close to a quarter of their territory being seized and returned to its previous inhabitants. The only recently established Confederation establishes itself as the dominant power in the northeast and begins to leverage influence in the region.

12 October 1492: Christoforo Colombo and his crew make landfall on Guanahani/San Salvador, escorted in by Taino fishing boats. He is met by representatives of the local villages and proclaims the land to be under the banner of the Spanish Crown. Despite being unable to understand the foreigner's words, the locals soon tire of his disrespectful behavior and attempt to force him to leave. A short fight breaks out with several Spaniards around twice as many villagers killed. Colombo flees, returning to his ship.

14-15 October 1492: Colombo and his crew are shadowed by a hastily assembled fleet of fishing and naval vessels. The decision is made, against his objections, to take on supplies at the first opportunity and make for Spain.

17 October 1492: Landfall is made and provisions hastily gathered. The Taino force has grown, by this point, to number a score of ships, joined by those of the Arawak. A brief battle takes place and the Pinta is seized, with its crew being subdued. Martin Pinzon is killed, his brother Vincente injured. Negotiations begin that evening for their return.

20 October 1492: After struggling to understand each other for several days, a system was devised to send meaning through a series of simple pictograms. The remaining Spaniards are allowed to return home, after surrendering Colombo for punishment. He is later executed and buried in an unmarked grave. News reached Europe, some months later, and preparations are made in the Hapsburg court.

1490-1520 Ojibwe-Nunangat Tensions: The two most sizable and populous tribal confederacies in the north vie for dominance. Economic sanctions were leveled, raids were launched, retaliations and threats made. No formal declarations of war pass, but the violence remains at a simmering rate, especially at sea and in the St. Lawrence River where acts of piracy became more common.

1494-96 Spanish Punitive Expeditions: A small fleet of warships reach the Caribbean, loaded with sailors and soldiers of the Spanish Crown and Genoan, Venetian, and Dutch mercenaries. They reek havoc on the peaceful, mostly unarmed villages and towns of the region, enslaving those they don't kill. Vessels that only just managed to outmaneuver and outfight the previous expedition prove next to worthless against proper naval vessels and crews. Refugees flee as far as Haiti, Cuba, and Florida, bringing word of the pale men from beyond the sea and their firearms.

Late-1496 the Colony of Grand Bahama is established. Vincente Pinzon is named governor. He enacts a reign of terror upon the people who slew his brother, expanding his holdings with brutal force, in the name of God and Justice.

1496-1510 Spain expands influence and control of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, choking trade between islands and picking them off, one by one. Other European powers begin to make inroads of their own: Portuguese ships arriving in Brazil; Dutch, French, English, and Nordic missions reaching various places along the eastern-seaboard of North America and Greenland. Conflicts ensue between the locals and outsiders, mostly going the way of the natives.

1501: Using old maps and navigation logs Danish-Norwegian ships reestablish contact with the old trading ports in Greenland. They arrive bearing both goods and guns, prepared to force the issue of reopening the valuable trade routes. Luckily for both parties, violence is avoided by the quick action of the local tribes quick drafting of a trade treaty, on mostly fair terms.
1508: French traders arrive in the territory of mainland Nunangat. They dub the people there, “The Water Tribes”, for their capable seamanship and kinship with the northern ocean that dominates their home. A trade mission is allowed, but heavily regulated by the Crown and local authorities. Several incidents take place involving improper contracts and confrontations over sub-par goods being peddled. Criminal violations are frequent, mostly involving drunkenness and soliciting prostitution.

Mid-to-late 1558: Anglo-Mohawk War: After several failed attempts to establish settlements and open trade talks, mostly due to growing resentment of European actions in the Caribbean and the introduction of chattel slavery to the so-called “New World”, the English grow tired of diplomacy. Choosing to exploit a moment of disunity between the Iroquois, as well as continuing animosity towards the group as a whole, the Royal Navy transported a sizable force of soldiers to take advantage. Under the King's Banner, territory in eastern New York is seized. Regional powers look on, deadlocked in their own conflicts.

1550-1600: The English continue to chip away at the weaker nations surrounding their holdings. Progress is kept deliberately slow to avoid angering the Ojibwe on the border and keep sea-lanes free of Nunangat raiders. The Crown-Colony of Canada is established on the southern banks of the St. Lawrence River, joining the already established New York on the coast. It eventually stretches throughout New England as the remaining tribes either are conquered or absorbed as protectorates.

Spain runs into their first stumbling blocks in their steady conquest of the islands of the Caribbean and Gulf in the juggernaut of the Seminole, the meat-grinder of the Mayan City-States, and the colossus of the Aztec Republics. Even with the benefits of firearms, numbers and harsh conditions eat Iberians alive in futile attempts to expand into the interior.

France chooses the road of silent influencers, worming their way into the courts of Kashechewan and tribal capitals around Inuit, Nehiyaw, and Ojibwe territory.

Firearms start to spread across the Americas, purchased from smugglers and legitimate traders, alike. A ban on such sales is passed at the Treaty of Rome.

End Notes

So, how was that? Any pointers would be appreciated, please and thank you.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!