New Faces Old Places

by Kelseyalicia

Summary

Based on the ATLA comic "The Search." What if Ursa HAD been able to take her beloved son, Zuko, his sister, Azula, and his true love, Akiko with her when she ran away, but Iroh wants to get them back? What will they look like with new faces and identities? How would they grow up? What happens if they find out the truth?

Notes

I wrote this after getting the idea after borrowing the graphic novel The Search out the library. Technically speaking I had to order it through the system and they had to get it from a different library. But the idea came to me just before I had to return it.

I hope I did a great job with this AU take on it and you love it. So enjoy this. And today I'm actually gonna keep my promise to myself with my detoxing from too much computer time and watch the movie I said was gonna watch yesterday after I'm done with this. And hope
that the emergency maintenance line works and they fix my broken toilet!

So enjoy!
Isn't it utterly astounding how one uncomplicated individual action can change the course of not only one life but several? Like the ancient metaphors of ripples in a pond or a butterfly beating their wings?

However, what exactly are the choices and decisions that will forever transform the world the most? Moreover, what are the circumstances will they be made under? What will be your mindset? What emotions will be driving that choice? What events are going on in your life that, in turn, will influence countless others? What choices in your history will bring you to determine what you'll choose to do next?

There are so many variables behind each choice we make that every past decision will affect each future choice and in turn, it truly is marvelous the tapestry that is woven from the collective decisions that tie all the lives together that one person choice that affects so many lives.

Furthermore, seldom is one choice and the consequences and its repercussion are so life-alerting to the world and countless lives that you don't ultimately live to see the results of what happens till years in the future. Sometimes not for generations, you won't understand what that one choice did, but you still see the consequences paid nonetheless.

Therefore absolutely you extraordinarily must think before you act. For every single choice you make, no matter how small and insignificant you make think your choice is, it may end up altering the course of more than just your day. It may change the world and everyone living in it.

One example of how a person choice affects many lives and how the consequence of that choice was so far-reaching to the point it affects people 100 years later resulted in the least likely of all place.

It originated on a day that was meant to be a day of new beginnings and enjoyment and love. It was the wedding of Avatar Roku to his true love Ta Min. Each had asked their best friends to take the essential roles in the wedding party.

Roku, whose best friend also happened to be Fire Lord Sozin was best men. Ta Min's best friends Surya was the maid of honor, and her other best friend Xiu Mei was her bridesmaid.

It was a stunning and fabulous wedding, and everyone was genuinely enjoying themselves. It was then Ta Min and her best friends were having a private conversation with her new husband.

Both of Ta Min's best friends were stunningly attractive young women. Xiu Mei was tall with an envious figure with raven black hair in odango buns with white lotus flowers woven into them. She had a rather good-looking face with well-sculpted features, full lips, and brilliant gold eyes.

For the wedding, she'd sewn herself a stunningly gorgeous gown. It was the most exquisite shade of pink, with a sweetheart neckline, magnificent embellishment along with the flowy skirt and even managed to narrow her waist flawlessly.

Her other best friend Surya had a goddess-like beauty. Her jet-black hair was in a braided hair bun with a small golden dragon hair comb holding it in place. She had a very fit, curvy body that was well endowed with flawless alabaster skin and brilliant jade green eyes every woman in her family line had.
Her favorite color was fuchsia, which she regularly wore never the traditional red of the Fire Nation. Xiu Mei, who had a knack for designing, had not only sewn her bridesmaid dress but done both the bride's and maid of honor's outfits as well. It was her wedding present from her best friend.

Still, after the vows had been said and before they feast Roku was having a private conversation with his wife and her best friends. One that would forever change the course of their families.

"Ta Min is so lucky to have a wonderful and honorable man like you, Roku for a husband. We are honored to welcome you in our circle of friends and trust," Xiu Mei was saying with such ecstasy in her voice over the whole event. Weddings and such celebrations always made her fill with happiness and wanting to cry tears of glee all day long.

"Thank you, Xiu Mei. I'm delighted my wife has such wonderful friends like you to count on. You and Surya are exceptional young women, and it's an honor to be your friends as well."

"I consider it a great honor on behalf of my people that I could be the one to gift you with your animal guide, Fang. Furthermore that we have a trusted ally in the Avatar. Plus, to know the bonds, we make today will stand the test of time. That the bonds of our friendship will be forever." Surya smiled with perfect teeth her jade green eyes sparkled with happiness and hope.

"Yes, no matter what comes in the future for all of us, let us make a promise. That we all remain friends forever." Ta Min declared passionately smiling with such joy that her true love and best friends would be forever by her side.

It was at this moment in time the four vowed no-matter-what they and all who descended them would always be friends and help each other no matter what.

All of sudden they heard the sound of footsteps approaching them. Looking up, they saw their Fire Lord coming towards them. "Pardon me. I don't mean to intrude. But mind if I borrow the groom for a moment?" Sozin inquired as he came upon the group.

"Well, it's not very traditional, but okay." Ta Min agreed reluctantly. However, her friends Surya and Xiu Mei both got edgy looks as Sozin led Roku away. They both seemed to be sensing what Sozin wanted to talk about alone was troubling news.

No-one would ever guess two choices were made that day would change the course of many lives. One was a vow of eternal love and friendship between three families. The other was a choice that would break the bond of two friends who were like brothers and change the course of the world's fate forever.

Years past from this moment and many things changed for better or worse. While Roku and Ta Min had a daughter Rina as did Xiu Mei eventually and Surya, whom they named Xiaoli and Kiku respectfully, they didn't end up with happy lives in the end. Sozin's choices affected all their lives and all who followed them for years to come.

The choice Sozin made that changed all their lives and the world was when he chose to murder his once best friend and brother in flames Roku by leaving him to die at the hands of a volcano.

That changed the world's fate and the fate of all three women and all their descendants forever. For Ta Min's best friends both were more than just her best friends but highly significant people to the world, and when Sozin made that choice it changed things for the worst.

Surya's family were the leaders of the Legendary Dragon Guardians. Female firebending warrior women chosen by the dragons themselves to protect them and the origins of firebending. They
alone had pure dragon fire inside them and a secure spiritual connection to the original firebenders.

Xiu Mei’s family also held a powerful secret as well that she and her husband alone been trusted with. Xiu Mei's family were for centuries part of the ancient secret society The Order of the White Lotus an organization that transcends the Four Nations, and her family held the title of Grand Yon or Second in Command.

Yons were special agents sent to preserve profoundly spiritual locations or rather significant individuals. Her family had for generations protected the leaders of the Dragon Guardians and never faltered in that responsibility.

However, after the assassination of Roku, the three best friends and their daughters' lives were forever changed. Because Sozin's next two victims in his war on the rest of the Nations were the Air Nomads after that, it would be the Dragons and Dragon Guardians on the chopping block.

Ta Min and her daughter were present with her best friends and their daughters when the Dragon Guardians, along with some of Order, decided what to do knowing what Sozin had in mind. Recognizing Sozin was capable of anything if he could assassinate the Avatar his once best friend and brother in flames there was only one thing to do.

The Order and Dragon Guardians all agreed unanimous that the Grand Yon and her charge the Dragon Guardian Leader would have to go into hiding and remain in hiding. They disputed for hours with this decision but in the end, did see it was for their own good. If there was any chance to preserve one bloodline that may outlast the massacre to come and save any dragons one line had to remain undetected.

With heavy hearts, Surya and her daughter recited the Dragon Guardian vow one last time with the rest of the Dragon Guardians.

"From the first rays of the morning sun, my spirit's embers ignite again, turning the shadows inside me into the light.

My sword is at the ready. I will survive this journey and carry courage ahead to what awaits.

The forces of evil are strong, they do not fear us, but we will show them the error of their ways.

When daybreak comes, so does our resolve in remaining brave. Even the bitterest of enemies can stand united and face as one!"

Then they all left never to return and awaited what was to come. Ta Min went to live out the rest of her days on Ember Island. Surya and Xiu Mei lived out their final days on the Cliffs of Fire where it said your powers are tested against the most influential forces and only the strongest will survive.

After their mothers' death, their daughters Rina, Kiku, and Xiaoli all began their lives living in hiding from Sozin's son Azulon and striving to live happy lives and do some good in a world that was gradually becoming decaying with corruption.

Rina found a humble seaside village far away from the capital called Hira’a and married a man Jinzuk who was the local magistrate. She became the village master herbalist and often thought of her best friends Kiku and Xiaoli.

They would send her cryptic letters via Xiaoli's White Lotus Dove written in Dragon Guardian Code when they were away. They had to keep on the move. They didn't stay in any place long enough to draw attention to themselves but were always willing to help the sick, impoverished and tyrannized.
Except when it was summertime. Despite the Fire Nation was centered around the equator and therefore pretty much summer all year round, the only time Xiaoli and Kiku came to Hira'a personally, and stayed was during the summer, and it was these moments the friends look forward to the most.

One summer changed everything, and that was summer several decades after their own mothers’ death when they had their own daughters — calling it a blessing from the spirits that their bloodlines would continue. Plus, their vow of friendship would extend to a new generation; they were glad their daughters were only born a week apart. Rina's daughter Ursa was born first, followed by Kiku's daughter Sakiko and then finally Xiaoli's daughter Xiaoying.

They strongly felt with so much dying and sin going on in the world that the Black Spirit of Death Anto must be feasting heartily on all the souls dying. Therefore the White Spirit of Life Alanna must be singing joyfully to grant them children so late in life.

It was said Alanna the White Spirit of Life was the daughter of the Spirit of Light and her duty was to conceive life and protect all that was good on this earth. That she was near when anything was born into this life. She was the one who bestowed the world with children. That she sang the world and new life into creation.

Consequently, regarding how old they all were when they had their daughters, they considered the fact she must have felt they had something extraordinarily exceptional to offer if she'd sung her song. It was true they'd all dreamed of the White Spirit and heard her sing to them telling them they'd have daughters.

The dream had been so realistic. A tall exotic woman with hair whiter than snow in an extravagant hairstyle, wearing flowing white robes accentuated with soft pinks and lavender, with shimmering dawn-tinted butterfly wings on her back, had gazed her stunning azure blue eyes at them and sang to them her song.

"All the colors in the Four Nations,
All the voices fill the Air Temples.
Every spirit that reaches out,
That reaches out to find where love begins.
Every word of every story,
Every star in every sky,
Every corner of the Realms lives to testify.
For as long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.
I'll be the light in the darkness,
when your fight goes out.
With every breath, I take,
I will give thank to the Spirits beyond.
For as long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.

From the Earth Kingdom to the Air Temples,
From the Water Tribes to the Fire Nation,
Every heart that reaches out,
Every heart that reaches out to offer peace.
Every simple act of kindness,
Every step to one of the Nations,
All the hope, in every heart,
will speak of what love has done.

As long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.
I'll be the light in the darkness,
when your fight goes out.
With every breath, I take,
Will give thanks to the Spirits beyond.
As long as I shall live, I will vow to love...
I will vow to love.
(For as long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.)
I'll be the light in the darkness
when your fight goes out.
With every breath, I take,
Will give thank to the Spirits beyond.
As long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.

As long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.
I'll be the light in the darkness,
when your fight goes out.
With every breath, I take,
Will give thanks to the Spirits beyond.
As long as I shall live, I will vow to love...
I will vow to love.
(For as long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.)
I'll be the light in the darkness
when your fight goes out.
With every breath, I take,
Will give thank to the Spirits beyond.
As long as I shall live,
I will vow to love.

And with that had come to the blessing of their daughters. That was almost six years ago. It was summertime again, and the whole village of Hira'a was abuzz because the magistrate was throwing his daughter a birthday party for her sixth birthday.

The village was incredibly festive with any celebration. It was a particularly close-knit community where everyone knew everyone, and pretty much everyone was extremely welcoming, and you could ask anyone to give the shirt off their back, and they do it.

Hira'a had precious few things which to be proud of since it was frequently disregarded by the rest of the Fire Nation as a whole. It was incredibly proud of its acting troop which was the life and heart of the village.

One of the other things the village had to be proud of was this was the only place in all of the Fire Nation you could obtain sunburst pearls. The oysters that lived in the waters near the seashore made a uniquely colored pearl that was sunburst yellow.
It was a real hot commodity among artisans as they were so rare and hard to come by. So it was one source of revenue when the season was right to try and dive for them. Though this was still dangerous work almost as hazardous as the Forgotten Valley that bordered the village that came with all sorts of stories about dangerous spirits.

But at the moment the village wasn't thinking about anything other then their beloved leader daughter was turning six years old, and the party was going to be 5:00 that afternoon. The villagers were all happily chatting about what was going on and how they couldn't wait for it.

"Good morning, Magistrate Jinzuk. How is darling little Ursa today?" inquired a middle-aged woman in cerise and violet attire. She'd her snow-white hair pinned in a tight hair bun with a purple blossom that looked like a cross between a lily and an orchid.

Ursa's father looked up to see the benevolent face of the village school teacher. She had set aside her wooden cane as she was bending down to pick up some children's playthings scattered in the schoolyard.

Compared to the rest of the Fire Nation, they weren't so strict and mind molding here in Hira'a. Ms. Lal was like everyone's grandmother and treated all her students as if they were her grandchildren. She was dotting, encouraging and willing to listen to anyone who had a problem.

Though she did have a bit of a problem of keeping up with them sometimes because of her limp. She'd been in an accident years ago that caused her to have a limp, but she didn't let it slow her down any.

"Ms. Lal, how are you doing today? Still thinking sunny thoughts?" he asked her in a genial tone of voice.

"Don't I tell all my little ones to think sunny thoughts?" she replied with a little giggle of her own. "You'll get through life much better if you look at the glass half full then half empty. That's why I tell all my students to look on the bright side."

"Well, you're an outstanding teacher the best in all the Fire Nation, Ms. Lal," the man compliments the woman who flushed a faint shade of pink.

"I'm a humble teacher, Jinzuk," she spoke in a modest tone but still smiled proudly. "I only encourage the little ones to do their best and hope to think for themselves. I don't approve how other schools are run in the rest of the Nation. I want my little ones to be able to think for themselves. Not all be cut from the same cloth."

"Well, however you do it, you do wonders with all the youngsters in the village. They are all bright-eyed and curious, and it's a nice change of pace from what I hear when I talk to your husband," he remarked in an impressed manner.

"Yes, Kito, bless his soul," as Ms. Lal paused for a moment to consider her husband of so many years. He was the local tradesman in the village. The only one to do any trading with any outsiders actually.

"He's such a lovable giant. Could stand to lose a little weight to be fair. Though he a giant of a man he's got a big heart and he's great with kids. The only time he gets too wrapped up in work is when the traders come to the village," Ms. Lal comment, thinking of her husband. He was both very tall and overweight; on the other hand, it wouldn't harm a fly. He is the one to get it out of a spider web not swat it.
"I know the man a bit of a perfectionist at times," Jinzuk noted, and the school teacher shrugged.

"He simply likes things to be in order and done right and wants us and our family to be cared for," she clarified as to her husband need for things to be 'perfect'

"So yeah he likes to do his best and things in their place. But all the same, if you're wondering if our family will be at your daughter's party, don't worry. We'll be there."

"Great. Can't wait to see you. Got to get home and help my wife get ready for the party." he replied as he looks to wear that sun was in the sky to tell him the time.

"Looking forward to it," Ms. Lal replied in her honey-toned voice.

"See you later, Ms. Lal."

"See you soon, Jinzuk." as the two smiled with a bow and parted ways on this delightful sunshiny day.

Back at the house, the women were busy setting up for the party while their little girls were running around the yard laughing and singing. Even though they're out of their youth, it was still clear that Rina, Kiku, and Xiaoli all took after their mothers in looks.

Xiaoli right now was currently occupied with preparing a feast. She may've been on the one hand a master of the art of ninjutsu, but on the other hand, her family was still naturally gifted when it came to cooking and fashion.

Right now she was super busy making spice cakes, curry, and her family special 'mystery cookies'. She was adding the spices for the spice cake when Rina came over and tapped her on the shoulder. She jumped high in the air before coming back down to catch her breath and looking at her best friend a little annoyed.

"AH! Rina! Don't do that! You'll give me a heart attack! Or worse ruin the recipe!" she lightly reprimanded her best friend.

"I'm sorry, Xiaoli. Why do you have to insist on everything being perfect when it comes to your cooking or when you're making clothes? It seems a trait you've passed on to little Xiaoying if what I just saw our little girls going on about outside is anything to go about," as she told her about Xiaoying giving Ursa her present early.

Xiaoli lowered her head and played with her short pigtails for a moment. Then she spoke her words carefully. "I do not wish to fail in my duties, Rina. None of my family has failed in any of our duties, so we tend to be a bit of perfectionist when it comes to whatever we do. Whether its Order duties or are natural talents in homemaking. We strive for perfection and fear failure because it's just not an option."

"Don't you think its okay to fail once in a while?"

She then gave Rina an amused grin, "Well, how do you think I found my daughter's father? I fell flat on my face! I was so klutzy and tongue-tied I couldn't do anything right with Xiaoying's father!" she laughed thinking of her lost love.

Rina did touch her shoulder sympathetically. "I'm sorry that neither Xiaoying or Sakiko will know their fathers. It must've been tough to find love only to lose it when such great happiness was approaching."
"Alanna the White Spirit gave us all blessings yet Anto the Black Spirit still sang his song of death and swung his sword to cut our happiness. They do their dance and their battle. It seems if you have a dream of the White Spirit, you should know you'll be visited by the Black Spirit in your dreams as well."

"Was it really scary?"

"Rina, both of us and our mothers faced countless dangers, and I who carry the blood of the Dragon Guardians know this," called a voice from the doorway as they turned to see a long-haired beauty with a golden dragon wing barrette in her hair.

Her jade green eyes were filled with passion and devotion and yet still seen more scars of battle then she cared to remember said as she delicately walked across the threshold of her best friend's home.

"As my people would often say in the past. "Our journey may be long and arduous, but our courage will guide along the way." she recited one of the proverbs of the Dragon Guardians.

"You're always so wise, Kiku, and so beautifully eloquent," praised Rina in a gracious way which made Kiku grin brilliantly at her friend.

"Thank you, Rina, you're one of the kindhearted people this world has ever known," returning her compliment with one of her own. She sighed dejectedly as she pulled back her long and loose hair before continuing with her train of thoughts.

"I too wish my love didn't have to die to protect our child and me just as Xiaoli's had to do for her," in her melancholy voice as she was reminiscing about why their daughters would never know their fathers or even their names.

"That it could've been another way to keep our secret safe. However, our loves who must continue to remain anonymous knew that they were doing the greatest act of love there was. Giving their lives for the sake of their wives and unborn children."

"But that battle still disturbs you, I can see that as clear as day. Every time you visit, I see in your brilliant jade eyes you've seen more horrors. It worries me, Kiku."

"I've seen numerous terrors I wish I could unsee, Rina," she shuddered as if ice had gone down her spine. "I don't particularly like it when I can see Anto's handiwork personally as infects people to try and end a whole culture with his greed. Like that wasn't filled enough when the Air Nomads died."

"You feel the pain every time one of your sisters dies?" Rina chanced a guess to the secret to her friend's pain.

"Yes, every time someone kills a dragon and violates a Dragon Guardian just to become a "Dragon," I can feel it. More than that, I see it in my dreams, my nightmares. Spirits know what Sakiko will see when she's old enough to understand." Kiku repressed the shudder of disgust.

Though it was real The Dragon Guardian Sisterhood was linked to each other through the dragon fire they all shared and their spiritual connection to the dragons. Therefore when either a dragon died, or a 'sister' died everyone felt it.

But for their leader who was the most spiritually connected as they'd been chosen first and given the highest honor of them all? The spiritual connection was the strongest, and with each death, it only gave Kiku a worse case of PTSD having to live the death throes of her vanquished sisters and
the original firebenders.

Every Dragon Guardian was beautiful, brave, wise and devoted to their cause and would gladly give their life for their mission. That was true and would be till the last one fell. Still, what would the ultimate cost be when the last one fell?

It was a sickening thought to dwell in the back of Kiku's mind, which is why she tried to cover it up most of the time by being a bit fun and flirty. How she even found love and had her beautiful daughter Sakiko. She only hoped Sakiko's life would be full of happiness and not sorrow.

While each of the mothers had been expressing their anguish and other anxieties unostentatiously in the kitchen outside their daughters were laughing and singing as they were holding hands as they twirled around in a circle singing their family song of friendship.

"When every moment gets too hard
The end of the road can feel so far
No matter how much time we're apart
I'm always near you

I'll be the shelter in your rain
Help you to find your smile again
I'll make you laugh at a broken heart
Wherever you are

Cause I'm never gonna walk away
If the walls come down someday
All alone and you feel afraid
I'll be there when you call my name
You can always depend on me
I believe until forever ends
I will be your friend

So many people come and go
But nothing can change and you, I know
You'll never be just a face in the crowd
And time will show
Through the seasons and the years
I will always hold you dear
Never you fear

Cause I'm never gonna walk away
If the walls come down someday
All alone and you feel afraid
I'll be there when you call my name
You can always depend on me
I believe until forever ends
I will be your friend

I'll be around when every candle burns down low
And I want you, and I want you to know

Cause I'm never gonna walk away
If the walls come down someday
All alone and you feel afraid
I'll be there when you call my name
You can always depend on me
I believe until forever ends
I will be your friend!' and then they all fell laughing.

"We are best friends forever! Just like our mommies and our grandparents! Friends forever!" Ursa shouted cheerfully as she helped her best friends up.

"Yeah, we will always be together, and no matter what happens in life, we'll be there whenever the other needs us! Whatever it is will help the other out!" Xiaoying agreed while smiling a big smile.

"And if our loved ones in danger we promise to look out for each other! Let's make our own pact here and now," Sakiko said solemnly.

"Okay. What is it?" Ursa asked with bright eyes.

"That when we grow up and have kids of our own if anything should happen to any of us that the other will raise other's child in their place and if the final one hasn't had children yet they'll be godmother to all children," Sakiko stated in a severe voice to which the two other girls nodded in agreement.

"We promise on the holy first fire of the dragons that we will watch over each other children and do anything to protect them at all cost!" and they watched as Sakiko's special fire formed a firebending dragon fire friendship bracelet sealing the pact.

"Okay, now that we've sealed our pact, what do you think of my birthday present to you, Ursa? As it's my first outfit, I ever made since Mommy taught me how to sew!" Xiaoying asked breathlessly as they relished her handiwork.

Ursa first looked at her best friends before her dress. Xiaoying and Sakiko both had the same prominent features that seemed pass from one generation to the next in their family bloodlines.

Xiaoying had seemed to incorporate both her grandma and her mother's hairstyle together. She wore her raven black hair with odango buns with flowers woven into them and had long pigtails falling from them. She also wore a traditional topknot.

Though unlike her grandmother who'd worn white lotus, she wore fire flowers that were ruby red and looked more like a calypso. She was always fabulously dressed, and though she was already undergoing her training to take her mother's place one day as Grand Yon she was still lots of fun.

Sakiko was a little goddess with her family legendary beauty particularity their trademark jade green eyes. She wore her jet-black hair in an elegant knot on top of her head and again her secret training in her heritage was essential, but when they're together it was all about friendship.

Now they're all looking at the fabulous dress Xiaoying had created for Ursa. It was a color she called wildfire pink. The neckline was designed to resemble a flame with three-quarter sleeves. The embroidery in the skirt was telling a story. Sakiko had loaned her some of the family's priceless jewelry, and she looked like a princess.

They're all admiring the dress when they heard a male voice behind them. The trio of girls turned quickly around and noticed a local boy named Ikem. He was a charming little boy that lived just down the road.

But right now he was trying to suppress laughter. The girls had hands on their hips, asking what the joke was? He started to say how silly the dress was and why did all the girls ever think about was
being princesses and stupid junk like that?

They were getting mad at him as they started to defend their friend and work. But then Ikem made a more significant mistake then just being a silly dumb six-year-old boy. He was laughing so hard at them he lost his balance and fell over ripping the dress.

Ursa was in tears seeing her birthday dress that was a present was ruined. She was so upset she kicked Ikem in the stomach and shoved dirt in his face. That wasn't the end of the torment for him.

Sakiko used her firebending to shoot flaming arrows at him till one nailed him in the butt and Xiaoying uses a bomb with a strong adhesive to cement his feet together and tied his hands behind his back.

Then after he was captured the other girls told him he had to help them fix the dress in time for the party. It was his fault the dress was ruined therefore he had to help them fix it, or they would do something so bad he didn't want to know what they do!

He relented and helped fix the dress in time for the party, and after apologizing to Ursa, he did say she was the prettiest girl in all of Hira'a and did look like a real princess. He also said she was lucky to have Xiaoying and Sakiko as her best friends.

That day cemented the four in their own forever friendship and Ursa's favorite gifts for her birthday was her dress, Ikem's bond, and Sakiko's beautiful diary to keep all her precious memories and thoughts safe.

She wrote her first entry after the party down. "Today I understand why love and friendship are so important to my family and why my grandparents made their vow of friendship.

It's more than the friendship we are family and when it comes to love there more than enough to go around. And when you show love and kindness to others, it comes back to you in your time of need.

I know my friends will be a treasure that can't be replaced and that love and friendship are what matter the most as they helped make my birthday the best day of my life!

The gifts were lovely, but the gift of our friendship is the best gift of all. I can't wait till I've something more to write in you about what the next offering of love and friendship is.

P.S. I think Ikem may be starting to like me."

Ten summers later.

"Will you hurry up? We need the stage fully set up for the show if we are going pull off this for the Summer Solstice celebration!" Ikem was berating the girls in an annoyed tone.

"Ikem, please calm down! You know the Hira'a acting troop never failed to get production done on time. So don't fret about it now," Ursa assured her boyfriend from the stage where the people behind them were getting the set put up.

"But we aren't just doing a play this time, Ursa. We are also doing a ballet," her boyfriend moaned pitifully as if that was a big difference.

"So what the problem, Ikem?" called out Sakiko as she started to dance over to them correctly. "Phoenix Heaven" is one of the rare stories that is both a play and ballet in Fire Nation performing arts. She paused in her dancing for a few moments and then pirouette off the stage and began to
recant what the story they're performing was all about.

"It tells the legend of the Sun Spirit Agni's daughter Agnimitra being cursed by a foul sorcerer into the form of a phoenix and a vow can only break the spell of true love.

Meanwhile, in the Fire Nation Royal Palace, the Crown Prince Mishal is supposed to marry, but he's aloof, detached and apathetic and never once been touched by love.

One day he goes out hunting with one of his lackeys and sees a phoenix and is determined to annihilate it only for when the sun goes down on the Cliffs of Fire she transformed into the most alluring woman he's ever seen.

Gradually, he learns to love and earns her love in return; however, he must still prove his love to break the spell. At a special kind of Dragon Ball, she supposes to come but cannot due to an eclipse and the sorcerer sends a fraud in her place and he makes the vow to the wrong girl.

After realizing his mistake and seeing Agnimitra dying, he challenges the sorcerer to an Agni Kai for her life. Saying if he loses the duel then he can have both his life and the kingdom.

Fighting for love and honor for the first time the Crown Prince is able to win the duel and the sorcerer perishes, and Agnimitra is restored to life. Her father gives her a choice. Be restored as a spirit or become mortal and live out the rest of her life with her love.

She becomes human and marries her true love, and their reign over the Fire Nation marks a golden age." Sakiko finished explaining the plot of "Phoenix Heaven"

"And everyone in the village acknowledges that Sakiko is unquestionably the best ballerina to play Agnimitra in the ballet version as Ursa's the correct actress to play her in the stage version, Ikem.

You'll do fine in both the ballet and stage production. You've had exceptional teachers. Besides, we couldn't find anyone else to play the role of Prince Mishal. I'll make sure both your costumes fit flawlessly, and your toe shoes are comfortable," guaranteed Xiaoying as she came trotting over with a sewing basket swinging under her arm.

"Xiaoying! How does it go with our costumes?" the girls asked with great anticipation.

"Well, they are different colors and fabrics because the ballet and stage shows are various. The ballet has darker tones with more prints for symbolism purpose, while the plays have far bolder and more dramatic colors for visual appeal as they hear the story.

As opposed to the ballet that is told through movement and dance and without words. But here is my sketch if you want to see how they are coming along," as she showed them her sketchbook full of designs for her friends which they approved off.

"So I've to execute a perfect grade jete during the key part of the story. Mom's a bit too old to teach me to do. I hope I can pull it off. It's like the hardest move in the whole story," Sakiko expressed in an anxious voice as to what was the hardest part for her in her half of the show.

"I'm more worried about when I have to sing the Phoenix Ballad. When Agnimitra is asking Mishal if he understands love and willing to do what needs to be done to break the spell and for them to be together?" Ursa replied in her own anxiety.

"You don't sound that bad, Ursa. You won't freeze up during the play!" assured her boyfriend. "Come on, just sing it for us now just to get the butterflies out now and feel more comfortable singing it."
"Alright, maybe with my friends I'll feel better before doing in front of the whole village." taking a deep breath she closed her eyes and cleared her throat and sang.

"Do you want to be in the Earth Kingdom and carve?
Do you want to be an actor up in lights?
Do you want to be in the Fire Nation and fight for what you were taught believe is right?
Do you want to travel to the Four Nations?
Do you want to be a Water Tribe warrior?
Or make your own path to touch the clouds above?

Go anywhere you want to go,
Bring to life your fantasies,
I want something in return. I want you to burn,
burn for me, baby.
Like a candle in my night,
Burn.
Burn for me, burn for me. Are gonna' be a trader and sell?
Are you gonna' be a Healer and fix?
Or go-between and touch the Spirit's face?
Are you gonna' be a dreamer, who sleeps?
Are you gonna' be a sinner, who weeps?
Or an angel under grace?

I'll lay down on your bed of burning coals,
Offer up my heart and soul,
But in return...I want you to burn,
burn for me, baby.
Like a candle in my night.

.Burn,
Burn for me, burn for me

.Ohh,
I want you to burn, baby.
Ooh,
Laugh with me,
Smile with me,
Pray with me,
Fly with me,
Live with me,
Die with me.

I want you to burn,
Burn for me, baby.
Like a candle in my night.

.Burn,
Burn for me, burn for me.

I want you to burn,
Burn for me, baby.
Like a candle in my night.

.Burn,
Burn for me, burn for me!"
As she finished, everyone clapped and complimented her saying she had done a stunning job and she had a voice of a phoenix herself. Three nights later during the three-night celebration of the Summer Solstice, the performance was met with standing ovations, and everyone would remember these four and this summer for years to come.

Ursa's wrote in her diary after the celebration. "I never dreamed my 16th summer would be so magical, and my friends and I could have such fun. I hope one day I can share this magical and enchanting world with my own children and maybe my friends' children as well"

Two Summers later.

It was a peaceful and serene location. Rina had planted years ago a cherry tree along with some of her perennials in this spot. For years her family and best friends and their daughters had shared so many memories here. Picnics, storytime, sharing mystery cookies, just mother-daughter time. She couldn't think of any other place to lay her best friends ashes to rest.

She should've known and been prepared for it. Why else would Anto have personally visited her in a dream? Singing his song to her with his sword and whip? Only when he wants to be exceptionally cruel and make off with a 'prize soul" did he visit a person loved ones in their dreams. Then he swings his black soul blade down to end their life and use his whip to collect their soul.

She'd seen him in her dreams. He was terrorizing. Seven feet tall, bone-white skin, dressed black and blood red with his yellow ocher cat-like eyes. Cold, cruel, apathetic even sarcastic as the narcissistic spirit sang his song to her of her two best friends impending death.

"In sickness, I spoke to you, at death, I came. My voice calls to you, leading you to your doom. If you try to run, you'll find Anto, The Black Spirit of Death will find you again...

When with me, our strange existence, my power over you will grow stronger yet. Though you yearn for the life you left behind, The Black Spirit of Death will trap you...

Those, who have seen my face, run away in fear, no mask for me to wear when they hear [me.]

My body and power in one combined, The Black Spirit of Death will rule you once more.

Beware, Anto!

In reality, we always knew, that spirit and mystery were in me. And in this world, where men are blind, The Black Spirit of Death will kill them all again!

I am Anto, the Black Spirit of Death! I am Anto! The Black Spirit of Death! I AM ANTO, THE BLACK SPIRIT OF DEATH!" then he laughed a blood-chilling laugh, and she woke up.

The next day her friends were supposed to arrive for their summertime visit instead their 18-year-old daughters brought two golden urns with their ashes and explained they'd died, and now they wish to lay them to rest where they happiest. So the families were holding a private service at the cherry blossom tree as they laid Kiku and Xiaoli to rest.
"I'm sad to know this is goodbye, my friends. May you know peace and happiness wherever your souls are now. Know you'll be remembered. That you're loved and that your memories live on in your loved ones. That your legacy lives on in your daughters. I will miss you both. My friends, my sisters, my family," as Rina bent down to lay peculiar white wildflowers on the grave.

"I'll miss you both, Kiku and Xiaoli. You two were like the aunts I never had. I'll miss seeing you both every summer. I'll miss your teasing and sense of humor, Xiaoli, as well as your beautiful cookies. Especially your mystery cookies with afternoon tea.

I'll miss your captivating stories, Kiku. I'll never again get to say the words. "Tell us stories and legends of a long time ago, an era when spirit and man could exist in harmony." Ursa wept as she laid her flowers down the graves.

"I can think only of what my father told me when my mother passed. He told me, "We soar above the world into the light. Nothing will hinder us." Jinzuk spoke of his father's eulogy for his mother.

"We thank you for your last words for our mothers. They mean a lot. Now we must say goodbye ourselves," wept Xiaoying as she cleared her throat and kneeled down towards her mother's urn and spoke her final words.

"Mother, I know right now your spirit is being carried to untouched lands, far, far away from this place. Please go there. Know your strength emboldens me."

Sakiko then stepped forward and spoke her final works with tears flowing from her jade green eyes. "You once told me, Mom, that before anything else, our job as Dragon Guardians were to protect the sacred dragons and the origins of firebending from harm was the most important thing ever. And not let anything obstruct me from my duties.

But I've come to realize you taught me I've other duties just as important as that one, and I need to make sure they are met and fulfilled as well. I will not fail in any of them and keep the Dragon Guardian bloodline alive. I swear it. May you finally be at peace, Mother."

They finished the service after that and went back into the house after that. Xiaoying and Sakiko spent the remainder of the summer with Ursa's family before they got ready to leave. Ursa tried to persuade them to stay, but they shook their heads.

"Please stay. Don't leave me! I can't stand the fact your leaving when you won't have any family to take care of you. I got a bad feeling this could be the last time we see each other. Please stay," she pleaded through her streaming tears.

"Ursa, we wish we could stay. Hira'a, the close thing we have a place to call home. And yes your family is our family," Sakiko informed her with a gentle hug in a soothing voice.

"Then why won't you stay?" she asked in a bewildered tone.

"We've worked to do elsewhere, and fate is telling us we must be elsewhere. Besides, we can't jeopardize you or your family. Remember what was decided by our grandmothers and why?"

"Yes," chocked out Ursa, answering Xiaoying's question if she didn't like the reality of the answer that she already knew. "It's not safe for us to be together except one time a year if your bloodlines are to stay safe from the Fire Lord's family."

"We also sense soon there will be a time of great danger coming. Furthermore, we can't endanger the one place that is home for all of us or what may be the only hope for our families, the Fire Nation or the world if we stay together." Sakiko recalled her of their responsibility and promises
that were so near and dear to their families.

"But what if this is the last time we see each other? I can't say goodbye to my best friends!"

"We will see each other again. This isn't goodbye, Ursa. It's just until we see you again. We promise one day we shall all meet again. Our family kept its promise, and so shall we." Xiaoying assured her with as much force as she could even though there was a hint of doubt in her voice.

"Who knows, Ursa? Possibly the next time we meet, we shall all have children of our own who will be friends, and they shall be singing the friendship song, and we'll all be happy and safe. Who knows? I want to be when we meet again. As mothers with our children altogether." Sakiko spoke in a sad and dreamy tone.

"Let's hope that's when we meet again then. I love you both. My friends and my sisters."

"We love you too, Ursa. Our friend and our sister." and with one last hug, they said their goodbye and Xiaoying and Sakiko left. Ursa didn't know how right her feelings of trepidation would be or how this be the last time she would see one of her friends.

That night she opened her diary and wrote. "Saying goodbye is the hardest word ever. No-one should have to say that word ever. If saying I love you is the hardest three words ever to say then Goodbye is the next hardest word to say.

My best friends, my sisters, my family are going away, and we have no idea when we will see each other again. What if we never see one another still? Is this the first of many heartbreaks?

Saying goodbye to Aunt Xiaoli and Aunt Kiku was hard enough. Have I said goodbye forever to Xiaoying and Sakiko?"

Three years later.

Ursa hadn't seen or heard from her best friends in three years. At that time, she'd found comfort in her boyfriend Ikem and become one of the best actresses in Hira'a. She found she could pour her emotions and feelings by pretending to be someone else.

Her favorite play was "Love amongst the dragons," and she got the lead role when she was 21 years old was delighted when Ikem got it too. They'd been fooling around with one scene when he unexpectedly proposed to her.

She'd been confused at first, and then he brought up the fact he'd fallen in love with her at her sixth birthday party after she'd kicked him in the stomach and shoved dirt in his face.

She'd been so delighted she agreed to marry him, and he promised that they would seek and find Xiaoying and Sakiko so they could be part of the wedding. Filled with such joy she ran home to tell her mother the joyous news.

Only for her world to burn to ashes in a matter of moments. Fire Lord Azulon had tracked her family down and forced her to accept his second son Prince Ozai's hand in marriage. How could she possibly say no to either Fire Lord or a Prince? It broke her heart.

She was forced to make Ikem go away to ensure they spared his life as she was taken away from her home and her heart only broke more being told she must forget her past. Her home, her parents, her friends.

But what Ozai would never find out about was Ursa had managed to smuggle something with her
to the Fire Nation Capital was a way to hold one last link to her past, a way it would forever be
with her so her memories would always be there.

She'd managed to keep her diary with her all this time, and she swore by the Fire Fire that Ozai
would never take that from her. He wouldn't take her precious memories and last physical link to
her past away from her.

It was shortly after the birth of her son Zuko that something happened that gave Ursa hope in her
darkest hour. It was a couple of days after Ozai had tried to cast Zuko out for thinking him not a
firebender.

Ursa had pleaded with him not to do it, and with help from the Fire Sages, they had convinced him
to give Zuko a chance. To her, it didn't matter if Zuko was a bender or not.

Furthermore, you couldn't tell if a newborn was bender or not at any rate. That wasn't revealed until
early childhood. When the child either did bending because of an emotional crisis or out of reflex.
But again it wasn't something that didn't tend to happen till a child was at least around the age of 4.

When they'd developed enough cognitively along with moderately emotionally plus their chi had
time to grow as well. You honestly couldn't tell with a newborn no matter what anyone said. Other
then all the Air Nomads were naturally benders due to their spirituality.

She was alone in her bedroom with Zuko nursing him crying as she held him. There were fresh
bruise marks on her body because of a fight she'd gotten into with Ozai. He'd left to go firebend
training after he'd beaten her up for standing up for her son again.

"Oh, Zuko, my love, I fear for your future, our future. What kind of life awaits us? Or any other
child I might have? Will we ever be safe? Or happy?" she wept pitifully as she rubbed his back
soothingly.

"I don't have the power to see the future, Princess Ursa, but I can offer some protection to you and
your son. If you will allow me and my friends to help you," came a soft voice from behind her.

"What? Who there? Show yourself!" as Ursa clutched Zuko tighter in fear as she tried to find the
source of the voice.

"Fear not, Princess Ursa, I mean you and your son no harm. I was sent to protect you by the great
White Spirit herself. Allow me to introduce myself." and to Ursa's shock, a hidden passageway in
her bedroom opened up.

A petite woman dressed in robes that were golden orange with flecks of pink and lavender walked
in. She wore a headdress with a half golden sun with a red jewel in the center. She had rather
attractive features with extremely comforting and trusting golden honey eyes.

"Who are you? What are you doing here? What do you mean you were sent here by the White
Spirit, Alanna?" Ursa quickly asked in a startled tone, and the young woman smiled warmly and
spoke in soft and sweet tones.

"My name is Healer Yang, and I'm the Leader of the ancient secret society of the Sisterhood of the
Dawn. The Sisterhood of the Dawn is the Chosen Children of Alanna, whom she chooses to be her
acolytes and do her work in the world of man. We protect the innocent, fight the darkness and help
bring light, love and hope to those that worship the ways of Anto the Black Spirit.

I was chosen to become part of the Sisterhood when intoxicated soldiers came to my village. My
village was a rice planting village, and we had had a bad year, and they were angry we couldn't
feed them. So they turned on their own people and burned the village down for us 'slightly' them," she paused for a moment in her narrative as if to give her story more weight.

Then she smiles was like the sun itself bringing new hope and love into the room as she continued explaining who she was and what she represented. "I was one of the few to survive. But though I was only seven at the time, I found my heart wasn't full of hate or revenge. Instead, I to find hope and see something good happen from the tragedy. I wanted justice but not revenge. My heart was still pure.

My four friends felt the same. At that moment Alanna appeared to all of us and said because our hearts remained untainted by this evil act orchestrate by Anto we would be rewarded.

My friends Kishi, Rei, and Saura and I began our training to become part of the Sisterhood. Kishi's twin brother Kami was rewarded with becoming a Yon in the Order of the White Lotus.

Now I've come to help you and your family from the darkness who share Sozin's blood. Your blood with Roku's is strong and pure. Although you'll have to do much to make certain it's good energy is more dominated in a place full of such negative energy."

"I feel I can trust, even though I just met you. Something about you makes me know you can be trusted, and you are very devoted to the fight for what's right and all that is good in this world."

"I am. Perhaps you can also sense since you are the granddaughter of Avatar Roku that part of Alanna's spirit lives in me? I am her apprentice, and not many know this, but Alanna's mother is Raava, and she's the Avatar Spirit. Therefore you and I share a spiritual connection, so to speak."

"I knew there was a reason I trusted you! Moreover, only one who has a heart of gold would earn the right to be the apprentice of the daughter of the Avatar's Spirit. I give you my trust and trust you with my life and my family lives."

"Then come with me, and I'll help you now," as they went within the secret passageway to a mysterious and hidden healing chamber.

"These secret spiritual locations are known to a few, but this is where Alanna's healing powers are the strongest. I wish to cleanse both you and your son Zuko. To attempt to remove the negative energy and protect you both from future attacks."

"Is that all you can do for now?"

"I can make your bruises disappear as well, that if you wish to hide the fact, Ozai is a monster. The Sisterhood must stay secret, but we have eyes and ears everywhere. Abuse shouldn't be tolerated," she voiced strongly, and it was clear she wasn't one to stand by while someone was abused.

"For now do what you can, and if you or your friends can help in the future, please do." Ursa consent for now what she wanted to be done.

"As you wish. Please lay down on the table with your son, and I'll perform a spiritual cleanse for now," as she gestured to the table to which the young mother laid down with her little babe in her arms.

Healer Yang then gently placed a sunstone on each side of Ursa's head, lit some incense and sage, and began to chant ancient prayers of Alanna and began to do her work. It would be the beginning of a beautiful friendship but also a terrible burden for her and her four friends to bear with Princess Ursa and her children.
When Princess Azula was born Healer Yang immediately wanted to see the child and told Ursa that Azula had a demon seed in her. Ursa didn't understand what that meant but was much concerned by it.

Healer Yang described to the terrified young mother that because Sozin in a sense sold his soul to Anto, he'd planted a seed of evil in his family line and now that had been growing with each generation which is why everyone seemed to get worse down the line.

Azula, despite having the blood Roku, her soul was being strangled to death by this demon seed. Alanna had shown Healer Yang in a dream what the little girl would become if they couldn't exorcise this demon. Which if left unchecked and allowed to be nurtured by Ozai Azula would lose more then her soul. She would ultimately lose her humanity.

"What can you do, Healer Yang? I can only do so much as a mother, and I don't think as a mother, I can do enough if my husband's seed of evil is so strong it is infesting her this severely. You already told me how much negative energy here and the abuse is ongoing, and I fear what going to happen next!"

"I can attempt to conduct an exorcism myself. Alanna has given us of the Sisterhood some of her perfect tools. One being a cordial from the healing flowers in her garden from the Spirit World. I can try that, along with her healing prayer, but Anto's power may be too much."

"Do what you must."

Setting up in the secret room late a night when the rest of the palace was sleeping they lit unique candles and once again incense and sage and placed Azula in an individual basket decorated with sunstones.

Outside the circle Healer Yang's three friends Kishi, Rei, and Saura were chanting ancient prayers while Ursa was cradling a sleeping Zuko as Healer Yang took to cordial and began to sing and bathe Azula's hair in it.

"Oh, my power
Oh, how you worry,
Oh, how you're weary, from your fear you lost the fight.

This is the one thing you didn't see coming,
And though no one would blame you,
If you cried in private,
If you tried to hide it away, so no one sees,
No one will see if you stop believing.

Oh, my power,
you are not alone.
There's a time where pain has to face the Spirits, you know.
But I will show YOU the way to one more day.
Let me show you how you can lay this down,
'Cause your not alone.

Here and now,
you can be honest.
I will promise everything will work out,
because this is the way life is.
Now, your breath is whistling through your dry bones,
And there will be dancing.
There will be beauty where was fire and ash.
This much I know.

I'm not strong enough, I can't take anymore seeing darkness.
You can lay it down. You can lay it down
My body can't contain any more of your pain.
You can lay it down. You can lay it down.

Will He find me here?
Can I keep myself from going under?

Oh, my power,
Your not alone." she finished singing as the ceremony was completed.

They saw two balls of light dance above the newborn baby one blacker the black and one of pure white light and they seemed to dance and attack one another before vanishing.

"What does that mean?" demanded an apprehensive Ursa and Healer Yang sighed slowly looking very downcast.

"I wasn't able to eliminate the demon seed from Azula. Only weaken it. It seems the only one who can expel the demon is Azula herself. You must watch her and try to encourage light and love in her. We'll do what we can to try and influence more of Alanna's power in her.

But try to fight your husband's influence on her or her heart and soul and eventually, humanity will be lost forever, Ursa," warned the Apprentice of the White Spirit of Life.

After that troubling night, Ursa wrote of her fears in her diary. "I'm scared for my children. Ozai's abuse towards me is horrific enough, but I can already tell he got no love for Zuko and with Yang's warning about Azula I can only imagine the way he'll abuse her will be unspeakable as well.

How I wish my parents were here to help me and protect their grandchildren. How I wish Xiaoying and Sakiko were here as well. How we'd all look out for one another and how we'd keep our promise from so long ago.

I wonder where they are, are they happy? Are they safe? Do they have children of their own now? Will our paths cross again? Oh, I could use them right now. I really could."

Ursa wouldn't have to wait much longer to learn the fate of her best friends but it would come at a price. At her brother-in-law, Iroh urging to his father Fire Lord Azulon, all servicemen with family were to take a mandatory vacation to Ember Island for a week with their families.

What she had no way of knowing it would change her life and her children's lives forever. It was the fifth day of the vacation and Ozai had left before daybreak to go to the war meetings not wanting to be part of anything to do with the family.

Ursa had awakened the children early to go down to the seashore to collect shells and driftwood for arts and crafts project.

The family was almost at the end of the path when they heard someone crying for help. Zuko didn't even think he just reacted and ran to the water before she could stop him. She and Iroh rushed to shore to get both Zuko and the person he'd saved from drowning out of the water.
It was a beautiful little girl who looked strangely familiar to Ursa like she had seen her before. She took the girl to her bedroom and had Iroh take Zuko to a different bedroom to recuperate.

Half an hour later the child regained conscience and while Azula who was only 3 said nasty things which she scolded her about Ursa came into check on the little girl to see if she was alright.

When she saw the girl's eyes she knew in a heartbeat who this was. Before the little girl said her name she knew in her heart this was Sakiko's daughter because of her jade green eyes.

No-one else in the history of the Fire Nation except Sakiko's family EVER had jade green eyes. Not to mention the little girl who told her her name was Akiko was the spitting image of her mother.

Then Ursa and Iroh witness a miracle that was like a boon to Ursa's broken heart when she saw Zuko and Akiko's eyes meet for the first time. It was the miracle of once in a 1000 lifetimes of true love at first sight.

It was secretly because of knowing who Akiko's mother was that Ursa didn't deny Akiko's request to spend the day with them. Though it was still appalling to both her and Iroh to find out who Akiko's father was and what crimes he'd commit to her and Sakiko.

When they'd return Akiko home, and she'd been reunited with Xiaoying they didn't recognize each other right away or talk about their connection till after they'd thoroughly punished Akiko's father Zhao.

Iroh had stripped him of his claim to Akiko now claiming her as his daughter and Ursa honoring her promise become her mother. Zhao would forever have to live with the dishonor of abandoning his wife and not even acknowledging his child existence which is a big deal when the Dragon of the West dishonor you for showing such dishonor to your wife and child.

It wasn't till they're about to depart that Xiaoying, Ursa and Iroh had a moment alone to talk. Ursa was surprised Iroh and Xiaoying had already met as well, but Xiaoying was thrilled to see her best friend again. Even if they both grieved terribly over Sakiko's death as she'd died giving birth to her daughter.

But they all agreed from that day forth the children and their happiness and protection came first.

When they got home, Ursa wrote in her diary. "I'm saddened to learn of my friend Sakiko's fate. To learn she too was forced into a loveless marriage and died giving birth to a beautiful and wonderful daughter is just heartbreaking.

While I'm happy and overjoyed that Akiko is Zuko's fire lily and hopefully they can have the happy ending both me and Sakiko were denied I still worry for what's to come.

Iroh and I already arranged that Akiko would spend the day and occasionally dinner with us at the palace before returning home and Xiaoying will do her duties as all the children's godmother.

But will be enough to protect all the children? With so much evil, darkness, and abuse going on, are any of us safe? But I will honor my promise and raise Akiko with all the love she deserves."

The following years had pains and pleasures of all kinds for Ursa and the few friends she had as she watched the kids grow. She watched as Zuko and Akiko fell more deeply in love with each passing day as they tried to live up to their favorite story. "The Promise of the Fire Lily"

A tale of two feuding families, true love, death and explaining why the fire lily is the Fire Nation
symbol of true love. She watched them struggle and fight each day with everything they did from their lessons and firebending.

She also knew secretly why Ozai abused both of them so brutally was to punish her. Because she had told him she wished Zuko would not turn out like him and that he and Akiko could be together forever unlike her being forced into a marriage with someone she didn't love.

His reply to her for that was for her to watch as he 'simply fulfilled their mother's wish' for the rest of time as he would treat them both as if her words were real.

She also still struggled every day to help teach Azula how to be a good person and help her expel the demon that Ozai seemed to be determined to bring out in her. Ursa felt more discouragement with each passing day that she was failing to stop as Azula didn't seem to see how hard her mother was trying to save her soul.

One night when the children were ten and eight Ursa was alone with a single candle burning reminiscing about everything that ever happened to her. It had been quite hard that week.

Ozai's wickedness had reached new heights, Iroh and Lu Ten left some time ago to take the Earth Kingdom capital on the Fire Lord's orders, and she was getting a strong sense of foreboding.

Something was coming. Something extraordinarily dangerous. Dipping her brush into fresh ink, she penned in her diary a song as her thoughts came to mind on what she felt and what she would do with this sense of foreboding.

"I am going to hold on, because what I believe in is so strong. No matter how long, no one can tell me I am wrong-

I am not going down!

I had a baby boy years ago... Ozai would never forgive me... I never heard from Ikem again. I was plucked from my simple lifestyle, though everybody treated me so well, I did not give in, but I will never give up my son or my daughters.

I am going to hold on, because what I believe in is so strong. No matter how long, no one can tell me I am wrong-

I am not going down!

Zuko's smile got me through the day- and every night I would pray, I could give him enough. At night, I would lay awake and cry- hoping he would get by, because he couldn't live without my love.

I planned day and night to keep us going,
through the sweat and tears,
without them knowing,
it was worth it to watch them grow.
Oh, oh, at least I was able to hold them,
whenever they needed my shoulder,
I'd never let them go.

I am going to hold on,
because what I believe in is so strong.
No matter how long,
no one can tell me I am wrong-

I am holding on!

Akiko's smile got me through the years-
dried away the tears
and filled me with hope.
At night, I would lay awake and cry-
pray she would get by
and the courage to cope.
Oh, oh, oh...

Azula's smile got me through the day-
and every night I would pray,
I could give her enough.

I am going to hold on,
because what I believe in is so strong.
No matter how long,
no one can tell me I was wrong-

I am holding on!

No one can tell me I'm wrong...
I am not going down!"

with that song filling her heart she hid her diary in its secret place. She then did pray once before going to bed not knowing soon she'd have to make some life-changing severe choices of her own.

Akiko- Me

Sakiko- Ming-Na Wen- Mulan

Xiaoying- Lucy Liu- Silvermist Tinkerbell movies

Healer Yang- Nia Vardalos- Goddess Selena DuckTales 2017

Rei- Catherine Tate- Magica De Spell- DuckTales 2017

Saura- Paget Brewster – Della Duck- DuckTales 2017

Kishi- Julie Bowen- Queen Arianna- Rapunzel's Tangled Adventures

School Teacher Ms. Lal- BJ Ward many roles
Kami- Thom Adcox- Lexington Gargoyles

Trader Kito- Dan Fogler- Jacob Kowalski- Fantastic Beast and Where to Find Them

Kiku- Kaiba-Loves-Samara-DA Friend

Xiaoli- Rosiecrafts-DA Friend

Jinzuk- Dennis Quaid

Rina- Peggy Lipton- Hannah-she was in a Dog's purpose, and Quaid played her love interest and the dog's favorite person.

Alanna the White Spirit of Life- Avocadolove author of the hit avatar story "Another Brother"

Anto the Black Spirit of Death-Keith Silverstein- Hawkmoth- Ladybug (Shout out for my twin liking the show and her great fanfics on the show)

Songs were tweaked by Japananimegirl
It was a glorious afternoon in the Fire Nation Capital. The luminescent golden sun was blazing radiantly in the periwinkle cloudless heavens, as a soothing breeze danced its way throughout the majestic city.

Multicolored birds plus butterflies either soar upwards or fluttered about making the atmosphere more optimistic as well far more ecstatic. It filled the air with much-needed songs of exhilaration and confidence. It was just a good day to count your blessings and look at the glass half full and not half empty.

Typically the city was a bustling hive of red and gold bees running about. Today was no exception to that rule of thumb. Although some neighborhoods appeared to be getting far more business today than others.

One such place was a holistic healer clinic called Sunshine Medicine. It's where Healer Yang lived and worked when she wasn't doing her duties for the Sisterhood.

In fact, all her fellow Sisterhood members all had various jobs that related to their innate abilities all over the city. How they got in and out of the palace or any other secret location was the natural occurring tunnels from the long-dormant volcano the town was built in.

Some were part of the Fire Lord's underground bunker. Those were known to the Royal family and military. While others had been cut off and went all over the place like a twisting labyrinth were concealed to everyone else.

They were exclusive known only to the two mysterious societies. Furthermore, only the Order or the Sisterhood or those allied with them knew how to navigate the tunnels without getting lost or knew all the secret entrances or exits. It was an exceptional way to get around in secret without being seen.

However, at the moment that secret was neither here or there. Yang was in her civilian outfit attending to her customers. Her clinic offered everything from acupuncture, acupressure, aromatherapy, balneotherapy, chiropractic, naturopathy, reiki, and reflexology. She also volunteered her assistance in assisting people with improving their home energies with Feng Shui plus doing remarkable marriage counseling.

Right now, she was currently occupied in finishing with today's acupuncture treatments with a regular customer. It was a seasoned general who had a lot of back problems and devoid of weekly treatments, there was no way he'd be still able to do what he desired to do in this war.

She took a deep breath before walking in to check on him and see how he was doing. Plus also how the added aromatherapy was helping as she crossed the vibrantly painted and well-decorated room one could see what Healer Yang looked like when she wasn't doing her work for Alanna.

Yang, in her civilian form, was still astonishingly attractive. Her ebony black hair was thick and straight and went to her shoulders. Her attire was rose-red silk with dark red and gold flames embroidering it. The neckline was low and edged with elaborate golden lace.

Her earrings were golden roses and ruby studded bracelets. However, it was the amulet that matched her Sisterhood of the Dawn headdress that was most significant. That was the secret to
reveal who was a member of the Sisterhood and who wasn’t.

When Alanna chose her 'children' for the Sisterhood, she gave them an individualized accessory of the Sisterhood crest of the rising sun with a red gemstone in the center. It held part of her energy, and it connected them all. Therefore the entire Sisterhood of the Dawn was joined on a Spiritual Level and connected to the Spirit World and Alanna by the spiritual jewelry she fashioned.

Consequently, it was a way to distinguish members in civilian form just as the White Lotus Gambit helped the Order of the White Lotus talk to one another in public. All secret societies as their little ways of secretly talking and identification.

Still, the young woman walked up to the old general and asked him thoughtfully. "Hello General Jiro, how are you feeling today? Is this week's treatment working?"

"Oh yes, my back feels healthier every week I come in. Honestly, I can't thank you enough for letting me come here. You've done wonders for my back. Not to mention, you saved my marriage as well. I would've lost Hua and Hoa forever without your help!" the only general thanked her graciously.

"Well, it helped considerably eliminating the negative energy in your house when you listened to my Feng Shui consultation first. Furthermore, then, when you all came to a few sessions and worked on your communication issues."

"You did save my family and us! I can't thank you enough!" he again declared in a rather enthusiastic tone that made him sound like a young boy, not an old man.

"Think nothing of it," Yang replied in a kind and humble tone with a glowing smile. "I'm always delighted to help. I'm here to heal mind, body, and spirit, and for me, sometimes that includes the heart. I do feel if you can neutralize the negative energy in your life, the rest of your life will be much better."

"Well, now that we've gone to marriage counseling and exceedingly improved the energy in our home it's like we were reborn and everyone so much happier. Even my daughter's happier! She's gone from being pessimistic and low-spirited all the time to this gorgeous, vigorous social butterfly! I believe she might even be smitten with someone! All in six months after our first session with you after taking your advice!" the general was laughing and smiling with such happiness at the thoughts of such rapture.

"Glad I could help improve your life so much, Jiro. Now I'm removing the needles, so relax," as she meticulously removed the needles and put them away. After ten minutes the middle-aged general got up and stretched.

"Oh, I feel so good! The pain is gone, and I feel like my back never had a problem to begin with! Oh, I don't think I can thank you enough," as she handed him his shirt so he could get dressed.

"Seeing people happy is thanks enough for me, Jiro. Although is there anything else you might need I could help you with, out of curiosity?"

"Now that you mentioned I hope this isn't out of line. I need a woman's advice on something."

"Depending on what it is, I'll do my best. What is it?"

"Well, my 35th anniversary is coming up as is my daughter 21st birthday. I got married when I was still a teenager. My wife and I were childhood sweethearts and..."
"I know you told me in our sessions. You were childhood sweethearts who couldn't wait, and so you faked your ages to run away eloped before you joined the army. Neither of your families was happy at first.

Which was part of your relationship problems years later, but let's get back to the point at hand. Your wedding anniversary and daughter's birthday?"

"Yes, well I want to make both occasions super special and show I'm both a changed man and that our family gone through a rebirth and they both are the most important thing in the world to me."

"Hmm," putting a finger to her chin in thought for a moment before she smiled.

"Well, my best friends also happened to be three of the most popular and most glamorous women in the whole city. My friend Kishi is the most prominent jeweler of the entire town and designs custom jewelry.

My other friend Rei is the best stylist in the city. When it comes to hair and makeup, she can turn anyone from plain to drop-dead gorgeous. She makes her own line of hair and makeup commodities and trusts me they are 100% than anything else ever marketed. You will look younger, healthier and feel it too all-natural and it's not a scheme or fraudulent results like so many others.

My last girlfriend is the legendary bombshell who serenades all the servicemen at the Ember Lounge. That tavern all the soldiers go to before they deploy or come home? Might you have heard of her? Saura? She's the most glamorous and sexy woman there and got the voice of a Phoenix."

"All your friends sound so wonderful, but how does that help me?" questioned one of her best customers.

"Well, I can ask them for a few favors and help them plan and the perfect night out for each occasion for you and loved ones. What woman doesn't like a little bling or some severe pampering?

And if it's true that Hoa is smitten with someone why not set up a date for her birthday and have the most beautiful siren to sing to them so they can all dance the night away?" she informed him of the full contents of her idea.

The general looked like he had died and gone to the spirit world with joy.

"You really could arrange all this for me? Really?" he asked in disbelief.

"It's not a problem. I can handle it all for you. I'll have it all arranged for your appointment next week. Trust me." Yang assured him confidently.

"Thank you so much! I don't know if I have enough gold..." she held up a hand.

"Seeing your family happy is all the payment I need. Now I hate to cut this short, but I have got an appointment of my own to keep. So if you don't mind, I need to close up my clinic."

"Oh, of course. See you next Wednesday! Thank you again ever so much!"

"Welcome, Jiro," as he left and she had a small on her lips. Her amulet glowed brightly for a moment.

"Yes, I know Alanna I've done good work helping bring a family back together that was breaking
apart. Even if I can't stop him from participating in the war, I at least mended the bonds of his family," she sighed to herself halfheartedly. She looked around her small but humble residence with longing and nostalgic look, and for a moment her mind drifted back to her childhood.

"It was a simple, humble village no more than 120 people. It had been a rice planting village as long as anyone could remember.

Yang's parents were the elected leaders of the village. Her mother for her idealism and sage advice and her father for his natural leadership skills and hard-working attitude.

Though when they weren't overseeing the village and or the harvest her father did have a rather special hobby and talent. He was the best kitemaker ever seen. He would whenever have a day off take the family on picnics and fly one of his creations.

Her other friends in the village parents all worked hard in the fields but still, they too again interested in other things that lead them to where they are today.

The only twins in the village were Kishi and Kami but although they looked alike as two fraternal twins could since Kishi was a girl and Kami was a boy they're still different even though they'd strong sibling bond.

As children when she thought about the twins they're curious, joyous, brilliant but each with a different particular area of interest.

Kishi loved geology, gemstones, trinkets, and crafts to make jewelry. That was her dream to become the most exceptional jewelry designer in all the Fire Nation. She spent all her free time crafting and designing jewelry.

Her twin brother Kami was far more interested in studying history, culture, spirits, and myth. More of an anthropology look at the world. So he was more academic than her. As a result, he wanted to be a professor one day and teach anthropology.

Rei spent more time giving anyone she could makeovers then she did attending to rice fields and Saura was always practicing her singing rather than helping in the areas.

But that night when that brigade of foot soldiers came to the village changed everything.

They reeked of whiskey and who knows if few had hit one of those few concealed opium dens that the Fire Nation denied existed. The Fire Lord and Nation rejected the truth of the war and what was happening the rest of the world.

Why wouldn't they cover up the despicable and dishonorable behavior of the suppose honorable men and women who served? The ones who did bodily poisons like liquor, narcotics or far worse crimes ranging from grave robbing to gang rape.

If people just thought those things didn't exist in the war as well, they were kidding themselves. And it was foolish that the world didn't think the Fire Nation didn't harm itself in the process of this war.

That night those drunken doped-up soldiers came looking for a free hand out from a village that had experienced a year of bad luck. What had they gotten? Beaten, battered, and burned. The whole town had turned to ash, the rice fields saturated in blood, screams throughout the night and only a few surviving that terrifying night.

Five children had escaped relatively unscathed and taken shelter in the nearby woodlands. Though
they should've died, they're spared. Moreover, though they lost everything, they didn't want revenge. They just wanted reconciliation, justice and somehow to turn this tragedy into something where life could be found.

It was genuinely astonishing when emerging from like a human-size chrysalis of white light came forth the White Spirit of Life herself Alanna. She told them she could sense their pureness of heart and that their souls were beautiful and whole.

Therefore she'd chosen them all to be her children. Though she had given Kami a White Lotus tile telling him, he'd be welcomed into the Order. She had then personally delivered them to a concealed sanctuary hidden far away.

They were then raised by a husband and wife who both were part of the Sisterhood and Order whose job was to raise those chosen for both societies. They grew up in a secure, peaceful, and lighthearted environment until the day they could be given their assignment."

Waking up from reliving the time she was seven till the time Alanna had appeared again at the Sanctuary where Sisterhood of the Dawn member Amaya and her husband Yon Benjiro filled her with a sense of melancholy. All her recollections of her life were precious. As were her own choices in life. How they had led her to here and now. It was a great honor to be chosen as Alanna's apprentice, and she wouldn't fail in that duty.

Shaking her head, she gripped her amulet tightly and finished gathering her things before closing up her clinic and heading to pick up her friends. It was soon going to be tea time, and one must never be late for a tea party. You must never be delayed for a critical date.

The first stop was the business district as it was closer to get Kishi and Rei who's stores happened to be across from each other. She went to get Kishi first, and the bell rang distinctly when she entered the medium size room of the main store. It was empty at the moment, but she could tell from the noises someone was in the studio in the back.

"Sorry, I'm on a lunch break," called out a voice from the back room loudly. It was clear they didn't want to be bothered by their tone.

"Kishi, it's me. And it's Wednesday. We have got a standing appointment, and we mustn't keep them waiting. For more than one reason," Yang called out a gentle reminder and heard the sound of someone falling out of a chair hitting the floor hard. She also thought she heard someone curse by saying, "By the first fire that hurt!"

Sounding like a thundering Komodo rhino came a youthful, vivacious and attractive woman in a magenta and yellow sunburst dress, fingerless gloves with impressive jewelry and her black hair in high pigtails that met in the middle to form one braid that went down to her mid-back.

Her Sisterhood accessory was a simple charm necklace which wasn't as pretentious as the rest of her elaborate jewelry on her person or what was on display within her shop. She positively had a lot of creativity when it came to designing accessories that were clear from just a glance around her shop.

"Oh, how could I forget today was Wednesday! Of all days!" she was still cursing under her breath when she looked at Yang in her eyes.

"Well, you've been working overtime for how many days, Kishi? Considering you're designing for some high paying nobles and the upcoming fashions for next year? The nobles and the military spouses do get brutally judged at functions. A single bad critique can affect one's honor or effect
even if simple a family lifestyle in so many ways." Yang reminds her yet again of the absurdity of life and people obtuse opinions.

"Yes, I know the mid-season line of accessories needs to be perfect. Surprisingly even with the war being the most prominent thing on most minds, people will forever be concerned about their appearance. How you look, and dress will always matter no matter how many times its suppose to be what inside that counts. People perpetually worry more about the outside!

Fire Nation women, particularly those looking to hook up with up and coming young men and women to gain honor, want to look as high end and beautiful as possible. Between my fashionable accessories and how Rei styles them, we can virtually guarantee people will bring honor to their families!" she spoke in an exasperated voice.

"You don't sound as joyful as normal, Kishi. Why?" Yang asked in confusion.

"Yang," she looked at her again with some exasperation. "I'm happy and having fun when I'm designing. That's my passion and joy. But the joy has gone when it becomes a job."

"Yes, when play becomes work and one's dream just turns into another long hour of no fun."

"Yes, and I can't work on my designs or let my creativity flow. I've many thousands of ways to get inspiration. Also, I hear the average gossiper when the gaggles of ladies are in here shopping, so that helps my other job. But still, you can also see some people show a lot of trivialities, along with being extremely self-conceited, greedy, and overall narcissistic at times.

I rather see some altruism, benevolence, and generosity. You know some virtuous behavior and people secure in their looks for once? Not a million girls always think you need a million jewels to snag a man."

"Well, we sometimes have to put up with seeing the less desirable side of humanity. Do you have your weekly gift for the tea party?"

"Yes, the special order is in my special case. Let me get, and we can pick up the others. How much time to do we have?"

"An hour and a half. That should be enough time, that is if your brother class not run-nth over."

"Let's hope not. He can be a bit too passionate when he seeks his teeth into his teaching," she warned Yang as they closed up her shop and walked to the salon across the street where Rei was fishing with her last customer.

The customer was one of those extremely demanding ladies who thought she was even more critical then the royals themselves and the world revolved around her. And worse of all she was a regular at Rei's salon.

"Ms. Yuza, please, it's time to go. I've got a standing appointment to get too. I'll have to ask you to leave now."

"Who is more important than me? I've paid you three chest of gold for the deluxe treatment!" the older woman was saying in a rude obnoxious voice.

"And as I've graciously explained, Ms. Yuza, you've already received the full deluxe spa treatment. A whole royal pampering experience including everything from a Mani-peti to a traditional facelift. I even thinned your eyebrows and did your hair and makeup in the latest style for no extra fee,"
explained a young woman with a slender build in what looked like modified kimono that was the same red as a robin's breast.

Her face didn't appear like it was caked in makeup, so she knew how to style herself in a way she looked like she wasn't wearing makeup and her long black hair was in braided ponytail bun, and her Sisterhood accessory was large comb on top of her hair.

Rei continues to kindly deal with her customer till she finally got her out the door and turned to her friends with a great sigh of exasperation. "That woman? You think she was the Fire Lady or something. She always insists she saw first and gets the best treatments even when others come before her."

"At least you try to be kind and fair, Rei."

"Yang, in case you forget the couple who raised us after our village burned to a crisp taught the importance of having good manners, being kind to others and being honest and fair.

So yes, I do try my best to follow all the proper manners a young lady should follow as well as be kind to my fellow man. Treat everyone fairly. But I'm always honest with others as well," as she bent down under the counter to look for something.

Resurfacing a few moments later, she had a large wicker basket full of bottles with her. "Well, I've my weekly gift for the tea party. Shall we trample over to the Lounge and pick up Saura and then pick up Kami from the University and then go have some tea?"

"Yes, we shall go do that. Let's hope some of the patrons at the tavern aren't trying to do her some harm this time."

"Well, it's not the happy hour yet, so maybe they won't be as boisterous?" Kishi suggested as they began to walk downtown and Rei sighed at Kishi sense of naivety.

"Kishi, Saura is not known as a 'bombshell' for nothing and men, and their disgusting hormones can make anything happen!"

A "bombshell" was precisely what Saura was to a T. She had the right body type, her jet black hair was cut short with just a little teasing curl, and her 'work outfit' only added to it.

When she was working as a vocalist she had to wear because of her boss a bright red one-shoulder halter dress with a slit for her right leg. Her boss Arun picked the attractive ladies for his tavern essentially for their sex appeal to turn a profit and for his voracious appetite and fantasies.

Needless to say, the women looked after each other, and a few honorable men made sure the hostesses and other girls weren't dishonored in any way. But again some girls had to do some things they didn't want to do to earn a living.

Though all the girls honored and respected their bodies and wouldn't ever sell themselves or degrade themselves even if that stuff did happen, also if it was swept under the rug or kept in the shadows from the public.

Clutching her choker that was her Sisterhood accessory tightly was finishing singing an old romantic ballad for the afternoon gathering before making a swift retreat off the stage. She was attempting to get to the dressing room when Arun confronted her.

"What are you trying to do? Leave work early? I don't think so, babe. You still have a few more lonely hearts to serenade before the evening crowd comes in," the selfish and slightly perverted
fellow told her.

Still clutching her choker to give her strength she stated boldly. "I've another appointment as you seem to fail to recall. It's a standing appointment. One that's every Wednesday, and I can't go there dressed like this."

"Who? And why? Sure, you get a lot more gold and tips if you show a little more skin," he spoke in a seductive voice. Man his breath reeked.

She pushed him away and looked at him sharply. "I highly doubt the Fire Lord would be pleased if his grandchildren were being entertained by a woman dressed in a slinky outfit, Arun.

Now if you don't mind, I've got to change into a more appropriate outfit. Princess Ursa's having her weekly tea party promptly at 4:30 and it's my job to provide the entertainment for the party. I can't do that dressed like a slut now out of my way!" as she shoved him away to go change into a more respectful outfit. 20 minutes later she left and came out and saw her fellow Sisterhood members waiting for her.

"Was he harassing you again?" was the first question they all asked and she shrugged.

"No more than usual. He does it to everyone who works there. It's a great place to pick up information from patrons that excellent for the Sisterhood, as are all our civilian jobs. A little dangerous. But I can take care of myself.

At least I have got a spare set of clothes to wear for these tea parties. Ursa's our friend, but she wouldn't approve of her children seeing what I wear while I'm working." She glanced down at what she was wearing now.

A long-sleeved apple red shirt with rhinestones embroidered on the collar with cutouts on the upper arms, darker red skirt over billowy pants and flats. It was a cool look but at least not provocative like her other look.

With that handled, they headed to the University to pick up Kishi's twin brother Kami. Kami had fulfilled his dream as well of being a professor of anthropology, though he could only teach what the Fire Lord approves of. Thus only what was politically correct and followed the lies that went with the war. Not what he knew and spent his spare time in secret and with his undercover work being a Yon doing.

His job as a Yon was to make sure the real cultural history of the Fire Nation wasn't lost. That the war didn't destroy the truth and if by some miracle the war ended that the people were once again taught the fact long lost to them.

When you saw him and Kishi, you could tell they were twins as their faces, and body types were identical, but he is a male. He was different. His hair was in a pageboy haircut, and he had a small goatee. He also dressed in less flamboyant clothes. Settling for a maroon buttoned shirt and darker maroon pants.

Still, he'd several books with him and hugged his sister and told the girls who made up his family he was ready to go to the palace. They all headed to the palace and took a deep breath as they approached the intimidating firebending guards.

"State your names and purposes." one guard ordered to them.

Yang rolled her honey-colored eyes as they went through this every week. She once again for the
The umpteenth time withdrew her invitation with Princess Ursa's seal on it.

It said quite clearly they're friends of Princess Ursa and they'd also been assigned commissions for the royal family. That they'd been invited for a weekly tea party every Wednesday a 4:30 to discuss and deliver their goods.

The guards then grudgingly opened the gate, and an escort lead them to gardens where Princess Ursa and Xiaoying were waiting under a shaded gazebo while the servants set up tea for everyone.

Off in the distance was the laughter of children. Prince Zuko and his best friend/girlfriend Lady Akiko were by the turtleduck pond. Lady Akiko was currently painting a portrait of Prince Zuko feeding the turtleducks.

Elsewhere Princess Azula was with her 'friends" Mai and Ty Lee. Oddly they seemed to be playing with dolls. Although Azula's toys didn't have heads, Mai's dolls had knives in them, and Ty Lee's dolls were strangely limp.

Princess Ursa was finishing writing something in her diary when her guests showed up. "Oh, Yang! I'm so thrilled to see you all! It's been so atrocious the last few days!" as she jumped up to hug her friend.

"I'm sure it has been since we've not seen each other in a while," she whispered back as the others greeted and hugged Xiaoying.

"So what did you bring for the children this time?" questioned Xiaoying respectfully.

"Well, for the girls Rei and I've brought our mid-season line designs and products that would be used for the upcoming fashion show. But they'd be given to the girls first before they are available to rest of the public," answered Kishi as she opened her unique case.

"I've for Ty Lee a complete set of pink tourmaline cat-owl accessories. Necklace, bracelet, and earrings. For Mai, a garnet lion-turtle anklet and charm bracelet. For Akiko, I've got morganite dragons earrings, necklaces, and bangles. And lastly for Azula pink diamond tiara headband, choker, and earrings of dragonflies," as Kishi laid out the velvet cases out.

"Anything for Zuko? You do make male accessories, right?"

"This ruby ring and pendant with dragons and Phoenix on them." as she laid the last case on the table.

It was all so dazzling, styling, and bling. Excellent craftsmanship and incredibly fashionable. The children would adore their gifts.

"I've for the girls and you all specialized tailored perfumes. Each to go with your unique body chemistry. So it's one of a kind scent to go with each of you. Yours Ursa is Red Lilac," handing her the bottle. Turning to Xiaoying, she gave her her scent which of course was fire flowers.

Akiko's scent was fire lilies, Ty Lee was sunflowers, Mai was pansy, and Azula's was lavender. She even crafted something for Zuko and gave her latest beauty products for hair and skincare.

again

Kami had brought with him from the university library a few books that he thought each of the children might be interested in reading.
So now they called them over from their playing to bestow them their gifts and so they could be entertained. Each of them was polite and thanked the grown-ups for their donations.

Zuko looked very interested in his book about sword fighting, Akiko more on the legends and history of dragons, Azula's book was on famous firebenders, Mai on different kinds of weapons and Ty Lee about gymnastics and chi blocking.

All of them hugged their books tightly to their chest along with their other gifts before sitting lotus-style on the lawn as Saura came over to sing to them as this was the best part of Ursa's tea parties.

Saura always made sure when she sang for the children it was her best performance, and she saved her best songs for them. So clearing her throat, she began to sing to them a powerful and soulful ballad.

"Where have the stars gone?
Dark is the land.
How can I find my way home?
Home is a smoldering ruin,
Lost to the fire.
I feel so alone,
My family promised they'd be there,
Whenever I needed them,
Whenever I'd call a name,
No one is there.

I'm trying to hold on,
Just waiting to hear a voice.
One word, just a word will do,
To end this nightmare.

When will the dawn break?
Oh, endless night.

Sleepless, I dream of the day,
When you were by my side,
Guiding my path.

I can't find the way,
my family promised they'd be there,
Whenever I needed them,
Whenever I'd call a name,
No one is there.

I'm trying to hold on,
Just waiting to hear a voice,
One word, just a word will do,
To end this nightmare.
I know the nightmare must end,  
And the sun will rise,  
And the sun will rise.

I know, yes,  
I know the sun will rise.

Yes, I know, I know,  
The clouds must clear.

I know the nightmare must end,  
And the sun will rise,  
And the sun will rise.

I know, yes,  
I know the sun will rise.  
Yes, I know, I know,  
The clouds must clear.

I know this nightmare must end,  
I know the sun will rise,  
And I'll hear your voice deep inside.

As the children were mesmerized by the song, Ursa was speaking of her troubles with the others. How the abuse was getting worse now that Iroh and Lu Ten were gone. That she felt she was failing in protecting the children. That Ozai's violence towards Zuko and Akiko was intensifying tenfold, and his nurturing of Azula's demon seed was also increased tenfold.

"I don't know how much more I can bear this burden. Every year its got a little worse, and now it's every day. I don't know how much longer I can protect them.

I keep thinking about that one time at dinner when he told both Zuko and Akiko to hurt them and me further that they were lucky to be born and Azula was born lucky.

Or how Azula burned Zuko for telling she burned a flower in the garden. Or just how when Akiko and Azula met the first words out of Azula's mouth was wishing Anto the Black Spirit had taken her soul.

All this is so troubling. Not like I don't see the warnings. I've done all I can. Not like I don't see how my dear brother-in-law hasn't tried to be there for both Zuko and Akiko. He even told me about an incident when Ozai got physical with Zuko!" she was sobbing and shaking trying not to think about what Iroh told her before he left for Ba Sing Se.

"WHAT?!" everyone cried at once, and Ursa cried even more pitifully as she gradually spoke of what Iroh had told her had befallen Zuko and Akiko.

"It was just before Iroh and Lu Ten left. Zuko and Akiko, who is a perfect duet in everything they
do. As long as they do it together, they are perfect. Firebending, dancing, music, singing, firerope jumping! It doesn't matter as long as they do it together. They are perfect!"

"I guess it has to do the fact they are soulmates and our families history?" suggested XiaoYing to Ursa who tried not to cry even more than she already was.

"That's as good as guess as any, XiaoYing. But apparently, they've found a spot they like to practice their firebending unseen by others. Well, one day about a week before Iroh and Lu Ten left Zuko came out first to see if the coast was clear and ran into Ozai.

Naturally, Ozai was so furious he...hit him. Akiko, still in hiding, saw it and used an original firebending move to protect Zuko and burned Ozai's hand. Then she got in front of Zuko."

"Your kidding? A nine-year-old girl even though she the Last Dragon Guardian is trying to defend her true love from a monster?" Kami asked in astonishment, and Ursa nodded as she was shaking and rocking now as she revealed the rest of what Iroh told her.

"I unequivocally believe he would've murder both of them if Iroh hadn't arrived in the nick of time. He demanded Ozai to stand down and to leave the children alone. Then told Akiko to take Zuko inside to get clean up.

They're going to go meet up with Lu Ten for a picnic before he left. He wanted to give them both gifts before he left. Iroh then told me he warned Ozai to never think of hurting Zuko or his daughter Akiko again or so help him he pay dearly for it." Ursa finished telling them about this incident that had shaken her to the core when Iroh had told her.

"Well, you don't want to mess with the Dragon of the West. Everyone knows that" Kami replied like it was evident as she sipped her jasmine tea.

"No, it's more than that. You don't want to get in the way of a true father and his children. But is this the only thing concerning you, Ursa?" Yang asked nervously fingering her amulet in an apprehensive manner.

She felt dreadful that they hadn't learned about this until a year after it occurred. After all the Sisterhood of the Dawn Members were here on the orders of Alanna herself to protect the royal family and the children, and this felt like a severe failure of that mission.

"I've had a strong sense of foreboding that's been growing since that day. Each day its been getting bigger. I've been just so worried I can barely sleep," confessed the granddaughter of Roku.

"Well, you do know that the Order and the Sisterhood are both at your disposable to help you. Plus, your children with anything, right? Our family promised a hundred years ago forever friendship, and I won't fail you," XiaoYing assured her resting a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

"Neither will the Sisterhood. Here take this in case you need us in an emergency," as Yang reached into her pocket and pulled out a charm with the Sisterhood crest on it.

"Take this as well, Ursa," as XiaoYing slid a white lotus tile over to her, and she looked confused.

"What am I suppose to do with these?"

"Besides any members of our little clubs will help you if you show them to us? They can contact us ASAP. Hold the charm in your hand and call for us. Since you and I share a spiritual connection, I'll hear you calling and come immediately to you. I promise," Yang explained about the charm.

"Same with that tile. It's not a normal White Lotus Tile. It's infused with spiritual energy from the
Spirit World. It bonded by our Spirits. You need me to hold it and call for me with your spirit, and I'll come day or night no matter what time it is."

"All of us are at your disposable and anything no matter what it is we are at your disposable. We will help you with anything and everything. We promise," everyone assured her.

"Thank you, my friends."

That night before bed Ursa looked at the diary entry she wrote. Flipping to the last page to where there was a detailed illustration of Zuko and Akiko standing in front of the sunset on the left page and the right page was a song she wrote.

"I write this song in dedication to the miracle of true love and how every day it saves everyone in so many ways. A big and small one and all."

And then came the song.

"We could've bowed down gracefully, but we didn't. We knew enough to leave well enough alone but we wouldn't.

We'll drive ourselves crazy trying to stay out of others way. But the messes we keep making and our secrets we try to keep safe with the people who get us.

We don't realize how amazing it is... That Every Day Every Day Every Day we save each other lives.

We come around all broken down and crowed out and seeking comfort. Sometimes the places we go are so deep, dark and desperate we don't know we just don't know.

That Every Day Every Day Every Day we save each other lives.

Sometimes we swear we don't know if we are coming or going. But we always know there someone there to say something without even knowing.

That we are hanging onto those words with all of our might and we'll be alright. Yes alright for one more night.

Every Day! Every Day! Every Day! Every Day! Every Day!

We saved each we save each other! Every Day!

Every Day we save each other lives"

She closed her diary and held it tightly to her heart and whispered. "I hope soon that someone rescues all of us. For soon, I think every one of us will need to be saved."

Songs tweaked by Japananimegirl.
The Deadly Bargain

It was a gorgeous day. The sun was shining not a cloud in the sky, and the heavens above were the prettiest shade of azure ever.

A graceful hand-dipped one finger into the cooling, quiet, pond and held out bread crumbs to the turtleducks who came eagerly over to feast on them.

Ursa, Zuko, and Akiko who was in a brand new heliotrope colored dress that Xiaoying had just created for her.

Xiaoying had been experimenting with dying colors and come up with this one. This was one of the loveliest and exquisite gowns she'd ever made for Akiko.

It befits Akiko's station as both a Lady and the adopted daughter of Iroh and Ursa just from the beauty of the design and the unique color. Plus the charming golden hairpiece held her beautiful waist-length jet black hair its usual luxurious high ponytail.

"Hey, Mom? Want to see how Azula feeds turtleducks?" inquired Zuko abruptly as he threw the loaf of bread at the ducklings nearly killing it.

The momma got of course cross and went right for him and start biting hard on his leg.

"I'll save you Zuky! Come on, let go!" cried Akiko as she tried to pry the mother off her beloved's leg only for the thing to turn on her and then bite her. Suddenly she was crying out in anguish.

Finally, Ursa rescued both children from the mother and reunited mother and her babies as they swam off.

"Stupid turtleduck! Why she do that?!" asked Zuko in an angry voice.

"Yeah, she nearly bit my finger off!" Akiko was moaning sucking on her right ring finger.

"Zuko, Akiko, that's what moms are like. If you mess with their babies," she leaned for and chomped at them both "They are gonna bite you back."

They laughed, but Ursa wasn't quite finished. "You have to understand mothers are the most protective and possibly the one thing you never want to cross. You never want to come between a mother or her child.

Even if a mother can't be here physically for her child, her love and spirit remain forever by their side. For her duty is to be there for her children forever. For moms are forever.

Moms are forever as it's their job always to make things better. Furthermore, mothers love their children, no matter what. It doesn't matter whatever they have done. Mothers love their babies unconditionally and don't have favorites.

A mother's job is to take their child's hand and make them feel like a holiday. To tuck them in at night and chase all the monster away. To read them stories and sing lullabies and if they have a terrible dream to hold them when they cry.

Moreover, when we say we will always be there for you? To watch and to protect you-you never
have to be scared. Also when we say we "Always will love you" don't even worry about it for that is forever faithful.

Therefore whenever you get lonely we are there to take the time to play. We shall be the friend you need to help you find a rainbow when everything else is gray.

Furthermore, that is why Zuko, Akiko's moms are forever."

"And you'll be here forever for us?"

"Yes, of course."

"We love you." Before they all embraced tightly smiling and hugging.

Shortly afterward they started to head back inside when they're passing by Azula playing with Mai and Ty Lee.

Akiko then noticed to her anger that Azula was once again abusing her friends by shoving Ty Lee to the ground when Ty Lee outdid her.

She broke away from Zuko and her mom and ran over to help Ty Lee up and glared at Azula, who was still laughing with glee. Filled with a red-hot rage, she rounded on the young Fire Nation Princess and screamed at her.

"Azula! How can you treat someone who supposes to be your friend like that? In all the years I've known you never once have you shown any real concern for them. You don't care about their feelings or respect them. So why you do call them friends when they aren't friends, I don't know. You don't even know how to be a human being! Let alone a friend!"

"Their my friends and I can treat them the way I want, orphan!" Azula shot back using the derogatory name she called Akiko. She took such joy in reminding Akiko she was an orphan as if to rub salt into the wound. Additionally in her way to prove she didn't belong here among the royals.

Akiko let for the moment the Azula's evil words not sting her heart and instead permitted the words of morality and honor come out of her lovely lips instead.

"All people deserve to be treated with love, compassion, respect, and kindness. Like they are human beings who can think and feel! Not like they are things! You don't know anything about what matters in life at all!"

"I know a lot more than you and Zu-Zu! Furthermore, I can do way better than both of your pathetic firebending!"

"You may know history and politics and got some fancy moves, but none of that will help you in life for what matters Demon! What matters in life, you are wholly unenlightened and clueless!"

"I'll show you who stupid," she uttered under breath deviously. She then turned cunningly and called out to her mother.

"Mom! Can you make Zuko and Akiko play a game with us? It will be more fun if we all play together."

"We don't want to play with you! And I'm not gonna cartwheel!"
"You won't have to. Cartwheeling, not a game, dumb-dumb."

"We don't care. We don't want to play with you!" Akiko stated adamantly with her arms crossed.

"But Mom, don't you think it's essential for all of us to be friends? I mean we all spend so much time here at the palace together.

Doesn't it make sense we should all be best friends? And by spending more time together, we'll be better friends?" Azula asked sweetly her mother who nodded.

"Yes, I think it's a good idea for all of you to play together. Just for a little while," as she walked away and Zuko stomped over clearly miserable.

"You're up to something, Azula."

"I merely want to play a game with my big brother and his best friend. What's so wrong with that?"

'Because you never play games, Demon. You play tricks, and you don't like either of us anyway!"

"Aren't we getting a little old for name-calling?"

"You just did it," retorted Akiko and Azula merely skipped away and got an apple and put it on Mai's head.

"Okay, the point of the game is to knock the apple off the other head. Like this!" as she sent a stream of fire at the apple lighting it up.

Zuko immediately ran over to Mai to put out the fire but tripped and then fell over into the fountain and Azula was smirking cruelly.

"See? I told you I could get them," as she laughed gleefully at her brother and friend's humiliation.

Although for once Ty Lee didn't join in as she watched as Akiko immediately rushed over and help both Zuko and Mai up and out of the water fountain.

"Are you alright?" she asked them both concerningly.

"Wet and embarrassed but otherwise fine," Zuko replied sheepishly.

"Mai? You okay? Your not burned, are you? You didn't hurt yourself falling in, did you?" Akiko asked Mai as she assisted the young girl back to her feet.

Mai may not show much emotion. Furthermore, you had to be sharp to notice it. However, just the slightest twitch of her eyes showed she was surprised that Akiko was concerned about her and cared about her feelings.

"I'm fine. It's okay," she finally confirmed in her normal deadpan voice.

"Well, let me get you both dried off," as she first hugged Zuko and her body heat released steam through her firebending that dried his clothes. Then she repeated the action for Mai and looked her over quickly to make sure she was okay.

She then rounded once more on Azula, still laughing and said. "That wasn't funny, Demon! You do know one day you shall reap what you sowed, right?"

"Whatever do you mean?" she asked mockingly. Akiko got right in her face as she spelled it out to
the clueless princess who didn’t seem to understand how actions had consequences and what goes around comes around.

"Well out of nowhere you seem to want to be free? You think your going to cut me and everyone loses and forgot about all of them?

Well, Demon I've got news for you! Have you ever heard a little five letters word?

What goes around comes around! I'm telling you, demon. It's called karma! What goes up must come down, and it hits the ground! And one of these days you're going to find out all about karma!

So go on right now have your days in the sun! Have blast honey, and have some fun! But don't forget that golden rule. What you do to others is going to get done to you!

Life is like a rainbow. It just changes colors every single day! But there is one thing I know for sure! You can't mess around with your fate!

So remember this Demon! What goes around, comes around! I'm telling you, demon. It's called karma! What goes up must come down, and it hits the ground! And one of these days you're going to find out all about karma!

And when your karma catches up with you oh boy are you really in for it!" she finished her dramatic way of describing the principles of karma and how they worked.

Before another fight could break out one that might end in fire, Ursa came out calling out. "Zuko! Akiko! Azula! Come inside! We just got a letter from Uncle Iroh from the war front!"

Zuko and Akiko made a mad dash inside, and Azula growled but came inside as well as servants escorted Mai and Ty Lee to meet their parents at the gate.

Once they're inside Ursa began to read aloud Uncle Iroh's letter telling them if Ba Sing Se must be a sight to see if it is as magnificent as its wall. That he hoped they could see it if they didn't burn it down to the ground first." Which they all giggled madly about at Uncle Iroh's humor.

"Till then please enjoy these gifts," Ursa read aloud. "For Zuko a pearl dagger from the general who surrendered when we broke through the outer wall. Note the inscription and superior craftsmanship"

Zuko looked at the beautiful blade and read aloud. "Never give up without a fight."

"To my lovely Lady Akiko a jade amulet from the royal treasury of Ba Sing Se itself. Please note your beauty only matches the beauty of the jewel, and the inscription also reflects the beauty of your name"

Akiko turned over the beautiful jewel and read its inscription on the other side. "May the light of hope burn brightly," she read in awe.

"And for Azula, a new friend she wears the latest fashions for Earth Kingdom girls." since Azula's gift was a doll.

Azula looked revolted at the doll and shot a look of envy at Zuko and Akiko's gifts which she thought were better.

She watched for a moment as Zuko got the amulet around Akiko's neck and admired it and she was admiring his new knife. Akiko went to the nearest reflective surface to praise her unique charm
while Zuko practice with his knife.

Azula then said, "So if Uncle doesn't make it back from war, then Dad be next in line to be Fire Lord, right?"

"Azula we don't speak that way. It would be awful if Uncle Iroh didn't return. Besides, Fire Lord Azulon is a picture of health."

"Yeah, how would you like if cousin Lu Ten would like Dad to die?" shot back Zuko.

"Yeah, how can you say something so awful about your own family? Especially when Uncle was thoughtful enough to send you a gift? Doesn't that mean anything to you he was thinking about you enough to send you a gift?" Akiko challenged her only to back into Zuko and clutch his hand by Azula's next action.

"I still think our Dad would make a much better Fire Lord then his royal tea-loving kookiness." and then set the doll aflame.

Ursa sat up immediately and said, "Azula, stop! You mustn't destroy a gift! Please!" but the gift was already damaged, and Azula just dropped it to the ground and ran off not caring she once again showed that the demon seed in her was growing stronger.

"Mom, I'm scared," whimpered Akiko from behind, clutching both her new necklace and Ursa's skirt. Akiko was usually pretty brave given her secret legacy, although Ursa wasn't sure if Akiko knew her heritage or not. However, there were just some things that would scare anyone, and when you see a child light a doll on fire, you pretty much know you're dealing with a seriously disturbed person.

"It's alright, Akiko. No one is going to hurt you. No one is going to burn you. I'll have a talk with Azula about her behavior." Ursa tried to soothe her adopted daughter who didn't look so convinced by her adopted mother's words.

"As if that will work," grumbled Zuko under his breath and glanced into his fire lily frighten eyes.

Akiko called his sister a demon and his dad death for good reasons. Because Azula behaved just like a demon. Furthermore, Ozai positively portrayed himself to be exactly like the stories of Anto the Black Spirit of Death himself. Akiko pretty much found that out from day one when she'd met Azula on Ember Island and her first day coming to the palace and accidentally running right into Ozai himself. The years of torture by both hadn't helped.

"You two go run along and play. I'll join you shortly," their mother instructed them, and they nodded and left while murmuring about maybe working on one of their old firerope jumping routines.

Ursa smiled when she overheard that. Ozai thought it was a shameful thing, but when Zuko and Akiko were seven, they had won a beginner level firerope jumping championship.

Firerope jumping is fundamentally double dutch with firebending. But coming up with an astonishing freestyle routine plus still being able to jump two simultaneous turning ropes of fire wasn't simple at all to do. It took a lot of skill, practice, and hard work. Not that Ozai ever saw it that way. Being imaginative, having fun and doing things of beauty with firebending didn't impress him at all.

Even Azula who Ozai wouldn't stop glorifying to Agni high for being a prodigy couldn't do firerope jumping. That was talent and skill only Zuko and Akiko had achieved. Similar to how
Akiko had excelled in the creative arts that Ursa had tried to encourage both her and Azula to work as an artistic way to express themselves.

Akiko had mastered the arts of being a lady through music, dance, and art. While all Azula seemed to care about was what Ozai desired. Being a living lethal weapon of war. Ursa still prayed each day she could deliver Azula from that demon seed which she had several times begged Healer Yang to attempt to eliminate but all efforts had failed.

It was apparent now that solely Azula could eliminate the demon inside her but with each passing day that was looking like an impossibly. As she bent down to pick up the charred remains of the doll, she was seeing Azula's humanity slipping further away.

It was a few days later when Ursa's deep sense of foreboding ultimately reach its zenith. They're back in the garden, and the children were playing tag. For once Azula seemed to be behaving as she was in the game as she was It and Zuko and Akiko weren't going to make it easy for her to catch them.

Suddenly their mother stood up crying and said something that changed their lives forever.

"Iroh has lost his son. Your cousin Lu Ten didn't survive the battle."

Both Zuko and Akiko looked shocked, and a single teardrop rolled down the left side of their faces as they're thinking of their last moments with Lu Ten before he left.

How he said he loved them and he was proud of both of them. That he told Zuko every day, he was becoming a man of honor. That one day he'd be a real-life Kazuo just like the character in "Promise of the Fire Lily" That one day he'd be able to make the Promise of the Fire Lily with Akiko himself and live out the story with hopefully a happier ending.

Next, he'd told Akiko he'd loved her so much. That she was the greatest little sister in the world. That's when he gave her a diary as a gift. It was both a way of saying farewell and making sure she had a gift for her next birthday.

Since they didn't know when they see each other next when he left with Iroh to begin the Siege. Lu Ten had wanted to make sure his little sister had her birthday gift from him, even when he was away just to let her know he loved her, so much and she was forever in his heart.

Both the news shattered their hearts. But Azula, who was standing behind them? Her face? She showed no emotion, no reaction. Nothing. She wasn't upset at all. To Azula, the news of Lu Ten's death was insignificant. It meant absolutely nothing to her. She didn't care.

After getting that news, things started to go downhill for everyone in the palace immediately, and the mood in the air shifted dramatically. This one event was again going to change history and the choices that would be made following it though no-one knew that quite yet.

Shortly after receiving the catastrophic news of Lu Ten's death, Zuko and Akiko were in a chamber attempting to distract themselves from their overwhelming grief. Zuko was practicing with his knife and Akiko was busy writing in her diary.

Then the Demon walked in and opened that foul mouth of hers. "You spend all your time playing with knives. Your not even good! Plus, only silly babies need diaries!"

"Put an apple on your head, and I'll show you how good I am!" snapped Zuko fiercely to his little sister.
"And what's so wrong with keeping a diary? Lots of people keep diaries and journals, Azula. Their not babies! It's perfectly normal." Akiko also snapped furiously at her as she then snapped her diary shut and held it tightly.

"Well, I just thought I'd inform you both that Uncle is coming home."

"Does that mean we won the war?" asked Zuko confused.

"No, it means Uncle a quitter and a loser," sneered Azula and Akiko was getting more and more furious with how much audacity Azula had to say the words she said.

They're so brazen, callous, and not a hint of emotion. Not a shred of humanity within that little body of hers as Zuko tried to defend the man who had raised her as a daughter.

"Oh yes, he is! He found out his son died, and he just fell apart. A real general would burn Ba Sing Se to the ground! Not lose the battle and come home crying!"

"That is IT! I've had enough of you, DEMON!" snarled Akiko. "If you dare to mock the death of your cousin and mock the grief of your uncle then you have no soul and no hope of ever being a human being!"

It's time someone punished you for your lack of humanity and since it seems the only thing you understand is pain and suffering then let that be your punishment! Since I will not let you get away with this crime!"

Before Azula or Zuko could react, Akiko had taken Azula down in a tackle and was punching and clawing at her before the little bitch knew what hit her. Zuko quickly got caught in the frenzy and was also attacking his sister both to defend Akiko and because he was also outraged at Azula for her cold-hearted ways.

Even though Azula was a firebending prodigy, there was no fire this time as she strived to claw Akiko's eyes out and even choke Zuko. Hence this was a fight of white-hot rage, and no firebending was going to be used as all three of them brawling.

Ursa then walked in about to tell them something and was horrified to walk right into a slugfest.

"Zuko! Akiko! Azula! Stop this! Stop this right now!" as she scarcely managed to get in the middle and separate the three children who were covered from head to toe with abrasions, bleeding scratches and ripped clothing.

"What is the name of the First Fire was that all about? Answer me now!" Ursa ordered the children sternly.

Azula accused them of attacking her for no reason and they shot back she started it by her mocking Uncle's pain and Lu Ten's death and them as well.

Ursa knew the children well enough to know who instigated the fight and knew that Zuko and Akiko were extraordinarily upset about the news of Lu Ten's death.

"Azula, we do not make a joke out of a person in pain. Grief isn't a weakness, and losing someone you love is a terrible loss. Furthermore grieving is far more critical then any battle it's the only way to heal and move on in life.

Zuko and Akiko you both know there are better ways to solve a problem then getting into a fight with someone and beating them up. You should use your words not your fists or firebending either.
Now I want you all to apologize to each other, and I want you to say it as you mean it. Now."

"I'm sorry," Azula said with a straight face even though they knew she felt no remorse for what she'd said or done.

"We're sorry too." even though they weren't.

"Now I came to get you because your father has requested an audience with Fire Lord Azulon. Now please go and hurry and get cleaned up. Akiko, will you wait for me at the end of the hall? I'll be there in a moment to escort you to the gate where Xiaoying is waiting to take you home."

"Yes, Mom. See you tomorrow, Zuky. Love you!" she hugged him tightly.

"Love you too, Akiko."

With that, each ran opposite ways down the hall. Though Akiko shouldn't have heard it, she heard again Azula being disrespectful about her grandfather, the Fire Lord himself! And she heard her mother say, "What is wrong with that child?"

Ursa came down the hall and took Akiko's hand in hers, and they walked down the corridors towards the gate and got halfway when Akiko collapsed to the ground as if she got kicked in the stomach by a boot.

"Akiko?! Akiko, are you alright? What's wrong, my daughter?!" Ursa asked her frantically as Akiko gazed her jade eyes at the woman who raised her like a daughter. The woman who was her mother in all the ways the matter.

"Zuko is in danger. Don't ask me how I know. But I know, Mom, that something terrible is going to happen in that meeting with Fire Lord Azulon and Zuko is going to be in danger!

I feel it in my soul! I know his life is in danger! And if his life in danger, so is mine. If he dies, I die. For neither of us can live without the other, Mom, and you know that's true!"

Ursa stared at her adoptive daughter in horror because she knew she was telling the truth. She then hugged her tightly and kissed her forehead before then telling her something.

"Akiko, I need you to promise me two things."

"What?"

"One you'll never forget who you are. And two if something should ever happen to me that you'll not only give Zuko your love, but you give him my love. That you'll love him doubly hard for both of us."

"I promise, Mom."

"Good girl. I love you, Akiko, and you'll always be my daughter as well. Never forget that."

"I won't." as Ursa hugged and kissed Akiko one more time before handing her over to Xiaoying and returning in time to be with her children and her husband.

However, Ursa was troubled throughout the meeting. She could see and knew in her heart that Zuko was only performing inadequately by his father's standers because Akiko wasn't there.

Zuko and Akiko were a perfect duet which meant as long as they're together they're perfect. They kept each other relaxed and happy. They didn't crack under pressure together and together could do
Therefore, if Akiko had been there, Zuko wouldn't have messed up with either the history question or his firebending performance as he and Akiko were two parts of the same whole and only together were they complete. Still, Ursa comforted Zuko and made indisputable he knew he was a fighter who kept fighting no matter how hard things got.

But then Fire Lord Azulon ordered them out, and Ursa thought the children were right behind her. She didn't realize that Azula had dragged Zuko behind a curtain to listen to their father's despicable and dishonorable request. Zuko, of course, ran out in terror and to his room to hide before he heard what Azulon's punishment was going to be.

However, Azula was singing and dancing that Zuko and Akiko were both going to die because Ozai was going to kill Zuko and since Akiko had no reason to live without Zuko when Ozai killed Zuko she would die too.

Zuko yelled loudly at her to stop lying and stop making callous remarks about his fire lily. That's when Ursa came into the bedroom. She wanted to know what was going on. So she forcefully dragged Azula away for a talk. Zuko then started to chant "Azula always lies"

When she and Azula had gotten a reasonable distance away from Zuko's room and were alone she got down to her daughter's eye level and was adamant and forceful with her.

"Alright, Azula, spill it. What did you overhear? No lies! The truth!" demanded her mother. Azula was jarred by the force of her mother's words and took a deep breath and began gradually to tell her what she had overheard and didn't leave out any details.

"Well, I overheard Daddy and Grandfather quarreling. Daddy wanted Grandfather to revoke Uncle's birthright, and Grandfather was extremely angry about it. He couldn't believe Daddy would demand something like that so soon after cousin Lu Ten's death.

So Grandfather said Daddy's punishment must fit his crime. That he must know what Uncle feels like. Thus he's got to kill Zuko although that also means Akiko will die as everyone knows Akiko only lives if Zuko lives since she's his 'fire lily'

Not that Grandfather knows that he's just sentenced two children to death as Uncle never told him that he adopted Akiko all those years ago because he didn't realize how Grandfather would react about it.

Therefore Grandfather doesn't know he's just commanded Daddy to kill both his firstborn and Uncle's adopted daughter.

So now Uncle will lose his second child as well and I'll lose my brother after I already lost my cousin and well the royal family will be tiny indeed.

It's all pretty scary," she finished speaking of what she overheard her head bent down low and her rubbing her left arm apprehensively.

Ursa was horrified by the fact she knew Azula wasn't lying. But also by fact despite everything Azula was and Ozai had groomed her to be she could feel in her heart that Azula was in all actually in her deepest core of her being genuinely horrified and panicked by this.

That notwithstanding that demon seed inside her. After what Ozai had done to dehumanize her. Part of Azula's humanity was finally showing through! It may be rather meager nevertheless Ursa could distinguish it all the same.
Azula may've been influenced by Ozai not to feel anything or see people as expendable and be a weapon and all that. But right now, Ursa was looking into her daughter's eyes, and she could see the fragment of a soul and heart so long buried in them. Azula was terrified and didn't know how to express it any other way but the way Ozai had taught her.

Azula looked back up and looked straight into her mom's eyes and said in a small voice that didn't match her typical character at all, "Mommy, I'm terrified for Zuko and Akiko. What's going to happen to them? Do you think Daddy gonna hurt them?" Azula asked her mother and Ursa was overwhelmed it was said with heartfelt sincerity.

For a single moment, Azula showed she cared about her brother and his love and was just a terrified little girl and was then startled herself when her mother embraced her tightly.

"Azula don't worry. I'll protect you and your brother and Akiko. No-one will ever hurt any of you ever again. I promise. Go to your room and stay there and get some sleep. I'll see you soon. I love you. Never forget I love you." she unquestionably emphasized to Azula as she pronounced each word loudly and clearly to make sure Azula understood.

"Okay, Mommy. Goodnight," Azula said in a bit of bewilderment as she went to her room.

Once Azula was out of sight, Ursa went straight to her room to confront Ozai determined to save her children's lives. She found him staring out the window at the moonless sky. She could hear thunder in the distance which was perfect for the mood.

The dark and stormy night was perfect for what was going on. It was almost like fate. That all this foreboding she'd been feeling for months and all the years of a loveless and abusive marriage would accumulate in a dark and stormy night.

"Ozai, you cannot do this!" she blazoned powerfully as she strode right into the room. He didn't even bat an eyelash in surprise that she knew what was going on.

"I can't disobey the Fire Lord's command for that is treason. But I'm a merciful man. I'm waiting till he's asleep. He won't feel a thing."

"Ozai you know perfectly well if you do this you are not just murdering your son. You'll be murdering his true love, who is also Iroh's adopted daughter. But of course, that matters not to you either."

"The Fire Lord has command cannot be changed and he doesn't know about her. So it's not like he knows Iroh will suffer an even greater loss when I do as I've been commanded."

"I'm not gonna let any child die. No-one is going to suffer. Because I'm gonna offer you a deal."

"You have nothing I want."

"You want the throne."

"I'm listening."

"I know how to make a poison that is colorless, odorless, and untraceable. It makes a person slip away quietly as if they fell asleep. I'll give you a vial in exchange for the children's lives. Once you have the vial in your hands, you may do whatever you wish with it, but you must swear none of the children will die."

"Clever, very clever indeed. Where exactly did you learn to concoct such a substance?"
"My mother was a master herbalist."

"Very well I accept your deal on one condition. Once we make our little exchange, you must forever leave the Capital and never return. With you around, it's only a matter of time the new Fire Lord would receive a vial of the same poison."

"Fine, but I take the children with me."

"No, the children are my collateral. If you should try to take them, I will hunt you all down and kill you all, just like I did your precious boyfriend. If you leave them behind, they will remain safe."

Ursa knew she couldn't trust Ozai to not harm the children without her there. She had to take them with her. She wasn't going to leave without them. She could feel in her pocket two extraordinary trinkets and remembered her friends' promises.

It would be profoundly hazardous and may be almost impossible to pull off, but Ursa would rather die than leave her son and daughters alone with this monster. But she was willing to risk death to enter life.

once more

"Very well. I'll need two and a half hours to brew the poison. Wait here," she replied using all her acting skills not to give away her true intentions or the fact she was lying.

Once she was alone, she took out the unique charm and tile and held them close to her heart. She poured all her heart and soul out, calling for help. The time had come to escape this life, and she needed her friends to help.

Both Xiaoying and Healer Yang got the call, and they were on their way knowing the time had come but could they all pull off a miracle? It was time to find out!
Ursa waited with bated breath for what felt like an eternity. She had told Ozai she needed two and a half hours to concoct the poison. If she exceeded that time, he would know she was lying.

"Please, please come. Please keep your promise. Please, I need you now more than ever. Please come." she implored with all her heart and mind as she paced quickly in the privacy of the room she'd gone to brew the poison.

Eventually after what felt like forever when it was only in reality 15 agonizingly long minutes the concealed passageway opened up and rushing in were Xiaoying who was for some reason clothed as a ninja and Healer Yang in her Sisterhood robes.

"Ursa! What is the emergency? What has transpired? Something worse then life or death must have occurred since we can feel all our souls are shattering! What happened?!!" demanded Xiaoying as she lowered her veil enough to show her face.

"Yes, the air is so thick with negative energy a sword would shatter trying to slice through it! Not to mention, I can hear Anto's maniacal laughter like he's about to have a feast! What is going on?!" Healer Yang also demanded in an equally terrified tone.

"I can't go into the full story because it will take too long and we don't have the time. The short version is Ozai made a play for the throne because of Lu Ten's death. Fire Lord now sentence both Zuko and Akiko to death, and Ozai has every intention of carrying out the order.

I've offered the throne to him using an untraceable and deadly poison my mother taught me in exchange for the children's lives. However, he will only accept it if I leave and never return and leave the children behind in his care." she immediately filled them in on the desperate circumstances of what going on.

"We cannot leave the children alone with that monstrosity! I've spent virtually every day since you were forced to tie the knot with him, tending to every bit of abuse he has ever inflicted on you and the children!" Healer Yang exclaimed in outraged.

"I won't let Akiko the Last Dragon Guardian be left anywhere near that lunatic either! Iroh is an incredible father, only knowing Ozai? He'll find a way to take Iroh out of the picture! Then destroy her and Zuko in a way that will be both below the belt and beyond unforgivable!"

"Not to mention without me there no chance in keeping Azula from becoming a demon if she's left to Ozai and his cruel ways. He'll make sure she's nothing but a cold-hearted, unmotional walking weapon. She'll never reacquire her heart and soul and permanently lose her humanity if she left with him!"

"Then it's agreed we need to get all four of you out tonight. Ozai can have the throne. It may be one of the worst things for the Fire Nation and the world, but condemning the lives of three children's souls to eternal damnation without a mother is a far worse crime at the moment," Xiaoying said as she was weighing which evil she was willing to deal with.

"Agreed, if this was why Alanna chose my friends and I was to prepare us for this very night, then I'm ready to fulfill my duties and bring for light and life when it's about to be consumed by darkness and death!" Yang affirmed vigorously.
"So can you both help me pull off a miracle? Can you get us all out and to safety? I told Ozai I needed two and a half hours to brew the poison. But then I've to leave, and surely he'll have his own man waiting to ship me out of here!"

"Ursa doesn't worry, miracles happen when they are least likely to happen, and the impossible happens every single day. We swear right now by hook or crook come to Spirit World or the Fire Falls we will get you all out of here and to safety!" vowed the two women.

"Thank you, my friends. Consequently, how are we going to arrange it? How can the entire royal family disappear and also make certain Ozai doesn't come after us? I mean, how can we get the children out without him knowing? Or get Akiko as she's back at her home?"

Yang held up a hand, "Let the Sisterhood handle that, Ursa. After all, we know the concealed labyrinth beneath the city and passageways within the palace better than anyone as you know very well," Healer Yang reached into her robe and pulled out her amulet.

Clutching it tightly it began to give off a celestial luminosity which sent a corresponding glow to everyone else's accessories. Suddenly a mysterious aura encompassed Yang, and her voice began to reverberate somewhat as if it wasn't just her speaking.

Ursa realized right here, and now Yang was channeling the White Spirit of Life herself, Alanna!

"My children listen to me. The time has come for you to fulfill the purpose I had chosen for you for so long ago. You couldn't bring justice for the senseless death of those of your village.

But now you can save innocent lives from abuse, torture, heartache, and death. Listen to me, my children. I'll tell you how to protect these innocent lives. Once I give you the instructions, I'll bestow to all of you a fraction of my powers which will aid you in tonight mission.

It will help guarantee there will be no lives taken and that there will be rebirth as well as freedom. Are you ready for my children?"

The room was filled with the sound of the Sisterhood and also one Yon who been touched by the Spirit of Life's powers all collective voices. They all said in one voice.

"Yes"

"Good. Kishi? You and your brother Kami will make your way to the subterrene boathouse. Use my gifts to incapacitate Ozai's ferryman. After he's rendered unconscious hide him broom cupboard.

When you come back outside, you'll see where I've left my other benefits that will support Ursa and her family on their journey. Load them up speedily and thoroughly and make certain you pack lifevests and detailed maps."

"Understood, Lady Alanna. We shall do as you command. We won't fail you," the twins' voices were heard.

"My apprentice?"

"Yes, my Lady?"

"You, Rei and Saura must quickly collect the children and use my perfect tools to do an emergency purge. They will need to be cleansed of all the evil energy of this location while simultaneously put into a spiritual coma so they will not risk alerting anyone of what is going on."
You all know the prayer song that will do that, and a few drops of my cordial with a sunstone on
their forehead will do the rest."

"Yes, we will do as you command, my Lady. We will work swiftly and silently and get them to the
boathouse before anyone knows what going on," replied Yang aloud.

"Pardon me, Great Lady of Life and Lady. But that is only half the plan. If we are to succeed I feel
I must share what I must do if we are to succeed and what both parties must work together to do to
pull this miracle off truly," Xiaoying addressed the great spirit as courteously as she could.

"Yes, Grand Yon?" as Alanna was still talking technically through Yang.

"Well, my family has always had various talents. We've always been naturally gifted when it came
to cooking and fashion. But our fighting style always been ninjutsu and using clever tricks and
smoke and mirrors to aid us."

"Given your attire and what I know of your family history, Xiaoying I shouldn't be surprised why
you're dressed up as a ninja," Ursa murmured and Xiaoying looked at her for a moment to be quiet.

"It's necessary for our work as the Grand Yon and how we've managed to stay alive and protect our
chosen assignment for all these centuries. Nevertheless, My Lady, for the rest of the Nation, will
need some story of what happened to Ursa and the children, or they will know there was foul play
was afoot tonight."

"True"

"Well, not to sound too boastful, but anyone from the Order will tell you the only other member
who could act as a one-woman army would be Iroh. Well, he'd be a one-person army if you wanted
to be gender-specific not that we have the time!" she admonished herself shaking her head madly.

Then she straightened up and got to her point. "The point is we've got to stage the scene, and I can
do that. Ursa, you give Ozai the poison, and he can off his father. I'll make sure he does it.
The second he's done it? I'll become a one-woman army and take him out. I can make it look like a
whole league of assassin broke in and tried to murder the whole royal family. I can make it so
convincing it will fool everyone and make them believe you were all killed by assassins."

"Though you are saying a little extra help from the Sisterhood to stage, it wouldn't hurt?"

"No, it would not, dear Lady of White. Furthermore, we need also to cover our own tracks and get
the hell out of the capital ourselves before Ozai realizes it was us who helped Ursa and the kids
disappear. We need to be out faster then an Airbender could fly!"

"So all our lives in the capital end tonight, don't they?" Yang asked in her normal voice, and the
collective feeling cemented them to that fate.

"Where will you go?" inquired Ursa to her friends worried where they would go. She previously
lost Xiaoying once she couldn't forget her again not knowing her fate.

"All I need is my trunk and Sakiko's ashes, Ursa. Knowing Akiko's safe is enough for me. As for
where I'll go? I'll go be with my true love."

"Your true love? You've never told me you're in a relationship!" Ursa was so shocked for a
moment she forgot what was going on. Xiaoying shrugged and quickly explained as they didn't
have the time for more than a quick answer.
"Yeah, sorry, it was part of the Order. It's Master Piandao, the man who the greatest swordsman in
the world and gave Zuko and Akiko a few pointers? We've been in love for years."

"As for the Sisterhood, Princess Ursa? Don't worry about my children at all. I'll make sure they all
make it out of the capital and to where they need to be safe. They'll be okay.

For now, let's focus on getting you and your family out of here alive." Alanna spoke again through
Yang.

"Yes, lets. Thank you all for helping me. If we live through this night, you all have my eternal
gratitude and my friendship forever. I must start brewing the poison, and you must get to do what
you need to make this happen. Good luck."

"May luck be enough, Ursa, because we are gonna need it!" Xiaoying answered as they left by the
secret passageway to begin the perilous escape plan.

Ursa offered her prayers to all the spirits and one to her grandfather, hoping they provide their
assistance and powers to make sure they all escape tonight. Then she gradually began the task of
making the deadly poison.

Down by the covered boathouse, Kishi and her twin brother Kami were both wearing their robes of
both Sisterhood and Order. They could see only one man who seems to be taking a smoke break
while waiting to take Ursa away.

"Ugh, why did it have to be a guy who smokes dope?" Kishi criticized in an aggravated tone.

"Sister, this isn't the time for your views on why poisons are bad. Or how it's wrong how infinite
aversions the Fire Nations swept under the rug. We've got a job to do." Kami warned his sister in
an austere whispering.

He knew all too well how powerful his sister's opinions were on the poisons to the body. Plus, the
despicable behavior that was covered up by the war. Being part of the Sisterhood since childhood
only made his sister already self-willed tendencies only more problematical when it came to the
concerns she wanted to make her opinions clear on.

If she was to ever come to the University for a public debate class and the Fire Nation truly
allowed people to speak their mind and offered to change his twin sister be a great activist. On the
other hand, now wasn't the time for that sort of behavior. They had an extremely significant job to
do and couldn't get distracted by personal feelings.

Sighing she counted to ten and nodded. "Yes, brother, you are right, of course. No matter how sick
the behavior is, we've got a job to do. So how are we going to do this? Alanna said we needed to
use her powers to knock him out. But how?"

"Well, I hate to ask you to do this but could you may be doing some persuading with him for a few
minutes? I can take care of the rest?"

"You are not asking me to do what I think you are asking me to do brother are you?!"

"We all must make a sacrifice tonight, sis."

"Ugh! Fine but if he offers me dope or touches me I'm breaking his wrist!" as she walked out there
thanking the spirits it was the new moon and that thanks to the coming storm it was already
starting to get a little foggy.
The man who looked somewhere in his late 30s or early 40s was about lit up his hookah pipe again. He was far from being attractive, and it was apparent he’d been long addicted to the pipe. His teeth were disgusting, and his fingernails were both yellow and need of a proper trimming.

Plucking up her courage she sashayed over to him till she was about 15 feet away so he could see the suggestive silhouette of the curves of her body and made sure her voice was alluring but kept her face in the shadows.

"Hello, handsome, why you out here on this shivering, stormy and desolate night?" she did in her best sultry voice she could muster.

The ferryman who likely never caught any woman attention glanced up and dropped his hookah. His heartbeat picked up, and he blushed so redly. Common sense flew out the window as hormones took over as he could see was the outline of a fine female near him.

"Oh, I'm... I'm just... what are you doing out in this terrible weather ma'am?" he stammered.

"Oh, it's so terrible. I was on my way home from this party, and these hooligans beat me up and robbed me blind. Then I couldn't find my way home because there no moon, and the beating made my mind a bit fuzzy. So somehow I ended up here," she purred to him.

"I'm sorry to hear that, my lady. Might I be able to help you out?" he asked hopefully.

"Well, I could use a big strong man to escort me home. I'm scared of the night and who knows if those robbers will come back?" she pours on the helpless damsel in distress act.

"Well, I'm supposed to stay here and do a critical job. But as Fire Nation man, I should do the honorable thing and help a lady in distress."

"Great. Come with me. We can get going I'm sure someone else can do this job."

The boatman started to follow her away from the boat that Kami came right over to start making everything was secure. He watched his sister take the boatman a little further in the dark and could still hear her sweet-talking him.

They just reached the broom cupboard when he heard her say she needed something to keep her dry as it was about to storm. The boatman went to the broom cupboard to get an umbrella, and she clutched her charm necklace and whispered. "In the name of the Alanna the White Spirit of Life may you slumber and only dream sweet dreams tonight till morning light graces the land once more," and the man slumped to the ground as enough of his life energy was taken to render him asleep.

Kishi quickly made the boatman as comfortable as she could in the cupboard and then using her charm necklace and the powers bestowed to her by Alanna began to insert what kind of dream the boatman was to have.

"You'll remember nothing of meeting me tonight. Instead, all you'll remember is up to the point of smoking your hookah and then feeling extremely tired and going inside to rest for a minute and then nothing else.

When you wake tomorrow, you'll start to rethink your priorities and what you need to get healthy and what it means to be a true man of honor. Think sunny, happy thoughts and embrace light, love and life," as her charm necklace finished glowing and the man seemed to be slumbering peacefully.

"Well now that taken care of and possibly he'll stop smoking I've to go help my brother load up the
boat," as she dusted off her robes and went back to the docks to help her brother do precisely that.

Meanwhile under cover of the moonless sky as the storm was rolling in faster the three other attractive and magnificent women made their way through the secret twisting tunnels of the underground labyrinth beneath the capital.

With hearts in their throat as they quicken their pace, they all arrived at their destinations at the same time, which was the same time Kishi was dealing with the boatman. The children were all sound asleep, but they needed to ensure that.

Gliding across the room as soundlessly as a ghost, they all took out a single large sunstone and placed it on the crown of the child's head. Then unscrewing a crystal vial dropped three drops of the special cordial on it which caused an otherworldly aura to encircle the child.

Placing their right hand on top of the child and clutching their Sisterhood accessory in their left they sang as quickly and as quietly they could Alanna's healing prayer. The sunstone pulsates, and a massive orb of dark energy burst from the crown of their heads.

It floated over to the Sisterhood members who then spoke a few hushed words and the orb of negative energy causing it to disperse. Then they collected the purified child who was now in a spiritual coma and hurried to take them to the boat.

There be no time to collect personal effects or even clothing in this state of emergency. So, unfortunately, a great deal was going to be left behind, but in a life or death matter that wasn't a concern at all.

The sun charm's red gemstone glittered by the time Ursa finished making the poison letting her know subtly that part one of the plans had been carried out effectively. She slipped the charm back in her pocket and holding the unique White Lotus tile letting Xiaoying know her part in the plan was needed shortly.

Put on a long robe with a hood and then proceed back to Ozai, once again using all the acting skills she had honed in her youth to fool him into thinking she was resigned to never seeing her children again.

"Here it is. Do whatever you wish now with it. At least allow me to say goodbye. If you are truly a man of mercy, you allow me to say goodbye."

"Very well. I am a merciful man. You may say goodbye, but again you can't take them, or I will hunt you all down and kill you. Even this little vial won't change that bit of the bargain. Understood?"

"Perfectly."

Ursa headed to Azula room first where she met with Kami. He seemingly spent hours reading the chronicles kept of the royal family, including any attempts on their lives or any other murder plots in history on the other nations. He prepared for this part of the plan. Maybe overprepared, to be honest.

He had with him multiple useful tools and items to help stage the scene. "We can't leave behind anything that can be linked back to us. No hair, fibers, fingerprints, nothing like that," as he handed her protective clothing and other useful items they would need for this part of the plan to succeed.

"So what do we do?" as she finished dressing appropriately for staging her own daughter's assassination.
"Well," as he took out some of Xiaoying's trick bombs and different weapons. "We need to create the right amount of chaos and then leave behind convincing evidence. You get to using Xiaoying's trick bombs following the precise instructions I wrote down.

I'll handle staging the bed where Azula would have bleed to death. Hurry!"

Therefore, they once more began to work swiftly and noiselessly began to stage the scene. Ursa was relieved her years back home in Hira'a, and acting was coming in extraordinarily beneficial here helping with this.

Given how to correctly arrange a set for a play was a lot like this. You had to persuade the audience where the story was taking place, or they wouldn't get lost in the story you're trying to tell them.

Therefore once she got that idea into her mind that this was just another play that had to be performed flawlessly it was much simpler to get to make things perfectly match the perfect assassinate crime scene of her daughter's murder.

The same for her son, it went perfectly. For it was nothing more than prepping another set for the audience to see the performance for the greatest actors ever. By the time they finished with Zuko's room, she felt the White Lotus tile heat up in her pocket. Taking it out it was shining brilliantly.

Looking up, she saw a ninja emerge from the darkness. "It's done. The Fire Lord dead and I took out Ozai not that's he's gone, but he'll be out for at least a day and a half till they can revive him.

Now let's finish staging the scene here so I can get back to my house and stage it there and then vamooses. It's already 3:00 in the morning. We don't have many hours of darkness left for all of us to get out of here." Xiaoying warned them.

They kicked it into an even higher gear, and soon both Ursa and Akiko's death scene had been staged perfectly, and everyone was at the docks saying their quick but heartfelt goodbyes.

Ursa told her friends they had her eternal gratitude, and she didn't know if they ever see each other again, but she at least knew she owed them for granting her life and freedom once more.

"You're going home, aren't you?" Xiaoying asked her, and she nodded.

"I'll figure out how to hide from Ozai once I get there. But I'll take the long and back-ways so he won't find us on our way there. Plus, I've got the White Lotus title and Sisterhood Charm if I get into any trouble to call for help."

"We all miss you and the children," Yang told her with tears in her eyes.

"And I'll miss you as will the children. But I must go, and so must you or we'll all be killed by Ozai." Ursa replied with her own eyes filled with tears.

"Till we meet again." with one last tearful hug Ursa launched her vessel with the three sleeping children inside and disappeared into the obscurity of the darkness and fog. Once they could no longer see her, everyone looked at each other and nodded. It was time they pulled the same disappearing act and quickly left to do the same.

The official story of that night to Fire Nation as a whole was as followed. That Fire Lord Azulon had passed away from natural causes while on that same night highly trained assassins from the other nations came to the royal palace.
Spurred on by the death of the Dragon of the West's only son the unknown but deadly assassins sought to take out the whole royal family in a bid to end the war.

They'd managed to kill Prince Ozai's wife and son and daughter and the adopted daughter of the Dragon of the West. (Again, you can't keep something like that a secret no matter how much you try. Word does get out)

Ozai had been left for dead and barely survived the attempt on his life. Also due to being the younger brother and likelier to marry again have more heirs due to his youth the crown went to him.

A large service had been held for the deaths of all the royal family members as the whole Fire Nation mourned that day. Iroh who had returned by then hearing the news he'd lost his entire family was the most devastated of all.

He could care less about the crown just knowing Ursa and the children were dead broke his heart more. Though during the week-long grieving of the city Xiaoying and the Sisterhood members all unostentatiously fled the city undetected and could only hope Ursa would make it home without being detected while Ozai finally assumed the throne.

Giving Ursa's family a chance at life and freedom might have cost the world's it.
The Journey

Ursa only sincerely considered she could release the breath she been holding when they ultimately were cleared of the capital island and had made it to the subsequent islet without being detected. Only then did she feel honestly confident. Her nerves finally felt the electricity drain a little and her vice grip on the pole rowing the boat slackened a little as she let out the breath.

Looking ahead, she witnessed the stunning daybreak just commencing to leisurely climb over the far-off horizon, and for her, it was like seeing the day-star for the first time since she had been abducted from her home. It was like being born once more.

Looking down at her small vessel she saw tucked under pimento and tawny quilt in their spiritual coma sleeping as sweet, docile koala lambs were her children. They were blissfully dreaming away. Wholly and utterly ignorant what had transpired or the dire peril they still were in. If only they could remain pure and innocent, but it was not meant to be. When they awoke from their beautiful dreams, it would be into the ugliest nightmare anyone could imagine. Worse than war itself.

Ursa took another deep breath as she took the long pole and kept the small boat on the course and headed towards an inlay steadily praying not to be seen by anyone. Thanks to the maps she hoped to take a route back home that would go through the most unpopulated regions.

She expected when she got home her parents would be there to embrace and shelter them. She was depressed to know Ikem, who Ozai had informed her that terrible evening he assassinated him wouldn't be there. How evil could one man be? But considering what she had just escaped from Ozai was truly capable of anything, and nothing should surprise her.

Her grandfather was murdered by Ozai's why was this terrible nightmare she fleeing from any different? Sozin and his family sold their souls to the Anto the Black Spirit of Death 100 years ago and forced her and her family and friends into hiding. What could have been expected to happen when she was forced to marry Ozai just as Sakiko was forced to marry Zhao and even Xiaoying uncertainty fate now? Fate and destiny could be cruel at times.

At least in Xiaoying's case, she had a man who truly loved her for her, and she loved him. Perhaps she'd be the only one to get to marry for love and may be lucky enough to have a child born from two parents who truly loved one another. She sent a silent prayer hoping that was Xiaoying's fate if she lived to make it to Master Piandao's home without Ozai finding out she helped her escape.

Suddenly her mind was snapped back to the task at hand. She at least was able to guide the boat into the lagoon and to the mouth of the estuary and took advantage of the moment to hide in the verdant flourishing foliage and get a bite to eat and check her maps.

She then tried to figure out the daunting task where she was and how she was to get from where she was to get home. Although regrettably cartography had never been her strong suit and to get back without anyone seeing her or the children would be extremely challenging.

It made her stomach twist inside more. She eyed the smooth sea in front of her from her hiding spot. It was absolutely an incredible view to look at for someone which been a prisoner for so long.

From her hiding spot, she could see vivid green, koala-sheep cropped turf studded with daisies and
eye-bright. A huge peacock-goose was proudly strutting about with its young trying to keep up with it in a single file all trying to look dignified and noble.

Beyond the turf, the ground sloped to the bay with perfect white sand, not like the black sand found on Ember Island. And finally came the sea. The sea in the morning light was like a crystal mirror; she could hear the waves turning over quietly on the beach with three large shiny black rocks guarding the entrance to the bay.

Snow white birds circled and mewed, and the air smelled of seaweed, shellfish, and wind. It was the sea itself and all its beauty and freedom it offered away from the prison the palace had been.

As Ursa soaked in the view, she turned again to the children still in their coma. "I wish you were awake to savor this first taste of freedom and beauty. But hopefully, you'll see it and feel when we get home. That's if I can get us home," she spoke in a discouraged voice. Her delicate features were painted over with anxiety and doubted it didn't suit one of such great virtue who had shown so much strength for so many years.

Lamenting she couldn't help but think even if Ozai had the throne, he would still carry out his threat to find her and eliminate her and the children. They knew too much. They knew the truth and were too dangerous to live. Plus, he had no love for his son anyway, and if he killed Zuko, Akiko would die at the same moment. Furthermore, she would never let Azula ever become Ozai's puppet or tool of war again.

"How am I suppose to get home? How am I suppose to get us home safely? What if I fail? What if we die? Oh, what am I suppose to do?" she sobbed loudly to herself as she buried her face her knees and out of her pocket fell both the Sun Charm and White Lotus Tile. Scooping them up in her delicate hands she hugged them close to her heart and cried some more.

"Oh, Yang, Xiaoying, you jeopardized your lives for my children and me to grant us this opportunity to live and be free. You sacrifice so much. I wish I knew for sure you made it out safely.

I yearn you could be with me now and help me get home safely. This journey home is wrought with uncertainty as well as mortal peril. Furthermore, I don't believe I can do this all by myself. Please, I could still desperately use your assistance. Please," she murmured as her silver teardrops fell onto the two cherished trinkets.

They began to shine brilliantly, and then the atmosphere around her begin to shift dramatically. The morning breeze began to assimilate into the dawn's fair light, and then the energy from the two small charms leaped up and joined the swirly mass that seemed to form a butterfly-like chrysalis in front of Ursa.

Ursa shielded her eyes as the illumination intensified and suddenly as a human-sized butterfly emerged from the chrysalis. Ursa's golden eyes shot wide open and her breath all but still as did her heart.

Standing not more than 10 feet away from her was Alanna the White Spirit herself in person! She was even more attractive furthermore angelic in person. The way her mother had described her in her dreams when she predicted her birth paled in comparison to the elegant spirit woman standing before her presence in the morning sunlight.

This woman was tall, willowy with flawless porcelain skin and the most enormous most soulful azure blue eyes ever. Her soft silky hair was whiter than fresh snow and in an even more exotic hairstyle then what was found in the Water Tribe.
Her elaborate junihitoe were made of exquisite silks of purest white, palest pink and loveliest lavender with a set of soft dawn-tinted fingerless gloves and stylish accessories. She could've been a normal noblewoman of one of the Four Nations if not for the fact she had a set of human size bejeweled butterfly wings on her back that was all the hues of the sunrise.

Her radiant smile was warm as the sun itself and filled you with all the love in the world. "Don't be frightened, Ursa. You called for help, and help has come. You really shouldn't be surprised," she cooed softly to her as she gave her a dignified bow of honor.

"I shouldn't? The Spirit of Life herself has appeared before me. I know many do not get that honor. More to the point many aren't even blessed with the honor to ever receive the blessing of ever meeting a spirit, to begin with!" stammered the ex-Fire Nation Princess who couldn't believe what was occurring to her at this moment.

Smiling and giggling playfully Alanna looked at Ursa as if she were a small child who was still seeking to discover how the simple things work. Plus to Alanna, everyone was evermore a child that needed to learn something.

"Ursa, I'm surprised you've not figured out this. But for your information, I wish to enlighten you with some important truth." Alanna responded in a humble and easygoing tone as if they were already beloved friends of numerous years and this was an ordinary conversation.

"What do you wish to enlighten me with, Alanna? What truth?" Ursa asked not having figured it out what was palpable as the sky was sky-blue and the sun rising in the east.

"That you and your family, as well as your best friends families, have perpetually had powerful spirits watching over all of you for generations," Alanna replied quickly as the truth was as clear as day around them.

"What? I don't understand..." Alanna held up a hand to silence her and revealed. "My mother is Raava, and she is the Avatar spirit and chooses who will be the Avatar in each life. She chose your grandfather to be the last Avatar, and all lives the Avatar touches are, in turn, touched in many ways, including spiritually."

"Yang always said she and I shared a spiritual connection because you choose her to be your apprentice?" recalled Ursa as she relived what Yang had divulged to her when they first met and why they shared such an extraordinary friendship.

"Yes, Yang is my apprentice," Alanna confirmed quietly and carried on to clarify further what it meant to be her apprentice. "I'm training her to master my innermost secrets and how to channel my powers. Furthermore, if need be like you observed how to let me become one for her when I need to have an anchor in the human world.

It's not extremely easy for me to take human form or be in one place in the human world when I'm the Spirit of life, Ursa. I'm supposed to be omnipresence as well as omnipotent. Just like my mother's enemy and his son are."

"Anto and his father?" guessed Ursa and majestic spirit woman nodded and continued with her story. Although she looked both profoundly anxious furthermore severely depressed from whatever the anecdote she was about to narrate had to reveal.

"Yes, Anto and his father. Mother and Vaatu do their dance for all of the time, and Anto and I do ours. Although it's remarkably challenging for a spirit to be in the world of Man devoid of some spiritual anchor."
There are spiritual locations throughout the world as I'm certain Xiaoying's told you numerous Yons safeguard, except due to the war countless of them have been demolished or critically damaged. Moreover, many spirits are losing their abilities as a direct result. It's unequivocally atrocious," she looked both resentful and highly distraught about this development.

Ursa couldn't blame the Spirit for her feelings towards the actions of what humans had done to this world and how it influences both humans and spirits and the worlds they both share.

Alanna took a calming breath and continued with a lesson in the enlightenment of why it was so important she helped Ursa and the children right now and how saving them might help the world at a later time.

"What happens to one world affects the other, I'm afraid. Plus, there only a few days like the Solstice to have access to our full powers. It also doesn't help that the Avatar still slumbers awaiting the time to fulfill his destiny."

"The Avatar is alive?!" Ursa was startled as like most of the world feared he was dead and never returning to this world.

"Yes, but I can't tell you where he is or when or where he'll be found once more. That's not part of your journey, or at least not at the moment. I'm sorry I can't say much more about that. For it is not the reason I'm here. I'm here to escort you home. I'm here to give you life for now. Whatever happens years from now, it's not of concern. What happens right now at this moment in time is my responsibility."

To make certain Ozai and Anto don't take you and the children from this world. You and your children have parts to play later in this world. The Spirits know a little bit more than humans although we cannot say anything that would give too much away," Alanna explained in an obscure way to try and say what she could say without giving too much away.

No one should know their future, and even then fates and destiny could change in the blink of an eye. Nothing was set in stone. Even her mother's chosen ones should know that. Though they had a hard time learning that one her mother had often told her how often her chosen ones couldn't figure out how to separate her from their own soul and well it was confusing and why Alanna sought to make sure her "Children" knew the difference between what and who.

Still, she needed to focus on her task, and that was saving what was left of the royal family so they one day could save many more lives and bring life to a world that could be devoured by death if those who chose Vaatu and Anto's way of life ever got too strong. They needed to be protected at all costs. Furthermore, she was just one of many to make sure they continued to remain unscathed.

"How will you get us back home safely?" inquired the panic mother in a despairing voice in front of her.

"Put your faith and trust in me, and I'll make sure you get home. Though first, I like to give you a gift."

"A gift?" she asked in a stunned voice.

"I will be a way you'll have the power of your friends' love and protection and a piece of my spirit with you always. Please if you give me the charm and tile?" as she held out her hands and quite casually Ursa handed over the two precious gifts and placed them in the Spirit's hands.

She nonchalantly closed her hands over them, and her hands gleamed lustrously. She brought her
hands to her chest and placed them over her heart then opened them to unveil a stunningly gorgeous locket.

She'd merged the sun charm and white lotus to fashion the locket. The outside was the sun charm, and when you opened it one side was the tile the other side was a heliotrope butterfly gemstone.

"Please come here, Ursa," the beautiful spirit instructed her as the beautiful granddaughter of the former Avatar strolled over to the daughter of the Avatar Spirit.

Alanna placed the precious locket around Ursa's neck and told her in her beautiful voice gently but purposefully. "You must never remove this locket. It gives you protection and keeps your friends' spirits near you.

Even if for some unexpected reason you don't remember where the locket came from, never remove the locket. It will keep you safe. Even if your mind can't remember, trust your heart to remember it's significant okay?"

"Yes, I swear no matter what I won't ever remove this precious gift no matter what, Alanna," Ursa promised the powerful and beautiful spirit who smiled happily.

"Good. Now you finish eating your breakfast and load up the children. Then I'll start escorting you safely home."

"As yourself? By my side?" she asked in an unsettling manner.

She shook her head. "I'm a spirit, and I've numerous forms. You'll know me when you see me. Trust me. Just finish eating first, and I'll be back in half an hour to lead you the first leg of the journey before we stop for the night," and with a smile, she vanished just like a ghost.

Ursa wasn't sure what to think but clutching the locket tightly she quickly ate a bowl of rice before loading up the boat and waiting for her escort. She didn't have to wait for long.

She heard a familiar song on the breeze and looked up and saw sitting on a branch above a swan size bird. It had the same coloring as Alanna's human form, but this bird looked far more impressive than anything Ursa had ever seen.

The size of a swan with a long luxurious tail and abundant plumage on its head and singing like a voice out of a dream with eloquent azure blue eyes and she swore it could smile.

The bird waited till Ursa was ready and then took off and she followed it as it led the way up the river and kept singing its song. She was as graceful as she was beautiful and stayed at a steady even pace as she flew.

They made surprisingly good time as Alanna in her bird form showed her the way. She would change her song if she saw a threat or hindrances that was obstructing their way. Or if they were about to be spotted by humans, she flew down, and somehow her form hides the boat completely till the humans disappeared.

For two days they traveled this way making perfect time till they came to an insignificant desolate isle to rest for the night. Ursa knew the children would soon awaken from their three-day spirit coma. Alanna flew off inland leaving Ursa to make a fire and get the campsite ready for when the children awoke.

She had some sweet tea going and bowls of rice ready when one by one they finally roused and were naturally confused as to where they were and what was going on. As the last thing they
remembered was going to bed in their rooms.

"Mom? What's going on? How did we get out here? What's going on?" inquired Zuko as he rubbed the sleep out of his eye.

Yawning loudly Akiko also rubbed her eyes, "Where Xiaoying? Why aren't we in our bedrooms? What are we doing out here, Mom?" she queried drowsily.

"Where Daddy, Mom? Why aren't we at the palace? Why are we out in the middle of nowhere?" Azula questioned in confusion as she shivered for a moment and her mother covered her in a thick blanket.

"Kids, you need to sit down. This isn't gonna be an easy story to tell, and I'm not sure I can say if the ending gonna be happy or not." their mother told them, and their three young children looked puzzled but gathered around the fire obediently.

She gave them each a bowl of rice plus some tea. She let them has some food and a little refreshment before she began to reveal what was going on.

She explained the truth of the matter in a matter of fact way. It would do no good to lie to the children about what really was going on or what Ozai had fully intended to do. Or what the reality of the situation was.

It was a disturbing, appalling and horrific revelation-something no child should have to hear or be burden with ever in their lives. Yet there they were two ten-year-old children learning they had been sentenced to death because of one man's ambition. That he honestly was going to murder his own child, fully knowing by doing so, he'd kill two.

There were other truths they heard they didn't like hearing. That Ozai had been abusing their mother from the first day of their marriage. That the reason he abused Zuko and Akiko was to punish their mother for her simple wish that her son not to be like his father and that they could be happy when she wasn't.

Plus for Azula to learn he'd been in his own way abusing her to make her his ideal child because what he wanted was a weapon and not a daughter. The perfect tool and for him, she was expendable as well now for knowing too much.

Ursa began to reveal what she'd been forbidden to speak about herself. Her own past, her family and friends because Ozai told her she was his possession and she was to be defined by him and everything she was before mattered not.

Tearfully she started to explain her family history including who she was descended from. Then to her children shock about her family promise of friendship with Xiaoying and Akiko's families and the truths about both families that they'd kept secret from the world for the past 100 years.

Akiko was shocked Ursa knew she was the last Dragon Guardian. Ursa was happy that Akiko did know that, but also sad Akiko honestly didn't know her own family history because she'd been forbidden from telling her about her personal family history.

She then spoke with great pleasure and enjoyment of her childhood about her home and her friends. She was crying when she spoke of the man who was HER Fire Lily. Ikem.

When she spoke about him she spoke of him in song. It was the song she'd been singing all these years in her heart as she thought about her precious memories and her love, Ikem.
"It's been so long since we last talked.
I hope you're still the same,
hoping you'll never change,
because our love can't be replaced.
I won't let our memories fade away,
Keep me in your heart for always.

You made me believe,
I could do almost anything.
Stood beside me,
through the tears, through the years.

I'll remember you,
and that's true forevermore.

You're the one I always missed,
I knew it would feel like this,
I'll be there for you,
no matter what you're going through.

In my heart, you'll always be forever, my love,
I'll remember you.

I promised you, I won't forget the times we shared, the moments we cared,
You'll always be the sun in my sky.

It's fate that brings me back to meet you someday soon.
Even though we were forced to separate ways.

You made me believe,
I could do almost anything.
Stood beside me,
over the years, over the years.

I'll remember yoooooou,
and that's true forevermore.

You're the one I always missed,
I knew it would feel like this.
I'll be there for yooooou,
no matter what you're going through.

In my heart, you'll always be forever, my love,
I'll remember you.

Is the day should come when you need someone,
(you'll know that I'll follow)
I will be there.

Don't ever let there be,
doubt in your heart,
because I'll remember you, you.

I'll remember you,
and that's true forevermore.

You're the one I always missed,
I knew it would feel like this.
I'll be there for you,
no matter what you're going through,

In my heart, you'll always be forever, my love.
I'll remember you.

Forever, my love, I'll remember you!"

She paused for a moment after she finished her song to look at her children as they're taking all this in.

"So, Mom, let's see if we got this. Dad was ordered to kill Akiko and me, correct?" Zuko asked slowly, and his mother nodded.

"And you and our godmother and your tea party friends who are members of a secret society chosen by the Alanna the Spirit of Life helped smuggle us all out of the palace?" Akiko followed this up, and again Ursa nodded.

"And right now we are on our way to your place of birth being lead there by the Spirit of Life herself, praying our monstrous sadistic father doesn't track us down and kill us?" Azula finished up to see if they had got it all.

"Yes, that sums it all up. I'm so sorry I couldn't protect you all better. That any of you had to be abused, to begin with. I wish we could've escaped years ago. I never wanted to marry Ozai.

The only good thing that Ozai ever did was he gave me you two," looking at Zuko and Azula. "And if Zuko hadn't been born, you wouldn't have met you Akiko. As much as I hate to admit it. I think both me and your birth mother had to undergo incomprehensible misery just so you three could be brought into this world."

"Why would we be brought into a world just to experience unendurable suffering, Mom?" asked Akiko confused as she was thinking about what else Ursa had told her.

"Akiko, I promise I'll tell you all about your family. I'll take you to where your grandmother's ashes lie, and I'll make sure you know your family history and that I can finally at long last tell you about your mother's childhood.

I've wanted to tell you every day, but I was forbidden as was Xiaoying. We couldn't reveal we knew each other because of Ozai, and it killed us both. There so much we want to tell you.

There so much I want to share with all three of you of your history. Of all three of our families. How ours, Akiko's and Xiaoying's are so interwoven and how we've so much to share."

"We all like that very much, Mom. Even I would like to know there something more to me than a monster," Azula dipped her head down low in disgrace.

"Azula, you're not a monster. You choose who you want to be. You can choose to change your fate. But for now, it's time to sleep. We can rest here a night or two. Then we've to move on."

"Do you think Alanna still watching over us?" asked Zuko as Ursa started to make them a bed with the blankets and large burgundy silk pillow that Alanna had provided for them, and the Sisterhood
had packed for them.

"I think she's watching over us just fine, son," Ursa smiled with her eyes twinkling as she pointed to a rock formation that overlooked the island. The three children looked up and could make out a large and magnificent liger who had been Alanna in different animal form standing guard over them.

Alanna watched with passionate motherly love as the family slept and she kept watch. Breathing deeply, she allowed her senses to be open to the world's soul for a moment. She felt herself connect to every living thing for the moment.

Humans could be so foolish at times to think this realm of theirs this Earth was dead and without a soul and there to claim in their petty disputes. But that was far from the truth.

As Raava the Avatar's Spirit daughter Alanna knew both this Realm and Spirit world that everything every rock, tree, and creature had a life, spirit, and a name. And for her, it was her job to protect and ensure that was sustained.

To work alongside her mother and her chosen human vessel in each life and that's why "her children" the Sisterhood of the Dawn were selected for various virtues and purity of heart and soul.

Though like in the case of Kami she'd also been able to choose Yons for the Order of the White Lotus as they protect unique locations and people usually spiritually or of some other critical nature.

Alanna was also wondering at the moment if Anto had taken a form to enter the human world and try to infect more people? Was that why no-one had the common sense to end this war without her mother's chosen one helping as he slumbered?

Anto was many things but egging on evil was one of them he did best. Then thinking on she knew in her heart that Anto was the source of this problem Ursa and the children were in the first place.

There been so much turmoil going on back in Ba Sing Se however before she could stop it Anto made his move on their Pai Sho board. He'd claimed Lu Ten. Furthermore, he wanted Iroh to remember it for the rest of the time and never rest in peace from it.

Therefore he'd ridiculed Iroh by harassing him in his nightmares singing his song and showing him spiritually how he'd taken Lu Ten. When Anto wanted to torture people and obtain a powerful soul that would lead to mass murder he wants to drag it out with sadistic pleasure.

He was Vaatu's son after all. Consequently, she perceived the fact he'd be occupied for at least two weeks torturing Iroh with the same nightmare and singing his pusillanimous verse. Dragging it out as long as he could Before then showing his evil diabolical eyes swing as he swung black soul sword to cut Lu Ten's life-force in two ending his life. Then using his whip to bind him up and taking him to the Spirit World to do Spirits knows what to him.

Next to make matters wickeder he'd conceive horrific and gruesome illusions of what happened to Ursa and the children till he could fulfill them if she didn't meet her mission and get them back to Ursa's hometown safely and hope they could find more help.

Alanna sighed as she awoke from her thoughts to see the family was sleeping peacefully and seemed alright, but her fears and doubts linger. Looking up at the celestial skies above Alanna whispered.

"Mom? I don't know where you are in this world as you and your chosen vessel disappeared so long
ago. But I miss you terribly and could use you right now. Please. Tell me what I should do that will help me save this mother and her children?"

The air in front of the transformed spirit began to ripple like water in a pond, and slowly a semi-transparent imagine appeared before the disguised spirit. It was the image of the spirit hidden within the soul of the Avatar itself.

"Mom?" cried Alanna as tears fell from her cat eyes of her disguised form.

"Hello, my daughter. Been a long time since we last saw each other, sweetheart, hasn't it?"

"Nearly 100 years to be exact. That's how long the war been going on, and in about six years, it will be exactly 100 years. I've missed you, Mother. I've not truly felt you all this time. I only knew in my heart that you and the Avatar only slumbered but not died."

"True we slumber but haven't died. He will awaken when the ones meant to free him and start his path of destiny come along. But as you know..."

"There is time to live and time to die. There is time for each season. They're a time for the sun to rise as it is for the sunset. Nothing happens before its time. Everything happens for a reason and only when it's meant to happen," she recited her lesson from her mother.

"Yes, painful truth but a truth nonetheless. But, my lovely Lady, why are you in doubt?"

"Because, Mother, the world is already out of balance and I've got to bring a young family to safety without Anto somehow and Fire Lord Ozai murdering them. And I'm not sure I can do that," the Great Spirit's daughter confessed showing no matter how old she was she still extremely young compared to her mother.

Raava was silent for a moment before one of her tentacles wrapped itself in what would've been the equivalent of a hug around her daughter's transformed neck and dried her tears. Her daughter's cat form purred, and a smile lit up her lips from her mother's comfort.

"Do you remember the lullaby I sang to you when you were young, Alanna?"

"I think so but could you sing it again, Mom? I miss your singing so much."

"Yes, my lovely Lady. My lullaby to you if you recall went like this.

"I pray you'll be under my gaze,
And watch you where you go,
And help you to be wise.
Help me to let go,
Every mother's prayer,
Every child knows.

Lead us to that place,
Guide us with your grace,
To that place where we'll be safe.

I pray we'll find the light,
And hold it in our hearts.
As darkness falls each night,
Remind them I am here."
Every mother's prayer,
Every child knows.

Need to find that place,
Guide us to that place,

Give us faith, so we'll be safe.

Lead us to that place,
Guide us with your grace,
To the place where we'll be safe."

"Beautiful, Mother, just beautiful. But how does that help me?" she asked still not fully understanding her mother's advice.

"Take the advice of the song and use that as your guide and inspiration. Then you'll get with your faith and grace to lead Ursa and the children to a place where they'll be safe."

"Thank you, Mother. I'll do you proud. I promise.\) Raava's daughter vowed passionately.

"I know you will, I love you my dear Alanna and know you do me proud every day. Now I've to go back to my human body. I can't maintain this connection any longer," as her voice and astral form started to fade.

"I understand. I love you, Mommy, and know you make me proud, and I hope we meet again soon. Goodbye," as they held "hands" as long as they could through a tearful goodbye.

"Goodbye, my daughter!" as Raava vanished to return the unknown Avatar who still had to wait six years before released from his slumber.

Alanna was of mixed feelings. She was, on the one hand, happy to see her mother. On the other hand, she knew the cost of her mother astral projecting her form from whatever location she was it came at a terrible price.

She hoped she just hadn't hurt the Avatar wherever he was or his slumber. Nevertheless at least her mother's love, faith and strengthened hers and gave her hope to continue in her journey to deliver Ursa and her family home.

She spent that night into the next day providing for Ursa and the children with food and clean water while standing guard over them. Once the group had enough time to recuperate she transformed once more into her bird form and began to lead the way once more home.

She kept singing her song of love to keep their spirits up and bring only good luck their way. Her soulful and motherly eyes took notice of the critical details going on inside the small red boat.

It was apparent the children were still having a great deal of difficulty with absorbing all the facts of their current circumstance of the turn events in their life. Along with all the stunning revelations of the truth of their mother's past including precisely who and what Ozai was and all crimes he'd done.

It looked like all of them was taking a good hard look at their lives and attempting to piece back together who they were. While striving to figure out fact from fiction and figure out what was real and what had been had been lies.

Plus during the middle of this life-shattering event and identity crises that was throwing them
through emotional turmoil, they'd to reevaluate their relationships with each other along with their own secrets.

Not entirely unproblematic for anyone to deal with that kind of trauma drama, however especially not easy for children so young. After all, they were only ten and eight years old moreover this was after being both royalty and abused at the same time.

Consequently, this was going to be a particularly arduous journey for them in various ways as they had to figure out who they were from the inside out because everything they thought they knew was now upside down and well nothing was ever going to be the same.

Ursa knew she'd a long and challenging task ahead of her to help guide her children through this traumatic turn of events they'd been through and to help them find out who they indeed were on the inside.

Nonetheless, she was more than ready to help them and hopefully at least getting to a place where there wasn't so much abuse, negativity, no exceptions and demands would help. Where they had the freedom to chose whoever they wanted to be would help.

That there was more to a person than a title like a Prince, Princess, Lady. Or they are firebenders even. That merely told the world what they are. Hopefully, they soon learn WHO THEY ARE.

Ursa smiled as she knew she was missing Iroh who eternally spoke so philosophically. More than once he had tried to tell the children that titles and bending didn't define who a person was, but it was the sum of a person that said the world who you were.

She felt now that was about to be put to the test and see if that was true. Would going home indeed reveal who the four of them were on the inside? Would they find their true selves along with freedom and possibly love?

Looking up, she saw Alanna was directing them to retire for the evening on another small isle. When they got on this island and made camp Ursa checked the map.

They're halfway back to Hira'a. They could reach it in four days at the pace they're going. Still, they'd have to get past a nearby port with a messenger hawk tower first. Frowning at the significant obstacles in their path, she looked up, hearing gay hilarity. A smile turned her frown upside down at sight before her.

Zuko and Akiko were busy attempting to teach Azula how to do firerope jumping which the firebending prodigy still wasn't picking up easy. However, her older brother and his fire lily were being patient and understanding.

Ursa had to smile. All this time, traveling the relationship between the three children had changed dramatically. Akiko had stopped calling Azula "Demon" and Azula had stopped called Akiko "Orphan" and Zuko "Zu-Zu" or "Dumb-Dumb"

They're generally more sensitive to each other and more protective. Furthermore, Azula was even attempting to help them improve on their firebending when they'd practice during the times they'd rested. In turn, though extremely reluctant at first Zuko and Akiko began to demonstrate their secret moves which Azula was genuinely impressed with and wanted to learn how to do.

Akiko right now was telling Azula the key in firerope jumping was to jump in time with the music. Any music listen to the beat and jump to that beat. So when coming up with a routine keep it in time to the song you base it on, and that's how you perform it flawlessly.
Hence Azula tried to sing a song as she jumped the ropes this time and found she had an easier time skipping the ropes and pull off a few firebending tricks while still jumping as long as she kept the song going in her mind.

"Kids can you come here for a moment please?" called Ursa and they cease their play and came rushing right over.

"Yes, Mom?" they asked all at once.

"Well, I wanted to tell you were are halfway to our goal. Except we've to cross this stretch over water to get home. The Boiling Sea," she pointed to a spot on the map marked for a stretch of sea that went on for two miles in each direction.

"Why is it called the Boiling Sea?" Zuko asked puzzled as he examined the map over his mother's left shoulder.

"Zuko didn't you pay attention in school at all?" snapped Azula fiercely at her brother.

"Azula, we promised, no more putting each other down, remember?" scolded Akiko Azula who turned maroon and looked down miserably.

"I'm...sor...sorr...I'm sorry, Akiko. I'm sorry to you too, Zuko. I guess it's gonna take longer then I thought to change some habits," she shuddered as it was so hard to say a real apology.

Azula glanced at her mother, who nodded and gave her an encouraging smile as she placed her hand her shoulder. Feeling stronger and more relaxed the little girl then turned to explain what the Boiling Sea was.

"The Boiling Sea is a two-mile body of water that is full of burning, toxic water from the minerals and heat of the undersea volcanoes. It's extremely dangerous to cross as the water always at the boiling point, and again the water is poisonous to touch, and the air is choked with fumes let off from the steam," Azula elucidated the dangers of this body of water.

"So if it's that risky and there no way around it, how are we gonna cross it?" Akiko asked in dismay knowing they were between a rock and a hard place.

"That's gonna be a problem we'll have to overcome because of the navy port and messenger hawk station nearby to keep ships away from the danger zone," Ursa explained in a disheartened voice. She pointed out the other dangers the on the map clearly showing this be the hardest part getting to their destination.

"Well, we've gotten this far without being discovered, and I'm positive Alanna got an idea how we can get past a naval blockade and dangerous body of water without being seen. We just got to trust her, right, Mom?" Zuko said looking up at his mother with a big smile on his face with hope sparkling brightly in his gold eyes.

Clutching the locket she'd been gifted she nodded. "I'm sure she knows a way around the Boiling Sea and to get us home."

The family slept peacefully that morning, but they woke up the next morning with water sprayed into their faces and playful chatter. Looking up they saw what looked like a dolphin with oversized fins that were glowing which still matched Alanna's coloring.

She was playing around with all the natural energy and playfulness of a dolphin until she jumped out of the air and was able to glide over to them! She formed a chain of spiritual power to the boat,
and they all climbed aboard, and she began to swim at least 25 mph.

It wasn't till she approaching the Boiling Sea she changed tactics. Mustering all her strength, she jumped as high into the sky as she could and rapidly began to change colors till she and the boat and everyone in it blended perfectly with the background.

She soared effortlessly on her wing-like fins as if the sky that reflects the water below was the sea itself and she just kept changing to match the colors below. Finally, after over an hour they touched down safely on the other side.

She then resumed swimming and kept going. Finally, at long last, Ursa stood up and smiled with tears in her eyes as she could see her hometown in sight. Alanna swam till she came to a small sea cave in the cove on the beach where they could hide the boat.

Once she had completed her task, she transformed back into her pure form and smiled. She looked totally and utterly exhausted as if she wanted to sleep for a week and not wake up nevertheless she still was smiling even if it was a shaky smile it was a smile nonetheless.

"Welcome home, Ursa, and to you, darling Zuko, Akiko, and Azula welcome to your new home. May you find life, love, and happiness here. I must leave you now. But know I'll be checking in from time to time.

I leave you with one last form of protection before I must leave you," as she leaned in a kissed each of them on the forehead leaving her mark within their very skin forever.

"Now you've been touched by me forever and have my protection forever. I'll know if you're in trouble, and I'll help in any way I can. For now, I must go. Good luck." as she disappeared in her chrysalis back to the Spirit World.

"Wow, that was just plain astonishing!" Zuko declared who couldn't believe he was just kissed by a spirit.

"No other words for that, Zuky. No other words for it than that!" Akiko agreed with her true love who she was holding onto for balance.

"Well, are we going to stand in this grotto or go see Grandma and Grandpa?" Azula wanted to know as she looked at her mom anxiously.

"Yes, I think it's time I showed you my home and let you see where you all came from. And yes, that includes you Akiko as your family is as much part of Hira'a as mine is."

Making sure the boat was well concealed and secure they joined hands and started to gradually walk to the village under the ghostly silvery moonlight and headed into town with both exhilaration also trepidation not knowing what awaited them.

Songs by Japananimegirl. Note she is doing ALL the song tweaking for the stories, and I cannot do any chapters with songs in them till she's done doing them. So I've to be patient, and so do you with the sections as many sections have songs. I have to be patient with her doing her job of tweaking the song lyrics for my use. Thank you and thank you, my friend, for your hard work.
Contrasted to the Capital Hira’a was prosaic, diminutive furthermore rather humbling to Zuko, Akiko, and Azula who had never seen such a picturesque, little hamlet in their lives. It was the absolute opposite of what they were used too. After being raised in the lap of luxury of the Fire Nation capital, this was a real eye-opening experience for all three of them.

It was challenging to believe their mother grew up here or for Akiko to image that her birth mother spent a large part of her life here and this was also the nearest thing she had to call home. Or the fact their godmother called this place home at all. That any of their family came from such humbling origins. All Zuko and Azula had ever known was their father's side of the family. Furthermore, Akiko had been denied so long the right to know her origins including real history or even her connection to this place as well thanks to Ozai's family.

It was again astonishing how the choices and actions of one man from 100 years ago were now affecting people a century later. How Fire Lord Sozin's actions were now affecting both his great-grandchildren as well as his former best friend's wife's best friend's great-granddaughter. A straightforward choice changed history for their families for all time, and it is what led them to this moment.

It positively was mind-boggling and astonishing. Fate, destiny, free will, choice. Indeed how does it all come to this? How do the decisions of past generations lead to a mother with her three children fleeing for their lives? Or now only finding out about the other half of their family tree or just discovering any of it for the first time? Honestly, how does this happen?

Deciding not to dwell on those mysteries of the universe, the royal family made their way into the village. As it was the middle of the night, everyone was in bed for the night. Therefore, no-one was roaming the dirt paths aside from them. Which again was a direct contradiction to the cobblestone streets back at the capital. Everything here was so different! It was overwhelming their senses with just how different everything was!

Things here were unsophisticated, humble with a snug moreover warm-hearted atmosphere. There wasn't anything extravagant or embellishments anywhere. There were several flowers and a further natural look around here. As most people had thriving wildflower beds or at least a garden of some type. Like water or zen.

Things were also far more spacious and a lot more whimsical with a strong feeling of community and overall amiability. Much more cheerful and spirited colors were present throughout the village of Hira’a. For example, the red here wasn't imperial red like back at the capital.

Rather it was more of a rose-colored red and there was an abundance of festive figures that signified friendship and family all over. It helped soothe the children's concerns as they roamed the vacant streets in the pale moonlight.

Ursa was taking in any familiar sights of her old home as her long-buried memories awash over her. It may have been years, but it was mostly like yesterday for her. The first building that she recognized that was familiar to her was the schoolhouse.

She casually made her way over to the schoolhouse and could see it hadn't changed in the numerous years she'd been gone from home. The children looked at it curiously as they
approached the flower-covered oak wood fence. The L-Shape building was again inconsistent from the schools back in the capital.

Back at the capital, a school would not have been painted the way this one was both physically or have its landscape done in the manner of fashion as this small village had done it's. They were questioning how Hira'a got away with doing this without being burned to be honest as they observed it in astonishment and confusion.

This L-Shape school shared the merry atmosphere of the rest of the village. For example under all the windowpanes and around the perimeter of the building were gorgeous flowers.

The children could readily name all the wildflowers that were beautifying the schoolhouse. The ones in the flower boxes under the windows were chrysanthemums and peony. The ones encompassing the building were fire lilies, fire flowers, and sundrops. Finally in the two large vessels by both the gate and front door were red lilac and Agnimitra's tears.

The other thing that wasn't typical of a traditional Fire Nation School was the fact there was green grass or the water garden by the tip of the L where a cherry blossom tree was planted or the fact there were toys scattered about.

Every one of the new Fire Nation schools was all about being super austere with order and discipline. Minds were to be appropriately molded with no freedom of expression. This? This school here was just virtue, entertainment, and heaps of creativity furthermore liberty. It all had to do, of course, with making sure the war continued, and people went with the line it was all okay and was justified. That the people persisted in being clueless and unenlightened.

"Mom? What kind of school is this?" Zuko looked up at his mother in excitement as he could even make out with his keen eyes some dazzling paintings in the classroom window. This was a far better school than the one back in the capital he'd been forced to attend. He would like to go here and would look forward to school instead of dreading it like back where he came from.

"Well, I'm taking this as a sign that Ms. Lal still lives and teaches here," his mother gave him a tender grin as she rubbed her locket and felt a warm sensation that she took to mean she was correct. She could sense that this locket Alanna had gifted her had some unique qualities. Furthermore, they would assist her in times of necessity. If it had come from the Spirit of Life, it must be quite extraordinary admittedly.

"Who is Ms. Lal?" Azula instantly questioned while she was also taking in every detail of how much different this school was from where she and her friends had gone. She felt a bit of grief as she thought of Mai and Ty Lee and twinge of guilt as she now realized she hadn't treated them as well as she should have. Too late to fix that mistake. Another thing to add to the long list of regrets.

"Ursa could see Azula was feeling a bit down and squeezed her shoulder reassuringly before answering her question. "Ms. Lal was the village school teacher for many generations. If she still around which I hope she is she'd be in her early seventies.

She was one of the friendliest ladies you'd ever meet. She was absolutely like the ultimate grandmother and treated all her students like her grandchildren. She was incredibly composed, thoughtful, dotting and continuously willing to listen.

She had her style of teaching and didn't follow how the rest of Fire Nation teaches children. She didn't believe in taking away children's imagination or in as she once said, "Brainwash, rinse and dried"
She desired people to think for themselves, make their own choice, and follow their hearts and dreams."

"Sounds like she was a good woman. I hope she's still around so we can meet her, Mom. Did my birth mom know her?" Akiko inquired immediately, and Ursa nodded with an affectionate smile as she thought back on the summers of her childhood.

"Yes, she took time out her day every summer for individual lessons with your mother Sakiko as well as Xiaoying to support their schooling. As they never got much schooling due to being on the move the rest of the year."

"What else did my mom Sakiko and our godmother do here in the summertime?" Akiko asked, quickly eager to do more. All three starving for more knowledge at this point and want it now. They couldn't wait for a second longer they had to have it right now this very second!

"Well," Ursa thought for a moment and then led them down the lane about two blocks away was as she hoped Trader Kito's Rare Finds Shop.

"This is Ms. Lal's husband Trader Kito's trading post. Roughly the only time foreigners came to do any business with Hira'a was during the summertime. Kito was a gentle giant of a man," she fondly recollected as she was starting to get lost on her way down memory lane.

"So he was pretty tall?" Azula surmised as they hiked a little nearer to the store. It wasn't an unusually large store; however, it was well kept for such an aged building. There were few things here and there to spruce it up.

Like someone had crafted a wind chime on hanging on the porch. It had dragons and phoenixes dancing around a golden sun. There was a hand-carved sun on the door which had one side was the sun up a smile to show when opened and the other side with it sleeping to show when closed. Plus exquisitely knitted welcome mat.

"I guess it's charming if you like little knickknacks. It seems he takes his work seriously." Azula noted as she was examining every inch of the shop with a detailed eye.

"Well, he was a bit of a perfectionist. Everything had to be in its place and look perfect when he was working. But again, he was very good with kids and loved to spin a yarn about all the tales he heard from those he traded with." Ursa described as she remembered hearing to his enchanting tales with her friends as they ogled all the items he had within the shop.

"Hey, Mom, do you know what those two buildings are over there?" asked Zuko abruptly pointing at two newer looking buildings off in the distance that was near the community stage.

Ursa squinted as she looked at the unfamiliar buildings and couldn't tell what they were. "No, I've not seen them before, Zuko," she replied sincerely. "They must've been built after I was taken away. Let's go see what they are."

Flying down the road they quickly rounded the bend to the building that was about 28 feet away from the stage on the right was a tea shop/restaurant with an outdoor cafe section called "Zalika and Iye's Tea and Fine Dining"

"Zalika?" Ursa put the heel of her right hand to her forehead. "Zalika. I know that name. I know that name. Why can't I remember who that is?" she looked especially frustrated with herself for failing to identify who that was.

While Ursa was frustrated with her inability to remember someone from the village the children
had wandered off to check out the other building that was 28 feet away on the other side of the stage and it was declaring itself "Master Edan's Firebending Academy"

"Mom! Mom! It's a firebending academy!" they ran back excited about this little village having a master. They were starting to think this place might not even have firebenders.

"What? What are you talking about?" Ursa came out of her little trip out of reality. They immediately revealed the other brand-new building was a Firebending Academy, and someone identified as Master Edan taught it. Which they felt was a good thing if they were going to live here now at least they could continue with their firebending lessons.

"I agree that is a good thing the village now has a proper master and place to teach children firebending. We didn't have many benders when I was a child. I'm guessing the number of benders went up in recent years."

"Well, are we gonna stand out in the cold or go see who we came all this way to see, Mommy?" asked Azula impatiently, which her whole body language was screaming. It was also clear that both Zuko and Akiko were also getting a little impatience as well. This whole ordeal hadn't been easy on any of the kids after all.

"Yes, we are very close to my home. It's just three blocks away. Let's go. C'mon, sweethearts, we're almost home," as they all joined hands and hurried down the street all looking forward to meeting Ursa's parents.

When they reached the house, Ursa paused and asked the children to stand behind her as she knocked so not to overwhelm her parents. However when she knocked it wasn't her parents that answered but an unknown little girl.

"Yes, can I help you, Ma'am?"

"I was looking for my... I mean, I was looking for Magistrate Jinzuk and his wife, Rina?"

"I'm sorry. They passed away years ago."

"Oh, sorry to disturb you. Might you know where their ashes were laid to rest? Or the ashes from the graves in the backyard? I know that Rina's best friends were laid to rest in the backyard by a cherry blossom tree. Do you know what happened to their ashes or Jinzuk or Rina's?"

"Sorry I don't know that either. All I know is that the cherry tree was struck by lightning years ago and was burned down. I don't know what became of the graves beneath. And I wasn't born when Jinzuk and Rina died.

So I wouldn't know where their ashes were laid to rest or what might have happened to the ashes of their friends if they survived the lightning. Sorry, I can't be more help," the little girl replied with downcast eyes.

"No, it's alright. Thank you for all you could offer. Sorry again for disturbing you." Ursa hid her tears as she walked back into the darkness.

She waited until they were at the gate to tell the children the sobering news. That her parents had perished years ago, and she had no idea were their ashes might be or what became of Akiko's grandmother's ashes or Xiaoying's mother's ashes.

Now they all felt a touch of depression and desperation. They had fled the palace and made it to Hira'a, except they had no place to go. No one to take them in and to top it all off they were
starving.

The children tried to hide the fact they're starving from their mother as she wandered to the last place that still felt like home. The village stage as she collapsed crying in hopeless depression.

Zuko, Akiko, and Azula all did their best to cheer up their mother the best they could. However, the was no hiding the fact they're hungry from her when their empty stomachs were rumbling so blatantly.

Amid despair and hopelessness, no-one notice that Ursa's new locket faintly gleamed for a second. Or that two minutes later another light was approaching them.

"Pardon me, Ma'am, but are you alright?" inquired a sympathetic voice of a man.

Ursa looked up as the children got behind her and tried to look small. Ursa turned to look at the source of both the light and voice. It was a young gentleman with a mustache and short ponytail that she didn't recognize though he had kind eyes.

Though those same loving eyes when they saw her face looked as if they see a ghost for some reason. She quickly shook it off and answered, "I could use a little help, to be honest. My family and I are in a bit of trouble."

"Well, I'd like to help you in any way I can. Please, at least let me buy you all breakfast. You all look like you haven't had a decent meal for over a week. Growing children should have good food."

"You'd help a perfect stranger? Why would you be so kind to us? When you don't know us?" Ursa questioned as he helped her and the children off the stage.

"I owe some old friends of mine a favor I'd like to pay back. Plus, you should always help people in need. My name is Noreen, by the way. I'm the new village acting director. C'mon let's get you and your family the best food in town," he spoke in a sympathetic and peaceful voice that made them feel they could trust him.

Not too look a gift ostrich-horse in the mouth Ursa and the children followed the man known as Noreen back to the tea shop/restaurant. Taking a seat at one of the outdoor tables a woman came outside shortly to receive their order.

Ursa looked at the woman who again she swore she knew but couldn't place. Her face was quite familiar. She was a slim lady who wore a pinkish-lavender shirt with a floral print, matching pants, flats, and her long black hair was in a bun held together by chopsticks and matching gemstone barrettes with little gold studs.

"Good morning to you all! I hope you're all having a fabulous day!" the woman greeted in a lively voice. "What can I get you all today?"

"Well, what would you recommend?" asked Ursa respectfully to the lady who looked at her curiously as if she too was trying to place her.

"Well, for someone like you who seems so down in the dumps, I recommend the special. My husband Iye is the cook and handles the food and money. I handle the tea, decor, and the sunny thought advice of the day."

"Sunny thought advice?"
"Something I learned from my mother, Ms. Lal, the school teacher? Bless her soul, she's still alive to teach the children of Hira’a. Every day I always give my customers one particularly sunny cheerful thought to think about-to hopefully bring about good fortune to their day. So they never see the world in black and white but in all colors and shades of gray."

"Which is ironic with you isn't it, Zalika, considering your colored blind?” joked Noreen playfully to which Zalika glowed and swatted his head lightly.

"Well, okay yes, I can't even tell my country colors correctly. Although I'm fabulous with prints, as you can see on my clothes. Furthermore, I can see for myself your a young mother been through a lot recently.

Therefore tell you what this honey is on the house. I'll ask Iye to cook up the breakfast supreme, and I'll make my best tea recipe for you all. It will be ready in half an hour. So sit tight," and with a respectful bow, she left.

"Now, I know why the name Zalika sounded familiar. Ms. Lal's daughter! It was on the tip of my tongue, and I couldn't remember. She was always the best tea maker in the village," Ursa mused cheerfully as that memory became unlocked in her brain.

"Yes, she and her husband Iye, who is the best chef in all of Hira’a, opened this tea shop/restaurant about 11 years ago. Before they're only running it out of the back of her parent's house.

"It's been so long since I've been in Hira'a. I'm afraid I've forgotten a few things. Like didn't Zalika and Iye have a small son? Or am I mistaken?"

"No, you're not mistaken. Yeah, his name is Edan, and he's the village Firebending Master even if he's only 19. He's the only one the village got."

"That's right she married at age 17?"

"Yeah, very young. So you are from around here?"

"Long ago. Long ago."

"Mom, is breakfast gonna be here soon?” Zuko demanded abruptly as he was getting especially impatient.

"Son, please mind your manners. I know you, your sister, and your fire lily haven't had a decent meal in a while, but please try to conduct yourselves properly. Please?"

"Yes, Mom," they all replied obediently. They all instantly corrected their posture and tried to look as well mannered as they'd been brought up.

"You know you don't have to act so proper around here," Noreen laughed a little at the children. "No need to be so severe. I don't mind if a little amateurish or not perfect ladies and gentlemen. I mean your children," he laughed again. "You can't expect to be like perfect little adults and prim and proper. Part of the fun of being a kid is getting messy and making mistakes, you know. Getting a little dirty."

"That's not how we taught to behave," Zuko shook his head surprised at the man's words.

"Yes, we were taught we had to be perfect at all times. Anything less was unacceptable.” Azula unquestionably emphasized to Noreen as if he was the clueless one.
"Yes, it's profoundly significant to honor your ancestry and live up to your legacy! Furthermore, good manners are essential at all times. That's what the only good man in our lives taught us," Akiko revealed what she could before Ursa warned them with her eyes they couldn't say more.

Luckily by now, breakfast was being served now by Zalika, who was having help by her husband. He was just as slender as her but taller and paler. His long hair was kept in a bun at the back of his head. He wore a long robe shirt of the same color and design of his wife with a matching hat on his head, and he had a thin mustache.

"Voila, my masterpiece of the day!" Iye spoke as he served the family and Noreen their food. "I've cooked you up to a feast! A roast duck with skin which is parted and crisp, with the meat salty, fatty, and delicious. There is a squab cooked in soy sauce so that its skin and flesh were a deep dark brown down to the bone.

I've also included a shark-fin soup that tasted like it was freshly caught from the sea. Finally, to top it all of there are huge prawns fried in a special batter that gave them an extra fluffy coat. Enjoy!" as everyone eyes were big as tea saucers and mouths were watering.

"And for your sunny thought of the day. Rainbows follow stormy skies. Have a good day. We've other customers to serve. See you later and good luck in everything." and with that, Ms. Lal's daughter and her husband went back to serving the rest of their customers.

The children were all about to dive in. A look from their mother told them to eat properly. Therefore like a proper prince, princess, and lady, they ate as they savored the delicious food.

While the children were distracted by filling their bellies Ursa and Noreen were busy making small talk.

"You seem well acquainted with Fire Nation Theater and Literature," Noreen noted of Ursa casually.

"My mother and her best friends all were big fans of "The Ember Tales" you know that book of Fire Nation children's stories? They'd read the stories to us all the time when we're growing up."

"Yes, I can imagine your son's fire lily's favorite tale in the book is The Legend of the Dragon Guardians. Given her family history," Noreen comment off-hand.

"What did you say?" Ursa not sure she heard him right.

Noreen seemed to realize he had said something wrong, so he redirected the question. "Um, nothing. What are your children's favorite stories in the Ember Tales?" trying to cover up a slip-up.

"Well, my son's second favorite is "The boy and the phoenix kite" because it reminds him of his special relationship with his uncle. My adopted daughter, whose adopted father, is my brother-in-law; the second favorite is "The legend of the dragon guardians."

"And your daughter?"

"My daughter doesn't have a favorite but my son and his fire lily live and breath "The Promise of the Fire Lily. They know it by heart and could say it backward in their sleep by the time they were seven."

"Yes, it's one of the three legendary Fire Nation love stories. The other two are Phoenix Heaven and Love amongst the Dragons"
"Yes, those are the three most well-known love stories in all of the Fire Nation for various reasons."

"Well, I'm sure your daughter could sing the Phoenix Ballad as well as you did if she's anything like you. Or Sakiko's daughter could effortlessly and flawlessly dance the part of Agnimitra just as she did for Phoenix Heaven. Furthermore, if your son and Sakiko's daughter are truly each other fire lily, Ursa, I imagine they are a perfect duet, aren't they?"

"How do you know my name? I didn't give it!" she stuttered as she shot up from the table in terror.

"Ursa, I..."

"I think I should go. Children we are leaving," as she grabbed their wrist tightly despite them protesting they weren't finishing eating.

"Wait! Ursa, please stop!" called out Noreen. She was just about earshot when he called out again.

"When you were six years old your parents were throwing you a birthday party. Your best friends Xiaoying and Sakiko wanted to make you feel like a princess and the most important person ever.

So Xiaoying made you the first dress she ever made and Sakiko let you borrow some of her family jewelry," he called out, and Ursa paused in her step and turned gradually around as he continued quickly.

"But then I came and laughed at you for wanting to be a ridiculous princess, tripped and lost my balance and ripped your dress. You were in tears and kicked me in the stomach and shoved dirt in my face.

Sakiko shot flaming arrows at me till one nailed me in the butt and Xiaoying used one of her trick bombs to cement my feet together and tie my hands up and then you all forced me to fix the dress in time for the party. You said the best gifts you got that birthday were your clothing, the diary Sakiko gave you and my friends.

At age 16 we all were part of the village Summer Solstice production to do "Phoenix Heaven" Xiaoying was doing the costumes. Sakiko was doing the ballet and worried about doing the grand jeté, and you were scared about doing the ballad.

At age 18 both of your fosters aunts, your best friends mothers whom you called Aunt Kiku and Aunt Xiaoli died, and their ashes were laid to rest under the cherry blossom tree in your backyard, and that was the last time Xiaoying and Sakiko came to Hira'a, and you were heartbroken.

I proposed to you three years later when we were rehearsing for Love amongst the Dragons, and then you were forced away by Fire Lord Azulon and Prince Ozai.

Now are you gonna walk away again from me when we've been reunited after so much misfortune, and anguish has occurred and not let me make this up to our two friends by helping you when you need it so much?" he finished in a rush.

"Ikem?" she asked in skepticism for her eyes and heard couldn't grasp what they were seeing and hearing.

"Ursa."

She strolled over to him and caressed his face and then kissed him to the shock of her children. They waited till their mother had to breath again when she pulled out of the kiss.
"It really is you!"

"Oh Ursu, how I've long to sing my heart's song to you for so many years," as he took her hands in hers and sang to her so only she and the children could hear him.

"Here I stand alone,

with this weight on my heart,

And it will not go away.

In my head, I keep on looking back,

Back to the beginning,

Wondering what that man said that made you change.

I tried so hard,

but I had to decide,

Yet, that question still keeps on spinning in my mind.

What if I had fought harder?

Are you the lady I used to know?

If you stayed,

If I tried,

If only I could turn back time,

but I guess we'll never know.

Many paths to take,

Some to joy,

Some to heartache.

Anyone can lose they're way,

And if I said that I could turn it back,

Back the beginning,

Would you take the chance and make the change?

Sometimes, do you wonder what could have been?

I pray that I'd never left your side.

What if I had fought harder?

Are you the lady I used to know?
If you stayed,
If I tried,
If only I could turn back time,
but I guess we'll never know.
If only I could turn the hands of time,
If I could take you back would you still be mine?
'Cos I tried,
But I had to decide,
Yet, that question still keeps on spinning in my mind.
What if I had fought harder?
Are you the lady I used to know?
What if I had never backed down?
'Cos I still love you more than I can ever say.
If you stayed,
If I tried,
If only I could turn back time,
but I guess we'll never know,
We'll never know."
"How is this possible?" she asked him as she quivered as the song finished.
"Come with me somewhere private and I'll tell you everything, and you can tell me everything as well."
"I'll follow you to the ends of the earth and beyond, Ikem."
"C'mon, let's go to the village prop room that should be a good quiet and private place to talk."
"Okay, Zuko, Akiko, Azula. Come."
"Mom, are you sure we can trust him?" Zuko asked standing protectively in front of his love and sister.
"Yes, Zuko, we can trust him. Come along."

Ursa and her children followed Ikem now known as Noreen to the village prop warehouse which when Noreen opened the door Ursa's reaction was to comment it was still as untidy as ever.
The kids' reaction was instantly to play with everything, and soon they're lost dueling with fake swords and fooling around with whatever else they could find while their mother and her old
boyfriend talked. Ursa was okay with them playing, seeing how everything else in their lives was mess up. Them having some fun was a blessing to her.

"So Ursa should you go first or should I go first?" Noreen asked her after a few moments of letting Ursa appreciate her children's antics.

"I'd prefer you to go first Ikem or Noreen as you are called now. And don't think I didn't notice you took that name from Love amongst the Dragons. I'd like to know what happened here at home after I was stolen. Please."

"Well after you left, I was heartbroken moreover depressed. Everyone told me things would get better, but they never did. So I went to the Forgotten Valley and lived there for a quite long time. Then one day I encountered a powerful spirit who changed my life. She gave me a new life when she gave me a new face. I could return home as a new person and start over. It was like being reborn, not have to be remembered as Ikem and Ursa. But just become someone new with a fresh start."

"So Ozai lied about killing you again to punish me. As your new face protected you. That bastard. Tell me, I must know. What happened to my parents? Their ashes and my "aunts" ashes? What became of them?" Ursa demanded imperatively.

"Don't agonize about that Ursa. I honored our friends and your parents. When I returned to the village as Noreen, it was only about a year later your parents died. I made the arrangements for their ashes and your 'aunts' ashes to be relocated to the village cemetery because I knew the property would be sold.

They have a rather lovely gravestone with symbols to represent your mother and her friends with flowers and trees on a hill to see the sunrise. They are fine." Noreen calmly revealed what had become of her loved ones remains.

She let out a breath of relief. "Oh, thank goodness. So at least Xiaoying and Akiko's families are okay. Thank the first fire they are okay," she whispered to herself in sweet relief.

"Now tell me what happened to you? What brought you back here, and what's going on with your children? More importantly, what happened to our friends?"

Ursa gradually let it out about her years of abuse with Ozai. What he had done to her and the children. The fate of all her friends, both old and new. What had led to her escaping with the children and how exactly they'd come to be here.

"I knew the Fire Lord was messed up and knew Ozai was bad news, but he did all that and to his children and Sakiko's daughter?" Noreen asked in disbelief, and Ursa nodded in confirmation with tears in her eyes.

"If not for the help of Xiaoying, Yang, the Sisterhood and the Alanna the White Spirit of Life we wouldn't have made it here. But I know Ozai wouldn't rest till he's annihilated all of us. He's relentless, and the throne is not enough. He will assassinate us all. Nothing is gonna save our lives now," she hung her head as she buried her face into his chest.

"Shush, Ursa, please don't cry. There is a solution, and you're looking at it in the face."

"What?" she didn't get it.

"If a spirit saved my life from Ozai by changing my face she could do the same for you and your
"You are saying if we found this spirit we could all get new faces and no-one would ever find us?" she asked in disbelief at the very thought.

"Think about it, Ursa. It is your heart's desire come true. You'd finally be truly free of Ozai, and you and the children would be safe and finally happy. And you and I could be together."

"The royal family would be 'dead', and we could start over. No more abuse, no more pain, we'd finally be free. You said when you got a new face, it was like being reborn?"

"It is. You can become a whole new person. Start a whole new life."

"Then I guess," as she opened her locket and saw it was glowing in agreement. "We need to find this spirit and see if she'll grant us what she granted you."

Noren- Jeff Bennett- many roles

Master Edan- Colin Farrell- Percival Graves- Fantastic Beast and Where to Find Them.

Ms. Zalika- Local tea shop owner, daughter of Ms. Lal and Trader Kito, mother of Master Edan- Is-ES-Tracy-DA Friend

Mr. Iye- Co-owner of Hira'a Tea shop Zalika's husband and Edan's father, Lal and Kito's son-in-law- Niclove- DA Friend

Song tweaked by Japananimegirl
They'd departed that very twilight after having one more solid meal to venture into the Forgotten Valley in search of the ambiguous Spirit who could grant them the sanctuary and second chance to live in freedom and peace that Noreen had promised them.

Initially, Ursa and the children were extremely reluctant about entering the Valley with pretty valid reasons. The location had earned quite an infamous reputation with the locals with all varieties of tales of uncertainty, horror and other unpleasantness.

Essentially, you walk in you don't come out kind of line — monstrosities, fiends, violent, disturbing, and sadistic hell that kind of thing. Not to mention, just looking at it gave you the heebie-jeebies. Consequently, it was nearly enough for Ursa to call off the quest from just a first glance seeing all three children whiter than a ghost.

However, when her locket hovered off her chest and began to pulsate a brilliant heliotrope light, and a speck seemed to be flickering back in correspondence, she knew they had to enter. Thus screwing up their courage they all walked into the Forbidden Valley.

For the first few days, they used Ursa's locket to guide them as it seemed to be responding to something hidden in this unnatural and mythical valley. Although after a few days, it seemed to have run out of energy and needed to recharge.

Hence Noreen went about setting up an encampment for them using the skills he'd honed when he'd spent time living here by himself years ago. Meanwhile, the children were trying to help any way they could.

Azula used her prodigy skills to make a fire, and Zuko and Akiko, with some help from an unknown source was able to get food and water. They seemed to be having a bit of an argument between them have they carried the food and water back to the campsite.

Ursa was considerably stunned Zuko and Akiko were arguing at all. She'd never know them to dispute about anything, given they're fire lilies after all. The term 'fire lily' was from their favorite story "Promise of the Fire Lily" It was the Fire Nation word for "Soulmates or True Love" or any other euphemisms to that equivalent.

"Zuko? Akiko? What's going on? Why are you fighting? Is something wrong?" their mother inquired inquisitively to the two ten-year-old lovers who almost dropped what they were carrying and smashing their feet with it.

"Um, nothing, nothing at all, Mom," fabricated Zuko, who she knew was lying as the pitch in his voice was off. He looked exceedingly unnerved by both his mother's inquiry and the way she was looking at him at the moment.

"Yeah, everything is just peachy! Nothing to worry about!" Akiko further lied. Ursa knew when Akiko was lying since she did the same thing Sakiko had done when she was lying or anxious.

When Sakiko had been feeling nervous or lying about something, her left eyebrow always twitched for precisely 30 seconds. Akiko was the same way. When she wasn't entirely truthful, her left eyebrow twitched for 30 seconds.
Ursa elected to let the matter drop for the moment, not wanting to push them or even Azula right now when things were already so nail-biting and flooded with anxiety. She'd wait to see what came about in a day or two. Then see if they come clean about it on their own.

Since escaping the palace, Ursa had become more vigilant over the children. Which paid off for her big time. For the first time, she began to notice several unusual things regarding Akiko that she had brushed off beforehand.

It occurred that same evening that she and Zuko had their argument. Right before bed, Akiko had slipped behind a tree, thinking no-one had seen her do that. Concerned about Akiko's safety Ursa went to fetch her. She was near to Akiko's hiding spot when she stopped and hid.

Akiko was conversing with two people. She couldn't make out coherently what was being said. Merely she comprehended Akiko was talking to two people. A male and female whom she was requesting to do her and the family a favor.

She was just scantily able to catch their names. She heard her call the male "Kai" and said to keep a lookout from the heavens. Then address the female as "Ting-Ting" and for her to patrol the terrain while they rested. Furthermore, that's all she was able to make out from this conversation.

She doubles back, so Akiko didn't know she'd caught her talking to whoever Kai and Ting-Ting were. Nor did she let on that she knew Akiko had been speaking to someone in the middle of nowhere that might put them in danger.

She was astonishingly dumbfounded though at daybreak when left at the campsite for them was two gourds full of water and a hand-basket of pinkish berries and no explanation of where they came from.

However, Akiko didn't seem alarmed. On the contrary, she said they should take it as a sign the Spirits wanted to aid them in their quest. She had a peculiar smile on her face when she said this as if she knew a secret no one else did.

When Ursa removed her locket and looked inside it, the butterfly gemstone seemed to shine a calming lilac in approval. Therefore she felt confident that someone had left them food and water to assist them in their quest indeed. Akiko seemed to take charge for the next week leading them through the Valley. She just said she had 'feelings' where to go and seemed to be following something.

However, at the end of the week, Ursa had had enough of the odd behavior. She decided it was ultimately time to put her foot down and confront Akiko on what she was holding back from her.

That evening as they’re savoring the soothing water from the gourds that tasted much sweeter than any water they'd ever tasted before as did the berries. It was like nothing they'd ever tasted from this world, and Ursa had begun to suspect it wasn't from this world. But the spirit world which especially made her desire answers from Akiko.

"Akiko, can you come here please?" she requested as softly as she could. Akiko who had the look of a guilty child came over to her mother with her head hung low and was crying.

Ursa lifted her chin and dried her tears. "Akiko, I want you to know you are not in trouble of any kind," started off to try and calm the terrified child but was still firm with her. "But I think it's time you were honest with all of us. I believe you've not told me something highly of the essence.

I believe that's the reason you and Zuko were fighting a week ago. I think he was telling you that
you should tell me something important as it could help us and you didn't want to. For whatever reason, that maybe," Ursa surmise and by the look on Akiko's charming face, she could see she was on the right track.

She took a deep breath and continued peacefully "But beloved, we can only succeed if we work together. We are a family, and family shouldn't keep secrets from each other. We need to be honest with each other. Also if you're concerned that I won't love you if you tell me this secret rest assure nothing will change how I feel about you. You will ALWAYS be my daughter, and I will forever love you," Ursa promised her steadfast making sure to enunciate each word to her adopted daughter.

"You promise that if I tell you the truth you won't abandon me? That you will not think that I'm freak or bad luck?" she was crying hysterically now as she looked at her adopted mother and Ursa could see these fears were incredibly genuine to her.

Akiko had spent the first five years of her life being abandoned, shunned and outcast by virtually everyone. Thus it had left a devastating, lasting impact on her whole being.

Zhao had abandoned her before she was even born. Furthermore, he'd never acknowledged her existence or called her by name. The other kids in the Capital never played or talked to her either. They'd shunned her because being an orphan was considered terrible luck. Hence she'd been an outcast in numerous ways.

It was the primary reason she and Zuko had fallen for each other. They'd shared the same pain and been through the same pains and pleasure in life. Sure, the history of their families, which they're just learning about, played some part in it. Yet a significant portion of it was they understood each other pain. What is more the other made them feel loved by someone else for the first time.

It also likely helped that Iroh had been a true father to both of them. That he'd given them both the love and attention, both had been denied by their birth fathers. That he'd loved, protect, and done so far the job of raising them to this point. So they also had that in common too.

Still, she held the gorgeous little girl tightly and whispered too her. "You're my daughter and part of this family. Nothing will ever change that. You need never fear I will ever forsake you. I told you before that mom is forever, and I meant it. So please tell me what you were afraid to confide with me before, my little Akiko?" she asked fondly to her third child with only love reflecting in her warm gold eyes.

Akiko looked at Zuko, who nodded, and Akiko let out a breath. She looked back at her mother, then Azula and Noreen. "This will not leave this circle? No-one else will ever learn this? It will never get back to Death?" she asked referencing to Ozai whom she again always called Death.

"No one here will betray what you are about to say. Will we?" Ursa demanded sternly, and everyone said on their life and honor they wouldn't let anyone find out what Akiko was about to reveal.

"Okay, I only ever told Zuko and Uncle about this. Not even our godmother Xiaoying knows this about me," Akiko took another deep breath and let it out. She then gazed her trademark jade green eyes into her mother's eyes and revealed her secret to her mother.

"I'm not a normal little girl. I'm more than a Summer Solstice child, more than a firebender and," gulping, "More than the Last Dragon Guardian," glimpsing at both her true love and adoptive mother before she carefully resumed.
"Did Xiaoying ever share with you Mom the circumstances of my birth?" Akiko questioned her mother delicately.

"Not really no. What does that have to do anything?" blinking in uncertainty as to why she was questioning such a question.

"Everything. It took me a long time to figure this out. But now I get it, Mom! And please make sure Death never finds out!" she again implored with her mother.

"You've our solemn vow on our life, and honor no-one will find out what you are about to tell us," Ursa once more reassured her, and Akiko calm down some.

"Okay, the reason I asked that question is this, Mom," pausing. "Because I was born at the precise moment of the Summer Solstice the holiest day of the Fire Nation, something occurred that was unprecedented. I was born in limbo."

"Limbo? What do you mean, Akiko?" Ursa queried with bemusement scrawled all over her lovely face.

"My mother was dying! I was being born at the moment. The lines between the world of humans and spirit were entirely obscured. Consequently, I was born in the middle. Halfway in-between each! My mother was entering the Spirit World as she was dying and I was being born, so I was entering the world of humans.

However, as it was happening all at once on the holiest day of the Fire Nation. As a result, I was blessed weirdly. I can...I can...I can see and talk to spirits and go to the Spirit World at will!" she screamed deafeningly.

She was currently conscious of the fact that three people were looking at her as if she'd grown an extra head. Red-faced with frustration she again shouted. "It's true, let me prove it. Kai? Ting-Ting you can come out now," she called out to the thin air around her.

On the spur of the moment, two adolescent spirit animals materialize out of nowhere by the young girl's side. One was a pink and lilac fox-hawk kit: the other an amber and chocolate-brown rabaroo joey. Despite their coloring being feminine and masculine, it was the other way around in gender. Kai was the one with more girly colors and Ting-Ting with colors more boy-like.

"These are my spirit animal guides. I first encountered them just before I turned three. Since then, they've been watching over me and guiding me through the Spirit World. That's Kai, and that's Ting-Ting" Akiko explained as she introduced her spirit animal guides to the rest of her family.

Well, those who not in on the secret before were blown away no doubt about it. Even if Kai and Ting-Ting were extremely cultivated. They promptly praised Ursa for all she'd done for Akiko. Plus, how everyone else present had earned their trust and loyalty as well. Akiko suddenly asked her mother if she was a freak of nature because of this to which Ursa assured just like her adopted father Iroh had she was genuinely extraordinary.

Furthermore, indeed lucky to have the ability to see spirits and talk to them. Though like Iroh Ursa did advise her, she needed to be extremely cautious about who she shared this with. Honestly, atrocious people might use this gift for truly unspeakable matters. Therefore she needed to be extremely careful in the future. A grateful Akiko then embraced her tightly. Then allowed her spirit animals guides to explain the full extent of her powers to the rest of her family.

They promptly familiarized the rest of her family that her powers made her equal to the Avatar in
terms of being a bridge between worlds. Furthermore, they’d only grow and develop further as she got older. That yes the basics was seeing and talking to spirits as well as being able to go to the Spirit World at will.

However, there were also other techniques she had like how spirits mostly human could speak through her, spirits warning her of dangerous events. There were other powers they at least knew would come as she got older for sure. Like being able to sense other’s presence through their spiritual energy, summon spirits, create spirit portals, letting her soul leave her body in the human world, do spiritual healing. One thing she could learn to do as she could be the one to relearn and teach others the lost art of memory bending.

When they asked what exactly memory bending has, they then revealed it is about bending one's spiritual energy outwards so one can manifest their soul essence. It can project one's memories for others to see. They made it clear their job was to watch over Akiko furthermore instruct her in how to control her spiritual powers which again they'd been doing since she was nearly three years old.

They did express Akiko's powers were most influential on her birthday the Summer Solstice but also intensified on the Winter Solstice which for the Fire Nation is Day of the Dead.

Ursa suddenly had two different memories of cycling in her head concerning both those days. She now realized why Akiko had acted the way she did on those days, given this revelation about her secret powers. She remembered Akiko's sixth birthday distinctly. The reasons why she'd always before she'd a family her birthday brought her such sorrowfulness.

The Summer Solstice was a time of celebration for the Fire Nation. A three-day party where everyone dressed up in their most exquisite kimonos and savor festive foods, firebending dancing, kite flying, fireworks, and the big party.

Still, now she was seeing why Akiko was also extra miserable if her unknown powers were giving her trouble. Plus she had to deal with that on top of her depression on a day that no-one before had celebrated her birthday or honored her birth mother's death.

"Akiko's manor four years ago"

The garden in the backyard was enchanting. Colorful lanterns were glowing all over the place as well as origami phoenix, dragons and flowers. There was a table stacked high with both a buffet of food and presents and in their exquisite clothing was Xiaoying, Ursa, Iroh, Lu Ten, and Zuko.

Each of them was holding something. Ursa was holding a rather large and magnificent cake. Xiaoying was holding a long thin box. Lu Ten had a bouquet of the most attractive blossoms, and Zuko was holding a box that he was losing his grip on. Iroh was the only one not carrying anything but was beaming.

"What...? What's all this?" Akiko stuttered greatly confused as she wandered outside.

"You'd think we'd forget your birthday, sweetheart? Never. We've spent all morning putting together your party." Ursa beamed down at her daughter who was shocked.

"You care it's my birthday?" she stuttered still shocked.

"Of course we care, little sister. How can a family not care when it's the most important day of the year for someone they love? Everyone deserves to feel unique and important on the day they came into this world.

Moreover, you already gave us the unique gift of becoming part of the family. Therefore the best
gift we can give you is a birthday party you'll never forget!” Lu Ten told his adoptive little sister who he gave a big hug and handed her the bouquet.

Akiko for the first time on her birthday wasn't crying tears of sadness but tears of joy. "Thank you, big brother," as she hugged him back.

"Welcome, little sis. I spent all night doing all the origami stuff. But a few paper cuts are worth it to see your smile."

"Wow?! You did all those just for me?!"

"Yeah, and picked these flowers from the meadow next to the Fire Falls."

"Really?! Just like from "Promise of the Fire Lily?!"

"That's the one. I thought it is a generous gift to pay your respects to your mom with. As this also the day of her passing."

"Thank you, Lu Ten, it's very thoughtful and perfect."

"I made the cake myself. It's more special when it's made with love and not a servant." Ursa told her, and it did fill her up with love.

"And this is my present for later tonight when we finally join in with the rest of City for the celebrations," Xiaoying said as she gave her the box and opening it was the most exquisite kimono Akiko had ever seen.

"And this is my present for you. I made it myself. Hurry! It's slipping!" Zuko said as she took the box from him and opened it and found it was a costume jewelry hairpiece. It wasn't made of real gold or jewels like the jewelry that belonged to her mother's family.

But it was designed to resemble royal hairpiece like she'd seen the other royal family members wear. She looked at Zuko in shock as he took the piece of costume jewelry and fixed to her ponytail.

"There! Now you can be the star of the Summer Solstice!" he declared proudly looking at his handy work.

It wasn't the best-made thing, and it was not a real piece of authentic jewelry made of gold or anything like that. But for Akiko knowing Zuko had made this hairpiece by hand out of his love for her to make her feel like she meant something on her birthday? Well, if that's not an act of true love she didn't know what was! She rushed over to him and hugged him tightly, crying tears of joy. Everyone's attention was focused on them and how cute and beautiful was.

So no-one notices for a how a few seconds the flames in the lanterns half of them changed to gold and the other too hot pink or the fire tops all turned to perfect heart shapes.

Then Akiko got her gift from Iroh; a father-daughter dance on her birthday. The highest honor you could give a girl on her birthday dance with her father.

The rest of the party was very friendly, and they all paid their respect to Akiko's mother Sakiko.

What no one except Akiko and Zuko knew about was what happened before they left the party to
join the rest of the city in celebration. Ursa and everyone else had been outside cleaning up. Zuko and Akiko had gone inside to take Akiko's gifts up to her room.

Only known to Zuko and Akiko was when they went to her room they'd done something no one was aware of. They'd pulled out Akiko's mother's trunk. She felt she was ready to open it. So holding hands, she put her hand to the lock, and it opened!

They looked inside and to their amazement what they found was a Dragon Guardian uniform and sword, a diary written in the Dragon Guardian Code, and a blank journal with a bottle of ink and a brush.

That's when the truth about who Akiko was hit her and that story "Legend of the Dragon Guardians" took on a whole new meaning and yet again Zuko and Akiko swore to keep it between them.

They'd returned shortly afterward to rejoin their family. Then they went to take enjoyment in the rest of the jubilation of sweet cakes, fire flakes, games, fireworks, kite flying, dancing, and firebending shows."

It was only now through her deductions Ursa was able to figure out that this was most likely when Akiko learned the truth about her heritage since it wasn't long afterward she'd notice a change in her behavior and other subtle clues that she'd learned things.

Only she hadn't put two and two together because of the overwhelming fear and abuse that was so ongoing. Furthermore, she was previously prohibited from asking or telling Akiko about her heritage. Therefore she couldn't have questioned her if she wanted too even if she had deep-seated suspicions as had Xiaoying at the time.

She also comprehended now the reason why Akiko and Zuko took Day of the Dead so seriously. She'd continuously schooled her children to honor their culture and traditions as had Iroh. However, Azula never had taken that to heart, given Ozai's example of dismissing anything sacred or honorable.

However, Ursa had been particularly outraged with Zhao for not only dishonoring Sakiko in the ways he had when she lived but even more that he did not honor her on the Day of the Dead. Furthermore, she already knew to know Ozai even as the new Fire Lord wouldn't do his duties to 'honor' his family on the Day of Dead.

Although at least Iroh would follow all the customs to a T. For both them and Lu Ten and that at least was comforting. Even if they weren't 'dead' but going to be 'dead' in a sense, if this crazy plan worked, at least one family member would honor them. For the traditions of the Day of the Dead are quite different from the Summer Solstice celebration.

For one, everyone has a distinctive golden phoenix candlestick. It's a phoenix pointed skyward. With a candle on each of its wingtips. The final candle on its beak. This is called the Flame of Rebirth. For just as the Phoenix is forever reborn from the ashes, their loved ones truly live on forever in their hearts. So as long as you carry their memory and love in your hearts, they will live on forever just as the Phoenix does.

There are seven candles on the Flame of Rebirth, and during the week approaching the day of the dead, you light one every night and light the final one on the beak on the day of the Winter Solstice itself. All the candles must be kept burning until the Solstice is over. This is to honor your departed loved ones, to show they're welcomed into your home and to help them find their way back to the spirit world.
They also had individual incense sticks with a distinctive smoke meant to ward off evil or dark spirits that might come trespassing or follow their loved ones who come for a visit and drag the living into the spirit world.

For Day of the Dead is for both the living and dead. Families will go to the cemeteries where their loved ones are laid to rest to clean them up and make them look new. Then spend hours telling their loved ones what they've been missing. Then there is a large banquet held where half the food is left for the dead as are all the gifts made in offering to them.

So it's still a somber occasion but meant to be a happy one as well. For you're involved in remembering the good times and know you're loved ones are happy and to honor them still.

Ursa hoped her friends Xiaoying, Yang and all the Sisterhood would honor them on Day of the Dead even if they weren't dead as well. But it turned out Akiko wasn't finished telling her shocking things.

"Mom, there is something else you should know. It concerns Zuki and me." Akiko suddenly spoke up bring Ursa out of her whirlwind of thoughts.

"What about you and Zuko?" she asked as her brows knitted together in progressing puzzlement. What more was going on with her children that she wasn't knowledgeable of?

"Well, we can show and tell. Though I think we'll do a better job of telling you, Mom then showing you as we can't control this. But let's hope this works," Zuko sighed as he and Akiko looked at each other in calm resolve.

They took each other hands and let out a deep breath. With a look of intense concentration, they held out their right hands and managed to conjurer a flame in their hands. Nothing would've been unusual about that except for the color.

It had been foretold long ago by the Fire Sages to Ozai that Azula one would likely be one of the few Firebenders ever to produce the rare blue flames. Which she could tell now scared Azula instead of excited her as it once did.

Azula no longer seemed excited at what the Fire Sages had told her she would be able to do. Blue Flames and Lightning before she even hit puberty. That's what they'd told her long ago and why she drilled herself so hard to make this prediction come true and to please her father. But now after all this, she was scared of what that meant if it came to pass.

So she, her mother and Noreen had no idea what to think when they saw Zuko holding in his hand flames of pure gold and Akiko holding flames of hot pink! No-one ever heard of firebending of that color.

They snuffed it out and launched into the story of when it happened the first time. They recalled it arrived the day they met and Ursa and Iroh had adopted Akiko and dishonored Zhao for his actions towards her and Sakiko.

"While all the adults were shouting noisily in the other room back in Akiko's room she and Zuko had been making a promise of their own and something strange and beautiful had come from it.

They couldn't make out what the grownups were arguing about or how Akiko's fate was changing or how things would get better for her and Zuko. They're just making a promise to be each other best friend forever. They're standing up tall with their palms touching, and Zuko started with his first half of the pledge.
"When every moment gets too hard, and the end of the road feels too far. No matter how much
time we are apart, I'll always be near you. I'll be the shelter in your rain. I'll help you find your
smile again. I'll make you laugh at a broken heart. Wherever you are.

Because I'm never going to walk away. When you're all alone and feel afraid, I'll be there when
you call my name. You can always depend on me because until forever ends. I will be your friend."

Akiko took a breath and then said, "So many people come and go. But nothing can change you, I
know. You're never going to be a face in the crowd. And time will show through the seasons and
the years. I will always hold you dear, and you never have to fear.

Because I'm never going to walk away. When you're all alone and feel afraid, I'll be there when
you call my name. You can always depend on me because until forever ends. I will be your friend."

And that's when things took and an exciting turn for the two. Suddenly from their hand's fire
erupted, but they hadn't meant to firebend. But this wasn't normal firebending at all. For one thing,
Zuko's fire was pure gold, and Akiko's was hot pink. For another, it was bending itself as if it had a
mind of its own and all they could do was finish what was left of their promise.

"Because we're never gonna walk away. When either of us all alone and feel afraid, we'll be there
when others call others to name. We can always depend on each other because until forever ends
we will be friends.

We'll be each other rock when every candle has burned down low. And we'll forever know
Because we're never going to walk away. When either of us all alone and feel afraid, we'll be there
when others call others to name. We can always depend on each other because until forever ends.
We will be friends!"

They watched as the crazy firebending seemed to form a friendship bracelet made of fire around
them to seal the deal. Once that was done it vanished leaving the five-year-olds in a state of shock.

"What just happened?!" they asked each other as neither had heard of something like that
happening before.

"Have you ever heard of firebending being gold or pink before?" Akiko asked, and Zuko shook his
head.

"I've never heard of fire bending itself before either. That was weird! It was like it was responding
to us! Or something we did!"

"Whatever it was, I don't think we should tell anyone. That needs to be our little secret, Zuko."

"Promise, I'll never tell anyone about our special firebending!" he swore, and she swore too.
"Never tell anyone either!"

"It just happens at weird random times, Mom! We can't control it! We're still not sure why it
happens sometimes and not at others! Or why it seems to have a mind of its own!" cry out Zuko in
frustration stomping his foot on the ground to show his frustration at not understanding this part of
his bending.

"Well, maybe there is someone who can explain to us. If only I can get her attention. Kai? Ting-
Ting? Can I summon Alanna here?" Ursa questioned the two little spirit animals who been silent
up to this point.
"Well, summoning her might be hard. She's a very busy woman, after all." Kai remarked as he scratched his left ear. He seemed to be trying to think it over and just sank on the ground. He thought about it some more before speaking again.

"I think it worth a shot but it might not work. I'm a fox-hawk, not a cat-owl. So yes, I'm clever by nature but not always wise," he quipped. Fox-hawks have the bodies of foxes with the wings, talons, and eyes of hawks and best of both senses combined.

Everyone did giggle at that before looking at the other spirit animal guide for her opinion on the question if calling upon the Spirit of Life was even possible to answer their questions.

"Calling Alanna? Well, she did say she help you if you needed her, Plus did give you that locket. I think trying to understand something to do with the Spirit wouldn't hurt to ask. This is your family, and I don't think to ask about it would hurt to ask her about it. Go for it." Ting-Ting recommended as her long floppy ears twitched as if to a beat.

"Okay. Here's hoping she's listening," as Ursa held the extraordinary magical locket to her heart and called out with her heart and soul. "Alanna, we are need of your wisdom. Please, could you come to our aid? Please?" she whispered softly but in a commanding way at the same time.

"Ursa, I'm not sure you should bother her with this. Again she's one of the most powerful spirits, and we have got a hard enough challenge ahead of this, and I'm sure this can..." Noreen started to say when a flutter of butterflies flocked to them.

They're the most brilliant butterflies ever, and they're humming plus gleaming till they formed the shape of a woman and bursting from them was Alanna still beautiful as ever. Everyone quickly keeled before the charismatic and attractive woman who bid them rise.

"No need for that I consider you all family and family don't have to be formal with one another. Now I sense you've multiple questions that you need to be answered? I was listening to a bit of the conversation through the locket. So I'm here, and I'll answer the best I can. What do you wish to know and I'll see if I can answer?" the beautiful albino lady asked the group as a whole.

The children immediately interrogate her about their firebending powers and also about Akiko's spiritual powers. Furthermore, if she understood why they were the way they were. Moreover in Azula's case would she become a demon because of her abilities like the Fire Sages said as she no longer wants what they said she was destined for.

"Need not to be worried sweet children," Alanna spoke in pacifying melodious voice with a warm angelic smile at once quietening their inner doubts.

"None of you are monsters, and so you need not fear your abilities. As long as you draw your power from a pure heart full of love, light, and truth, so if you do that, in turn, you needn't fear them at all," she confidently consoled the children pausing for a moment, so the weight of her words sunk in. Her delicate butterfly wings fluttered a bit seems to make her look even more enchanting as she continued giving them both enlightenment as well as reassurance.

"Yes, great power and great responsibility go hand in hand young ones. On the other hand, you've nothing to fear your abilities again if you draw your strength from love and not hate. The truth of firebending has long be besmirched thanks to Fire Lord Sozin.

Firebending is life and draws its real strength from life, light, energy. Positive emotions. Not negative emotions. That is the truth the Dragons and the Guardians lived and died protecting.
It's the truth that lives on in both you and Zuko, Akiko. You two are bending the flames of true love like a pair of mated dragons. Only mated dragons could bend gold and pink.

"What?! We're bending dragon fire? Flames of love?!” they blurted out in shock.

Alanna nodded slightly but took it a step further. "You two are more extraordinary then you realize. You are more than just soulmates. You two are symbiotic."

"What?!” never having heard that word before nor understanding its significance.

"You both have admitted you can only produce your unique and special firebending together, correct?” she asked them benevolently to which the pair nodded in agreement.

"Yes, what's that got to do with anything?!” they demanded impatiently to the beautiful female spirit.

"You two are two halves of the same whole. What happens to one happens to the other. You've been through the same pains, pleasures, and trials. You're linked together to your spirits,” Alanna described as plainly as she could to the youngsters.

"Are you trying to say, Alanna," Akiko asks as she got off the ground and looked at her in astonishment, "That we can only function if both of us are together? That what happens to one will happen to the other?"

"A symbiosis in nature is an interaction between two different organisms living in a close physical association, typically to the advantage of both. What it means when you've become symbiotic you depend on another survival and need each other on every level.

Consequently, you two have a symbiotic relationship now. Neither of you can survive or function to your fullest potential without the other. Furthermore what happens to one affects the other,” the daughter of the Avatar Spirit thoroughly elucidated what she meant about the Prince and Lady of the Fire Nation who was taken aback about the revelation about themselves.

"What about me?" interrupted Azula drawing the Spirit's attention to her. "Am I gonna finally be a demon? The Fire Sages prophesied I will be the one to bend the legendary blue flames and master lightning at the youngest age ever. I don't want that anymore! I don't want to be prodigy anymore! I don't want to be like him anymore!” Azula screeched deafeningly.

Her outburst alarmed everyone around her. In truth, this wasn't the Azula they're used to seeing. The Azula they'd grown up with were barbaric, unemotional, and ruthless. The little girl before them? She was scared, defenseless, and well human. Alanna knelt to Azula's level and hugged her tightly before kissing her forehead.

"Once long ago you would've sided with Ozai as well allowed Anto's darkness to be the one your heart worshiped, Azula. Now you are gradually letting the flower that is your heart and soul grow and bloom. The one that has so long been strangled by the demon seeds and its thorny weeds, child.

I want you to keep focusing on the light, and you won't have to fear your powers. Let this flower keep growing till it reaches the skies above and blooms into the most beautiful flower of them all, you understand?” Alanna asked the young princess who nodded shakingly.

Smiling Alanna hugged and kissed Azula again before speaking more words of encouragement to the young princess. "I know you'll be able to full exorcizes the demon seed within you when the time is right, Azula. So when you do achieve those abilities, you won't have to fear them. For you
won't be drawing their power from lust and hate like they usually are drawn from.

For you when you get those powers it will because you've cast out the demons that feed the blue flames and control the lighting. Keep seeking out your humanity Azula and when you exorcise your demons? Well, then you'll truly master what you need to control the awesome power inside you in the correct way that you needn't think of yourself ever again as a monster, demon or savage.

You'll be free of everything and a better person. So you must defeat your demons to achieve these powers. Don't worry, Azula. They won't come till you have banished the darkness inside you and let light and love into your heart," the Spirit of Life explained to the panic-stricken little girl who seemed to be calming down a few from the Spirit of Life's words.

The three children felt more self-confident and consoled as Alanna walked to their mother and smiled. "I'll always be nearby to help if you need some guidance, help, or advice. For now, get some rest. The rest of your quest will not be easygoing, and you'll need to work together to succeed. Till we meet again, let love light the way!" And with that, she vanished into a flutter of butterflies.

"Well, I wasn't foreseeing that to happen! You can call the Spirit of Life a family friend?" Noreen asked in disbelief to Ursa, who shrugged with a smile. But she again knew their journey had just begun.

Three months later, it was a moderately different story. After months of traveling through Forgotten Valley after escaping from Ozai and his attempted murder on them back at the Capital, none of their spirits were exactly high given how miserable things had been.

Even Ursa, who even now after all this time still quite fearful for herself and their well-being. Despite her initial elation with being reunited with her true love was starting to feel exhausted and fatigued. It looked as if this idea wouldn't work. Even though Noreen who'd told them how he'd escaped being assassinated by being given a new face by a powerful spirit.

But it had been three months and no luck so far. By now everyone was beginning to get exhausted moreover demoralized by the lack of results after the initial first few days of action.

Because it had been far from a smooth journey for any of them. Especially for three young children, particularly those who were not used to their brand-new environment either. It was in truth still had to get used to being outside the lap of luxury and in the 'real world' even months later.

Nevertheless, the small family had been growing much closer throughout this journey in the past three months. For Zuko and Akiko, they're just appreciative to be alive given what started this journey and need to escape in the first place. Every time the feeling of hopelessness was almost too much to bear they just remembered all who'd sacrifice to help them and their mother had risked her own life to bring them here.

Although that was months ago, it was still fresh in their minds every time they woke to greet the sun. Right now, all their mother was concerned about was the four of them remained forever safe. For what kept Ursa going every day on this insane quest was knowing full well that Ozai would carry out his threat to kill them all. He couldn't afford to have any of them live. Even if he were now Fire Lord with them knowing the truth about that night, it would take away his power. Plus also he would kill his children to make their mother suffer for escaping with them in the first place especially Zuko because he hated him so much.

That's why Ursa was after months of searching was getting so desperate to find the Spirit who
roamed the Forgotten Valley. She needed to keep herself and children forever safe from Ozai and his evil.

Finally, after months of hopelessness and desperation, their prayers would be answered. For today turned out to be the day as they finally found her. The mighty Mother of Faces gradually arose from one of her three divine pools of water.

Ursa respectfully approached the omnipotent spirit and bowed before the magnificent and indomitable spirit woman with her many faces who held the fate of her family in her hands.

The great, peculiar, and fascinating spirit looked down at the small group of people who had gathered at her sacred pool with great curiosity and waited for them to speak. The attractive woman rose from the ground and spoke a beautiful voice that been petrified with great terror and desperation of much trauma and anguish.

"Dear spirit, my name is Ursa. I humbly ask for your help. I've come for a new face. But not just for myself but for my children. Please, oh, mighty spirit, can you please give us all new faces?"

"I grant only one person per season a new face. Why should I break my own rule? Why do you all need faces?" inquired the powerful spirit before her though she sensed something unique about the family before her.

"My family is in great danger from the man I was forced to marry against my will. He has no heart or soul and has threatened to kill us all. I know he's not bluffing. He was willing to kill our son without a second thought. He's done great harm to both our children already and to the child, I've adopted who my son loves.

Please, I beg you Spirit. I'm not merely thinking of myself but my children's lives! I'm asking you as a mother!" implored the young woman in great desperation with the three young children also having identical looks upon their faces.

The Mother of Faces own various faces soften as did her voice as she revealed a secret that she had never told another soul to the small family before her.

"Dear Ursa I am too a mother with a child who I have not seen in a long time. But I'd to do anything to protect him from harm as well. I will grant your wish, but I can only allow it if you all sincerely desire it. I can give you new faces and new minds to forget your old lives, but you must be honest. I wish to see the face of your heart to know your all sincere about your desire or I will not grant your wish. So tell me each of you? The truth? Why do you want a new face and a second chance? And remember, I can tell if your lying."

"We can do more then tell you our reasons we can show you first hand our own life stories if you need proof of why we want you to grant us our wish!" announced the little girl with the jade green eyes.

"How would you show me more than just your words? True actions speak louder than words but how would you show me, child?" inquired the spirit curiously.

Gulping she answered boldly. "We shall do a memory bending show for you first, then state the 'words of truth' if that fails to convince you. I've spent all this time we've been searching for you teaching my family the lost art of memory bending thanks to my spirit animal guides. Therefore let us show you our life stories and then tell you why we desire new faces," the little girl explained what she meant.
Apprehensive that none of them had mastered the technique of the lost art even though they'd practice it every night of this quest everyone put their hands over their hearts and focused all their willpower and energy and then produce a uniquely colored flame.

This flame wasn't fire but their spiritual energy. It leap from their hands till fused all together and became an inferno that didn't burn things to ash instead it burn splendidly with four souls collective memories and as they played out a song could be heard resonating from within the flames as their life stories played out from start to finish.

"She walks to school with the lunch I packed,
Nobody knows what she's holding back.
Wearing the same dress she wore yesterday,
She hides the bruises with silk and jewels.

The teachers wonder, but they don't ask,
It's hard to see the pain behind the mask.
Bearing the burden of a secret storm,
Sometimes she wishes she was not born lucky.

Through the wind and the rain,
He stands hard as a stone.
In a world that he can't rise above,
But in his dreams, he has wings,
And he flies to a place where he's loved.
Concrete soul.

We cry in the middle of the night,
The nation hears, but they turn a blind eye.
Our fragile souls are caught in the hands of fate,
When morning comes, it may be too late.

Through the wind and the rain,
We stand hard as a stone.
In a world that we can't rise above,
But in our dreams, we have wings,
And we fly to a place where we're loved.
Concrete souls.

A statue stands in a shaded place,
Human figures with an upturned face.
Names are written the polished rock,
Broken hearts that the world forgot.

Through the wind and the rain,
We stand hard as a stone.
In a world that we can't rise above,
But in our dreams, we have wings,
And we fly to a place where we're loved.
Concrete souls."

The Mother of Faces was weeping when she witnessed the tragic life story of this mother and her children. It was so appalling and unspeakable that it seemed virtually unmanageable even to conceive it had not been made up. The children then each spoke up in turn why they desired to be given a new face.
"I want to forget all the times my father has abused me. All the scars he's inflicted on me. I want a chance to grow up without ever having to remember the words. "She was born lucky I was lucky to be born." I want a chance to be myself and be loved for myself without being treated like I'm nothing." Zuko answered to the powerful spirit who could tell this was an honest answer.

"I too wish to forget my blood father and how he abandoned me — the abuse I had to suffer by my love's father who would wound us together. I want to forget what it felt like to be undesired, despised, and neglected by everyone! I want just to have good memories, and I won't have to be scarred by the past any longer. Just no more pain!" Akiko cried out to the spirit her reasons for a new face.

"And what of you, child? I can tell you, do not tell the truth very often, if at all? What reason would you desire a new face? Can you for once be honest?"

Azula turned away and sighed before speaking. "All my life, I've felt my mother loved my brother more than me. Thought I was a monster. And yet she didn't leave me behind when she fled the palace. She took me along. She's been watching over all of us. I've been feeling things I don't understand. Things I want to follow.

Maybe if I didn't remember my old thoughts and feelings, my mom and I could start over. I could start over with everyone. Maybe I could do things right this time." she confessed, and everyone was shocked that Azula was honest and her true feelings about the matter.

"I see you are all being honest and given all genuine reasons. Now please choose your new names and then I'll grant you your new name faces and new memories.

"I've always liked the name Noriko," Ursa replied thinking of the name her father would've chosen for her if her mother hadn't named her instead.

"We have always liked the names of the main characters from our favorite story, The Promise of the Fire Lily. Kazuo and Aiko" Zuko and Akiko explained why they're choosing those names as their new names.

"In that story, Kazuo has a little sister named Kioko. If my brother and his love are gonna be Kazuo and Aiko, then I shall be Kioko to complete the trio from the story." Azula explained where her new name was coming from.

"Then I'll give you three the faces of the characters from the story and you Ursa a face as plain as you are beautiful. You'll forget your past lives completely. You'll only remember each other within the context of your new memories."

"Wait, will I forget him?" Ursa asked pointing to Noreen urgently.

"Is he part of the life you wish to forget?"

"No."

"Then no."

"Alright."

"Hold still."

"AHH!"
It was over in a few minutes though there was mass confusion as the Mother of Faces started to disappear and whispered: "I'll be keeping watch on all of you."

Noreen then ran over to the family meaning to assure them he had them and they're safe. They're safe at last. But he was much confused at the moment as they all seemed to be comatose.

"They're fine, Noreen," spoke a familiar voice. "They're merely in a spiritual coma as their bodies and minds accept the transformation. Right now, we've much to discuss with you and your role in all this."

Noreen looked up and saw two attractive women now standing at the water's edge looking at him intensely. One, he instantly recognized as Alanna the White Spirit of Life. The other he was surprised to see though he knew her too or at least he thought he did.

It was a gypsy woman named Madam Masuku. She was an uncommonly tall woman with skin white as snow with lengthy coal-black locks in a slew of messy braids. She wore plenty of elaborate jewels. Her outfit consisted of a magenta corset with a keyhole with a long mauve and cerise skirt. Amethyst colored cape and fuchsia fingerless gloves.

"Madam Masuku? What? I don't understand?" Noreen blinking his eyes and she spoke again in the Mother of Faces' voice.

"Noreen surely you should understand as a spirit that spirits can take several forms? Furthermore, as the Mother of Faces, I can assume any of the faces I fashion? How do you think I gain inspiration to conceive the masterpieces that are the faces I make? I must walk the world of mortals in some manner or another without causing a ruckus!" she sweetly scolded him.

"So all this time you've been coming to Hira'a as the traveling gypsy woman Madam Masuku? The one who entertains children with fantastic stories, tells fortunes and makes so-called love potions?"

"I assume the identity I crafted for each face yes. This form is a gypsy woman, and yes, I've all the abilities associated with that form. Plus her name Madam Masuku means "Madam Masks." explained the disguised spirit who had granted him and his love their new faces.

Even though this was a lot of information to process, Alanna now took charge. "Look, Noreen, we don't have a lot of time. We've to get the former royal family back to Hira'a, and we need you to understand your role in keeping them safe and how to maintain their new identities from now on. Therefore, please listen to us carefully because you must understand all we're about to tell you. So please be quiet and listen to both of us, okay?" instructed the Avatar Spirit's daughter.

Noreen wisely shut up and listen as both spirit women explained the plan from here on out and what was going to happen to Ursa and the children when they woke up. They both told how they'd help Noreen take the family back to his home. That they'd be in a spirit coma the whole time. Once they woke they will think they've been in a coma because of disease and he's been taking care of them.

Once they awaken, they instructed him to ask Ursa now known Noriko what she remembers to learn the story that far in their memory. Furthermore, to explain to her that she and the children ran such high fevers it's likely any gaps of memory are lost due to the illness.

The two powerful spirit women also explained that the family's feelings and talents would remain the same as before. Consequently, they'll grow naturally, and they'll have phantom memories to do with their firebending or other abilities. However not the actual memories connect to these, just
The Spirits did have a plan in mind to keep an eye on the family as well as still protect them. Madam Masuku pointed to Akiko's spirit animal guides. Informing him, she'll deliver them to the children in disguise. So they'll help guide the children in their powers.

Consequently, Noreen, with the help of all these Spirits, manages to get his true love and her children back to his house faster then it took to find them and began tending them. He saw that Mother of Faces's faces are true to what she said. Ursa's new face was real as plain as she was beautiful, and Zuko, Akiko, and Azula now looked exactly like the characters Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko. He even got out a battered copy of the "Ember Tales" to compare the children's faces to the characters in the story and saw their new faces were identical.

Zuko's new face now had shoulder-length curly raven black hair, smooth alabaster skin, thin arched eyebrows, slanted cinnamon-brown eyes, and a strong jaw. Akiko's new face had wavy copper-colored tresses, possessing a face with an ageless quality, elfish features, and cinnamon brown eyes and smooth alabaster skin. Finally, Azula now had cascading chestnut locks, sharp nose, sculpted features, cinnamon brown eyes, and flawless alabaster skin.

When they woke a week later they're all extremely weak with their memories rather obscure. He asked "Noriko" what she recollected. What she could retrieve is coming from a 'blighted' settlement. It was cursed because for some unexplained reason the people had done something to agitate the spirits, and bad luck and evil could only be located there.

Their village had been wiped out, and their loved ones perished from ten fatal plagues. The four of them had scarcely escaped with their lives from the cursed land's terminal disease. Then by the grace of a miracle found their way here where Noreen found them and been taking care of them.

It took another week before the family had regained their strength and their 'memories" to the point they could. During that time, the village was set up for the wedding of Noreen to Noriko. It would be both a wedding and welcoming party for her and her small family to the village, and everyone was going to do their best to welcome the newcomers after hearing their tragic story and give them a blessing for bright future and a second chance at happiness.

The day of the wedding was such a gorgeous celebration. The variety of wildflowers plus vibrant green grass was a living carpet of excellent fragrances. The breeze itself smelled like sweet lavender. The sunshine from the sun that day was warm, plentiful as if the air had turned into butter.

It was such a picturesque scene with the way the cerulean river was in the background from where the bride and groom stood. The way the tiny frogs croaked on their little rosy and white lilypads while falcon-doves simultaneously dropped both rice and cherry blossoms on the bride and groom as they're married.

The children were extremely enthusiastic about their mother and gaining a new father in their life. For Noreen already legally adopted them all so he'd be their real father and not their stepfather or adopted father but their actual father. It made all three of them super happy indeed. For him, it was an instant family, so everyone was happy all around.

Presently the party began, and thus the dancing and dreaming were afoot as the celebration had begun. People were chatting up a storm while filling their bellies and sharing a dance with the ones they held dear. But of course, the first dance and song went to the newlyweds. It was, of course, the groom who composed the first song as tradition dictated. As his gift to his fire lily. So everyone watched happily as Noreen and Noriko danced to the love song that Noreen had
composed for the love of his life.

"All I am, all you'll be,
Everything in your world, all that I'll ever need,
Is in your eyes, shining at me.
When you smile, I can feel all my passion re-ignite,
Your hand brushes mine,
And a thousand sensations flow through me because of I,

I do cherish you,
For the rest of my life.
you don't have to think twice,
I will love you always.
From the depths of my soul, it's beyond my control.
I've waited so long to say this to you,
If you're asking, do I love you this much,
I do.

In my world, before you,
I lived a lonely existence, didn't know where I was headed,
'til that day, I found you.
How you opened my life to a new paradise.
In a world torn by war,
Still with all of my heart until my dying day,

I do cherish you,
For the rest of my life.
you don't have to think twice,
I will love you always.
From the depths of my soul, it's beyond my control.
I've waited so long to say this to you,
If you're asking, do I love you this much,
I do.

If you're asking do I love you this much,
I do, oh, I do!" and of course like many couples, they kissed as their song ended.

"Mom looks thrilled, doesn't she?" Kazuo sighed with rapture from the table where he, his sister Kioko and his love Aiko sat. They're dressed in the most elegant clothes they'd ever had and got ready to enjoy the best part of the wedding for the guest. The cake.

"I think Mommy looks like a princess, Kaz. She should feel like one on her day!" Kioko was also smiling radiantly seeing her mommy and new daddy as they danced.

"Yeah and finally we can put all the bad behind us, and all have a real father. We don't have to remember any longer how our daddies died when those terrible ten plagues hit our cursed village. We don't have to remember that place ever again. Because we are finally home!" Aiko reminded them graciously as she was making sure their cake slices were evenly cut.

"Yeah, I'm still sorry, my fire lily, your mommy, had to die from childbirth though."

"Well, I know you are, Kazuo. But in the cursed village, only half the mommies lived who gave birth. My mommy didn't make it. Luckily your mommy was there to raise me because she promised to do it if my mommy didn't make it."
"Well, let's leave the past where it belongs in the past. Let's eat cake!" Kioko exclaimed in a delighted voice as they started to eat when they suddenly realized someone from the next table over was watching them.

It was a strange gypsy woman that their new father had told them came to the village from time to time. Her name was Madam Masuku. Why was she watching them? The gypsy watched them for a few more moments curiously. Then she got up and strolled over to them before she bowed to them while smiling charmingly at them.

"I'm sorry I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable, my children. Sorry if I did," the gypsy apologized for her apparent rudeness.

"It's okay. Are you enjoying our parents' wedding?" inquired Kazuo respectfully.

"Yes, it's the best wedding I've ever been too. Although my gift isn't for the bride and groom, it's for you three," she replied to them with a sly grin on her fuchsia lips.

"Us?!" the children exclaimed in excitement and the gypsy woman giggled playfully for a second then nodded.

"Yes, I've explored the world for a long time. So I know it can be tough to make friends or feel comfortable settling into a new home. So that why I believe having an animal friend or two makes things so much better," she tossed some glittering powder onto the ground, and in dazzling purplish smoke appeared two small animals. A pink and lilac fox-hawk kit and amber and chocolate-brown rabaroo joey each wearing a marvelous collar. There was a peculiar uniquely colored gemstone on the front on the back was their names.

Madam Masuku explained these were incredibly extraordinary pets she was giving to them. Furthermore, they needed extraordinary love and attention. That Kai was a boy despite having girly colors, and Ting-Ting was a girl despite her boyish looks. "Take good care of them, and you'll see how good care they take of you," she promised them, and the three children promised in return they would.

Watching everything hidden in the trees in her bird form was Alanna, who was smiling. All was as it should be and everything was going according to plan.

Mother of Faces- Kate Mulgrew- Queen Titania Gargoyles

Songs tweaked by Japananimegirl
Five months had passed since the deaths of Fire Lord Azulon, as well as almost the entire royal family and Ozai, becoming the new Fire Lord. You'd anticipate a reasonable soul to be still bereaved with devastating depression and unconquerable hopelessness. Given he just suffered the loss of his entire family along with his father, only nephew plus his son's beloved.

You'd anticipate that conceivable the new Fire Lord and his brother would've become friendlier, that they would've consoled one another over their shared misfortune. That everything that didn't matter at the moment like governments or the damn war would've been put on hold till all five stages of grief had been dealt with.

Yet none of that come about at all. Fire Lord Ozai had shed not one solidarity tear at all for anyone who had perished. He had not demonstrated one of the five stages of grief in the scantiest. Not denial, anger, bargaining, depression or acceptance after the first four.

For him, it was "oh they're here one day gone the next. No big deal." He had no more reaction to their deaths. Then one has to swat a fly. He wasn't even concerned at all about discovering their assassins. No, he was not. His first plans were seriously ruthless, furthermore, truly diabolical admittedly. As soon as the requiem had concluded he held a war conference the next day to announce it was time to up the Atty and bring the rest of the world to its knees.

To ultimately establish the Fire Nation was the greatest rulers of this world and all the other nations were oblivion. It was time to throw 200% into this war and win it by the time Sozin's Comet returned.

He also said he was putting together a team of five unquestionably perfect super soldiers. The best of the best, they'd have power over everyone else and be his elite army. They'd be the Legion of the Black Flame.

When his generals asked who were these five super soldiers Ozai stated there at the moment being collected from their families who were being explained from this moment on they've no further contact with their children. Iroh, who was, of course, was bewildered and sickened at those statements. He was struck speechless and full of loathing as Ozai smoothly explained how he was going to train up his new Legion of the Black Flame.

Taking five young children all of the diverse expertise, all of them younger than ten! They'd be brought to a designated restricted location he'd built for this purpose alone. From now on, this would be their home. They'd be kept quarantined from the rest of the world so as not to be sidetracked from their training for their impending responsibilities. The only human contact they'd receive from now on would be purely from specialized trainers and handlers.

They'd make sure to increase their knowledge with analyzable puzzles along with being well versed in the world's ethnic history. They would be disciplined in all manners of self-defense and weapons. That they're in peak physical condition and those who were firebender their bending be perfect. They'd also be subjected to undergo torture resistance training and how do inflict torture in return.

They'd be perfect soldiers by the time they'd reach adolescence. Which is at what time Ozai told Iroh he'd be the one to watch over them as they're sent to execute the military missions he desired.
most fulfilled. Iroh had to ask who these children he was about to reduce to this maltreatment and misery were? This was exceeding inhumane and a living death sentence his brother had just condemned for five children's souls. No child belongs in a cage!

Ozai only sneered before saying in cold blood he already knew two of them very well. Azula's friends Mai and Ty Lee, who were perfect for their conspicuous natural endowments. The others he'd chosen were a female samurai in training named Jun for her prodigious abilities, a young boy named Takakage whose acute intelligence along with firebending skills was extremely sensational and in conclusion, an inexperienced youth named Ganryu who was like a mini Ozai.

They'd start their training immediately, and nothing would change a direct order from the Fire Lord. And with that, Ozai went back to his meeting, and Iroh left it in repugnance. This was a 1000 times worse than any of the abuse his nephew, niece and daughter had gone through.

His mind and heart were throbbing dreadfully. All the same, the Dragon of the West wasn't so preoccupied with his mourning his eyes were utterly blind either. He was able to read the signs and pick up the clues that the rest of the Nation hadn't picked up on. Furthermore, unlike Ozai, who solely relished other's misery, Iroh had known who and what made people happy. He'd know who Ursa's friends were and he'd also know who those friends were.

He was also well aware of all of them had disappeared from the capital while the week-long funeral had been going on. That wasn't a coincidence. There is no such thing in the world as a pure coincidence. Knowing he needed questions answered as well as time away from the Capital, so not deal with his power-hungry megalomaniac brother Iroh headed to his room to pack. He was going on a little sabbatical to the small village of Shu Jing to visit an old friend and potentially met other friends there as well.

In the meantime back in Hira'a at the happy and modest house of honeymooners Noreen and Noriko, they're subsequently getting things organized in their home, at last, turning the house into a home. As it's love that makes a house a home. They'd gotten numerous charitable and spectacular gifts at their wedding/welcome party, and it took them this long to get it all sorted and arranged the way they liked it.

Their home was modest and simple, and they liked it that way. There was the main room that was both the living room and dining area, small kitchen, the bathroom and three bedrooms with a front yard and backyard.

Though it would've been ordinarily the girls sharing a bedroom Kazuo and Aiko refused to be parted. Just like their storybook counterparts, they refused to sleep in separate rooms. Eventually to at least guarantee that there wasn't any inappropriate exposure Noriko borrowed one of the old dressing screens from the theater and set up in their room.

That way, Aiko had a place of privacy to change into her clothes, and it was more appropriate. She was captivated that the dressing screen displayed a picture story of what she called "The Dancing Dragons" As that what the dragons seemed to be doing on the screen was dancing in the heavens at twilight.

The bedrooms were again modest and small, but still adequate and suitable for their needs. Each of the children's rooms had a futon with blankets that been made from Ms. Lal and her daughter Zalika who'd given their parents a special one of a kind tea set.

The children's bedspreads were meticulously done in magnificent vibrant hues and had awe-inspiring and eye-popping prints embellishments on them. Heck, even their sizable feathery pillows they'd thrown in were equally amazing, which were done by the women's husbands. The cushions
had come from Trader Kito's shop, and the pillowcases designs were thought up by Iye.

The children were all told they didn't even have to pay a fee or anything that Zalika's son Master Edan was eager to take them on as his students to help them learn to master their firebending which they're looking forward too very much. His gift to them before coming to his academy was he'd made beds for their new pets he'd heard about them owning. Hence even Kai and Ting-Ting had beds. Kai slept with Kazuo and Aiko, and Ting-Ting slept with Kioko.

The whole village of Hira'a was making them feel particularly welcomed here. It was a kind and loving feeling, and it was about to get a whole lot better soon.

There also a few other things the children had in stock in their rooms. Their mother knowing they're all still somewhat terrified of the dark, had placed on their nightstand a lantern sealed tightly to act as a nightlight. Noriko had also stitched each of them brand-new dragon dolls to replace the ones lost when one of their plagues of hellfire had destroyed their cursed village. Kazuo's was gold, Aiko's pink and Kioko a blue one.

Their new father had replaced their lost musical instruments hearing they're all gifted in music. Consequently, a new tsugni horn for Kazuo, pipa for Aiko, and Kioko an erhu. He was looking forward to them continuing to pursue their creative talents in school.

Ms. Lal again blesses that older woman loving heart. She, in truth, focused on freedom of expression that the rest of the Fire Nation forgot. Thus at least in Hira'a, the children were taught cultural dance, lively music to play and sing, furthermore encouraged to paint whatever they yearned-for. Which all three children were enthusiastic about doing, and whatever else awaited them as their first day of school was approaching quickly. They already made a special gift for Ms. Lal. A bouquet of multicolored glass blossoms from their firebending.

They didn't recollect who taught them to do it as that memory been lost due to the illness. On the other hand, they did know how to melt sand down then mold it with their firebending to make glass objects. Plus depending on the color of the sand and the other elements in the sand would determine the color and texture of the item.

"Do you think Ms. Lal will like our gift, Mom?" inquired Kazuo to his Mom as he held up the vessel with the bouquet of glass flowers they'd just finished making. Noriko smiled at her only son brilliantly.

"It's a sweet and noble gesture, my little Kazuo. I think it's a darling idea you want to give the teacher a gift. These flowers are so beautiful and will look so lovely on her desk. I think she'll appreciate it."

"You are sure, Mom?"

"I've known Ms. Lal for years, son. She's truly like the village grandmother. Furthermore, she loves getting gifts from her students, whom she thinks of like her grandchildren. She always said a true gift comes from the heart, and you all three made those flowers from the heart. So no doubt in mind she'll love them," his new father told him as he was setting some things on the high shelf in the living room.

"Thanks for the compliment, Dad, that's good to know. Think you and Mom can help the three of us pick out our school clothes? You said they don't wear uniforms here. So we want to look our best."

"No problem, son. Though your mother might know a bit more about fashion, then I do. I'm still
"You're doing just fine this past month, Noreen. Trust me, you're not doing anything wrong, and it will come easier with each passing day. So tell me, Kazuo, where are Aiko and Kioko?"

"They're taking Kai and Ting-Ting for their afternoon walks. Then they're also going to the village market to get things for dinner. We also needed to get food for Kai and Ting-Ting. You did say our pets are our responsibility, Mom," he promptly explained.

"Yes, that means you must make sure they are fed and water, groomed and walked. Everything that goes into taking care of a pet. It was so wonderful and considerate of Madam Masuku to give you three pets to make you less lonely till you make friends."

"And you've done an excellent job this first month so far taking care of your new pets, Kaz. An outstanding job of taking care of them. Don't think your mother and I've not noticed."

"Thanks, Dad. Don't know if this sounds crazy or not. But sometimes, when we play with them or just hanging out alone with them, it's almost like we can hear them talk!"

"What? What do you mean?" his mother asked not noticing her husband look a bit frightful.

"Don't worry about it, Mom. It's likely just our imagination from being new in town and not made any friends. That we pretend we can hear them speaking in our heads. You know we have quite the imagination. It's not like animals can talk, you know!" Kazuo giggled, and so did his mother.

"No, but it's nice to pretend they do. Now go put your gift for your teacher somewhere safe, so it doesn't get broken and then go get the table set for dinner, okay?"

"Yes, Mom!" and he scampered off with his mother smiling. She then noticed her new husband looking troubled.

"Don't fret about Noreen! Nothing wrong with a child using his imagination to pretend an animal is talking to them. The children only can remember those ten awful plagues and other scraps of bad memories.

I imagine it's a coping mechanism and I'm sure once they get more adjusted and make friends they'll not need to talk to their pets as much as they'll be able to talk to other people." Noriko went over to the kitchen and started to gather things for dinner hoping her daughters returned soon with the rest of the supplies she needed for dinner.

"I mean those were ten extremely traumatic deadly plagues in a land that was cursed for so many years!" Noriko continued as she started to chopping some veggies up. She clutched the only family heirloom. She still had left her locket for strength before continuing. "I mean, you have to understand how it was, Noreen. It wasn't pleasant the devastating final year for our former village."

"How bad was it? Are your memories getting a bit clearer?"

"Oh, I'd never forgot the ten plagues. I could never forget them, Noreen!" she hummed a tune as she worked. He started to help her prepare dinner, and soon his wife was talking up a storm.

"First was the river that ran through the village became red as blood make the water undrinkable. We lost our fish, and the smell was intolerable. That was the beginning of countless deaths as without clean water we began to suffer dehydration since we only had such a limit amount of clean water saved," Noriko began to recant the ten deadly plagues her memories recalled that led her and
the children coming to Hira'a seeking a new life.

"Next thing we knew we're ravaged with frogs followed by lice, flies and then all the livestock began to die as well. It wasn't pleasant as it seemed to be happening more rapidly then anyone could keep up with. Then half the village broke out with boils before could process that we got to rain down with a full night of hellfire! The next morning a swarm of locus ate everything in sight!

Yet even that wasn't enough to punish whatever generation had done ago to offend the local spirits! No, it got worse! It was so dark for three days everyone thought it was an eclipse and was in a panic!

However then the last thing was people starting to die all around us. It began with the eldest and worked. It was down the line. Trying to wipe out all the village till no more made it. We left before that part reached us but everything we endured still hit us and well you found us and well you know the rest of the story," she sighed as she finished reliving the trauma drama in her mind's eye.

"But your husband and Aiko's father?" Noreen asked delicately.

"They've been dead for years. Aiko's father died in a logging accident, and my first husband died from an infection he got before Kioko was born. Don't remember him. Sorry, the fever robbed me of any real memories of him or Aiko's father. I remember promising my best friend Ryo to raise her child if she was one the unfortunate ones not to make it," she replied speedily and in a depressed tone.

"You are very good at keeping your promises, Noriko."

"Thank you, Noreen."

"Mom! Mom! We're back! And we brought back dinner!" called out her daughters gleefully as they came in with baskets full to the brim with food.

"Great! So you got fresh produce and fresh pork or beef? Or is it fish?" their mother wanted to know as her daughters and their pets brought over the baskets.

"Well, Kai is carrying a basket full of eggs from a pig-chicken, and Ting-Ting got some bottles of fresh anaconda-goat milk from the local farmer," Aiko explained as she picked up the pets baskets and placed them on the counter. Sure enough two dozen fresh eggs and three gallons of fresh milk.

"I've got all the meat, Mom. It's all the above! A pound of pork, a pound of beef, and a whole fish! It seems that a rare elegant dolphin-like creature was in the bay again, and the fishermen constantly say when they see her, she brings them good luck. Their nets are perpetually more bountiful and full of much tastier and more exotic fish. So we got an enormous fish! This one will feed us for two weeks," Kioko exclaimed excitedly as she showed them the fish they'd gotten.

"I should've known it was gonna be a good day at the marketplace. Whenever it is going to be a good day for us, my locket always seems to glow. But that's a family secret we keep to ourselves, understood?"

"Yes, Mom! We know! No-one needs to know about your family heirloom extraordinary powers! I mean it's worth is priceless even if the spirits didn't bless it as we long suspected.

That the only reason, we can suspect we didn't die from the plagues. I mean your family always said your family did the spirits a good deed and that's why the locket been passed down in your family ever since," Aiko explained the story behind the necklace as she showed her mom the bountiful fruits and vegetables they had.
"Yes, and that a secret you must keep too, Noreen." Noriko looked at her husband in a pointed manner.

"I'd never betray my wife and kids, Noriko. I take my wedding vows seriously," he assured her earnestly.

"Good. Now you two get cleaned up and get Kai and Ting-Ting cleaned up. I'll finish making dinner."

An hour later, the family was gathered around the table to eat. There was noodles, jiaozi, mantou, miso soup, tonkatsu, and rice cakes and some calming jasmine tea.

Kazuo had remembered to set the table properly for dinner. This meant the rice was placed to the left and the miso soup on the right with three flat plates behind the rice and soup to hold the other food plus made sure the chopsticks were placed accordingly. After making sure to give proper thanks and compliments to the host and maker of the meal, they could begin to have dinner. Everyone continued to eat appropriately and politely and made sure to finish their meal down to the last bite as it would've been rude otherwise.

Only once every last bite had been consumed, and everyone had said one last compliment to the host and maker were they dismissed for the night. Afterward, their parents were left to clean up the dinner table and the dishes.

"Well the children certainly know their manners and how to behave with proper etiquette," Noreen noted to his wife as she went to wash the dishes, and he stopped her. "No, you shouldn't have to cook and then washes the dishes. I'll do the dishes. It would be better manners if I did that."

"You're a true gentleman, Noreen, and yes, I did make sure my children were brought up properly. I do hope you can also be a good influence on them. Since none of them had a proper father in their lives.

Being a father is such an important job. I know I said early you'll learn as you go, but I still need you to understand a father has a powerful influence on a child's welfare."

He looked a little nervous. "What do you mean?" glancing at his wife who was looking as if she was about to say something very profound that was gonna change everything which was precisely she was gonna do.

"It's just Noreen. I know this is going to be extremely hard for both you and the children. Since I've seen first-hand the deep hurt and devastation that fatherlessness has brought to their lives.

That they and so many countless others have done some reckless things after being abandoned and wounded by the men who should've loved you the most.

So many souls never know this truth that they do not have to follow in their footsteps of irresponsibility. Like for example their mothers who often time sacrifice so much to help their children survive even if they weren't meant to do that alone.

I know countless fathers never understand how crucial a role that being a father is. But I assure I do understand that, my husband. Furthermore, I know in my heart of hearts you'll do your very best for the children we already have and the one I know we shall take one day.

My only I hope for all the children already here and yet to be born is when the day comes and they become parents they'll do better where a 1000 others have failed in this duty because of you.
I want you to help them be courageous right now. Help them and myself able to walk away from our past and truly embrace our second life. So we can indeed be reborn and be free. We might have some gaps due to the fever, but I want us to live again truly.

So when the time comes, and they've become parents they won't make mistakes like those who have been wounded in this world.

That they'll be involved in their own children's lives. That because of your example, they'll do more than provide for them. That they shall walk beside them and show them what it means to be people of honor and love," Noriko paused for a moment from her passionate speech to see her husband looking at her in a strange way.

Like he never realized this was what he was signing up for when he married her and became a father or when they would have a child of their own.

Noriko opened her locket and smiled at the glowing gem which told her she was again right about what she was saying and needed to make sure her new husband understood fully what he'd signed up for. Closing her precious heirloom, she continued in a passionate voice.

"Noreen? Mothers and fathers should love their children seeking to win their hearts, protect, discipline, and teach them what is right and wrong. Parents should teach their children to walk with integrity, treat others with respect, be responsible so they can live for what truly matters in this life and the next.

Some people don't realize too late that everything else in the world doesn't matter. Not as much as the souls of your children. It's those who live for themselves and don't leave a legacy of love behind that are the most dishonorable and fools.

But again what I want from you? What I've always wanted all these years for my children? After seeing all the suffering in the world? Is what I want you all to be able to do right now is.

To be able to regardless of the suffering we've all been put through that we all will find the strength in ourselves right now to let it go and walk away. Then mentor others who have no-one in their lives but desperately need help and direction.

So when the kids have children of their own that their families and all future generations these mistakes and evils will finally be broken. I want to see them guide all of us out of the darkness. I want to see because of you they break the chains of destruction," she finished telling him what it meant to be a father and what she expected of him to help her do for the children.

Needless to say, Noreen was taken back that being a father was a far greater duty and honor then he first realized. He knew when he married. He had to honor his wife every day and how she could love and trust him. To be faithful and had nothing to fear.

Only now was he understanding just how much he truly needed to do for his new son and two daughters and what they truly needed from him as well. Well if this were what it meant to be a husband and father, he would gladly accept this honor and duty.

"I swear to uphold this sacred duty Noriko. I will fulfill it, and I will do it and be the greatest father ever," he vowed to his beloved with all his heart and soul right there and then.

"That's all I ask of you. Now you get the dishes done, and I'll make sure the children take their baths. School the day after tomorrow and they still need to pick out an outfit out." with a gentle kiss to his cheek she went to check on the children.
Iroh's private ship had finally reached one of the remotest islands away from the capital. He hadn't taken an unusually large crew with him just merely enough to run the ship, and few trusted men who he knew wouldn't speak a word to his brother about this trip.

These men he knew hated his brother with a passion. They'd sympathized with what his sister-in-law and the children had been going through. Those who hadn't turned a blind eye and weren't completely stupid either.

His right-hand man was Lt. Jee and the other three members of his crew to help him on this mission was the cook Mako, Yoshi who was head of maintenance and finally Yama who handled all communications on the ship. All of them had sworn their loyalty to Iroh, and nothing would ever change that. Nor would they've ever stain their honor by any of the dishonorable behaviors and acts that Fire Nation had so far covered up.

All the men knew to keep this trip secret and make sure Ozai never found about it. They had to make sure as far as Ozai would ever know his brother had gone Ember Island to grieve privately. It was Yama and Yoshi's job to make certain no one ever discovered where Iroh's ship went. As for Mako, the cook? To make sure they're well stock on food and tea and Lt. Jee to keep everyone on top of things and to accompany Iroh if he needed him.

Arriving in the charming and tranquil settlement in the early hours of the morning, it was a truly magnificent sight. Iroh again not trying to draw attention to himself and cause a panic that might upset his mission was dressed informally and with a hood over his head.

He was benevolent, generous, and excessively genial with everyone he met as he soaked in the majestic beauty of the land. He was pleased to note that it was nice to find geographical areas such as this one. Locations that were far as possible removed from the bustle and hustle of the capital. Though he still made his way deliberately to his destination nonetheless. Hoping to get there by lunchtime as he only had a light breakfast. Finally, he reached the home of the distinguished sword master Master Piandao.

It was the grand majestic castle and hidden in plain sight was the white lotus. He smiled to know a fellow Order member was living here. He wonders if his hunch was right that a second one was here as well.

Knocking on the door, he was greeted by Piandao's manservant Fat. "Yes, may I help you?" asked the aged and humorless butler who couldn't even have cracked a smile if you paid him.

"Hello, Fat, nice to see you again. I've come to visit an old friend. So maybe you could make lunch for Piandao and me? Let him know his guest is of the highest order and would like to make a grand entrance." Iroh spoke in his witty wordplay in case he'd been followed, and there were spies.

"General Iroh, it's a pleasure to have you sit at our table. I'll announce to you, of course. However, please don't cause too much anxiety during your visit, please. My Lady is expecting, and we don't need to stress her out or do any unnecessary harm to her child."

"My Lady?" Iroh blinked in bewilderment as he was allowed inside. "Master Piandao has taken a wife? And he's expecting a child? Well, that's excellent news! I wish I'd know before I came. I would've brought a gift," Iroh apologized for feeling foolish for not knowing of this development with one of his friends in the Order.

"It was a private ceremony, and the Master doesn't want anyone to know about his wife or child at the moment. After all the Fire Nation still on edge regarding your...um... loss." uncertainly explained to the butler as they strolled inside the castle.
Fat lead him outside then indicated to a table on the veranda overlooking the garden and said he'd be back with the Master and his Lady in a few moments. Ten minutes later, Piandao arrived with his new wife, who was clearly in her second trimester. When she saw Iroh, she virtually fainted, and it took both men to lead her to the table to sit.

"Congratulations on your marriage and your baby, Piandao and Xiaoying," Iroh spoke with a smile, and for the first time, happiness since his family died.

Far, far, far away from where Iroh was having his lunch were Kazuo, Aiko and Kioko all busy trying to decide what would look best for their big day tomorrow. When they started their first day of school. They at least managed to get their hair to look right, ultimately with a lot of help from their parents. For some reason, it was if they had never done their hair on their own before or something.

Still, finally with his dad's help and much frustration with his curly hair being quite unruly with him, Kazuo managed to make sure he had at least part of it in a traditional topknot and the rest of his long raven curls cascading down to his shoulders.

He didn't like his topknot not decorated, so he took a cadmium red feather that Kai had found that morning and put it at a jaunty angle in his topknot with a matching one around his neck. Then for his clothes, he picked short-sleeved deep v-neck carnelian colored shirt with falu red pants and new open-toed sandals with wrist bands of both reds mixed. He thought he looked very cool and handsome.

Nearby was Aiko who was admiring her reflection in the full length looking glass. Her waist-length wavy copper-color hair had been styled in a super cool way. A topknot with an elegant bun at the back of her head with the rest falling in cascading waves. She'd used some hair accessories made from both sunburst pearls and persevered fire lilies string through her hair three times as it went down.

She also did this with her earrings, necklace, and bracelets. Her outfit was in two tones of amaranth and sky magenta, which was a sleeveless vest, over a crop top, maxi skirt and flats.

Also admiring herself in the mirror was his little sister. Kioko wore her hair in a topknot with rest falling over her right shoulder. She wore a sunburst yellow lightweight cardigan over an amaranth pink sundress with a flower embellished into the skirt and a choker with pink diamonds decorating it with matching bracelets and flats.

They're extremely captivated with how they looked, and even their pets seemed to approve of their new looks as if it suits them. Tomorrow would be such a big day, for sure. So that meant their mother better get to making their school lunches in preparation now that they had their hair and clothes all figured out.

The children were almost too excited to go to sleep but after their mother sang them a story from their battered copy of "The Ember Tales" they all finally settled down and went to sleep. As the family slept, their pets slipped outside. They ran into the nearby woods where both Alanna and Mother of Faces in her human form were waiting for them. After making sure no one could see or hear them, they had a heart to heart.

"How are things going in the house with the children?" Alanna inquired with both anxiety and curiosity in her voice to the two-spirit animals.

Their bewitched collars glowed, and the spells that made them unable to access their spiritual powers were removed temporarily. It was Kai who answered first. "So far, everyone is adjusting
"just fine, no problems at all. The children are all much happier and smiling a lot more."

"Though if it's their bending or Akiko's spiritual powers you're talking about, which I assume you are?" Ting-Ting looked at the woman who gave a curt nod, "No, none of the children have used any of their firebending. Nor has Akiko now Aiko accessed her powers."

"So far their actual potential and true power haven't resurfaced or developed yet?" Mother of Face asked for confirmation and spirit animal shook their heads.

"No, it's too soon after becoming someone new. We've been observing them for when their 'phantom memories' connected to their bending and Akiko's spiritual powers reemerge. On the other hand, we don't believe that will be for quite some time."

"But you've been establishing bonds with all of them, correct? Slowly gaining their trust so one day they'll be prepared for you to train them in secret of their true powers when they do reemerge?" Alanna pressed them earnestly.

"Yes, beloved Lady of Life, we know the plan and what was part of the memory your friend put in their heads. Your gift to their mother is explained as an "heirloom" as a gift from the spirits for a good deed to them," Kai explained how Ursa now knew as Noriko that the locket was unique and not to remove it.

"They do have the vague impression that they spirits favor them and watch over them. Which is true, and I don't think they will be surprised when at whatever time the children's true powers do come out that spirit animal guides will be teaching them to control their powers properly without anyone else knowing," Ting-Ting assured them sincerely.

"Good, because if word got out that three children had these extraordinary firebending powers Ozai would find them even with new faces!" both spirit women shivered with repugnance and the animal spirits felt they had to ask.

"Any rumors of what going on back at the capital?" they asked apprehensively wondering what precisely the bastard was doing back where the hell on earth was located.

"Not entirely sure to be honest," replied Alanna frankly, "Only that I've never heard my counterpart Anto been happier then he is right now." she looked outraged right now as she clenched her fist and her wings were fluttering angrily.

"He's intoxicated and been partying like no tomorrow since Ozai came into power because he knows Ozai will grant him his dark heart's desire. It's his glass of euphoria! The more senseless deaths, dark hearts and growing evil? All of it will only make Anto and his father stronger, and me and my mother weaker! Because all of it only refills their already overflowed cup of toxic booze!

The only hope for this world and my own life and my mother is if the twisting path of destiny is correct and the Avatar is found and saves the world before Ozai, who seems to be Anto and his father's favorite human claims the world in their name!" Alanna spoke with both fear and passion about how things indeed hung in the balance.

"Are you trying to say we shouldn't have saved the royal family?" the two-spirit animals asked in shock, and the White Spirit shook her head. "No, they had to be saved and protected. If the world is to survive all of them need to live and they all would've died without our intervention and our human friends."
They must remain safe and hidden until the time comes for them to play their part in helping this world. For now, we must keep them safe from all evils as well as train the children in the use of their abilities, which will aid them when it comes time to face their destiny.

"You know the rules and how we all work as spirits yourself, Kai and Ting-Ting. We may see a glimpse of the future, but we can't foresee it completely, and no-one should know the future anymore then they can alter the past.

We must live in the moment. We must learn from the past and shape our future according to how we live in the present. Still, there are sometimes there must be intervention, and this was one of the emergency times." Mother of Faces spoke fiercely of reminding them all of their own rules and duties.

"Humans don't understand the point of a spirit guides, do they? Or how fate, destiny, choice, and free will work together? How part of what your job is to do?" Kai sighed softly as he sat on his haunches and began to preen his wings.

"Huh?" Ting-Ting asked a little lost about what her friend was talking about or where this was going. She was always a little slow on the uptake and would occasionally take things too literally.

"What he means, my darling friend is there no one in this world. Not the human world or spirit world that 'got all the answers' You should never stop asking questions for that's how you learn. But no-one got all the answers," interjected Alanna as she explained what the little kit was teaching. He grinned his roguish grin and nodded.

"True, My Lady. More often then not, others can't give you the answers. You must discover them for yourself. That's how you learn. You can't learn if someone tells you the answer. You have to figure it out for yourself.

And no-one destiny, not even the Avatar is set in stone. We all created our fates by the choices we make, whether they be for good or ill. And in the end, our destiny is the fate we choose for ourselves it to be."

"Even though I craft faces, I too understand a great deal about fate and destiny. Or the question as to who you are? That's a question everyone will spend a lifetime trying to answer.

But the thing I can tell you about that is that who you are is determinate by the sum of what makes you up and ultimately the choices you make. The rest of who you are? That you'll have to figure out on your own," the Mother of Faces confessed that even with what she did she comprehended the more profound things of this world.

"I guess humans still don't get what a "spirit guide is" whether they be human or animal," Ting-Ting shook her head dismissively before carrying on with the answer to that question.

"A "Spirit Guide" is someone who guides you. Points you in the right direction and gives you the advice to help you help yourselves.

We don't directly intervene in your life or make choices for you. You have free will and must act on your own accord. We can't do more than point you in the right direction and offer advice."

"Yes, that the job description, in a nutshell, most of the time," Alanna sighed once. "We cannot do anything that would directly intervene in human lives. It's not like with Avatar, where past lives help one another become stronger or in times of danger. That's the exception to the rule. Everyone else spirit guides must provide only advice and take a passive role. Merely advice not take any real
"Well, this is the one time to bend that rule. All four of us made a pact to help these four human souls, and we will remain committed to this pact for as long as it takes. Agreed?" Mother of Faces asked allowed, and everyone nodded.

With that, the meeting ended, and the two-spirit women vanished, and the animals headed back inside the house before their presence was missed. They had to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for tomorrow.

The next morning after a hearty breakfast, Noriko and Noreen walked their children to the village schoolhouse, giving them lots of hugs and kisses before saying goodbye. Gathering their courage, Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko walked into the classroom for the first time. They couldn't remember ever being in school before. Those memories likely lost due to the fever that robbed them of so many other memories of that cursed village of theirs.

Ms. Lal hadn't changed in all those years. She still looked the same other than maybe a few more wrinkles. The children bowed respectfully before offering their gift, which she gladly accepts. "Well, isn't that lovely and thoughtful. Thank you very much. I will cherish it always," she gave them a warm glowing smile as she put the vase with the bouquet of glass flowers on her desk. She then turned to the class of what looked like maybe 20 to 25 other children all 11 or younger.

"Class I would like to introduce to you your new classmates. This is Kazuo, his sister Kioko and Kazuo's little fire lily Aiko. Please say hello."

"Hello and welcome to Hira'a," the class affectionately welcomed them, and they shyly waved back and said hello. Ms. Lal smiled and then told the class to introduce themselves one by one and say one nice thing to each of their new classmates.

The last two to introduce themselves were a pair of fraternal twins. Umi and her brother Shun. They had light suntan skin, honey-colored eyes, with brown sugar colored hair and well-sculpted features. Umi was very cute in her byzantine colored slip dress accented with her gold and pezzottaite jewelry and her long braided pigtails. Her twin brother Shun was handsome with his longish hair, and a coquelicot sleeveless vest over his lava red shirt, pants, and wristbands.

When the twins greeted the three of them, they all felt an instant connection. Then Ms. Lal said if they wanted to make them feel welcome, they should sing the school song they sang instead of the Fire Nation Oath. Wondering what that could be the children all smiled as they stood tall and proud and began to sing in a very enthusiastic voice their favorite tune.

"Got up this morning,

On the right side of my bed,

With all these fun thoughts,

Flying through my head.

I can't wait to see,

What this world holds for us.

Oh, it's a new day,

Oh, it's a new day."
And when we see you,
Anytime or anyplace,
You are the reason,
For the smile on our faces,
'Cause you to make us feel,
All our dreams can be real.
Oh, it's a new day,
Oh, it's a new day.
It feels so good to be alive,
Even if a little rain should fall,
'Cause every moment,
Brings a new surprise to us all.
Oh, it's a new day,
Oh, it's a new day,
Oh, it's a new day,
Oh, it's a new day.
Here in us, you found some friends,
We'll be with you 'til the end.
Oh, it's a new day!"

After that everyone was amicable and happy and the rest of the day seemed very much like a dream. This was as different as you could get from their former lives that they couldn't remember anymore.

There was no mind molding here. No disciplining here. No dishonesty. No strictness or forcing everyone to be cut from the same cloth. Eliminating the ability for one to think for themselves and lose freedom of expression. Children were urged to ask the question, "Why?" Use all their imagination and express themselves any way they please. Get a little loud and disorderly. Be friendly and open. Just be themselves and learn to think for themselves.

They loved free time where they could do anything they wanted. Therefore Aiko worked on her painting skills while Kioko practiced her erhu and Kazuo found a wooden sword prop and practice with that.

During recess, when the children were playing outside, the twins came over to three and asked them if they wanted to play. Kazuo and Aiko wanted to play firerope jumping, but neither of the twins was firebenders but love to see what they could do as it was their first day. Consequently with Kioko managing to control two spinning ropes of fire Kazuo and Aiko showed the twins why
they loved firerope jumping and just how good they were at it.

They jumped a few times, then came first part of their routine. They moved with the grace and beauty of a phoenix before a ring of fireballs surround them and elegantly moved around their bodies. The fireballs then became a lovely dragon that danced in the sky as they jumped back with their arms crossed then spreading them wide.

From them burst twin phoenix who sang and danced with the dragon as they matched the moves of their benders who were now making incredible dance moves of their own. Their dance moves were of traditional dance, amalgamated with ballet, break dancing, and several gymnastic movements. They're all superbly choreographed and blended perfectly together.

Then Aiko held up her right hand and all the fire they'd conjured collected itself into her hand in a perfect heart. She then performed what in figuring skating would have been a ideal triple axle as she stuck the dismount she blew the heart of fire over to Kazuo who caught and kissed it then blew it outward it became several hearts of fire.

Then after that, they began to fight with imaginary swords as they still danced in time in their minds to music before finally ending up in a rather romantic embrace for two children their age as they finished their routine.

"Wow! How did you ever get that good?!" exclaimed Umi with much exhilaration as she and her twin brother applauded the loudest of all the kids in the schoolyard after the three stopped the game.

They shrugged sheepishly with a smile at all the attention they'd gotten what just came so naturally to all of them. Although then they merely explained the answer to the question while not trying to be overwhelmed by all the attention they're getting at the moment.

"I guess we are just naturally talented, Umi. Or maybe because Kazuo and I live up to our storybook counterparts and are a perfect duet in all that we do. I don't think our mommies intend that to happen when they named us though," Aiko told their first new friend as well as answering the whole school's question.

"Were you all named purposely after the characters in "Promise of the Fire Lily?" Shun wanted to know as he looked at Kioko who blushed super pink at his gaze.

"Our mom loves theater and literature. So she and her best friend Ryo were influenced by that when they gave us our names. It's merely a coincidence I guess we look and act like the character somewhat," Kioko looked extremely pink in the face as did Shun as if they couldn't meet each other eye.

"Yeah, we've heard it many times we look like the characters. I guess everyone 'looks like a," and we look like the characters by coincidence. So what do you guys do for fun?" Kazuo explained about the strange coincidence about their names and faces who they just were accustomed too.

"Well, we can tell you more after school. After all, we live next door to you. Our mommy and daddy were planning to come over for dinner after your first day of school. So that's why we wanted to be extra nice." Umi explained some background facts about herself and her brother.

"That's great! Nice to have brand-new friends who live right next door!" exclaimed Aiko jubilantly as her love and his sister nodded in happiness too. This was the best news ever! Everything was falling into place so quickly for them.
"Yeah, it is! So let's play some more and then make sure we all on our best behavior for dinner when our families get together tonight?" Shun suggested, and the five children all played happily together, and soon they joined all the other kids with any other games they were playing.

Back in Shu Jing things had been rather quiet tension between the three Order members. Nevertheless, they all tried to make this appear to be a routine visit as possible.

In case anyone had followed Iroh. Or someone was listening and figured out what was going on. So they worded everything and did everything with meticulous care and thought.

Again Iroh congratulated them on their marriage and the baby and casually asked for some details. Like how they met, the wedding and minor things you might expect from a normal conversation as they ate the fabulous lunch Fat had provided for them.

Iroh had some of the information already. They had to play their part to a T. Someone could be watching. So again, they explained they had met through a friend a long time ago and kept in touch through letters. This part all three of them already knew and that Ursa was unaware of because she'd never been to one of the secret meetings of the Order that been under the guise of "Pai Sho Tournaments."

That was code for members to gather at local tournaments or their country championship to talk in code while playing Pai Sho. Furthermore, since both Iroh and Xiaoying were the Grand Lotus and Grand Yon, they're the greatest Pai Sho players around. It was often noted on rainy days by Zuko and Akiko the two them spent hours trying to defeat each other to only ever end in stalemate. The two young lovers said no-one could hope to beat either their true father or their godmother and they couldn't hope to beat each other.

Though they and their mother had no idea that it was Iroh who introduce Xiaoying years ago at one of these 'tournaments' to Piandao and for them, it was love at first sight. Moreover, since then they'd been in nearly weekly correspondence using their White Lotus Doves to send each other love letters.

Only members of the OWL had White Lotus Doves which are slightly bigger than an ordinary dove, whiter than fresh snow with eyes as blue as the heavens above and the mark of the White Lotus naturally on their breast. They had an excellent sense of direction, could survive extreme temperatures, they sang with unspeakable joy, their faithfulness to their owners and mates was unsinkable, the love they expressed was unstoppable, and the hope they brought to the Order and the world made many people believe anything was possible.

Xiaoying said she hadn't desired a lavish wedding. Just a simple wedding and they'd just gotten married at her husband's castle with Fat as their witness and not long after she'd discovered she was with child. Which she said she considered a blessing as she dreaded she would never have a child for personal reasons she couldn't speak about plainly and not to a man who wasn't her husband.

Iroh said he understood having been married once to his wife Kimana and she explained all about how someone women have various reasons for having a harder time becoming with a child. At that moment, both Piandao and Xiaoying offered their condolence to Iroh about the loss of his family as they both knew he already felt guilty for his wife's death. Even if it was an accident or at least thought to be one.

Anyone who knew Iroh and been around the palace had learned what happened to Princess Kimana Iroh's gorgeous and kind-hearted wife. How she died from accidentally from drinking tea with lychee nut dust in it when she and Iroh thought it was tea spices. The thing was everyone in the entire palace knew Iroh's wife was deathly allergic to lychee nuts. Therefore it made no logical
sense that they could've possibly mislabeled a flask of tea spices with lychee nut dust. Especially for the heir to the throne and his family.

It went unspoken the rumor was Ozai had knocked her off to make sure Iroh only had one heir to limit his chances at the throne. This had never been proven, but it didn't mean everyone had had their suspicions and for good reasons! And considering what just happened, this seemed even more likely to be accurate than ever.

Lunch continued with them continuing to chew the fat about a few different topics. Their thoughts on the war, about the baby Xiaoying, was carrying, local gossip, a few fond memories. Later they went inside where Xiaoying went to an enormous attractively crafted birdcage where their two doves, Piandao's Adamu and hers Ibu who were also mated for life needed their food and water.

"They're so lovely and a sign of hope for the world. That there will be a rainbow after the storm," she mused as she stroked their breasts as she gave them fresh food and water. Then she turned to face Iroh before asking him straight out. "Are you planning to stay here tonight or go back to your ship? How long are you staying in Shu Jing?"

"I think I'll need a week maybe a few more days away from my deranged brother. He's become so similar to Anto the Black Spirit he rightfully earned the title of Death. Just like Akiko forever called him."

Xiaoying looked severally jolted at hearing one of her godchildren's names. Holding herself up by a piece of furniture she got out shakily.

"Akiko knew who was a demon when she saw one. She knew who was a human being and who was a monster Iroh. She wasn't stupid, you know. None of us who were apart of the three families of the Vow of Friendship were ever stupid. We knew what the Face of Evil looked like."

"I know my daughter wasn't stupid, Xiaoying. I know exactly how special she was even if she could never tell you or her mother how special she was," he replied in a way that showed he was still incredibly outraged by his family's death. Yet he'd a conspiratorial smile on his sad face. It confused her about what that smile meant. What's more, he said by knowing something about Akiko that she and Ursa hadn't.

Still, she knew he might just be fishing for something. As a result, she kept her face impassive and refused to give anything away. She asked once more to him as respectfully as she could manage."Well, should we get the guest room prepared? Or are you going back to your ship?"

"I'll stay the night," Iroh replied in true gentleman's gentleman fashion, "and tomorrow I think I'd like to see our other friends who moved here as well."

She tried to act dumbfounded as if she didn't know who was speaking about. "Friends? Whatever do you mean Iroh?" feigning ignorance and he looked at her like he was a dragon.

"Xiaoying, please don't patronize me. Please don't. I know you and all of Ursa's special friends left during the week of grief in the capital, and all now live here. Ozai doesn't have a clue. You have my word, Xiaoying, he doesn't know you here nor your friends and hasn't followed up."

She stared at Iroh for a few moments before lamenting in defeat. "Should've known only the Dragon of the West would notice only Ursa's tea party friends all up and left the Capital during the week of grief. Damn," as she slammed her right fist into the wall behind her.

"Yes. The rest of the Capital may not have noticed why you all disappeared or that three business
enterprises were shut down for no reason in a week. But I did notice. I'm astonished you all slipped out without anyone else noticing."

Xiaoying waved her hand dismissively and looked at Iroh as if it was apparent how they pulled off that feat. "The whole country is grieving Iroh. Not like anyone paying attention to much else," she answered him as if it was apparent how they got out undetected.

Iroh thought it over a moment stroking his beard before nodding in agreement."True. Still, I hope we can talk more about it in the morning," as he poured them some evening tea and offered her a cup which she took.

"We'll talk, my old friend, but I can't say you'll get what you came for," she advised him before she took her first sip of some of the best tea ever brewed. Oh, how she missed Iroh's tea recipes!

The following morning after an excellent breakfast prepared by Fat Iroh then thoughtfully requested if he and Xiaoying could take a stroll through the village together. He'd have his first officer Lt. Jee, protect Xiaoying in her delicate state. Xiaoying was about to protest against the idea she required a bodyguard simply because she was pregnant, except her husband agreed to it. Therefore she had no choice but to go along with it. She said they'd return in time for dinner and after dinner, she and Iroh would've their mystery tea and cookies and play a game of Pai Sho.

They nonchalantly started to head into town to visit her friends and catch up with them in their new lives in Shu Jing after living there for five months. Although she knew Iroh wouldn't get what he desired from them anymore, he gets it from her. No longer aware of their connection to Iroh or Xiaoying and how their day played out today they’d never know about. For the former royal family was preparing for dinner with their new neighbors.

At six clock their neighbors came over bringing over a well-prepared meal with them. Noriko and the children had done their best to make their home look as clean and inviting as possible for their new neighbors which Noreen was well acquainted with.

Noreen worked with them as they'd help with the acting troop. So, therefore, he did the introduction to the family. He introduces the head costume designer Hinata who was the twins’ mother.

She was on the shorter side with the same brown sugar locks as her twins with almond-shaped amber eyes and had ashen skin. She kept her hair moderately quick, but long enough to at least do a partial top bun with sunflower as a decoration. Her outfit was a Venetian red and soot-black off the shoulder shortened kimono style dress with gold and fire opal jewelry. On her right ankle was a tattoo of a ring of fire. Overall her looks and her crucial personality traits were unquestionably evident within minutes.

From just how Noreen described her work life and her husband explained her home life, it was clear that Hinata was a very family-orientated, friendly, hard-working, diligent woman. She hated hearing gossip or rumors. When it came to her family, she'd be the one to enforces the rules in the family. Though she was very gentle and wanting what's best for the twins. Just kind to everyone and therefore everyone she considers a friend.

Her husband Jwala, who was in charge of building sets and props? Well, there as a lot you could say about him. For example, he was extremely tall with tan skin, with longish chocolate-brown locks and honey eyes. His outfit was cross between beachwear and that of an ordinary laborer and was vivid burgundy in color plus he also had some tattoos as well.

Both his wife and Noreen defined him as a hard-working, athletic, punctual with an intense phobia
of water the result of a near-drowning accident as a child. He enjoyed a drink now and then. He could also be stern but teasing and joking as well.

Dinner was overall a joyous affair as they had several engaging conversations that included talking about the acting troop, favorite plays and other performing arts, ideas for what the children could do in the future together and just Hira’a in general. When the twins informed the three other children they’re their parents' apprentices Kazuo, Aiko and Kioko got pretty excited and said they wanted to help their father some way with the acting troop. Maybe one day get to act for themselves among many other things.

Hinata said she be glad to take anyone who wanted to learn to make costumes under her wing and teach them that art to which Kioko readily and gladly agreed. Kazuo and Aiko really wanted to act but decided for the time being. They help out where they could till they're older and could work. Their parents pointed out the children had many other activities. They didn't have to overwhelm themselves. Just take a little time each day to work on one at a time. And also remember their responsibility to their family.

That night after their neighbors had left, the kids went to the enclosed backyard. Kai and Ting-Ting followed closely behind them.

They quickly took notice of the children's movements and behavior. Zuko used a fallen branch that showed the phantom memory of knowing sword fighting, Akiko was doing ballet. Azula was running advance katas cold and making moves that Mai and Ty Lee would've done without realizing where she'd picked them up.

All of them were doing this in a choreographed manner. Singing as Kazuo and Aiko were teasing Kioko. To say she was in love with Shun! This peculiar dance and phantom memories began as they sang and played it out in their backyard as their pets watched and listened attentively to all that was going on.

"No chance, no way, I won't say it, no, no
If there's a prize for rotten judgment,
I guess I've already won that
No man is worth the aggravation
That's ancient history,
Been there
Done that!" Kioko sang, diverting the accusation and continued with her phantom behavior. Then Kazuo and Aiko cornered before singing to her while performing their own phantom routine.

"Who'd ya think you're kidding?
He's the earth and heaven to ya
Try to keep it hidden, honey, we can see right through ya
Girl, ya can't conceal it
We know how you're feelin', who you're thinking of!"

Kioko did astonishing acrobatics to get over them before singing back in reply.

"No chance, no way, I won't say it, no, no
You swoon, you sigh
Why deny it, uh oh
It's too...cliche
I won't say I'm in love
(Oooooh ooooh ooooh)
I thought my heart had learned its lesson  
It feels so good when ya start out  
My head is screaming, "Get a grip, girl!  
"Unless you're dying to cry your heart out!"
Ooooh oooh"

As she tried to run away only to be cut off by her brother and his love using some tag team moves from their Book of Secrets that had all their secret moves from firebending to hand-to-hand combat and everything in between and with her stuck between them they sang again to call her out on her lies.

"You keep on denying  
Who you are and how you're feelin'  
Baby, we're not lying, hon', we saw ya hit the ceiling  
Face it like a grown up  
When ya gonna own up that ya got, got, got it bad?" to which she answered with a round off kick.

"Whoa  
No chance, no way, I won't say it, no, no" she again stated only for Aiko to retaliate with. "Give up, give in Check the grin, you're in love! You're doing flips, read our lips you're in love"

Kioko gently shoved her away before singing back

"You're way off base  
I won't say it  
Get off my case  
I won't say I'm in love  
I won't say I'm in love  
I won't say I'm in love  
No chance, no way, I won't say it, no, no!"

Her brother came back behind her and whispered into her left ear. Give up, give in  
Check the grin, you're in love!" she slapped him away and again sang back to him.

"The scene won't play I won't say I'm in love!"

Then both Aiko and Kazuo took it up a knock and unleashed all skills they did when firerope jumping and kept singing loudly and the truth to Kioko in a theatrical way as the grand final of this little show was coming up for all of them.

"You're doing flips read our lips you're in love  
You're way off base  
I won't say it  
Girl, don't be proud, it's OK, you're in love  
No chance, no way, I won't say it, no, no  
Give up, give in  
Check the grin. You're in love!  
The scene won't play  
I won't say I'm in love  

Ooooooh  
At least out loud  
I won't say I'm in... love
Sha la la la la la!" and everyone cheered happily at excellent performance and the fact they'd all found love, happiness, and friendship all in one day. They laughed once more before running inside to get ready for bed not noticing how their beds shared a nervous look upon their faces.

Same couldn't be said for how Iroh's day in the countryside had gone exactly grievously. While unrevealed to him hidden far away with new faces and minds was his, not the dead family, he was busy striving to get answers from those closest to them. But he might as well been talking to a brick wall for all the good it did him.

The first stop had been Healer Yang's brand-new clinic. She had hired two young girls to be her apprentices. A pair of sisters named Hana and her younger sister Hoshi. They'd been quick studies with quite a marvelous potential for so much more.

When Iroh and Xiaoying had shown up, the young sisters who were only 15, and 14 respectfully were for the first time minding the clinic while Yang was having a counseling session with a young couple considering marriage. So to be polite, Iroh allowed the young girls to practice what they'd learned on him to succeed. It wasn't like his back couldn't use some work as he was getting on in years. So some acupuncture wasn't bad, and the aromatherapy wasn't bad either as it calmed him like a good cup of tea.

Half an hour later a young couple that looked about 18 years came out of Yang's private chamber, and she gave them last-minute hush advice before they bowed and left looking both happier before she gestured for Iroh and Xiaoying to enter.

"Xiaoying, how is the baby? Are you taking all the vitamins prescribed for you? Following the diet?" she asked at once before she was cut off by Xiaoying raising one hand to silence her.

"Yang you're a healer of many arts, mystic, holistic and even a good midwife. I know you'll deliver my baby safely, and yes, I've been following your advice to a T. But I think you know that's not why I've come with our guest."

"Iroh, I'm saddened for all our loss. I'm a good healer and do give sage advice when it comes to Feng Shui, relationships, but never really tried my luck as a grief counselor.

I mean it was easier to tell those two love-struck teens to take things slow and steady and let things develop naturally and not rush into things. But I can't heal your broken heart any more than my own. Grief just got to run its course. I'm afraid I can't help."

"You could if you gave me some answers."

"Answers? Why would there be answers when there no questions?" she asked nervously playing with her hands while attempting to keep her beautiful face's expression the best poker-faced.

"The story given to the public may sway it, and they may not see the holes in it or question it at all, I do, however. I know all of you better than anyone else. So what do you have to say about what happened that night?" he pressed her in a somewhat aggressive manner.

"On the one hand, I'm deeply saddened none of us can be together any longer. Though I won't deny, I'm happy those who remain can remember them happily. The question remains what are we going to do now that they're gone? I wake up every morning thinking I'll see their smiling faces and they'll be there. And I know that's just a dream Iroh.

So I cannot live in the past nor can I live in a dream. My advice to you is to move on, sir. Stop living in the past. Just cherish and honor their memories and move on. Now could you please go? I
have got a business to run," as she kindly shooed him out.

Iroh got the same response at both Kishi’s brand-new jewelry store where she too had two assistants. One to mind the store named Agate, who was 13. Then her 11-year-old sister named Amber to help gather the gems from a nearby hidden cave of wonders and assist with the designing process.

Kishi was working on a masterpiece when Iroh showed up. She was helping her apprentice do her first design and making it come to life. It was a dazzling piece of jewelry; a lacework collar of gold with eye-popping rubies and diamonds.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion? Can't you see I'm helping both these sisters reach the fullest of their marvelous potential?" she asked a little miffed as she crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes.

"Mistress Kishi should I?" Amber started to ask when Kishi looked down at her and shook her beautiful head no.

"Amber keep working on your project. I'll be back in ten minutes. And remember both you and your sister have the talent to become great jewelers and designers in the business!" as she yanked Iroh and Xiaoying to a private room.

"Yes, General Iroh? What brings you to Shu Jing? I know your grieving, but even all the riches in the world can buy back a soul that Anto took, and you know it!" she reminded him in a heated tone of voice.

"Kishi, you know the reason I'm here. Please," begged Iroh but the jeweler shook her head again and replied merely in a disheartened tone.

"Ursa was a friend like no other, Iroh. She knew all the little things that no-one else ever knew. How could it only seem like yesterday and now it's all suddenly fading away?

I thought goodbye was a word I never have to say again to another friend. But alas, I have. No one WANTS to say goodbye, but we all must say it. To accept this is goodbye and move on. Now I've to get back to my work. Good day, Iroh it was nice seeing you again."

At the beauty salon next door like all the others Rei had taken two apprentices to help her with her shop, and of course, the underlying reasons was to test them to become future members of the Sisterhood.

Her apprentices were two cousins who shared the same birthday. Cai, who was very feminine and her cousin Cam, who like a bit more of a tomboy. Either way, they worked wonders in the beauty parlor and helping Rei making her magical elixirs.

All Rei would say to Iroh was. "They'll never be forgotten! A million days could pass us by. But all that time we spent together will not just be a dream for us! Because they're still here with us. For they're more than just a memory, and they'll never be forgotten!" But other than that she asked him to leave.

Saura was now teaching two young half-sisters by the names of Melody and Harmony, both named by the mother they shared for her love of music how to sing. All she sang to Iroh was.

"Iroh we can only hold each other hands right now. None of us will pretend what happened wasn't gruesome. Nor will we let their voices just become echoes in our minds. We won't allow this tragedy to make our hearts turn to dust.
No, we can only let the world keep going, Iroh, sadly, because they're just gone! There nothing we can do to change that. So accept that fact already!"

Even when he went to the local school and he found Kami with two students of his own. His students' names were two boys who were best friends named Alim and Anka. They were helping him with several journals when Iroh showed up.

So while the boys were busy Kami made it clear he wouldn't yield any information. He informed him since leaving the capital he planned to spend his days now truly doing his duties.

Which was documenting the real Fire Nation history. While praying one day by a miracle, Ozai has toppled then afterward he could teach it with the help of his two students.

After that Iroh and Xiaoying returned to her home for their dinner and the game of Pai Sho with their special mystery tea and mystery cookies which was going to be more than a game and Iroh last hope to glean the truth he wanted so badly and came all this way for.

Using the wedding tea set Iroh poured his mystery tea, which was a secret recipe of his. It was called mystery tea because you couldn't guarantee the flavor which was different each time and to each person who drank.

Just as Xiaoying's family mystery cookies were the same way. Passed down since her grandmother's time no two cookies ever taste the same twice and everyone served would taste a different flavor.

Each complimented the other on their signature treat and couldn't help but reminiscence a moment how they'd always serve this for snack time with the children which again Iroh tried to use as an opening but Xiaoying wouldn't take the bait.

Instead, she opened the game with the White Lotus Gambit and then began to place her pieces in particular spots on the board. Each title had, of course, deeper significance meaning as she was using the game board to represent the world and her pieces to speak of her Yons.

Iroh's pieces on the board were to tell her what his brother's diabolical plans were for the future and how she should order her agents to circumvent the current orders of the new Fire Lord while asking him about some of the top members of the order.

She was then surprised when he moved four unforeseen pieces to the center of the board. A red lotus, the gold flame, dragon, and lightning bolt. She glanced up nervously as she met his aged old eyes.

"What with these four odd pieces, Iroh? They will not help you win the game, you know that" as she gazed at the board than him and saw the famous Dragon of the West glint and swallowed hard when she saw that.

Taking a sip of his tea and one bite of her cookies, he explained in a relaxed manner which didn't feel that way at all. "It's more to do what I was singing every night on my way over. I've found pouring my heart and its grief into music has helped me greatly. I've been teaching my crew a new song during our music night."

"What's this song, and how does it relate to these pieces and our game?" Xiaoying inquired in a guarded and heartbreaking voice. She knew what was coming and was bracing herself for the storm to come. This wasn't going to be pretty or easy to hear all at all.

"Sha la la la la
Sha la la la la

I used to call them my children.  
Said they were sent straight from Spirit World  
I'd hold them close in my arms  

I loved the way they tried to be so strong  
I never wanted them to leave  
I wanted them to stay here holding hands with me.  

I miss my family  
I miss their smiles  
And I still shed a tear  
Every once in a while  
And even though it's different now  
Their still here somehow  
My heart won't let them go  

And I need you to know  
I miss them, sha la la la la  
I miss them.  

I used to call them my little dreamers  
And now I'll never see them live out their dreams  
Oh how I wish they were still here so they could see  
Everything that's happening to me  
I'm thinking back on the past  
Time is indeed flying by too fast  

I miss my family  
I miss their smiles  
And I still shed a tear  
Every once in a while  
And even though it's different now  
Their still here somehow  
My heart won't let them go  

And I need you to know  
I miss them, sha la la la la  

I know they're in a better place, yeah  
But I wish that I could still see their faces, oh  
I know they're where they need to be  
Even though it's not here with me  

I miss my family  
I miss their smiles  
And I still shed a tear  
Every once in a while  
And even though it's different now  
Their still here somehow  
My heart won't let them go  

And I need you to know
I miss them, sha la la la la
I miss my family
I miss their smiles
And I still shed a tear
Every once in a while
And even though it's different now
Their still here somehow
My heart won't let them go

And I need you to know
I miss them, sha la la la la"

Xiaoying was silent for a few moments and much moved to tears by Iroh's heart's song. Still, it didn't stop her from what she did next. After a moment of hesitation, she turns them upside down and said cryptically, "Somethings are better left unsaid and pieces not played with. You don't want someone to cheat and take the pot that they didn't honorable deserve, do you?" and that was all she said to him for the rest of the night.

Iroh spent the rest of the night with Xiaoying and her husband before departing back to the capital but they promise to keep in touch with what was going on and let him know about the baby.

As Iroh made his way back to his ship a sad song seems to be singing on the winds and carried to four corners of the world and filled everyone's heart who was involved in this whether they say it or not out loud with the same song.

Somewhere out there
Beneath the pale moonlight
Someone's thinking of me
And loving me tonight

Somewhere out there
Someone's saying a prayer
That we'll find one another
In that big somewhere out there

And even though I know how very far apart we are
It helps to think we might be wishing
On the same bright star

And when the night wind starts to sing a lonesome lullaby
It helps to think we're sleeping
Underneath the same big sky

Somewhere out there
If love can see us through
Then we'll be together
Somewhere out there
Out where dreams come true

And even though I know how very far apart we are
It helps to think we might be wishing
On the same bright star And when the night wind starts to sing a lonesome lullaby
It helps to think we're sleeping
Underneath the same big sky
Somewhere out there
If love can see us through (can see us through)
Then we'll be together
Somewhere out there
Out where dreams come true"

Umi- Eden Espinosa- Cassandra- Rapunzel's Tangled Adventures
Shun- Chance- ChanceC- Fanfiction Writer and Friend
Jun- Lauren aka The Queen of Plot Twist
Ganryu- Carrriejokerbates- DA Friend
Takakage- KunYKA DA friend
Kai- Trwilson881-DA friend
Ting-Ting- my twin sister
Hinata Twin's Mother- Alexx-is-h3re- Fanfic Friend- Author of the Avatar Fanfic Hope Found. Continually changing her name.
Jwala Twin's father- Randomindianguru-DA Friend
Songs tweaked by Japananimegirl
All of Hira'a was currently assembled around the stage in remarkable brand new wooden seats that had freshly been built. It was more comfortable to sit then stand up all the time to view the numerous performances that were put on in the village so frequently.

As usual, Ms. Zalika and her husband, Mr. Iye, were serving food and drinks as they did at every event in the village. They were furthermore giving their 'sunny thought' advice as they did also anywhere they went, which improve the whole village viewpoint whenever they listened to it. Consequently, right now, everyone was appreciating having their makunchohi bentos with delicious rice, fish, meat, pickles, eggs, veggies, and umeboshi. Simultaneously with some genuinely exquisite jasmine tea, it made the entire event merely sublime.

The event they're currently providing for was the yearly Hira'a school play. Zalika's mother Ms. Lal and her class had elected to do a play based on the Ember Tales tale "The Legend of the Dragon Guardians"

It was continuously a particularly extraordinary time of year for Hira'a when it was time for the annual school play. As the entire school worked together to put it on themselves with little to no help from their parents. Though they did have of, course adult supervision plus Noreen as the village director did supervise anything to do with the theater.

Moreover, since his kids all had significant roles, he was majorly involved with this year's play. The village as a whole assumed it he craved for this play to be the most excellent school play ever put on. As if to show how far he'd come as both a husband and father in the past two years considering his second wedding anniversary was a couple of weeks away.

Hard to believe it had been almost two years since Noreen had married Noriko and accept her children as his own. Two years since they'd become part of their community, and now it seemed like it had been forever! Furthermore, everyone had savored getting to know them and having them become part of Hira'a.

In fact, the village had absolutely nothing but beautiful things to say about Noreen's kids. Ms. Lal's grandson her daughter Zalika's son Master Edan who was the village Firebending Master said he'd never taught such naturally gifted students before.

In fact, at Ms. Lal's home she shared with her family she frequently spoke how an evening at their house went with the village. That they regularly would go over the positive things of the day. That Edan couldn't go one day after a firebending lesson without singing some compliments about his three favorite students. Regarding their hard work, perseverance, and how they're skilled. But also their humbleness, generosity to the other students and enthusiasm to help anyone who was struggling.

Ms. Lal's husband, Trader Kito, was making modest earnings from the glassware they alone could produce with their firebending, which they're more than happy to make for him in exchange for anecdotes he got from those who came to trade. They'd just made a flawless set of rainbow-colored dragons for him to sell with the tradesmen due to come next week and the tale they got in return for that one was so hilarious it had them in stitches all night long.

Still, right now all that anyone was thinking of was the play going on. Kioko who seemed to have a
gift for being a narrator was up on center stage in an attractive gown that her best friend Umi had made for her for the play.

"Before the Dawn of the Fire Nation. Before the Land of Flames was tamed, the skies were commanded by the original benders of our great lands. The ones who been honored by the greatest fire of them all. Born from the Eternal Fire of the Sun the Dragons flew freely without a care in the world," she recited from the script in a captivating and dramatic voice as she held the audience in the palm of her hand.

The charming ten-year-old's cinnamon brown eyes scanned and saw all whom she loved filling the front row. Her parents, her teacher and her family, her best friends parents and even Madam Masuku with an unfamiliar but fascinating pet feline had shown up to watch the play today!

"The Dragons were knowledgeable as they were beautiful. They knew the secret of fire before even man could even conceive of what fire was and why it also burned! However, the dragons knew such knowledge needed to be guarded against the wrong hands.

Therefore they needed to find special protectors. Guardians. Ones who were pure of heart and showed they had the soul of a dragon and be worthy to receive their flames!" she distinctly articulated as behind her some of her classmates were in dragon costumes and others were the 'dragon guardians'

Aiko then stepped forward in her armor costume and began to act out her role as the leader of the sacred guardians. She'd been practicing for weeks for this and wanted to get this right. For some reason, failure didn't seem like an option to her. Like she couldn't dishonor this role even if it was just for a play.

"By the First Fire, we are honored by your presence, my spiritual brothers and sisters. I now pledge my life and loyalty to you and the Sisterhood of the Dragon Guardians as I recite our most sacred vow.

"From the first rays of the morning sun, my spirit's embers ignite again, turning the shadows inside me into the light.

My sword is at the ready. I will survive this journey and carry courage ahead to what awaits.

The forces of evil are strong, they do not fear us, but we will show them the error of their ways.

When daybreak comes, so does our resolve in remaining brave. Even the bitterest of enemies can stand united and face as one!"

As she finished reciting the vow, someone in dragon costume touched her with a treadle, and she bowed her head in respect before quoting the next line. "I will keep my vow with my life and willingly lay my life down for my sisters and spiritual brothers and sisters. I will protect you and the sacred secrets of Firebending for all time and all who descend me shall as well!" she spoke with such passion and dedication it truly pulled at the audience heartstrings.

Though for Aiko she couldn't help but feel on the inside these words meant something to her and were not just words in a script. After all, she had been the one pushing to do this play. She worked so hard to get the lead role as the leader of the Dragon Guardians. But right now it felt so... so... So REAL. But why? Shaking her head, she focused on the next act in the play.

"And so the dragons chose their Sisterhood for reasons unrevealed to rest of man. These women they have chosen were gifted with both dragon fire and souls to be forever linked to each other and
the dragons they swore to protect!

The Dragon Guardian faced numerous foes for many generations! All who met them fought both powerful firebenders but brave warriors who fought with courage and skills unmatched!” Kioko continued to narrate as now Aiko and Kazuo were on stage dueling each other.

Kazuo was supposed to be one of the ‘evil’ who terrorized the dragons and the divine secrets of firebending and Aiko as the leader of Dragon Guardians was leading her sisters into battle.

While all the other kids were considerably lousy at pretending to duel, Kazuo and Aiko were the only ones with the actual skill and talent to duel with real sword fighting and firebending which technically they weren't supposed to do. This was supposed to pretend after all, and no one was supposed to get hurt.

However, they couldn't help but make the play as realistic as possible and also a part of them felt they just had to do it this way. It was only one of those time their spirits seem to be telling them to do something that their mind was utterly blank too.

The audience was oohing and awing as the two 12-year-old lovers dueled with fake swords and real firebending and fought a deadly duel. Till Aiko won the duel though no one was sure at that point if she won fair and square or if it was just part of the play. Based on her fire lily’s face he wasn't feigning his look of being irritated at having his butt kicked in front of his village.

Sensing they needed to wrap up this play before her brother blew his top from being embarrassed, Kioko quickly sped up the end. "Thousands of years, the Dragon Guardians kept their sacred vow of protecting the first Firebenders, and while they are all gone now, we will never forget them and the noble and honorable duty they fulfilled. And with that we close the curtain on this tale of the Legend of the Dragon Guardians." and with that, the bright red curtains closed for a split second and reopened with everyone from the school joining hands to take a bow and savor their applauds.

"Bravo! Encore!" the villagers were shouting, and it made everyone feel excellent inside from doing such a good job. Then all the kids raced quickly off to meet up with their parents and couldn't wait to get to the tea shop for the after-party celebration.

"That was brilliant kids! You all did an amazing job!" their mother glorified them as the three walked off the stage.

"You think so, Mom? I didn't fumble with being the narrator or anything?" Kioko questioned as she played with her long chestnut mane apprehensively.

"No, you have a gift for doing that sweetheart. I was especially impressed by it," her mother replied honestly.

"Well, I didn't fancy getting my butt kicked on stage! I thought I was doing so well learning how to sword fight, and yet Aiko showed me up!" Kazuo pouted acidulously.

"Oh, Kaz! I was supposed to defeat you! You were the bad guy I was the good guy! That's how the story goes!" she scolded him while rolling her cinnamon-brown eyes at him. Then she hugged him to make him feel better to which his scowl gradually turn to a smile. Kazuo never could stay mad long at his fire lily no matter what.

"Besides son both of your should be proud of how well you can both sword fight without a master to teach you anyhow. That was pretty good fighting," his father complimented him which he blushed the color of an overripe tomato.
"Thanks, Dad," sighing, "I know Aiko, and I are striving to get better at sword fighting although it's tough to do when your self-taught and only got one book on it."

"Well, you were extremely fortunate to get a book on sword fighting composed by the greatest sword master in the world, son. Master Piandao doesn't seem like the type which ordinarily writes a book on his talents. We're just incredibly fortunate last year a ship of merchants came from Shu Jing among other small remote areas, and Trader Kito was able to get great bargains," his mother recalled as she fiddled with his long kinky hair.

"Well, Mom, I believe between last year's harvest of sunburst pearls and all our glasswork? I'm pretty positive that is what made the deal go so splendidly and why Hira'a got such a bounty of goods last summer," Kioko commented knowingly, and they all had a good laugh at that.

"I relished how you three did. It's positively delightful to see how far you've all come in the past two years," spoke an amiable voice from behind them and they all turned to see Madam Masuku holding a gorgeous but mysterious house cat in her arms.

"Madam Masuku! So good to see you! Didn't know you were in town," Noreen gave her a slight hug. She smiled an enormous smile in return and flipped her multiple untidy braids over her shoulder, and the breeze blew her cape dramatically before she spoke again.

"Oh, I never miss a performance, Noreen. I adore the theater. The idea you can transform yourself temporarily into someone else is always something that resonated with me. Moreover, I love theater masks," her golden eyes twinkled playfully as she said that before gazing down at the children who'd grown a lot in the past two years.

"So how are my favorite children?" she asked in a whimsical tone she always used with them. "You are doing well. I take it? How are the darling pets doing that I gave you?"

"Kai and Ting-Ting are doing extremely well! We have taken excellent care of them!" Aiko gushed out with a huge grin plastered on her beautiful face.

"They are incredibly faithful, compassionate and truly members of our family and constantly with us as you can see," Kioko pointed to how the pets in question were at their feet. They looked very spirited and quite happy that was for sure as was the fact they're well taken care of.

Madam Masuku laughed loudly and cheerfully before smiling. "Well, they certainly look well taken care of. So what's on the agenda for the rest of the week?" she asked coolly as if this was making regular small talk.

"Well, the children are keeping themselves quite busy. I mean so busy I wish they slow down, to be honest! It's hard to keep track of them even in a small village!" laughed Noriko vivaciously for a few moments.

Collecting herself and holding her locket tightly she carried on, "They've got firebending lessons Monday, Wednesday and Friday after school. Tuesday, they've Music Lessons, and on Thursday, they spend it with their father and anyone else connected with the theater working on anything connected to the performing arts."

"Glad to know your keeping busy and sounds like you happy. Or aren't you happy?"

"Compared to where we were almost two years ago? We are MUCH happier! Our neighbors are our best friends, and Shun and I have become fire lilies ourselves! Isn't that exciting?! I can't wait till I'm old enough to get my first kiss! Or go on a real date!" blurted out Kioko with a mile-wide
"Kioko what have I told you and your brother and Aiko?" her mother gently reminded her daughter who looked down glumly for a moment and kicked some dirt before saying in a rather downcasted and somewhat resentful tone.

"That while we've found our soulmates no actual dates or real romantic stuff till we are past the age of 14. We are as you said "Too young to be fooling around" to which all the children looked a bit disgruntled about not getting to as their mother put it 'fool around' just yet.

"Yes, take it nice and slow. I'm quite happy all of you found the one, make no mistake about that, my darlings. All the same, still don't rush into and try to do all the epic romance. Let that come when the time is right. Make the moments that matter special and not rush them simply because you want them to happen."

"Your mother right, you know, Kioko. If you genuinely love someone and it's meant to be forever, things will happen when they are meant to happen. No sooner or later. Love potions or not. Slow and steady does the trick," acknowledged the gypsy sincerely.

"Okay, I'm positive you know more then we do. So, Madam Masuku are you come to the after-party?" inquired Kazuo curiously before the gypsy smiled her brilliant smile again as she was stroking her cat contently before answering the boy inquiry.

"I'll meet up with everyone there. I need to get a few things first. But I'll be there for sure."

"Okay, oh, will you still be in town for our anniversary party in two weeks?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want to miss that, Noriko, what time does the party start?"

"It starts at 5:30 and will go, I guess roughly to 10:00. We plan to reveal a special surprise at the party," Noriko whispered with a secret smile.

"A surprise?! Mom what is it?!" demanded her children.

"Sugars, if she told you that it wouldn't be a surprise now, would it? And you'll have to wait for a fortnight like the rest of us. See you in two weeks!" she waved as the family started to head to the tea shop for the after-party.

"What do you think, Alanna? Everything going according to plan?" murmured the masked spirit as she petted the other disguised spirit.

"All seems to be well, though I still worry about what's to come."

"What do you mean, what's to come? What do you know that I don't know?"

"I'm the Spirit of Life. I create life, don't I? Everything that is born into creation, I play a part in bringing into this world. No one is born unless I give the seed to create it. Though I do rue some of the people who were given the gift of life! They use it to slaughter the gift of life!"

"Alanna, you can't prevent people who have the free will to choose what they wish to do with the power of the life they were given, and you know that! People can choose to act like humans, or they can choose to act like demons. They can choose to save a life or choose to end a life."

"Doesn't mean I've to like it, Mother of Faces. It doesn't mean I can't be disgusted by it. Doesn't mean I can't mourn the lives and souls that are slain by this unforgivable war and all the atrocious
acts perpetrated by one soul who even a 100 years later his actions and his descendants' actions are affecting so many."

"Which is why we swore to protect this family."

"But what about the world?"

"Hopefully, your mother and her human body will be found sooner rather than later."

"I hope so. Come we can't be late for the party," and with that, the two disguised spirits traveled to the tea shop to savor the party and have some joy in a world that was quickly losing joy, laughter, and faith by the day.

The next morning, the usual routine was going on for the family. The three young firebenders rose with the sun as did anyone who was a firebender. They made up their beds, got dressed and did their grooming, and their mother had a healthy breakfast waiting for them.

Before the family ate, they made sure Kai and Ting-Ting had food and water as well then they'd their breakfast. Afterward, Noriko handed her children their bento school lunches and gave them hugs and kisses as they and their pets left to go to school.

Noriko would then handle the housework while Noreen would handle things with the acting troop while the kids were in school and their pets would wait patiently and obediently for them with the small lunch that Noriko also packed for them.

Then depending on what day it was would depend on where Kai and Ting-Ting would accompany the children after school. On the days it was their firebending lessons they'd attend them to the academy and watch from the corner of the training arena.

They observed as the attractive young man Master Edan who wore a red brick karategi with gold flames on the chest with a matching belt taught the village children firebending. He looked a great deal like his father Iye only he wore his hair in a topknot and had a simple goatee.

Kai and Ting-Ting always paid close attention during firebending classes to make sure the children didn't reveal they're real powers. That they kept their flames and forms usually. It was critical that the kids, while in class, didn't show what they really could do. Which they did note was getting harder with each lesson to do.

Today was another typical day as they're going through the regular sets. They always ran through the basics at the beginning of each class. At the moment it seemed Kai and Ting-Ting had nothing to worry about.

"Everything seems to be going smoothly. Their forms are impeccable, and Zuko has done much better since getting away from his father's abuse," Ting-Ting murmured to Kai who subtly nodded in agreement.

"Yes, his and Akiko's self-confidence has soared since getting away from the abuse. Also look at Azula, Ting-Ting. Look what she's done in two years away from that negative environment?"

"You mean you can see a soul in her eyes? Yes, I can unmistakably see it every night when I sleep in my bed. She always hugs me tightly before she goes to bed and says, "I love you, Ting-Ting."

"That wonderful news..."

"Kai!" hissed Ting-Ting abruptly as her ears twitched dangerously, and he noticed for a split
second their fire changed color. Luckily no one else notices but they couldn't take chances now.

"Damn it! Didn't we warn them?!!"

"We need to get them out of class now!"

"Leave it to me!" and Kai let out a pathetic groan that filled the room, and at once the three kids came rushing over and looked at their pet to see his left-wing hanging crookedly.

"Oh no! Something wrong with Kai! Sorry Master Edan, we've to take Kai home right away!" apologized Kazuo as he bowed formally to his master. Aiko picked up the fox-hawk gingerly, and Kioko scooped up the other pet tightly in her arms.

"It's understandable. Make sure the little guy's alright. I hope he gets better. See you later," as he dismissed his three favorite students.

"Thank you!" as they turned and dashed immediately outside it wasn't till they got past the tea shop Kai stopped playing sick and spoke again, and their reaction wasn't that of a surprise but acceptance.

"Didn't we warn you not let anyone see your firebending change color?" he asked mentally.

"Kai we're sorry. We have tried to use all our self-control. I mean, can't you cut us a break?" Kazuo asked the fox-hawk kit. His face showed that the kids were still not completely used to this little secret.

It had happened 18 months after they first got their pets that they revealed themselves as spirit animals. They'd done this because the kids had been fooling around in this cavern at the seaside looking for uncommon sand to make unique glass object with.

They'd just been fooling around and then found themselves in a three-way duel with each other and got the shock of their lives when their firebending had changed color! Kioko's turned blue, Kazuo's gold and Aiko's hot pink and somehow each of them pulled of strange moves they didn't even know possible!

It was then to their further shock their pets spoke to them and first off assured them no they were not deranged. They had peacefully and politely explained Madam Masuku had summoned them from the Spirit World as she 'sensed' something quite peculiar about the three of them.

They'd promised to guide them in mastering their strange powers and anything else unexpected that came up. However, they had to swear not to let anyone else find out about it. Countless despicable characters in this world would do wicked things if they knew. As the children distinctly remembered the terrors of what happened from their former blighted village. Plus had no desire to upset the quiet, happy and simple life they'd acquired here with their parents in Hira'a they swiftly got used to the fact their pets were indeed spirit animals.

They honestly figured it was destiny. After all, their mother's ancestor had done a good deed long ago for some spirit, and they'd given her family that locket as a thank you. As a result, it wasn't that outlandish for them to trust talking spirit animals. It just took about two weeks actually to digest. It was all. Thus they did spend a lot of time whenever they could in that cavern away from prying eyes training to control their special firebending. Plus for Aiko these other peculiar powers she'd gradually unearthed about herself after her first Summer Solstice and Day of the Dead in Hira'a.

"We need to go to the seaside cave now!" they agreed and took their concealed shortcut to the cave. They hurried to the cave making sure no one was following them. The cave was continuously an
enthralling place to explore. The unusual colored sand, the multicolored rocks, and jewels plus this dilapidated vessel that was wrecked inside it.

"Okay, you three ready to train and control your powers?" Kai asked as he puffed himself trying to look a bit more impressive and Ting-Ting thumped him a bit out of annoyance when he got like that.

"Get off your high ostrich-horse, Kai! You can't lecture them! Geez!" the kids laughed enthusiastically as their pets bickered for a few moments till Aiko sent a small dragon of fire between them.

"Kai? Ting-Ting? Mind settling down? Please? We've only got an hour to train before we've to be home in time for dinner," she reminded them of their time crunch.

"Sorry, we won't get sidetracked again," promised the two young spirit animals even if they did shoot one last look of daggers at each other.

"Well, I love it when you act ridiculous. Give us a reason to laugh and not think we are freaks. I mean from the old tales Master Edan told us when going over the history of firebending and any other lore it's said only a selected few can produce blue flames. But I don't like that I'm one of them." Kioko shivered as she opened her palm and looked at her blue flames.

They all cupped their colored flames in their hands with looks of anxiety and puzzlement. They queried about why they could do this and was it for a good reason or a wrong reason. What could they do or not? Was the power they had a miracle or a blasphemy? That's what something they're still questioning six months later because they hadn't figured the answer out yet.

"Tell us, what do you know about yourselves and what you feel when you bend then?" Kai asked yet again. He had done this every time they had come here. Hoping they understand the truth. He wasn't the best with philosophy but still wish to teach them what they needed to remember that they couldn't recall now with their new minds.

"Well, what's has been taught for the past 100 years is firebending is about anger and aggression. That's what fuels it. That's what our inner fire is driven by. Or at least that what we learned in class with Master Edan," Kazuo admitted honestly as he looked at his gold flame.

This was significant progress as they finally had an answer to the question, and it took six months to get this far. Now all they had to do was get the rest of the way. Hopefully, today be the day they understand once more. "But what do you feel on the inside when this fire comes out of you?" the two-spirit animals pressed benevolently and encouragingly.

"I don't feel angry. None of us do. We've put all our misery, rage, and scorn behind us since coming to live here. It took a year and a half to find genuine happiness. That's when these crazy powers and our firebending changed colors, and all this started," replied Aiko as she spoke of her observation of when their powers had emerged.

"Yeah, it's like we were reborn as was our bending. Like somehow, we became lighter and freer when we became happier?" Kioko tried to word it even if it felt strange to do so.

"You're saying because we are happy our firebending changed?" they asked confused at that.

"Bending is from the Spirit of the soul. Bending is fueled by emotion. Fire is life. Think about the play you three just did. What secret do you think the dragons knew that the Dragons and their Guardians died for?" Ting Ting pressed them hoping they could figure out what they're told two
years ago with a little hint.

"Fire is life, emotions, spirit, soul?" they all start talking as they looked at their strange fire and thought about their past few months in this cave. They hadn't got it yet in the months they'd been practicing their forms.

They'd been asked this question before but not made the connection until today. They all said in unison. "Fire is life, and firebending true power comes from positive emotions. We are drawing our power from our hearts, not hate but love."

"Exactly. It took you all a few months to get that one, but that was the truth that's been lost to the Fire Nation. Sozin took away when he'd all the Dragons and Dragon Guardians killed. You three must protect it for it now lives on in you. You must master your powers and the other blessing you have. You may never know what you'll use it for one day." Kai told them proudly. Even Ting-Ting was clapping happily. Finally, they got it once more! Yes!

"Well, let's run through those moves you said the spirits wanted us to learn. But we still have to be home in time for dinner," Kioko reminded their pets, who agreed it was time to run through their sets with their real powers. At last things at least on this front was going well and they're doing their job once more.

After gaining insight and wisdom, the secret lessons got much more comfortable after that. Still, that was one thing they couldn't share with anyone. It wasn't like their other extracurricular like music, which they'd all excelled at making beautiful music. The twins were part of their music lessons after school. Umi played the flute, and her twin brother played liuqin.

The Tuesday after the play music class was going as well could be expected as many of the children from the school were playing many different instruments. The band was arranged appropriate, and things were sounding pleasant.

Once again Kai and Ting-Ting was in the corner of the schoolroom listening. Hoping no more phantom memories would come to play. Again their actual memories were wiped out, but their talents and powers remained and instinctual.

Ms. Lal being the grandmotherly type and encouraging type asked the children to play for her something of their own composition to the night before they went home.

"I want to see you use your imagination. So please play from the heart and soul. Please."

Everyone did this in small groups with their closest friends and soon it was just the twins, and the trio left. The twins played a particularly happy whimsical tune. What the trio played shocked their pets. They played the tune of the last song Saura had sung to them!

Keeping it to themselves, they didn't say a word and let the rest of the week pass and into the next. Nevertheless, Kai and Ting-Ting were getting a bit anxious. The children's phantom memories connected to their natural talents were getting stronger now that they were happier. While this was one hand excellent that they could teach them to control their powers, on the other hand, could that also place them and the family in danger? They hoped not as they tried to act like normal animals as they watched the kids with the twins helping set up the backyard for Noreen and Noriko's anniversary party.

"So your Mom and Dad got some big announcement, huh?" Shun questioned as he and Kioko were hanging some paper lanterns and she was lighting them.
"Yes, but we don't know what it is, Shun. They've kept a tight lip about it!" she replied as she lit the last of the lanterns.

"Wonder what the big announcement is? I hope it's something good. Where do you want these?" asked Umi holding up two vases of glass flowers centerpieces.

"Be careful with those, Umi! It took forever to find the right sand to make that unique color those flowers are! And their centerpieces so they go to the center of the tables!" Aiko told her as she came up with more vases of glass flowers.

"Oops. Sorry, slipped my mind a bit. How many tables are gonna fit in the backyard?"

"Ten or 11 at most for the guests. The family table where we sit, I'll take care of. You and Aiko finish with the centerpieces before Ms. Zalika and Mr. Iye get here with the food and drinks."

"You know it is so kind they host and cater to all the village important events and parties! That's generous and thoughtful of them." Umi admitted in a thoughtful tone.

"That's because sweetheart Hira'a is known to be a community that takes care of one another and helps thy neighbor," called her mother Hinata as she came out into the backyard with her father Jwala close behind.

"Mom! Dad! What are you doing here?" asked Shun confused as he hopped down from his step stool and helped his love down from hers.

"Well, I see your sister isn't the only one with things that slipped her mind. Did you all forget who set up the tables and chairs before you all came out decorate? And who now coming to make sure you all put on the clothes I made for the party?" Hinata asked with one hand on her hip.

"Oh, we did forget that you're making all our clothes for the party," Kazuo admitted with a blush that matched his current clothes.

"I don't make just costumes as you three know. I do run a dressmaker shop on the side. So please hurry up inside and get cleaned up and changed? Your father will finish with the decorations, won't you Jwala?" she glanced up at her husband at her side

"Yes, sweetheart, I'll do that," he replied, and she looked happy about that.

"Good. I hope I got all your measurements right considering all your recent growth spurts," chuckled Hinata as she ushered the children to the bedrooms to change.

"Hinata, you didn't have to make us all new outfits for our anniversary party..." Noriko starts to say, and Hinata held up a hand.

"Noriko your, my neighbor and best friend. I'd gladly give you my dress if I had too. I want you to look nice and beautiful for your special night. That shade of pink looks good on you," as she compliments the guest of honor sweetly.

"Thank you."

"Now Zalika and Iye will be here in twenty minutes with the refreshments, and I'm sure Kito got some little goodies to spice things up. So let's get everyone ready for the party. Let get gussy up!" laughed the two ladies laughingly as they went to get ready for the party.

One rule of any party. As long as you keep the drinks flowing and the buffet well stocked, no one
will ever notice if anything else is wrong. Which is why whenever there was a party that Zalika and Iye were catering too they always made twice as much needed to cover anything that might go wrong.

Ideal chatter was going on as was children's laughter as all were having a good time. The school band was playing some of the original songs they'd been practicing for a few weeks. A few other firebending students were bending in time with the music, so it was quite a lovely show for sure.

It is again thoughtful of Hinata's family to make and built a tiny stage for this little show and make clothes for everyone involved. It had been their twins' idea, after all. Umi and Shun had asked a few weeks back their best friends what they thought could be the entertainment for the party and their best friends had immediately said that combining everyone talents in a very cool and artistic way would be perfect!

So this was the result of that effort that again the whole school had put some time and effort in for the last two weeks practicing for and of course a little help from the rest of the community.

"This is such a beautiful show. You three are so clever to come up with this idea to make our party such a smashing success," as their father ruffled all their hair affectionately.

Blushing but smiling at the same time, they said thank you. "It's nothing, Dad. We had a lot of help from everyone in town. I mean we got the vases for the centerpieces from Trader Kito," Kazuo explained to his parents.

"Which I was more than happy to exchange for free with you young man. Lovely party Noreen. I hope can stay married as long as me and my love Lal have," spoke up a lovable tone of voice.

Looking up the family saw the familiar gentle giant of a man who was almost bald wearing a distinctive talisman approaching with his wife their teacher. Both were dressed up and looking very elegant tonight.

"Ms. Lal and Trader Kito you look wonderful tonight. Enjoying the party?" Noriko asked graciously as she gave each a hug.

"Oh, this is a wonderful party. So happy to see you've been together for two years. Still, it's a long way to go to catch up to my husband and mine 55 years!" giggled Ms. Lal as she readjusted her cane some.

"Wow, 55! That's a long time to be together!" the children whistled impressively, and the overweight man laughed a deep heartfelt laugh before he looked at them and gave them some good helpful advice for the future.

"Well, when you find your fire lily, and it's just meant to be, you can make love last but know there will be ups and downs young ones. You need to get past the fantasy of the wedding and then to the reality of what marriage is."

"What is that Trader Kito?" Aiko asked curiously.

"Marriage is about making the ultimate commitment, young lady. However, there must be some give and take, truthfulness, faith, and good communication. The choice to love one another every day compromise and working together through good and bad days. Furthermore, agreeing to disagree."

"Yes, it's not continuously gonna be happy and enjoyable. There will be stormy weather along the way. But you can weather any storm as long as you do it together and are willing to see through the
other POV and don't let one as they say "Wear the Pants" Ms. Lal explained unabatingly to three of her students.

"Good advice. We'll make sure to heed it," the children promised their teacher earnestly.

"I have to say I've never heard better judgment," called out another familiar voice, and everyone looked up to see everyone favorite gypsy woman. In her hand was a wrapped bundle and down by her feet was again her beautiful white cat that the children now realized looked like a lot like a liger only house cat size.

"Madam Masuku so glad you could come. Where have you been the last few weeks in your travels?" asked Kito curiously. He loved any traveler and loved hearing their stories, and this woman told some whoppers of stories.

"The stories I could regale you with Kito would take too long to tell. Furthermore tonight about Noreen and Noriko not about me!" she giggled as she said that and they all laughed in agreement.

' But I did brew up some of my special brews and spells you can sell at the trading post and have a few of my extraordinary masks for the upcoming traders week. You know everyone pitches in when the trading week comes."

"I must admit while your remedies and amulets don't fetch much of a price. Though your masks do sell for a grand price with those coming from outside acting troops. Last year sold one of your masks to the director of the Ember Island Players for three boxes of gold! He said he'd never seen finer craftsmanship. It was so realistic, almost like a real face, he said."

"Well, I do have my secrets! And I can't reveal them to anyone! You understand that, right?"

"We all do know one must not be told the secrets of others and why Madam Masuku. But what did you bring for our anniversary present?" inquired Noriko thoughtfully as she looked at the box in her hand.

"This is for you two, and I think you'll find it a great treat. Go ahead and open it. I'm particularly anxious to see what you think," as she handed Noriko the box and she tore off the paper to reveal the most exquisite masks to go with Love amongst the Dragons.

"My favorite play! You remembered! They do truly look just like the characters! Never seen something so realistic that as if it were the real faces!" exclaimed Noriko in delight as she handed her husband the package to give a grateful hug to her friend.

Only the children's keen eyes notice how their mother's spirit locket gleamed for a second. Again they knew that locket was a gift from a spirit that their mother's ancestor had done a good deed too. They figured out by now that good deed was likely saving that spirit's life in some way and turn now that why spirits watched over their family. Why they'd been protected from the plagues of the cursed village they'd come from before.

How Madam Masuku knew to summon spirit animals to help them with their unique powers and how their mother knew things no other woman could understand and felt they're protected.

That locket was sacred to them, and they just knew it was the reason they're safe and happy right now and also it brought them good luck and good fortune. It seemed good chance had been granted to the family when their parents made their announcement.

They're expecting a baby! Everyone was cheering and congratulating them and the kids for their
new sibling who was on the way. It was existing news, and everyone seemed happy.

But after the party ended a few people in private voiced their concern. "Mommy can we talk?" her children asked her after the party, and they're supposed to be getting ready for bed.

"Is something wrong, children? If you're worried that the new baby will change how your father and I will feel about you, then the answer is no. We all love you just the same and..."

"Mommy, this isn't about love or anything like that!" Kazuo interrupts his mother rudely.

"Kaz watch your manners!" his father admonished him.

"Sorry, Dad, but we are worried about the baby and our family protection."

'What? Why? Why would you worry about that?" asked their parents confused at that statement.

"Mom, you know curses are tough to break. And even though we escaped the evil cursed village two years ago doesn't mean dark spirits won't seek their vengeance. That land was very cursed by dark evil spirits by whatever former villagers did to make the spirits enraged enough to curse it!" Aiko reminded her fearfully.

"And we're the only ones to survive, Mommy, because one of your ancestors did an act of kindness by saving a spirit's life and thus your locket protect and has blessed all three of us.

But it might not protect us now is what we are worried about is all." Kioko explained as she shivered to remember the horrible ten plagues.

"I see you already looking out for your sibling and as always your family. We've been so happy here, but your worried so evil spirit will seek vengeance for our escape?"

"It's just what we heard in some of the stories Kito told us from the travelers that come through his trading post yes," Kazuo admitted with his head hung.

Noriko got down on her knees and hugged her children tightly. "Don't worry, my love. I promise nothing going to happen to you or our family. We will do all we can to make sure this baby is protected and delivered safely and hopefully whoever was the spirit who gave my family this locket will watch over the baby and make sure no harms comes from vengeful spirits.

Till then we will be vigilant and prepare for their arrival. We shall stick together as a family, alright?"

"We promise!"

That night Kai, Ting-Ting, Alanna and the Mother of Faces met again in the woods to talk about this development. Alanna didn't look well as she looked like she may have Fire Fever, which is the Fire Nation version of the flu. Though that's a childhood ailment and you can only get it once.

"Are you alright, Alanna? Is something wrong?" Ting-Ting asked with concerning laced over her voice the Spirit of Life.

The Spirit nodded her head and had to sit down with her wings sagging. Her breathing was getting labored. "I'm not doing so well. I suffered a great loss of life today. Anto had a feast today because of Ozai."

"What did that barbarian cause that demon to feast upon?" demanded Mother of Faces furiously.
"Well besides not even pretending to mourn his family on their 'deathday anniversary'? Which greatly cripples me when life is not honored? On Ozai's orders, his Legion of the Black Flame was sent out for their first mission."

"You said when he took those children and did what he did to them, it felt like your heart has been ripped from your chest," recalled Kai and the aristocratic spirit lady nodded as sweat was now perfusing down her face.

"He stole their lives from them! I don't know for sure if he's taken their humanity completely and thus made them demons and servants of Anto and his father! But that crime has caused me great pain. I've had some of my children in the Sisterhood observe the situation from a distance. And we know the Order is going to hopefully put a stop to it. But no-one could stop what the first order was."

"What was it?" everyone asked in a hushed voice. Swallowing hard Alanna's voice broke as she whispered in an almost hoarse voice what Ozai had asked the Legion to do first and they did it without question or hesitation.

"He commanded them to attack a secluded out of the way village of the Fire Nation. A whole village of innocents was wiped out because he's looking for Ursa and the kids!"

They looked at each other as they couldn't believe children had wiped a village of their own country without a second thought. That Ozai had programmed them to be blank slates who now seemingly had no free will or ability to think. Just did what they were told.

"It was a blood-soaked massacre. Carnage and horrors not seen since the Air Nomad Genocide. The butchery and people being tortured to death for not yielding any information that might lead to Ursa and the children," and with that Alanna proceed to throw up for several moments to reflect what happened and the senseless loss of life.

"Now what are we gonna do? Anto and Ozai are working side by side, and I won't be surprised if Anto spiritually attached himself to Ozai and is egging him on and inspiring even darker thoughts to his already twisted mind!" shrieked Ting-Ting.

"I can't hold my corporal body much longer. I won't be able to return to Hira'a for a while after such a significant loss of life. Anto recognized that, and that's why he made sure Ozai gave that order. It's forcing me either to return to my home within the Spirit World for a long-drawn revitalization, or I could merge for some time with Yang and live in her body for some time till I've recovered."

"But then who's gonna help watch over the baby?" the spirit animals knew they didn't have that kind of power. They couldn't return to the Spirit World themselves to recharge their energy, which is why they wore the collars. The collars worked simultaneously to make them mortal-like while at the same time keeping them infused with energy from the spirit world via the gems in the nametag.

"I can't protect the family or the child myself from this kind of danger. I already need my own rejuvenation by returning to the Spirit World being away too long and using too much power up." Mother of Faces conceded to the fact she too was out of reserve powers.

"That's the point. Anto struck now sensing we are exposed and defenseless. He doesn't know about the baby or where the family is; nevertheless, he's seeking to help Ozai's agenda in unearthing them and annihilating them," Alanna unveiled what she recognized was her mortal enemy plan was.
"What can we do? The family and that baby need to be protected!"

"You two can not use your spirit powers, and we will have to rejuvenate ourselves. All we can do is pray right now that their new faces and minds are enough to protect them. Keep the children from revealing anything that might alert Ozai. That's all we can do."

"What are you two gonna do?" demanded the two-spirit animals once again.

"I'm gonna have to return to my home space in the Spirit World for the next six months to reclaim my life force energy and powers. I can't hold on much longer to this form, or I'll lose it forever." Mother of Faces informed the two-spirit animals what her plans were.

"Are you going back home as well to the Spirit World?" Kai directed to Alanna who shook her head vigorously no.

"I'm not going back to my glorious luminous palace of Keaparaberu in the Limbo Valley. I will seek out my apprentice Yang and merge with her for the next six months or longer if that's what it takes. I will be able to check up on the Sisterhood and gradually rejuvenate my life force furthermore grant my apprentice more of my powers."

"Okay, we shall do our best in the meantime. Everyone keep your eyes and ears open for news in both the human world and in the spirit world of anything to do with Ozai and Anto. Got it?"

"Got it!" and with that, all the spirits faded into the night and went to do what needed to be done.

For the family, they offered their prayers to the sacred animals and prayed to the First Fire for a healthy baby and safe delivery of a child. Noriko was cautious with her diet and kept a very busy pregnancy diary. Sadly though, there was no village midwife available to help her with this, and that worried her much about this. Still, she just did her best as did her family and the rest of the community to aid her in having a healthy baby.

The children did all they could while still secretly being trained to master their strange firebending and other abilities that they couldn't explain in the most secret and discrete manner.

Six months later, nothing short of a miracle happened for the family. An enchanting healer woman just happened to come to the village just by chance. She said she was looking for a rare flower that grew only near Hira'a for her holistic healer clinic and began to obtain them herself.

She was at Trader Kito's shop asking where she could find this rare wildflower. "It's highly significant I obtain this flower. Have you ever heard of the rare Dragon Dew Flower? I heard that it could only be found around here anymore. That it's extinct everywhere else."

"It exclusively blossoms in our village graveyard, Ma'me. We essentially use it for beautifying our family crypts on Day of the Dead. Though we want to celebrate life right now. Or hope we don't have a death coming up."

"Why? Is someone sick or something? Perhaps I could help. I'm a master in several arts of healing as well a few other talents."

"Well, we have got this woman who's pregnant, she's not due for three more months but as our last midwife passed last winter without training anyone new we're worried about her delivering her baby."

"Really? Well, I wouldn't mind helping with that. I could stay for a few months and help train up some local healers and midwives, and if this woman has me, I'll even deliver her baby in three
months."
"You'd stay for three months?"
"Yes, my apprentices can manage my clinic back in Shu Jing that long if I sent them a messenger hawk it's an emergency and this is an emergency. You need people trained as healers and midwives."
"Thank you. What's your name?"
"Oh, it's Yang."
"Thank you, Yang. It's like fate you arrived here."
"No problem. I believe everything happens for a reason. So I'll need a place to give my lessons and also tell me where this woman with child lives?"
"Well, we have got an abandoned house from an old family that died three years ago with no distant kin. That should be good for a healer clinic as for this family, they live near the outskirts of the village about a mile and half from the forest."
"Thank you."

Yang strolled at a steady pace through the village hoping to see Ursa and the kids somewhere, but her honey-colored eyes didn't notice them at all. She felt that possibly Ursa had felt Hira'a been too obvious and gone someplace else to hide from Ozai. Couldn't believe its been two years since she'd said goodbye to her friend and those beautiful children. Checking herself, she put them out of her mind and focuses on her new mission.

She had to meet this woman who was pregnant and help her. She came to a simple, modest home and knocked on the door, and a plain-faced woman answered the door.

"Hello, may I help you?"
"Actually I've come to help you. May I come in, and we can talk over tea?"
"Sure. Pardon the mess, I've not had much time to clean up given my condition. The kids try to help, but they've been pretty busy with their normal activities as has my husband and with two rambunctious pets as well..."
"I get it, ma'am. Though I could show you how to improve your home energy. I know a lot about Feng Shui, and I'm sure it would lighten the mood in the air. It could also help improve your life in ways you never imagined!"
"You're pretty friendly and extraordinarily talented, aren't you?" Noriko laughed as she got them some tea.
"Oh, I try to be. Oh, where are my manners? I'm Yang and you are?" as they sat down at the table to enjoy the calming tea.

"Noriko. My husband is the village acting director Noreen. My children's names are Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko. And before you ask yes, they're all named after the characters in "The Promise of the Fire Lily"
"You like that story?" as she sipped the calming tea.
"Well, my best friend from my former village and I loved the Ember Tales and named our children after the story characters. I came from a town cursed by evil spirits from some misdeed done long ago.

No-one could remember what that misdeed was, but all generations afterward paid dearly for it. My best friend was one of the unlucky mothers who died as for us half the mothers died or half the children died," Noriko explained her origins to her guest who looked very upset to hear such a tragic story.

"That sounds terrible! So a lot of many terrible curses befallen you?" she asked sympathetically as she gave her hand a reassuring squeeze.

"Yes. Ryo and I promised if one of us lived, and our children lived to take care of each other's children. It only seems fate that Kazuo and Aiko would fall in love like their storybook selves. Though my daughter Kioko is in love with the boy next door."

"That's very nice to hear your doing well, and so are your children. So I originally came here to obtain the Dragon Dew Flower for some healing purpose for my clinic back in Shu Jing. Then Trader Kito told me you're expecting a baby but have no midwife? And your village hasn't had a proper healer in a while?" Yang asked to see if she had all the information correct.

"Yes, that's true."

"Well, I told him all I need to do is tell my two apprentices I'm taking a short sabbatical to train up some new healers and midwives to help a local community. I'd like to help you out for the rest of your pregnancy," she offered her services and what the woman's eye light up happily.

"That be wonderful! Thank you so much! It would be such a relief for my children and husband," she said in a profoundly grateful tone.

"Think nothing of it," Yang reassured her compassionately. The two women talked about half an hour longer before Yang said she had to post a sign-up sheet on the community builtin board to tell them about her healer lessons. She was just about out the door when she finally noticed Noriko's locket and thought it looked vaguely familiar. She then asked. "Your locket? It's quite beautiful."

"Oh, you like?" Noriko smiled as she held it tight. She stole a quick peek inside but didn't show the inside to Yang. She closed it before explaining the locket's importance to her new midwife. "It's an old family heirloom. It's been in my family for over a hundred years. Passed down for generations. According to the story, the family passed down, it was a gift given to one of my ancestors for saving someone's life."

"It's truly charming, and I'm sure it's worth more to you for its sentimental value then it's materialistic value."

"Yes, I'd never part with it. It's again a family heirloom, and when I die, it will go to Kazuo and Aiko because they're likely to marry and then their children. I do have other things in mind to leave for Kioko and this child I'm carrying. Don't worry about that, if you are, I mean."

"No, I'm sure each child will get something just as important. Well, I'll be back in a few days to check on you and your baby." So the two ladies shook hands and hugged before they parted ways.

Healer Yang did stay the remaining three months of the pregnancy turning the abandoned house into a thoroughly qualified healer hospital and trained six young women in all the ways of healing and being midwives.
Then with Alanna inside her helping to guide her hands three months later she helps safely deliver Noriko and Noreen's child a little girl named Kiyi. She was significantly praised for her help by the whole family, and she replied she was just glad she could aid them in their time of need. She just felt fate had put her where she was needed to be and thus she'd come where she was required to be.

And now she needed to go where she was needed again. Though she asked if she could do a blessing of sorts, she knew from the ancient ways on the child before she left. It would make her feel better. Plus, she said she did this with every baby she deliver. The new parents answered anything that Yang thought would be good for their newborn daughter was fine with them. Kiyi's older siblings agreed on anything to protect their new sister was good with them.

Normally Yang wouldn't have done this in front of people but she could only feel she wasn't in charge of her body at the moment. After all, the young apprentice of White Spirit of Life had agreed to share her body nearly a year ago with the Spirit herself.

She hadn't asked questions when Alanna had told her she was so sickly and wounded but for whatever reason couldn't return to the Spirit World. The only way she could recover her health and still function in the human world was to merge with a human temporary.

Therefore, for these past nine months, Yang and Alanna had been the same. One body and one mind. Yang had no idea for all intents and purpose having Alanna merged with her own spirit made her just like Alanna's mother merging with the human who was the Avatar.

While Alanna's mother did this in a perpetuating cycle Alanna was only doing this out of emergency and could only use one of her 'children'' in The Sisterhood of the Dawn. And even then only one with the most compatibility which is how she chose her apprentice each generation.

So right now Alanna was entirely in control of Yang and Yang herself was more or less dreaming. Alanna herself performed her rituals and cleansing on Kiyi and blessed the home itself with her powers in a discreet manner before saying now that her work was done in this town she'd to catch the next ferryboat back home to Shu Jing. The family once again thanked her for all her help, and she said again they were welcome and left.

Alanna remained in control of Yang till she was on the ferry and were far away from Hira'a and well on their way back to Shu Jing that she released her from her passive control.

"Huh? What is going on?" asked Yang as she woke up in her cabin on the ferry and gasped to see Alanna standing before. "Alanna! What's going on? How are you corporal again? The last thing I can remember is checking on Noriko's pregnancy diary about a week before she was due. How am I on a ferry, and what's going on? Please tell me?" she questioned the precious spirit woman.

"I apologize in advance if you feel offended or violated. I know you didn't understand why I sent you to Hira'a when you vowed never to go there so as not to jeopardize Ursa who might be hiding there."

"Yes, you told the Sisterhood to stay away from Hira'a and never do anything that might tip anyone off that's where they were. Why did you insist I go there with the cover story I need to locate Dragon Dew Flowers?"

"Well, as you did see for yourself, they did need a healer touch severely. So they needed a ray of hope in their darkest hour. Someone of your talents could only teach them. It was a risky move, but I had to give you a reason to show up coincidently, didn't I?"

"True, but I never observed or sensed Ursa or the kids anywhere during my time there. Plus, I'm
"Remember what Noriko told you about her family history? And already how risky this mission was?"

"Yes, I remember. Are you saying you took over me in case evil spirits or by the Dragon Anto came along to take that one child by making it a stillborn to punish them? Since her ancestor helped save a spirit's life?"

"Yes, I want to make sure the family and the baby were delivered safely and add my power to ensure the blessing along with cleansing would succeed. I told you I've been using your body to recuperate."

"You were preparing for this mission because you could foresee this event coming, couldn't you? Was the spirit this woman's ancestor saved you? Where you afraid Anto would seek payback like he tried and failed to do with the other children?"

"Yes, countless lifetimes ago that woman's family healed me in a time of great need when I was in pain and dying. Yes, spirits can die if we lose our spiritual anchors or something that connects to this world is damaged beyond repair in ways I cannot tell you in words.

I told you when there a great loss of life I lose a great deal of life force and power. Her ancestors saved me after I was left frail and dying. That's where that locket came from. I gifted it to them as a token of my gratitude. I didn't want anything to happen to her or her children or her new baby. That's why I sent you to make sure this child was delivered safely. But we had to work together to ensure that."

"I understand Alanna completely. I understand why you couldn't return to the Spirit World now to recover if a personal friend and her family were in danger. That's not who you are. Are you strong enough now to manage on your own?"

"I will have to go back home for a few days to check on things at Keaparaberu in Limbo Valley after this. But then things should get back to normal. Just know you and the Sisterhood will still be needed if I call upon you. Furthermore, your chosen ones will soon have to be sent to the Sanctuary to begin their training as well."

"Understood."

"Thank you. Now rest, Yang. Sleep and only beautiful dream dreams."

Yang nodded as she laid her head down to dream with a happy smile on her face and Alanna disappeared in a flutter of butterflies. One mission had been accomplished, and no-one was any wiser.

Now if they could only keep it that way and if the new trainees were up to the challenges awaiting them. She also hoped that Kiyi would grow into a happy and loving child to only brighten the lost royal family lives forevermore.
Summer Solstice Festival

Summer Solstice Festival

It was one of those summertime days that you knew you never overlook. Where everything appears to be perfect in every sense of the word. The azure heavens above are just the loveliest hue of blue, the gentle breeze is soothing and full of delicious fragrances moreover it's not too humid, and everything is just as gorgeous as summertime suppose to be.

Hilarity, passion, and playful cries filled the air throughout the picturesque little village of Hira’a. They're just doing their ordinary everyday routine and living a humble, modest, simple life without a care of the world.

From first glance, you'd presume no-one who called this village home was even that concerned with the events of the War. Nor that at the end of this summer, Sozin's Comet was returning. Although you'd be in for a fabulous shock on that particular issue. For whenever the topic of the war was articulated about it was rather unexpected what numerous souls had to speak regarding it.

Possibly it much helped that Hira’a was so far removed from Capital. Furthermore, mostly isolated from the vast majority of Fire Nation. Or that they lived such humble lives or the fact everyone here remembered who had once lived here and desired to honor her when the Fire Lord would not.

Either way, if you surveyed the village of the Hira'a, you'd be considerably overwhelmed multiple if not all villagers had tremendously varying viewpoints and thoughts when it came to the war. Furthermore, more then a few them had quite a few things they desire to say to Fire Lord Ozai. Things that would either have them banished or end up with lighting shot of them if they voiced them to his face.

But for the past ten months ever since the dramatic return of Avatar Aang to the world and what bits of intelligence of his escapades with his traveling companions had reached this little village they'd been opening their eyes and minds little by little. Again in remembrance and sake of the lost royal family and their personal friends whose fate remained unknown to the villagers of Hira'a but hadn't forgotten them either.

At that moment it was the topic most talked about when you stopped at Zalika and Iye's tea shop where Kazuo, Aiko, Kioko wherewith the twins on a sort of date. Well, almost date.

Now that they're all 14 or older they're finally approved to do as their mother said 'a little fooling around" which at least meant they could be a little romantic and sexual. Translation? They could go on proper dates, kiss one another, and do minor romantic gestures but no further then kissing. No make-out sessions, no getting hickey's and no dishonorable behavior such being alone together in the bedroom like being in the same bed!

Therefore they're just beginning to date and still taking it slow and steady although at least grateful they're permitted to hold hands and kiss. Though that didn't stop them from sometimes such as today to also have babysitting duties.

Which was Kioko was doing when she had to retrieve her little sister Kiyi who'd gotten once again sidetracked by chasing a flutter of gorgeous butterflies nearby. Kioko had a firm grasp on her little sister's hand and was gently scolding her as she leads her back to the table at the tea shop.

"Kiyi, how many times have we told you not to run off? Mommy and Daddy told you to stick close
to us, remember? I know you love butterflies, but please don't wander off and get lost!"

"I'm sorry, Kioko! I am," blubbered the four-year-old holding tightly to her doll in one hand as she was being led to the tea shop.

"Kiyi, we don't want to lose you. Please understand that. You're not in trouble. We don't want to lose you is all," her older brother reminded warmly her as his fire lily her other 'sister' pulled out a chair after fluffing a huge maroon silk cushion to help her see over the table.

"I know, Kaz, I know. It's just some of the butterflies look like the ones you made on my necklace!" as she pulled out the unique necklace her siblings had crafted for her 4th birthday.

Using both their firebending and the gemstones located in the cavern where they went to practice their special firebending in secret, they'd made a charm necklace for Kiyi. It had three glass butterflies of azure blue, gold and hot pink amongst a string of beads made up of sunburst pearls, pink tourmaline, garnet, morganite, pink diamonds, rubies, and pezzottaite.

Next, to her doll that she had named after herself, the necklace was Kiyi's most prized possession, which she never took off. Her siblings smiled at the precocious child, and all hugged her once. Then they got a little stern with her so she knows again why she shouldn't run off on them.

"We love you so much, Kiyi and we don't want to lose you ever. So pretty, please stay near us, okay? Mommy and Daddy don't want to lose you either. You are our responsibility so don't let us dishonor our duty by losing you," her sister Aiko spoke to her affectionately, and the four-year-old nodded in understanding.

"So now that you've recovered the half-pint, can we get on with our little date?" asked Shun as he flexed his arms to show off the new tattoos he'd recently got. His girlfriend looked at him both amused and annoyed.

"Shun, the safety of my sister is just as important as our quality time together. Don't you feel your brotherly obligation to Umi?" turning to her best friend who shrugged once and played with her pigtails.

"He doesn't do them as often as he did when we're children. I blame puberty for that!" Umi laughed amusingly at her joke. As she looked at her friends, she could still see all of them back when they met at school the first time six years ago as if it were only yesterday. Given they're still all dressed in the same outfits, just upgraded to teenager size with some mild changes here and there. But they had all pretty much had a set style on how they liked to dress.

"Sorry if I picked up a slight slacker attitude, sis," Shun apologized who she waved him off in a flippant manner.

"At least it's not like those beach vagrants who hang out all the time on Ember Island. At least Mom and Dad installed the value of hard work in us. That's important knowing how to do things for yourself and the satisfaction of doing for yourself."

"Good point. Being spoiled is never a good idea, Umi. Not even one time. Children need to be disciplined, taught to think, and do for themselves. Learn right from wrong. Said no too. Parents need to set rules and limits and enforces them, so we don't grow up rude or selfish or worse." Aiko agreed with Umi as she tasted her tea.

"Well looks like our parents did a good job with all of us," the girl replied positively as she looked at all of them who nodded mutually at that assessment.
"Yeah, they sure did. But what do you think of the rumors that have come out in the last six years since the deaths of the royal family? It sounds like it was especially messed up in the royal household." Kazuo commented as he turned to cut up some snacks for Kiyi.

"You do know rumors and hearsay tend to get highly exaggerated, right?" Shun asked his best bro, but his girlfriend then interrupted. "I don't think it's an exaggeration when you look at a person character, and that's the only thing you should judge someone by, Shun.

And judging by how the prevailing Fire Lord has behaved for the last six years considering the tragic demise of his whole family? I for one adamantly believe the rumors aren't rumoring rather the truth that most people turned a blind eye to!" as she munched on a muffin with some crumbs falling out of her mouths as she gave her opinion on the matter.

"It's just so difficult to know what precisely to believe anymore. Given what's been circulating throughout the entire nation for the better part of the last four years. Ever since that first despicable mission of his precious Legion of the Black Flames and how the gossip and everything went buzzing like wildfire when the Avatar returned after a 100 years." Umi recollected what happened over the past couple of years.

It was true during the time Noriko was pregnant people had only spoken in hushed whispers regarding what they began to suspect occurred to the royal family after discovering about what Fire Lord Ozai ordered the Legion to do.

However eventually ever so gradually a couple of the palace lackeys start speaking about what went on behind closed doors. Then great news travels fast, and before Ozai could silence it, everyone in the Fire Nation was now gossiping and murmuring about what had been going on. They had dozens of conspiracy theories and a myriad of outlandish stories. Therefore by this time no-one was quite sure what was the truth and what was a lie.

As a direct result of all this scandalous scuttlebutt for the last few years, the cohesion of the country was gradually coming undone. Furthermore, when Avatar Aang and his friends started stirring up trouble as he set out his destiny to end the war? Well, when THAT starts getting around, you can't imagine now what people were thinking and talking about. A 100 years of propaganda was now being flushed down the toilet because of the death of the royal family, and the world was in more of a bind then ever.

But back in a simple village that really no one paid any attention to or most even knew about things were neither here nor there as five teens were trying to have a date while still also babysitting a four-year-old.

"So you believe the rumors that Ozai was beating his wife?" Umi challenged Kioko, who gave her an intense glare. Umi cringed a bit never having seen Kioko give such an intense look before in the six years she had known her.

"I most surely do, Umi! I also firmly believe he was abusing both his children in different ways. Finding ways to hurt them to punish his wife further. Why else did he not care what happened to them after they died?" she argued back to her friend who had nothing to rebuff her friend argument.

"Or are they indeed even dead? They never actually validated there were bodies just lots of blood. Plus, isn't so convenient that Azulon and every other heir is left dead on the same night? What's up with that unless it was a murder plot?" Aiko murmured about how everything was so convenient. No one questioned it at the time of cremation due to overpowering grief, but six years later people had wised up.
"Yeah, but it begs the question? Did he succeed in eliminating them, or did they somehow disappear? Furthermore, if the royal family isn't dead, then where are they? Kind of difficult to disappear for six years when the whole Fire Nation knows precisely what you look like." Kazuo admitted as he rammed a scone in his mouth.

"Yeah, like how would they get out without anyone knowing? Moreover, where could you hide that no one could find you, brother? Still, it does seem that's noticeably why he conceived the Legion of the Black Flame in the first place. So they could locate his enemies and exterminate them indiscriminately. Though from terrors I've heard them do while they've also stalked the Last Airbender? I wish it didn't have to be so."

"Is it because of what we presently know is a bunch of B.S.? Because the Fire Lord is amenable to sacrifice his whole family and attack his people, then what else has that family done for the past 100 years to our own country?" Umi asked aloud to all gathered at the table the question that was on ever Fire Nation citizen mind for the last six years since they wised up.

"And if we've been indoctrinated to do disgusting feats like think murder is alright then just what exactly have we done to the rest of the world?" Shun asked aloud as he looked like the rest of the sick to death to know what exactly their country leaders had done to them for the last 100 years and the people had blindly followed it without even stopping to think twice about it.

"Nothing good. I mean Ba Sing Se built a wall to keep us out for a reason. Now that wall is gone and well? I can only vaguely remember the ten plagues from hostile spirits for the misdeeds of our old village. That was bad enough." Kazuo shivered as his mind recalled the scant memories the fever didn't take from him when he was ten.

"Yeah, the Fire Nation has a whole has a so much bad karma, and we shall reap what we sowed. We've got a century worth of bad karma for so many wrong things. I secretly hope that the Avatar isn't dead," Aiko confessed in a bittersweet voice What she hated most about her country was this since she was such a believer in karma.

"You know your speaking treason, girlfriend," Shun warned her, and she glared daggers back at him.

"So what? We've committed treason for 100 years to the whole world, Shun! Moreover, virtually everyone in the village wishes they could avenge the royal family who by now everyone is convinced was assassinated by the Fire Lord himself!

He never once on honored them Not once! Not on the Day of the Dead or the Day of Mourning, which is their deathday anniversary! If you're gonna try and get away with murder at least attempt to show you ain't guilty!" snapped Kioko fiercely to her boyfriend, who wisely backs down. He knew you didn't piss off a woman and not one who could firebend by all means.

"Mommy once sang a song about the Avatar to me. She told me why he's such a good guy, and why it is so sad, he's gone. That the Avatar cannot take sides. He cannot be bias or hate anyone. He's born a human in each life so he may understand humanity and why he must protect it.

That he needs to understand and love all humans no matter what their background, origin, or what they've done. He cannot hate or judge them. He must give them all his love and protect them all.

For his duty is to the whole world and therefore he must love us all. Wrap us all up in love and forgive us all. Want to hear it?" asked Kiyi abruptly. She'd had been a bit inattentive to the conversation because she'd been eating tea cakes and scones.
"Sure little sister. What did Mommy sing to you about the Avatar? Come on, we are all ears," her brother requested of her. Gathering up her courage the little girl sang definitely and the song her mother had taught her about the Avatar.

"I know there is healing in the blood upon this land. Comfort for the broken and the hurting of this land. Come now, all you burden with the pain of this world. And he will give you rest.

Stretch out, your arms to the one who gives you life. Lay all of your sorrows before the grace of the Avatar's might. Come now all your suffering in silence through the night.

And the Avatar will hear your cry. He will hear your cry

TAKE ME AS I AM BROKEN AND BLEEDING. WRAP ME IN YOUR LOVE. YOUR PRESENCE I'M NEEDING. WRAP ME IN YOUR LOVE. YOUR LOVE SO PURE. HOLD ME IN YOUR ARMS. AND I WILL ENDURE."

Hold me in your healing arms. Touch me, oh mighty Avatar. Make me whole.

Hold me in your healing arms. Touch me, oh mighty Avatar. Make me whole.

Hold me in your healing arms. Touch me, oh mighty Avatar. Make me whole.

TAKE ME AS I AM BROKEN AND BLEEDING. WRAP ME IN YOUR LOVE. YOUR PRESENCE I'M NEEDING. WRAP ME IN YOUR LOVE. YOUR LOVE SO PURE. HOLD ME IN YOUR ARMS. AND I WILL ENDURE.

TAKE ME AS I AM BROKEN AND BLEEDING. WRAP ME IN YOUR LOVE. YOUR PRESENCE I'M NEEDING. WRAP ME IN YOUR LOVE. YOUR LOVE SO PURE. HOLD ME IN YOUR ARMS. AND I WILL ENDURE.

I know there is healing in the blood upon this land. Comfort for the broken and the hurting of this land. Come now, all you burden with the pain of this world. And he will give you rest.

Stretch out, your arms to the one who gives you life. Lay all of your sorrows before the grace of the Avatar's might. Come now all your suffering in silence through the night.

And the Avatar will hear your cry. He will hear your cry." Kiyi finished singing in a pretty good singing voice. She got a nice round of applauded for that.

"Perfect little sis, but did Mom ever sing you the other song about the Avatar? The one she sang to us when we caught Fire Fever as children?

You seemed to remember and sang that one correctly. But I too remember the other one about the Avatar. Why he doesn't belong to any of the nations but belongs to us all. Why he is the spirit of humanity and gives the world something to believe in. Why he is hope, faith, love, friendship.

Why Avatar Aang inspires so many people. He doesn't realize the miracle that the Avatar is or what the Avatar has done since the Avatar has come into being.

For my sister, there are big miracles, small ones, simple and impossible. But the Avatar is a miracle all by himself and that why people believe in the impossible and have an unshakable faith in the Avatar and have depended on him for over a 1000 lifetimes and will always believe in a spirit that shall never leave them and always be there for them, Kioko informed her little sister who was in awe by her powerful captivating word.
"Wow! What song did Mommy sing to you?"

"Let me sing it to you," clearing her throat as the 14-year-old began singing like she was a beautiful phoenix as she sang so beautifully.

"WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST. YOU BELONG TO NO ONE NATION. WE ARE RUNNING TO YOU OUR AVATAR. THERE IS NOTHING THIS WORLD NEEDS THAT YOU'VE NOT PROVED. WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST OUR AVATAR!

Your body is this world bread. Your blood is this world water. Because of you, we are made complete. You've sustained this world time after time. And we trust you, though the road is rough and long. We'll seek you Avatar. Till kingdom come."

WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST. YOU BELONG TO NO ONE NATION. WE ARE RUNNING TO YOU OUR AVATAR. THERE IS NOTHING THIS WORLD NEEDS THAT YOU'VE NOT PROVIDED. WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST OUR AVATAR!

Through every season Avatar. You're the tie that always binds. Things on Earth come and go, but you are constant by this Earth's side. We'll trust you. Though at times, you make us wait. Cause we know you only do it to increase our faith.

WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST. YOU BELONG TO NO ONE NATION. WE ARE RUNNING TO YOU OUR AVATAR. THERE IS NOTHING THIS WORLD NEEDS THAT YOU'VE NOT PROVIDED. WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST OUR AVATAR!

You are the bridge between the world of spirits and man. You have bent the sea and lands. You've given this world it's very breath, and we shall trust you both in life and death!

WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST. YOU BELONG TO NO ONE NATION. WE ARE RUNNING TO YOU OUR AVATAR. THERE IS NOTHING THIS WORLD NEEDS THAT YOU'VE NOT PROVIDED. WE ARE SEEKING YOU FIRST OUR AVATAR!

We are seeking you first our Avatar. We are seeking you first, our Avatar!"

"Now those two songs are quite profound, even if they have proven enough reason for banishment or being shot to death with lightning at point-blank range," concurred Umi with a whistle as she refilled everyone tea and bit into her own scone.

"Is that anymore an injustice than that of Iroh Dragon the West being locked up for the simple crime of being a human being? To defend the rights of humanity and not wanting more people to suffer the sins of a demon that he must by misfortune called "Grandfather?" spat Aiko suddenly slamming her fist on the table causing all the flatware to jump.

"You do realize that had to be the catalysts for everything that happened six years ago, don't you? I mean, you heard the rumors of what happened to his wife, Kimana. Then he loses his son Lu Ten and then his family, including his adopted daughter? And if rumors are true, Ozai abused the hell out of her too. To make both Ursa and Iroh suffer!" Aiko was gashing her teeth at this.

"No, it's not right that such a great and honorable man like Iroh is stuck in prison and some ass is in charge. He's not done one thing for the country just things for himself agreed," both twins said in unison as their parents didn't agree either that Ozai been a good leader since coming to power. They said Iroh or one of the children who'd been killed would've been so much better than Ozai.

"Still let's get off the topic for a while. Let's talk about how Hira'a plans to honor the Royal Family this upcoming Summer Solstice. Let's talk about that instead." Kaz said changing the subject
before they all firebended the tea shop to the ground.

"Very well, I'm nearly done making the costumes for the production of "Phoenix Heaven," Umi replied instantly though she did frown. "Though I'll never be as good as the legendary Xiaoying from 21 years ago.

The village still tells tales about her and her talents that put my mother and mine's to shame. They called her the world's most exceptional designer and chef saying she was also an astonishing culinarian as well.

Although the last time the ballet/play was performed? Her costumes weren't just costumes but works of art. She has not just stitched together fabric but true masterpieces and so flawless together. No-one has been able to duplicate her skill since. I mean, check out the costumes if you don't believe me."

"They still have them?" Kiyi asked in astonishment, and Umi nodded. "They save old costumes and props for as long as possible, Kiyi, but no-one beside Ursa, Sakiko, and Ikem ever wore the costumes that created for Phoenix Heaven 21 years ago. We can show you if you like. You don't have to be home for another hour, right?"

"Yeah, and we can run if we have too."

"Okay, let's show you the treasures of the Hira'a acting troop!" as the teenagers and four-year-old dashed off to a small reliquary near the theater. Not far behind was their pets who had been snoozing at their feet all this time and been harshly awaken when they scampered off.

It was a medium-size building, not anything awe-inspiring again if you went by the standers of the larger islands and cities of the Fire Nation. It was humble and modest with a fresh coat of paint and attractive blossoms outside it.

Stepping inside they saw some displays with some cards describing why these particular items were so important. Like a few masks were on display for craftsmanship purpose, first edition scripts, sentimental props and things of that nature.

Then they came to the back corner where displayed on some dressmaker mannequins were two sets of costumes complete with accessories. One set was matching ballet outfits, and the other was matching outfits all for "Phoenix Heaven." As Xiaoying had said long ago, different fabrics and designs used for these outfits. Both outfits were impeccably executed and would correctly emphasize a person body and allow for both elegance and grace most defiantly.

The ballet outfits were made out of a blend of black silk and chiffon with a blazing phoenix rising from the ashes in triumphant athwart the chest with accessories of gold and pezzottaite. The other costumes were far more explosive in color and more exuberant with a bit of an ombre effect using silk chiffon and lace and intricate accessories including a golden-winged headdress with diamonds and rubies on it.

"Wow! That is impressive!" Aiko said with a long whistle. Their little sister summed it up in three words. "Very, very pretty!"

"Yes, it's stunning and as you can see no one ever match the legendary Xiaoying's skill. Then again no one also ever matched Sakiko who was the one who danced the part of Agnimitra skill as a ballerina.

She truly embodied the heart and soul of the trapped soul of a spirit imprisoned in the body of a
phoenix. And her grand jete? No one could pull that off as she did! The village still talks about it!"
Umi informed them about the history of the items.

"So some pretty big shoes to fill I see. Well, I can't stay and chat. I'm afraid we need to get home. See you tomorrow!" Kaz apologized as they left to get home.

When they got home their mother was busy tending to her flower garden. All the local flowers were in her garden, and it always seemed to attract a lot of butterflies which made Kiyi so happy to chase after.

"How were your dates, today kids? Did you keep a watchful eye on your sister?" asked their mother as she stood up and dusted off her skirt.

"We all had a good time and checked out the historical stuff belonging to Hira'a acting troop," answered Aiko as they came inside the garden.

"Wonderful. Now that you're home, you can get to doing those chores you put off. Remember, we have an agreement. You can go on a date at the weekend if you make sure you don't lag in your chores. So if you want to be able to go out next weekend, please go make sure your chores are done."

"Yes, Mom," the kids replied dutifully and immediately went inside to begin their chores.

Kazuo was soon sweeping and mopping up the whole household as that was his chore on the chore wheel this week. Aiko was occupied, getting all the laundry for the entire family done. Kioko was tackling the dishes, and the windows and little Kiyi was tasks with giving their pets their baths and grooming them afterward. This took up the rest of the afternoon so by the time they'd finished it was dinner time, and their father had come home, and everyone was eager to for a healthy family dinner.

Again it was Kazuo who correctly set the table but made sure to help Kiyi learn how to do it by pointing out what he was doing and what went where and why. So after everyone was seated and enjoying a lovely home-cooked meal.

"So how did your dates go today? You did follow the rules correctly?" Noreen asked his teenage kids. After all, they're young adults now, and we're growing fast and might not follow the rules as teens rebel.

"Dad!" drawled out Kioko irritably that he always questioned them after every date. "We've never dishonored any of yours and mom's rules before, and we shall not dishonor them now. We know not to get carried away and just holding hands, and yes, we can kiss but not get overly passionate. We are doing as you said. Taking it nice and slow and letting things take their natural course."

"Yes, Dad, you honestly don't have to worry about us going to fast or doing anything dishonorable or violated anyone. We are not like that!" Kazuo insisted to his father for the umpteenth time. This had been grinding all three of their nerves since being allowed to date accurately. As if being a teenager wasn't hard enough as it was!

"Now, Kazuo, you know your father and I have to ask these questions regardless of how well you behave. It's a parent's job, and we wouldn't be good parents if we didn't do our job."

"What about trust, Mom?"
"We trust you, but you still have to understand we allow things as long you remember our rules, and sometimes it means a little tough love and being annoyed."

"Okay. I guess that makes some sense," her son mumbled a little in defeat, and his love and sister sighed in agreement. Their parents smiled, and dinner continued for a few moments in silence as they enjoyed their simple meal before the next topic of conversation was brought up.

"So, so that we can get off the topic of our love lives for a moment, can we talk about what we are doing for the Summer Solstice Festival less than two weeks away? Since all of Hira'a begged Dad to do it?" Aiko brought up the topic that the family hadn't spoken about yet.

"Do we have to talk about that sweetheart?" her father asked her as he paused in eating his rice.

"Yes, Dad, we do! Everyone is talking about it, and Umi was showing us the legendary costumes from the last time the village did "Phoenix Heaven!" Really why is it you don't want to talk about it? Why you so reluctant to do it?" questioned the beautiful young lady to her father in confusion.

"Yeah, don't you want to HONOR the royal family, Dad?" Kioko looked up at her father curiously who gave her a weird look for a second and she brushed it off before continuing.

"Look we all know the whole country is in a bit of an uproar with this year being the year Sozin's Comet is returning and amidst the rumors and the theories going around not to mention all that happening with the Avatar. Plus some people thinking there is a chance he didn't die at Ba Sing Se. I mean he was gone a 100 years and somehow came back! If he can cheat death once which to say he can't do it twice? Really! You can't go anywhere in the world today without hearing some story of a 12-year-old boy shocking you!" she pointed out what was the truth for the last ten months.

"Yeah, the whole world been turned upside down for the last ten months after the past 100 years of it being inside out basically. Makes you see things from a whole new point of view for sure! Anyway, is there a reason we shouldn't honor the royal family by doing this particular performance?" Kazuo asked in a severe tone of voice.

"Yeah, Daddy, why don't you want to do it?" asked Kiyi in a small voice as her mother wiped her chin some.

Sighing he pushed his food away and got a far off look. He looked like he was being careful with choosing his words before he spoke. "It's not that I don't want to help the village honor our most famous member who ever lived as well as honor all her children. It's more of a little heartache. I didn't know Ursa or her friends myself. But hearing all the stories about her, her best friends, and love makes me feel like I did know them personally. Furthermore, it makes me feel incredibly depressed they had to suffer so much and that no one in this world knows what the real story is. All we have is wild stories, rumors, and speculations. We don't know for sure what transpired to Ursa or her children. Neither do we know what became of her best friends who were just as important to this village who too should be remembered as well.

Therefore it's just especially difficult to do this even if as a whole the village is trying to memorialize them. To make sure they are properly remembered and honored. Given the circumstances of the world and again, the uncertainty of their true fates."

"Wow, never knew you could be so philosophical, my husband. Though I guess as everyone views
each other as family in Hira'a, that makes sense even if you didn't know Ursa or her children it makes sense the village itself felt they're a loss as a personal loss." Noriko thoughtfully said as she comforted her husband.

"But that's why it's so important we do this, Dad! We can't let their memory continue to be dishonored by that swine! If only one place in the Fire Nation will honor them on the holiest day of our country, then I say let's give them their dues!" Aiko declared with a blazing passion.

"Yeah, Aiko and I shall dance the ballet, and I swear we do as well as it was done 21 years ago but Princess Ursa's best friend, Sakiko!"

"Yes, I'll do my best to match that woman's talent and skill level, Dad!" promised Aiko who saw her father give her a peculiar smile.

"I've no doubt Aiko not only will you match Sakiko's skill you will exceed her, and you and Kazuo will do even better then Sakiko did. As she wasn't dancing with her fire lily. See the only one who could play Prince Mishal for both the play and ballet was Ikem who was Ursa's love.

I do not doubt in my mind with you two the perfect duet in all that you do the ballet will be far more significant and give great honor to the past when you two perform it," as they two 16 years old blushed a bright crimson from hearing this.

"What about me, Dad? Do you think I'll do just as good job as honoring Princess Ursa herself playing her old role in the play version of Phoenix Heaven as the lead? I doubt if my voice is as good as her voice was said to be when she sang the Phoenix Ballad," Kioko admitted in an uncertain voice.

Putting his hand on her shoulder, he made sure their eyes met, and he told her boldly. "Kioko, just like with your brother and his fire lily I've without a doubt in my mind you and your fire lily will not only honor the lost royal family you shall outdo even Ursa's great talent."

"You think I can do that Dad?" she asked in disbelief at how he such a strong belief in her and he nodded with such firm conviction she felt a resolve.

"What can I do to help, Daddy?" Kiyi wanted to know as she didn't want to be left out of this as this was a family thing.

"I'm sure you and the rest of the school-age children will find things to do to help honor the royal family and the play sweetie."

"Well, Ms. Lal did start teaching us about arts and crafts. Maybe I can do something with arts and crafts?" as she was fingering her precious necklace.

"Sounds like you can talk about it with your teacher when you are at school on Monday. Time to get dinner cleaned up, and everyone makes sure you take your baths. We have a lot of work to do if we want to make sure we are ready for this upcoming event," their mother informed them as she began to clean up their dinner.

The next day did find half the school-age children employed with making jewelry with stuff that got from Ms. Lal's husband Trader Kito's store and the rest of the school was going around gathering wildflowers to make flower wreaths. The village teenagers were occupied with helping prepare for the numerous activities that went into celebrating the summer solstice as well as a third of them helping prepare for the production to be done.

No one was more focused on the show then, of course, the three main stars who were giving all
their heart and soul into being perfect for it while their best friends and neighbors poured all they could into it as well.

Finally, everything was ready when Summer Solstice arrived, and it was time to kick off the three-day celebration. Everyone in the village was dressed in their most exquisite kimonos, all courtesy of Hinata. All the refreshments came from Zalika and Iye. All firebender performers were students of Maser Edan.

The party started early, and everyone was having a good time with the games, tricks and sweets and fun activities going around in this little village waiting till sundown for the main attraction. Finally as sunset set in everyone began to take their seats as Noreen walked onto the stage to hush his community.

"Welcome my brothers and sisters. I'm so glad everyone is here, and we've come so close as family and friends. Tonight we honor old friends who are no longer here and deserved to be remembered for how they lived and not for the murky ways they have died or whatever happened.

So please let's all be silent as for the first time in 21 years we shall perform both the legendary ballet and play of "Phoenix Heaven" Tonight it will be the ballet and tomorrow we shall enjoy the play. Both will have my elder children as the stars, and I can tell you right now I couldn't be prouder of them and how they shall honor the royal family when the one who should haven't.

So now let's begin the show!" as he walked off the stage as the audience applauded once and soon became lost in the living poetry that was the ballet. Members of the teenagers old school band were playing the dramatic mood music as the dance began.

It starts in the Spirit World with the evil sorcerer cursing Agni's daughter Agnimitra trapping her the form of a phoenix in the first act.

Second Act was all about Prince Mishal and his cold ways and then hunting the Phoenix only to learn about the enchantment on the beautiful woman.

Third Act is falling in love, and the Dragon Ball and Agnimitra doomed to die when the vow is made to the wrong girl.

Fourth Act is the Agni Kai with the Prince against the Sorcerer and saving Agnimitra's life.

Fifth Act is Happily Ever After.

That how the ballet and play both were broken into, and it was true what Noreen had predicted of his children they not only did as well as the last group who had done this they far exceed them in doing it.

The perfect duet danced the ballet it was as if it was watching a dream and not the reality the way they moved. The feeling and emotion you were just under their spell you forgot to breathe as Kazuo and Aiko did everything so flawless it was like they're inhuman and indeed the characters come to life.

Same when it was the next day Kioko and Shun. It was story come to life, and everyone was just so memorized they forgot where they were and only saw the story as if it were true and never heard a more beautiful voice sing. Even those who did remember Ursa singing the balled said this young girl's voice was also far more impressive.

What the family had no way of knowing it wasn't just their family watching them do the play and ballet. Those butterflies that been fluttering about so much that particular summer?
Alanna had used her powers to allow the spirits of the deceased loved ones of Royal Family to visit the mortal Realm without tipping off anyone. Not even Akiko's ordinary spiritual powers picked this up being masked by Alanna powers.

So all these butterflies were their departed family members all who enjoyed seeing their loved were safe and happy. Even if they feared what might happen with Sozin's Comet so close at least for this moment in time everything was perfect.

Kiyi- Kath Soucie many roles
Iroh's Dying Wish

Chapter Notes

There is some medical info at the bottom to explain the condition Iroh's suffering from in this chapter. To show it's real and what's going on and the facts about it.

Iroh's dying wish

It had been rather memorable two years following the conclusion of the 100-year war. Presently the world was still recovering from the countless scars of the century-long conflict. The heroes of the war Team Avatar had spent the last six months independently each doing their own thing to support their own corresponding country.

Sokka and Katara had been kept extremely occupied in the Southern Water Tribe with the rebuilding of their tribe furthermore with Katara training up the new Waterbenders that had started to surface while Sokka had been unavailable due to being involved with warrior and chief lessons.

Toph had been extremely hard-working with training Earthbenders the recently invented art of metalbending at her academy moreover working wimps into shape and liked she could boss people around instead of being told what to do. She relished her independence plus her other achievements so much she couldn't help but shout them to the rooftops every so often.

Lastly, Aang among his Avatar duties were gradually undertaking the hardest mission of all them. Which was to restore the Air Nomad civilization through the use of the Air Acolytes and other such means. There needed to be something or someone to continue on the legacy of his people when he was gone.

Consequently when they got a break for two weeks to attend a critical summit assemblage to address the ultimate goal which was to create a fifth nation where all four nations where benders and non-benders could live in peace and harmony they all took it.

It was delightful to get together even if Sokka was his goofy, sarcastic self and Katara was using waterbending on him, Toph was bored and dozed through the whole thing, and Aang honestly didn't understand a word being said by the discussant.

Subsequent the conference completion, the four friends left all working the cramps out of their backs. Sokka made an exaggerated yawn and said in the most sarcastic voice, "Well, that was an excellent way to spend the day! Having the pants bored off us!" only to get an extra snowball in the face. "KATARAAAA!" while Aang and Toph chuckled hysterically.

"Sokka that conference was extremely crucial for the renewal of the world! If we ever hope to realize the actual dream of the rebuilding of the world we are going to have the pants bored off us once in a while.

Besides, you should get used to it as your going to take Dad's place one day anyway. You need the practice!" Katara countered in a slightly superior tone.

To which her older brother respond by starting fingering his black sword that had miraculously
been recovered after the final battle. No-one had asked how in the world the mysterious Sisterhood of the Dawn had found the lost Space Sword has Sokka called his sword. He couldn't help but cry as if his firstborn been returned to him when he got it back.

Sokka never hurt his friends with his sword, but he always touched it to calm himself down when he was made and for good luck like with his boomerang. Like they gave him enough chance to come up with some witty remark to shut up others though it didn't look like that was going to happen this time. Instead, it looked like a brawl was about to break out when the rustling of wings was heard, and they all looked up and saw a bird they'd never seen before coming towards them. It was whiter than snow with the most amazing blue eyes and on its breast was the image of the white lotus.

"Is the Order calling us?" questioned Katara out loud in confusion as the bird landed on Aang's outstretched arm and cooed softly. It then gazed a powerful gaze into the Avatar's eyes before dropping a sealed scroll into his hands and took off and disappeared into the clouds high in the brilliant azure skies above.

"What do you get there Twinkle Toes? What did birdbrain leave you?" asked the blind earthbending master curiously.

"Not sure," Aang replied in uncertainty. He then whitened till he was whiter than the bird that just conveyed the message. He was looking at the seal on the letter. He looked like he was not breathing and Katara shook her boyfriend's shoulder.

"Aang! Aang what is it?!" she shook him as she was shouting in near hysteria.

"This letter is from the Fire Lord himself! It's got his seal on it!" he stuttered as they saw the seal of the Fire Lord and the words in tiny script say "Sealed by my own hand"

"What?! Why would Fire Lord Iroh be sending us a message? Plus, why would he use that bird and not a messenger hawk? Plus speaking of that what did you two ever do to Hawky that he never came back to me?" demanded Sokka sharply for like the tenth time to the girls.

"Sokka, could you drop it already about the stupid hawk! Like I told you, we sent Hawky to Toph's parents with a letter, and he never came back. We don't know WHY he didn't come back. Maybe he didn't WANT to come back, or he could've got eaten or something!" snapped Katara hotly who was so annoyed Sokka still hadn't let that go about his stupid pet hawk.

I told you I was sorry your pet didn't come back! Can't you just let it go already? It was two years ago!" snapped Katara hotly who was so annoyed Sokka still hadn't let that go about his stupid pet hawk.

"Oh, you like you didn't let it go when Dad made you get rid of your pet? He told you how many times tiger seal kittens aren't made to be pets, but no you just had to go adopted one..." and soon the siblings were bickering for a good twenty minutes till Toph managed to separate them by 20 feet by trapping their feet in the earth and earthbending them away.

"Thank you, Toph. Now you two ready to stop being the brickerson of the South so we can read what this letter is about?" asked Aang in a slightly exasperated tone to which the Water Tribe siblings agreed to call a truce and Toph released them.

Aang broke the seal on the letter and began reading it though he was still having considerable trouble with both the formal script of the Fire Nation and the blots that been messed up by unmistakably someone crying when they wrote it.
"Dear Avatar Aang. You and your friends are needed at the Fire Nation palace immediately. So please come the moment you get this letter. It's a matter of life and death.

The future of the Fire Nation and my own life hangs in the balance, and only the four of you can save the Fire Nation and my life. So please come immediately.

Thank you.

Sincerely Fire Lord Iroh.

P. S.

Long ago, in my broken heart,
I was walking alone in the dark.
Looking for a way to start again,
What I wouldn't give for a miracle.
After my son died, there was no love in my life,
No light in my eyes.
All the tears that I had shed and cried,
Seem they'd never end.

And I always believed fairy-tales could come true,
I know they do if you are faithful.
Now that we found you, now that you are here with us,
Just look at the sunshine, and you
Showed us a world,
That we'd never seen.
I woke up and fell into this dream,
Happily ever after just took time.
Once upon this broken heart of mine.

Long ago and far away,
I could never dream of the day,
That your love would come my way and help
guide my way to my family.

Always believed fairy-tales could come true,
I know they do if you are faithful.
Now that we found you, now that you are here with us,
Just look at the sunshine, and you
Showed us a world,
That we'd never seen.
I woke up and fell into this dream,
Happily ever after just took time.
Once upon this broken heart of mine.

This is the way a fairytale feels,
This is the way I know it's real,
Because this is the way a broken heart heals.

Always believed fairy-tales could come true,
I know they do if you are true.
Now that we found you, now that you are here with us,
Just look at the sunshine, and you
Showed us a world,
That we'd never seen.
I woke up and fell into this dream,
Happily ever after just took time.
Once upon this broken heart of mine."

"That's a peculiar letter, Aang," granted Katara after he finished reading it. But that's all she had time to say as they all knew if the Fire Lord commanded them to get to the Capital immediately they needed to do as he spoke.

Therefore in less then five minutes they're in the air heading at full speed to the capital. Katara and Sokka were going over the letter while Aang was driving Appa, and Toph was trying not to be sick. Even after all this time she still tended to get airsick.

"So brilliant Master Sokka, what do you make of this letter?" Katara asked her brother, who everyone in the group knew was the brains. Sokka took it the letter and began to investigate it looking for concealed hints or ciphers or something to figure out what they're begin summoned for. However, for once his brilliant mind was at a standstill.

"I don't get it. I don't get what could be more life and death then the war. I mean, I thought the greatest evil was Fire Lord Ozai and his Legion of the Black Flame he sicced on us. Except both of those menaces were taken care of."

"Yeah, because Twinkle Toes talked to some strange floating island who told him how to remove someone bending, and the Legion all expect that Ozai fanboy lover boy Ganryu defect before the war ended and help take Loser King the butt whooping he deserved," Toph recalled how sweet that all been.

"Toph, can't you ever talk with some tact?" chided Katara as she shivered after she remembered what Takakage told her in Ba Sing Se about what his childhood been like after he'd been chosen for the Legion of the Black Flame.

He'd been thrown down there with her for insubordination by his leader Ganryu when he'd defended her from his teammates made to think of his loyalty. And he explained to her what his upbringing been like and what the Legion been subjected too.

It made her feel immense pity the Legion and realize that they'd been abused, exploited and robbed of their childhood most unforgivably. Furthermore, it revealed to her precisely what kind of man Ozai indeed was. Moreover, why Takakage would want to defect to the Avatar's side. Especially when he announced a family secret which was the only way he'd kept his sanity during the unmerciful methods he was subject too.

It was because of who his grandfather was and his connection to Aang. Takakage was the grandson of Kuzon Aang's old Fire Nation friend. That what froze Aang up in battle when he first saw the Legion when he saw the youth. Was the point he looked just like him only as a teenager.

So it only perfect sense to the gang later on that Takakage escaped the Fire Nation during their invasion and became Aang's firebending teacher. Or that he helped Sokka at the Boiling Rock where the girls in the Legion finally defected too.

Jun, who'd been in love with Takakage before she was forced too into the Legion couldn't stand by and let him be captured and help the group escape and refused not to follow a code of real honor anymore. Then Mai and Ty Lee had stopped their former leader Ganryu from executed Jun. They'd all been imprisoned for it afterward, and it was then Ganryu gradually started to go haywire.
But according to Takakage, the boy had never been the most psychologically stable. The way he described him was that he idolized Fire Lord Ozai as if he was a god to the point of being in love with him. It was an obsessive love and hero-worship, and that's why his mind had come unhitched after Ozai's downfall.

The rest of the ride was recounting their various adventures as well as catching up with what they'd been doing for the past six months for their respective nations. Still, even with all that speed and leaving immediately, Appa didn't have the strength to make it till the next morning.

They arrived at the capital just as the sun was rising. As they landed, they're created in the courtyard by an assembly of females. Two were in the traditional garb of the Kyoshi Warriors, one was dressed in dark tones of red with a gold flame amulet around her neck, and the last one was a young woman in robes of golden orange with flecks of pink and lavender speckled throughout.

"Greetings young Avatar and friends. We've been anticipating your arrival and glad you came as swift as you were able too," spoke the Sisterhood member in a courteous voice first.

It took Aang a few moments to identify which Sisterhood member he was speaking with. After all, he and the rest of the gang had only learned about the Order of the White Lotus and the Sisterhood of the Dawn two years ago just before the final battle and still didn't thoroughly understand either of the two ancient secret societies yet.

It was far easier to remember the Order as they're all great masters and had trained all his friends. The Sisterhood was much harder for him as they were ladies of unique talents and chosen for far more mysterious reasons and had day jobs.

Finally, the name came to him and he addressed her. "Nice to see you too, Kishi. How is everything fairing for you?" he asked hurriedly hoping it was the right name and not desiring to make a fool of himself.

The lady smiled and replied in her lovely voice. "Well, Aang, things are going exceptionally well for me. I've received word from the Sanctuary just last week that our apprentices have nearly perfected their training and shortly Alanna will give them their accessories and send them out on their first missions for the Sisterhood.

Also, I've come with a fabulous new line of jewelry to display at the subsequent summit that incorporates all four nations. Therefore I can't wait to see how the sales of this collection go. All proceeds, of course, go to help orphans and other victims of the war." she answered his inquiry passionately, and he knew he got the right person.

"Yes, but before Kishi can get to her jewelry showcasing, we must first go arrest the members of the New Ozai Society. According to a reliable source a group of these terrorists is hiding on an island in the southern isles," Mai explained in a slightly more emotional tone then she had as a child.

"Which is what we're going to do, Mai. But first matters first. We all must be present for what Fire Lord Iroh wants to say. Then the four of us depart on our latest mission for redemption and repentance, remember?" Ty Lee reminded her best friend in a cheerful voice.

"I remember Ty Lee. The Legion still has a long way to go to obtain forgiveness for the misdeeds it has done, and so do we for our hearts and souls. But even if I still don't like that ugly green on you or Suki, I'm happy she agreed to help you and me find our penitence by helping us deal with these terrorists."
"I'm also happy you've accepted me as a friend Mai and allow me to help you in any way I can. I'm still not sure why you insist on accompanying us wherever we go, though, Kishi. That I don't get." Suki confessed her confusion to the Sisterhood member who answered the question swiftly.

"It is the mission Alanna gave me after the war. She told us to help heal the Legion after the battle. She assigned me to help Mai and Ty Lee as I knew them as children. So where they go, I must follow, Suki.

Alanna assigned Rei to work with Jun and Takakage in their rehabilitation from the ordeal they were subjected too and assist them in finding healing and peace. And though it may be impossible for Ganryu in that mental institution that was Saura must spend at least some of her time attempting to help put his mind back together."

"I still don't get who this enigmatic "Alanna" is or why you take orders from her. Or why she is so significant," grumbled Sokka under his breath.

Kishi looked at Sokka and sighed while shaking her head. She knew that both Sokka and Toph were truly spiritual lacking. While Sokka had a strong bond with the Moon Spirit due to whom she had been, he still didn't seem to know who Alanna was. Furthermore, Toph appeared to have no connection at all with the spirits. Hopefully, after today, that would change. Spirits above they needed to know what they were really up against.

"Come we must get inside. There is no time to waste," Kishi answered as she leads them inside the palace and to the throne room. Gathered there were the remaining Sisterhood members with the reformed Legion and to their surprise Master Piandao's wife Xiaoying with their eight-year-old daughter Xiang and Fire Lord Iroh himself.

Before anyone could speak little, Xiang broke free from her mother's grasp and dashed to hug Sokka and knocked him to the ground. "Sokka! It's so wonderful to see you again! How my favorite godbrother?" as she was hugging so tight he couldn't breathe, and everyone was laughing at the sight.

Sokka finally managed to disentangle himself and get the eight-year-old off him and look both proudly and amusingly at his little godsister. She was the average size of an eight-year-old and had inherited the trademark looks of her mother's side of the family. She wore her hair in 4 odango buns covered with candy apple red clothes with a braid hanging down from each. Plus she was also wearing a rather attractive cadmium yellow and red sundress with matching shoes and cadmium yellow ribbon around her neck with a white lotus tile as a necklace.

The simple reason she called him her 'godbrother' was in addition to giving him a white lotus tile after earning his black sword after studying with Xiang's father during their journey to end the war. Xiaoying had given him a parchment that was a signed document. It turned out there had been a secret test when training with Master Piandao.

It stated only "A worthy warrior of Piandao" would become the godparent/or godbrother or sister given the age at the time of Xiang. For Master Piandao and Xiaoying didn't just let anyone into their home or near their child. Nor did they take on any student. Even Xiaoying had been very selective with students SHE had admitted to their home. And that something came in the form of a document that Sokka had unknowingly signed during one of his training exercises with Piandao. Furthermore, he was the only person to fulfill what this secret test had stated for any student of Master Piandao.

They'd been unknowingly testing him and any other student they took on. First, by having lunch with the family to see how said student did with their daughter, next, by helping with various tasks..."
throughout the house to test their multiple character attributes. To see what virtues they had. Later an excursion to the marketplace while babysitting Xiang and then having to rescue her from staged trouble. Finally back to the house to complete their training with whoever they were studying with.

Sokka had been the only one to prove himself to not only her husband but her as well capable of passing their secret test. Plus, the fact he was with the Avatar didn't hurt things either. They knew he was the one they're looking for since he not all filled their requirements on their secret as did the rest of the gang, but also Xiang approved him as well.

Therefore once Sokka came of age he became her godfather. He proved his worth to become her guardian by becoming a true man of honor. As well as a master of the sword, and it didn't even matter he was Water Tribe. Though the other members of Team Avatar were also her extra guardians as well, just not in the same capacity as Sokka.

"Nice to see you too, Xiang. You sure have grown a lot since last time I saw you. How tall are you now?" he asked in a friendly and sweet voice and the little girl squealed in happiness.

"I've grown a whole foot and a half! Daddy says soon I'll be ready to train with real swords though I'll likely never good as you. Though Mommy says, I'm doing pretty well with her training. Plus at least I've gotten her family trademark talents in cooking and style!

I designed this dress myself! And I made you a treat! Want to taste it?" as she offered him a snack which the other looked at it little weary as it looked like fish that was a little burnt.

Still Sokka not about to honor the duty he was given just smiled and took what he was offered and chewed it for a bit and didn't make a face. "It um is an unusual flavor, Xiang. You might not want to cook it so long and add some more spice next time. But not bad for the first time," he said in the kindest way possible.

"Thank you! I'll try harder to make the perfect Sokka-Kabobs next time!" she said with fierce determination, and she gave him another vice grip hug before her mother came to fetch her.

"Okay, Xiang, no need to squeeze your godbrother to death. He still has important work to do," as she removed the enthusiastic eight-year-old. "Sorry about that, Sokka, she insisted on coming, and I couldn't deny her a chance to see you. It's been so long after all."

"Not a problem, really," he replied as he massaged his throat trying to find the ability to breathe again.

Everyone was snickering, but Katara then turned to the other Legion members and asked towards Takakage and Jun. "How are you two doing? Is everything okay with you guys?"

Takakage, who was a tall, muscular young man whose long jet black hair fell freely down his back with soft yellowish eyes. He was attired in an oxblood formfitting catsuit with lightweight armor on it and matching headband with a gold flame on it not black.

His true love stood next too him. Slender, tall, agile with short black hair in a bob cut dressed in a traditional female version of a samurai armor complete with the proper swords was Jun. Her eyes were like pools of tawny and could either pierce you like a sword or make you fall in love.

"It greatly honors us you ask how we are doing. We're doing very well thanks in part to Rei helping us through our healing processes," confessed Jun as she looked grateful toward the woman on her right.

"You're very welcome. Being forced to abandon the ways of true honor couldn't have been easy,
and after what they did to you, I only want to help you make right that which was made wrong."

"We thank you again for your continuing help, Rei. This is why I must continue to reteach the ways of true firebending to the people, and Jun here must help people relearn the ways of honor and warrior by reteaching Bushido and other noble, honorable ways to our country."

"And no doubt you shall succeed in both endeavors Alanna smiles on both of you as do many other spirits. I only hope they smile down on the last member of your old group. But alas I fear my efforts may be in vain with that boy," lamented Saura as she rejoined the group.

"Why do you say that?" vocalized the woman next to the throne pointedly.

Sighing Saura looked at her leader. "Yang, please don't think of me as a failure. But everyone else here was given the task of healing that which was broken and helped them find peace, forgiveness, and redemption.

While that was successful for four children, I'm beginning to doubt after two years it is possible for the fifth one. I believe entirely he's too far gone mind, body, and soul. He was madly in love and worshiped Ozai and by extension Anto.

His mind is gone and with that his soul. I don't believe I can help him. I've been seeking for two long years and done as much as I can to purify his mind and body, but I can't even seem to find the tiniest bit of a fragment to begin putting the pieces together.

He's an insane lunatic, and I think their no is helping him."

"Don't give up faith, Saura. Alanna wouldn't have assigned you to him if all hope was lost. There must be a way to save him, and you must keep trying."

"Yes, Yang, I'll continue my efforts then."

"Good. Now Kishi, why isn't your brother here yet?"

"He sends his apologies, Yang, but his anthropology lectures are hindering him today and giving a lecture to reteach a whole culture their true culture history will make him extremely late. He says by the time he'll be here, all he'll have time for is giving maps and directions and a small history lesson."

"So I guess that means we must start without him as this cannot wait a moment longer. So be it." Xiaoying said before she turned to Iroh. "You ready for this old friend?"

"It's eight years overdue, but yes, I'm ready."

"Okay. Let's begin. Aang, Katara, Sokka and Toph what we've to tell you is the most important story ever told at least next to your tale it is," Xiaoying started to say.

"Actually it starts just before your tale to be perfectly honest and is directly tied to you Aang and the War and your guys' journey in many ways but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

It best to start at the beginning but first, we must ask a question. Did you ever hear the story of how Ozai became Fire Lord, and what happened to the Royal Family?" Yang questioned Aang and his friends.

They all shook their heads no, and all admitted none of them had ever heard what became of the royal family or how Ozai ascended to power. Not even when they're traveling through the Fire
Nation two years ago for the Day of Black Sun.

It seemed funny now that the rest of the world had not ever stopped to wonder why there were no heirs to the throne. Or why it was just the Fire Lord and his brother or a dozen other strange questions that needed answers. But everyone only been too focused on their pain, loss and want the war to end to stop, think or ask.

"Well the answer to your question goes back to one night eight years ago when the previous Fire Lord, Fire Lord Azulon died and the rest of the Fire Nation Royal Family Prince Ozai's wife Princess Ursa and their children Prince Zuko, Princess Azula and Iroh's adopted daughter and Prince Zuko's Fire Lily or True Love Lady Akiko were all assassinated in a single night," Yang explained the answer.

"WHAT?!" Team Avatar exclaimed in pure shock.

"Actually the true story starts long before that night. It all began at Avatar Roku's wedding over 100 years ago. Do you remember that wedding right, Avatar Aang? Didn't Roku show you how the war began to tell you how to end it?" asked Xiaoying curiously.

"Yes, he showed me moments of his life with Sozin from their childhood, his avatar training, wedding, and his death and my birth. But what's so important about his wedding?"

"Do you recall the wedding party?" Xiaoying pressed him earnestly.

Aang closed his eyes trying very hard to remember what Roku had shown him and who was who at the wedding and slowly the memory came back to him. "I remember Sozin was his best man. I don't remember their names, but I know his wife Ta Min's best friends were both her maid of honor and bridesmaid."

"Yes, they were. Do you remember something happening before Roku and Sozin spoke privately?" Xiaoying pressed the young avatar, again and again, he forced himself to recall his past life wedding day.

"They're just talking, and I think...I think they made a promise of sorts? Something about friendship?"

"Yes, that's exactly what they did. What my grandmother did as did Akiko's great grandmother and Princess Ursa's grandparents, who are the great-grandparents to Zuko and Azula did. A promise of eternal friendship"

"What?!" everyone again yelled, and finally Xiaoying explained the secret that no-one knew.

"My grandmother, who is Xiang's great-grandmother, was Xiu Mei. She was the Grand Yon during Avatar Roku's time, and she was one of Ta Min's best friends. Her personal charge as a Yon to defend?

She was supposed to defend as every Grand Yon before The Leader of the Dragon Guardians. Hers and Ta Min's other best friend Surya Akiko's great-grandmother."

"Wait a minute! Are you saying what I think you're saying?" Takakage interrupted with his eyes bugging out of his skull as the pieces were fitting together in his mind.

"If you say that yes Avatar Roku had a child then yes. Her name was Rina, and she was best friends with our mothers. My mother Xiaoli and Lady Akiko’ Grandmother Kiku then yes.
If you were all thinking that we all had to go into hiding after Roku's murder, then yes. Rina settled in a small remote village and married a man named Jinzuk. My mother and Sakiko's mother wandered like nomads. Never attracting any attention to themselves but always doing good deeds.

They always visit Rina in the summer in her village. Myself, Sakiko, and Ursa, all born a week apart, were born very late in our mothers' life. We were figured to be a blessing from Alanna herself.

Sakiko and I never knew our fathers as they died before we were born. But for us, it didn't matter as Ursa's father was good enough for us even if was like an uncle fashion and her mother and aunt as our mothers were like aunts to her.

We spent every summer with her growing up in her village and it was beautiful. When our mothers died, we laid them to rest there. The last time either Sakiko and I ever saw Ursa together was in her village when we're 18 after our mothers funeral.

After that, I never saw the closest thing I had to a home. Because not long after that Sakiko and I was hunted down and Sakiko was forced to marry a pig of a man named Zhao and died in childbirth when her daughter Akiko was born.

Unknown to all of us Ursa was in the same situation forced to marry Ozai due to her heritage and her children were being abused as was she." Xiaoying stopped here and turned to Yang who shuddered at the memories before continuing with the narration.

"Ozai was positively an abomination! A diabolical demon! If Anto desired a human to possess and make his own, he had his champion in Ozai. He so mercilessly abused his wife and children in every sense of the word. Physically, emotionally, verbally, psychologically, just any way, you can abuse someone he did! And he was so relentless, and it was just a neverending nightmare! No one would ever think it was possible, but it was a living nightmare for all of us!

the Sisterhood and I were sent specifically to the capital to protect Ursa and the children. To try and heal them and keep them safe. You don't know how numerous times I had to perform everyday cleansings or heal the huge extensive abrasions all over them. I even attempted countless times to extract the demon seed that was growing in young Princess Azula, but alas, I didn't have that kind of power to exorcize that from her."

"We all under the pretense of tea parties would go every Wednesday to discuss in the open and attempt to help Ursa and help the children including Akiko after she was adopted at the age of five," the other Sisterhood members explained their past and the nightmare it had been to help this unfortunate family that the Spirit of Life had assigned them to help and save.

"Fate made sure to deliver Akiko to her true love and true parents. Ursa and Iroh. Due to the pact we made as children. If one us didn't' make it the other mother would raise the other child, and the final one be the godmother.

Iroh was a way better father and Ursa was the best mother, and well Zuko and Akiko fell in love at first sight when they saved each other on Ember Island. Nevertheless, Ozai still abused them both doubly seemingly to punish Ursa even more!" Xiaoying screamed as she despised having to keep that bottled up for so many years.

"So all this was going on, and no-one in the Fire Nation knew this was going on? And no one stopped any of it? Child Abuse? Battered women? Crimes against humanity happening right here in the place to the royal family and everyone turns a blind eye? Why did no one anything about it? Why?!!" demanded Katara furiously and the women all looked at her as if the explanation was as
plain as the blue she was wearing.

"Why do you think no-one stops the Legion from being created? Or the war before it started? Why do you think no one spoke about what happened to the Dragon Guardians who were battered, raped, and butchered? Or just exactly what the Fire Nation soldiers were doing to the rest of the world?" questioned Yang in a tightly controlled voice.

"Do you know how disreputable some people went and it was never spoken about or anything is done to give some level of justice?" questioned Kishi in an outraged voice about the millions of silent victims of the war not spoken about. Given Team Avatar's faces, they didn't realize what she was talking about.

"The sad fact of the matter is, Katara, is there were shameful malicious people who perpetrate everything. The drug trade, grave robbing to a gang rape in the war. And no, the Fire Nation still hasn't caught and convicted everyone who committed those barbarities. As too many of the victims won't come forward. They're too ashamed to speak up!" Rei revealed what had been covered up and by the looks on Team Avatar faces, this disturbing fact was an undesired and horrifying revelation regarding the war they'd ended two years prior.

"There are innumerable atrocities that occurred to the living victims then you think. It's not just those who perished who suffered in the 100-year war, Katara. The living as still paying for it," Saura informed her and Katara's tan skin was almost as pale now as Fire Nation skin from how sick she felt from hearing all this.

"Wow, that is so unbelievable! It can't be true!" she tried to deny what she was hearing, but there was no denying when you looked at the faces in the room and saw the truth in their eyes. And the next voice spoke left no room for any doubt that this was the truth.

"Sugar they ain't lying. They are being 100% truthful with everything they are saying, and you know I can catch anyone who is lying, and they ain't lying," Toph said in a faint mournful voice. Even though she was blind, her mind could still see the horrors they were talking about, and it wasn't pretty at all.

"Yes, there are numerous sins we'll never be thoroughly cleansed of. However, now we come back to that night in question and why this is a matter of life or death. Iroh, maybe you should explain this part as it affected you more than anyone." Xiaoying suggested to her old friend who had been sitting down his throne drinking his mystery tea wordlessly all this time.

"Very well," as he put his tea to the side. He looked quite old and broken at that moment. Just an ancient broken man in agony. He took a deep breath and started to tell his unbearable tale gradually. "Just before the mass murder of my family, I just suffered the loss of my only son Lu Ten after the legendary 600-day siege of Ba Sing Se. I abandoned the Siege to grieve.

What I didn't know or anticipate which I should've was what my younger brother was going to do with my son gone. I should've considered what happened to my beloved Kimana, my wife," he added seeing their confusion and then continue in his broken voice.

"It was never confirmed, but we all strongly suspect he was also involved in her death. But Ozai became Fire Lord through my father's downfall after my son's death even though I was an elder brother. That never made sense.

We all grieved, and it was terrible grief for the whole nation that just after the loss of the crown prince, the nation lost its leader and all other heirs. Approximately two and a half weeks ago was
the 8th anniversary of their deaths.

I couldn't take it anymore. We've had two years of peace. However, I've never had true peace since the day I lost everything. I've lost my wife, son, and I've lost my whole family, and on that anniversary going to the graveyard, something happened that nearly ended my life if Xiaoying and Yang hadn't been with me."

"Neither of us wouldn't have been there if we hadn't felt the strong feeling we were supposed to be there. But Iroh suffered a massive heart attack. If not quick thinking on Xiaoying part and my healing capabilities, Iroh would've been dead." Yang explained solemnly as everyone now absorbed the fact the Fire Nation had almost lost it, the last leader.

"Xiaoying started to tend to him, and I have consulted Alanna, and she told me this isn't a natural sickness. I mean, it's nothing to do with a family history or bad blood. Therefore it's not his physical health that caused him to have a heart attack," Yang began to explain to the bewildered crowd before. Taking a deep breath, she revealed what accurately the Spirit of Life had informed her of.

"Alanna informed me the reason Iroh had a heart attack is from something called "Broken Heart Syndrome," She informed me this ailment customarily occurs right after the something truly heartbreaking happens and it causes your physical heart to fail.

In Iroh's case, eight years of repressed anguish and depression caused a dangerously delayed reaction. Furthermore, now, it caused his physical heart to stop working correctly. She said I was lucky I was able to save him. She also informed me if Iroh suffers a second broken heart attack he will perish, and there will be nothing I can do to save him," Yang familiarized them all of the full diagnosis they had and how ominous it was.

"So how can we fix a broken heart? I mean, do you want Katara to try her waterbending to heal him?" Aang started to ask, and Yang shook her head vigorously no.

"The only true cure for this Avatar Aang is to end the grief the source of the emotional heart problem. If we can end the cause of the emotional heart problem, the physical heart will recover, and Iroh's life will no longer be in danger. That's the only cure for this I'm afraid. Alanna told me that is the only way to cure him. No healing or medicine will do the trick," she stated firmly, so there was no room for refusal.

"Okay, I'm not into magic, bending, and I'm more a straightforward guy, but how do you expect us to cure a broken heart, lady?" Sokka asked her and Xiaoying and Yang both said at the same time the simple answer to the question which was obvious.

"By bringing the Lost Royal Family home, of course."

Yet again everyone yelled "WHAT?!"

"What happened eight years ago was Ozai made the dishonorable request that Azulon revoke Iroh's birthright to the throne. Azulon was beyond tumultuous and ordered Ozai to kill his firstborn for him to know what Iroh felt like." Xiaoying started to explain about that terrible night eight years ago as the memories came back full force.

"What Azulon didn't know or didn't realize was by doing so he'd order the death of two children. Zuko and Akiko were soulmates, and if one died, both died. Plus, Iroh never told his father about his adopted daughter out of fear for her safety. Azulon wasn't one to restrain his temper." Yang explained also thinking back on the memories she tried to bury for eight years.
"Ozai had every intention of killing his son as he didn't love him. Frankly, Ozai isn't capable of love. Consequently, he to kill his son and knowing do so kill another child, the one who was his own brother's adopted daughter? No different then swatting a fly to him," Xiaoying described as if she solely was explaining what the weather was like that day.

"Ursa struck a bargain with him. Her mother had been a master herbalist, and she knew how to brew a deadly poison that couldn't be traced. She'd give it to him in exchange for the children's lives. But Ozai only would accept it if she left forever and left the children behind. Ursa knew she never could leave her children behind with that monstrosity. He'd still annihilate them one way or another they end up dead.

She deceived him by telling him she needed two hours to make the poison. Once she was alone, she then using a unique charm and tile we'd given her at the last tea party she summoned us. Told us in short what was going on. With our help, we got the children out and helped stage the scene, and then we all left the capital unnoticed. That's how it was pulled off, and no-one knew." Yang explained the truth they'd kept silent about for eight years.

"But then where is the royal family and how have they stayed hidden for eight years?" Aang asked, and everyone sighed loudly.

"Ursa would only run to one place. Home; her hometown, the village of Hira'a. It's as far away from the capital as you can get and as different from the capital as you can get as well.

Plus it's the only place she knows, and her parents were there. Though Yang did go there for a dangerous assignment a few years back and didn't see or sense her, she does admit Alanna inhabited her body at the time. Thus she may've been cloaking her senses to shield them." Xiaoying agreed as she knew her best friend inside and out.

"That's got to be where they are and how they've stayed hidden for eight years is anyone guesses. However, it's up to you to locate them. Furthermore, you've only got three weeks to do it. Because that's all the time and power I've got to keep Iroh from having another heart attack," Yang emphasized the time crunch they were in and the enormity of the circumstances.

"Furthermore, young Avatar there is another reason you must find my family and not just to save my life it's a matter of protecting the country. From a political standpoint, we need young leaders.

My nephew and daughter will by now come of age, and it is they who should be Fire Lord and Lady. For a new world and time, we need young leaders with ideas the passion and youth to help bring the world together.

People to work with you and can bring about the dream we're working towards. It's also imperative you find them for this reason." Iroh admitted sadly there was a political reason needed as well.

After absorbing all this, the four members of Team Avatar agreed to take on the highly dangerous mission and promised they'd succeed no matter what. It was then Kami showed up. He had with him some maps to show them the way, a book on the local history of the village, books on spirits, and then Iroh brought them a locked chest. He said it was many keepsakes of his family's past. In case they needed reminders if they had forgotten. Promising once again not to fail they quickly loaded up supplied and began to head to Hira'a to hopefully fulfill a dying man's broken heart's last wish.

Xiang- Moonfairy82-DA Friend

Songs tweaked by Japananimegirl
Takotsubo cardiomyopathy (broken-heart syndrome) Features of takotsubo cardiomyopathy

Chest pain and shortness of breath after severe stress (emotional or physical)

Electrocardiogram abnormalities that mimic those of a heart attack

No evidence of coronary artery obstruction

Movement abnormalities in the left ventricle

Ballooning of the left ventricle

Recovery within a month

Takotsubo cardiomyopathy is a weakening of the left ventricle, the heart's main pumping chamber, usually as the result of severe emotional or physical stress, such as a sudden illness, the loss of a loved one, a serious accident, or a natural disaster such as an earthquake. (For additional examples, see "Stressors associated with takotsubo cardiomyopathy.") That's why the condition is also called stress-induced cardiomyopathy, or broken-heart syndrome. The main symptoms are chest pain and shortness of breath.

Stressors associated with takotsubo cardiomyopathy*

A sudden drop in blood pressure

Serious illness, surgery, or medical procedure (e.g., cardiac stress test)

Severe pain

Domestic violence

Asthma attack

Receiving bad news (such as a diagnosis of cancer)

Car or other accident

Unexpected loss, illness, or injury of a close relative, friend, or pet

Fierce argument

Financial loss

Intense fear

Public speaking

A surprise party or other sudden surprise

The precise cause isn't known, but experts think that surging stress hormones (for example, adrenaline) essentially "stun" the heart, triggering changes in heart muscle cells or coronary blood vessels (or both) that prevent the left ventricle from contracting effectively.

Researchers suspect that older women are more vulnerable because of reduced levels of estrogen after menopause. In studies with rats whose ovaries had been removed, the ones given estrogen while under stress had less left-ventricle dysfunction and higher levels of certain heart-protective
substances.

Takotsubo symptoms are indistinguishable from those of a heart attack. And an electrocardiogram (ECG) may show abnormalities similar to those found in some heart attacks — in particular, changes known as ST-segment elevation. Consequently, imaging studies and other measures are needed to rule out a heart attack. To get a definitive diagnosis, clinicians look for the following:

No evidence on an angiogram of blockages in the coronary arteries — the most common cause of heart attacks.

A rapid but small rise in cardiac biomarkers (substances released into the blood when the heart is damaged). In a heart attack, cardiac biomarkers take longer to rise but peak higher.

An echocardiogram (ultrasound image) or other imaging technique that shows abnormal movements in the walls of the left ventricle. The most common abnormality in takotsubo cardiomyopathy — the one that gives the disorder its name — is ballooning of the lower part of the left ventricle (apex). During contraction (systole), this bulging ventricle resembles a tako-tsubo, a pot used by Japanese fishermen to trap octopuses. Another term for the disorder is an apical ballooning syndrome. (See "Apical ballooning and the tako-tsubo.")

Most of the abnormalities in systolic function and ventricle wall movement clear up in one to four weeks, and most patients recover fully within two months. Death is rare, but heart failure occurs in about 20% of patients. It's treated with diuretics, agents that improve heart muscle contraction, and other therapies. Rarely reported complications to include arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms), obstruction of blood flow from the left ventricle, and rupture of the ventricle wall.
Another Journey

The day after they left the capital for their quest to find the Lost Royal Family Team Avatar was feeling extraordinarily optimistic and considerably happy. The heaven was the prettiest shade of forget-me-not blue, no clouds at all, the sun was beaming and smiling brightly on them, and everything just seemed to be the ideal summer day.

It mostly made you want to burst into a rousing musical number and do a dance. Like people naturally would just randomly burst into song and dance. But of course, that didn't occur in real life.

However, there was some sentimental material going on. It was making Toph stick a finger down her throat. Sokka was attempting to break it up when Katara and Aang start to kiss too much. Getting sidetracked from what their goal was. Consequently, Sokka had to break up the lovebirds up and make them concentrate on the task at hand.

"Okay, that enough you two turtledoves! We already have Toph who gets airsick. We don't need a bunch of lovesick loons on board too! Now can we PLEASE focus on what matters?

Which is figuring out how we're going to find the Royal Family and do it in only three weeks which by the way only gives us precisely 504 hours to do it in. Therefore can we PLEASE pay attention to the facts? And not get sidetrack here?" Sokka urged in a somewhat whiny and fussy voice at the same time.

"Sure, Sokka, whatever you say. You are the eldest, and of course, the boss," Katara stroked his ego while at the same time trying not to roll her eyes. Still, she inched herself away from her boyfriend as they all settled into Appa's saddle to go over the information they did have.

"Thank you, Katara," Sokka, who looked very pleased she was focusing on the task at hand and not Aang. "Okay, listen up, Team Avatar, this is what we've got so far. Thanks to the information provided from the Sisterhood, Xiaoying and Fire Lord Iroh we've got a pretty good idea on the route the Royal Family would've taken eight years ago to get to Hira’a and we can triangulate with the route we are taking presently," as he rolled out a large map flatly on the floor of the saddle for all to see.

Everyone who could see looked at it quite quizzingly as not sure what to make of it. Plus, they're also questioning if Sokka was going to go overboard on planning this like he did when they were traveling for the invasion two years ago. Scrutinizing everything right down to bathroom breaks. They sincerely hoped it wouldn't come to that as it was bad enough the first time.

"Okay, Sokka, what have you got figured out so far?" inquired Aang who had no inkling on how to translate maps furthermore wasn't at all useful at trigonometry or any other sort of math in overall.

"Well, Aang, considering what Xiaoying and Healer Yang told us, Princess Ursa and the kids all escaped on a small boat. Therefore logically they would've followed these currents and the first island they that would've hit along that trajectory course would've been this little one right here, which is about two miles east from where the invasion force landed,” as he was using some elaborate instrument to identify the path that they'd likely followed.

Again, as no one else was sure how to read a map or do any of this brainy material with longitude
and latitudes or anything of that variety. Therefore, they just let Sokka keep on lecturing and wished he remembered to breathe in between explaining as he tended to forget to do that sometimes when he got cooking on something this juicy. They were the benders, and that was their realm of expertise. He, on the other hand? He was the brains, and so he had the floor now.

"Now again since they wouldn't want to be seen or discovered fleeing they'd likely gone out of their way to stay out of sight and traveled through the least populated areas, but you have to consider they need to stop for food, rest and potty breaks," his handsome face was really scrunched up as he was really thinking hard as he stopped to consider all the facts.

"Plus we know they had a limited supply that at most would've only lasted them a week and a half maybe 12 days tops if they made it stretch. Also, we've to take into consideration the times of day they're traveling, the weather conditions and other circumstance," he continued till Toph interrupted him harshly getting fed up listening to him use up their oxygen in the thin air they already were in.

"Okay, Mr. Egghead, we get it, but how about getting to the point already? We don't need the pants bored off us by you!"

"Oh, yeah, right, if my calculations are correct they would've been running low on supplies, and their course would've taken them into a highly dangerous zone of water. The Boiling Sea," as he pointed to the body as mentioned above of water on the extremely specified map.

"Let's see what the books say have to say about that," Katara said. She reached over and opened a book Kami had given them and read aloud, "The Boiling Sea is a two-mile body of water that is full of burning, toxic water from the minerals and heat of the undersea volcanoes. It's extremely dangerous to cross as the water always at the boiling point, and again the water is poisonous to touch, and the air is choked with fumes let off from the steam." she closed the giant black book and asked everyone at large the apparent question.

"So they had to cross that body of dangerous water without being seen to get to Hira'a. How they manage that? No-way the could've gone around it. Not if they're low on supplies as Sokka's estimations are surmising."

"Yeah, that is a mystery. Given the likely route they would've been spotted by the ships at this point. Or at several other spots along this route. How they managed to get there without being seen is a mystery, sis."

"Still if they did manage to make it to Hira'a without being seen wouldn't they be ravenous and bedraggled from all that traveling?" asked Aang scratching his bald head as he tried to get everything in front him that was boggling his young adolescent mind.

"Well, they sure wouldn't be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed that for sure, Twinkle Toes! They'd be practically dead if by the grace of a miracle they got there. Still no reports of unidentified bodies or ships right, Sokka?" Toph asked in her usual blunt way to get straight to the point. There no reason to beat around the bush better to get straight to point then waste time.

"No, none and that would've been immediately reported to Ozai if there were. Otherwise, he'd never created the Legion of the Black Flame, to begin with as a response. Hence he must have felt they still out there and a threat to his throne." concluded Sokka as he was now triangulated their path by air with one marked at sea.

The next hour of their journey passed without disturbance after that. Everything seemed excellent during that time frame. They're all feeling remarkably vigorous. Sokka was occupied with the
maps. Katara reached for a different book. Toph was merely picking her toes. Aang was getting ready to go back to steering Appa in the right direction when all of a sudden it happened. Aang let out a scream of bloody murder and start rolling and writhing in pain and agony.

"AANG!" everyone dropped what they're doing starting to rush over to the young avatar about to help him when they all let out the same scream of bloody murder and fell over and were all contorting in absolute anguish.

It felt like someone had reached inside their bodies and was twisting their internal organs with their bare hands. It was the severest torment any of them ever felt. All of them were shrieking and howling uproariously. "MAKE IT STOP! MAKE IT STOP!"

As they all managed to wriggle to the middle of the saddle together, it was like all the light and sound in the world dissolved in an instance. Fighting through the unendurable pain, they all managed to look up except for Toph and observed what had made the sun disappeared.

They saw a monstrous raven: a raven the size of a griffin with a blood red-winged star on its breast and golden eyes. Those eyes looked starving for something and regrettably that something looks like them.

The raven circled once and then let out a scream that could be defined as the sound of death coming at you. Then the colossal raven dived straight at them and began to pepper them. The raven was racking at Appa's fur and striving to peck his eyes out and seemed to be venturing to get at them itself. It was ruthless as it did anything and everything it could to cause them physical harm and knock them out of the sky.

"Whoever heard of a kamikaze raven?! We need to get rid of it! OWW!" screeched Sokka as he tried to reach for his space sword and fell to the ground again as the pain-wracked his entire body.

"Sokka we are in no condition to fight! I can't even move my arms to bend I'm in too much pain!" yelled Katara back as she tried to cover her head to protect herself from the demented bird who just almost took her head as flew up from another attack on them.

"And I can't attack anything in the air because I can't see anything in the air either, Sokka! Furthermore, this a pain I've never felt before!" groaned Toph, who hated being truly blind and in pain. She NEVER wanted to be helpless EVER! At this moment she was, and she HATED THAT!

"Then what are we going to do? Get murdered by a crazed bird?!" demanded Sokka who still managed to pull off sarcasm even in the face of death.

"No, I'm going to distract it, and you guys are gonna find a place to land Appa and hide there," Aang told them in a worried voice as he flicked open his glider even though he was scarcely able to stand.

"Aang, no! This pain is too much! You'll fall from the sky!" Katara cried out protectively only for her boyfriend to look at her in a way to tell her there was no refusing him or his plan.

"It's better than being sitting turtleducks! Katara try and get Appa to land somewhere protected! Just do it!" and with that, the 14-year-old Avatar leaped off the flying bison and into the air.

"Aang! Oh, I love that boy, but he can be so stupid at times! Brave but stupid!" as she inched over the saddle and got to the reins and said through clenched teeth, "Appa, we need to land somewhere safe! Put on some speed and fast!" and the enormous airborne bleeding bison complied.

Aang was currently letting the thermal carry him high in the air, and it looked like the deranged
raven lost interest in Appa and the gang and was now solely focused on him. It flew straight at him, and they locked eyes for a moment. When Aang's gray eyes locked eyes with the raven's gold eyes, something seemed to pass between them. Aang felt an icy shiver go through his entire body.

Aang's body became white as a ghost, and his heart almost stop beating looking at those eyes. For some reason seeing those gold eyes, he felt he'd seen them before though he couldn't recall where. All he knew was these eyes scared him to death, and the soul behind those eyes was beyond livid with him.

Snapping out of if it Aang began to pull off every trick he remembered from his childhood with the rest of the airbenders when they still lived and everything that Monk Gyatso taught him to try and outwit this bird. Although it was almost like this bird knew every move before he made it and was there to block it and administer lethal damage. Aang's agonizing screams grew louder and louder as he and the raven kept battling.

Finally, Aang decided to conjure up a tornado however before he could start the raven dived at him and shredded the glider to shreds, and abruptly Aang found himself screaming as the glider failed.

The raven was cackling delightedly as it watches the young avatar plummet to the ground from a thousand feet above. It almost seemed to be smiling waiting with pleasure to see the Avatar die.

Aang was screaming and in too much pain to even use bending to save his life. Death was coming closer and closer when all of the sudden moments before death Katara went to the rescue.

Fighting through the pain herself, she rose into the air on a magnificent waterspout and caught Aang in her arms. They looked at each other passionately and couldn't help but embrace and kiss before gradually getting back to the ground and regrouping.

The raven in the air gave a caw of pure disgust and vanished as if it was never there in the first place and when it disappeared, so did everyone's pain. Just as suddenly as the pain had come on it was gone.

"What is the name of Tui and La was that all about? And why is that pain gone? I've never felt like that before!" Katara stated sincerely as she and Aang rejoined everyone in a small copse of trees near a brook.

"That felt worse than being bloodbended by Hama! And I never thought I feel pain worse than that!" confessed Sokka with both repugnance and overwhelming fear and Katara looked like she'd been slapped in the face.

She knew her brother didn't mean to say anything harmful. But it still brought back nightmares to know that such a power existed in the first place and she'd been involuntarily made to acquire it to prevent the ones she loved demise.

To have such a power to enforce your will over others? Nothing good could ever come from such a power; only darkness and madness could come from it if Hama were any indication. Furthermore, it was Katara's full intention to make sure the immoral technique was never used by anyone ever again.

"Whatever that was, I don't believe a bender, Sokka caused it. It just didn't give me the feeling of coming from a bender," Aang spoke softly as the color was gradually returning to him.

"Oh, your Avatar senses tingling, Twinkle Toes? Or your past lives gonna come through you right
now and tell us what the heck was trying to kill us?!” demanded Toph violently as the whole world trembled underneath them.

Everyone took three steps back from the raging blind earthbending master and Katara then said calmly, "Okay, I think we all need to take a few moments and calm down. Let's try some deep breathing. Come on the count to ten and then inhale and exhale. Please?"

So they all tried to calm down some, but the second they tried it a second time Toph held out her left hand to stop them. "Sugar Queen, we are gonna have to take some time away from calming down because we are gonna need to get revved up for another fight."

"What, Toph? What are you seeing coming in?"

"It's strange, but I'm hearing them but not seeing them," she explained in a perplexed tone as she was holding one hand to the ground and one hand to her ear.

"I don't get it. What do you mean your ears can hear something, but your overly-sensitive feet can't see them?" Aang asked his earthbender teacher in confusion.

Everyone was still amazed by Toph's talents with her earthbending and never doubted her claim to be the greatest earthbender ever. But this didn't match up. How could she hear something but not see it with her earthbending?

"I'm hearing what sounds like an enormous pack of hounds coming at us at an intense rate of speed, but somehow even though I can hear at least a dozen different howls, I'm not seeing one of them actually touch the ground!" she exclaimed in both terror and failure.

"Well whatever coming our way we need to defend ourselves, so everyone gets ready for the fight of your lives!" ordered Sokka as he drew his black blade and everyone took their bending stances and not a moment too soon.

At that moment they appeared a whole pack of wolves the size of lions; all of them with blood-red eyes except none of them seemed to be genuine animals. They seemed to be composed of ash and smoke, and they left no footprints when they walked.

The leader was the biggest and malicious looking one of the bunch and was aiming for Aang's jugular. They all howled once and ran at them, and everyone attacked. Even Momo and Appa were quickly caught in the insanity of the battle.

Katara was throwing ice discs at them, but to her surprise, they just went right through them! She tried to freeze them, but they just reformed around them. This wasn't good at all! Toph tried to smash, crush and bash them and again they just rose as if they could not be physically harmed and kept advancing to her, and all she could do was try and get to higher ground.

Sokka was busy trying to slice off their heads or stabbed them through the heart but again they seemed to be made out of smoke, so that didn't do any good! Aang tried to airbend them away but quickly realized if he did that they all get the smoke the wolves were made of in their lungs and that would kill them!

It was a losing battle! They couldn't kill something that wasn't alive, to begin with, and their elements and weapons were just ineffective, and anyhow, Aang got the feeling if he tried to firebend it would only make matters worse. Like they double or increase the smoke!

When it seemed all hope was lost, a cold, evil voice called out. "ENOUGH! Come back to my beauties! That enough...for now." and the wolves howled once and disappeared into thin air.
The gang gasped for breath as they fell to the ground, feeling truly frail and exposed. So far they'd scarcely outlived two battles, and they hadn't even come close to their objective of reaching Hira'a and finding the Lost Royal Family.

"Okay, can we officially say something creepy is going on now?" demanded Sokka as he was hacking so hard right now he felt for sure he would cough up his lung.

"Yes, we can all agree on that vote, Sokka. Something seriously creepy and unnatural is going on. No doubt about it," his sister agreed as she caressed her sore throat.

"Guys we have no idea what going on or who hunting us but the most important thing right now is to find shelter and protection. Toph can you at least find us a place that protects and that we can reinforce for the night before we continue?" asked Aang to his friend who nodded.

"It's about two and a half miles, but I can still see it. So let's get going before the sun goes down," as they raced to get to it. They walked as fast as they could get to get to what Toph was seeing.

Toph led them to where the river fed into a pool that bled into another stream. On the other side of the lake was a stony moraine which had a portion underneath it scooped out, and there was a ledge off to the far right. It wasn't profound, not a cave, but it was smooth and made a perfect roof, and they all could stand under it even Appa. Feeling it was the best they could hope for they got busy.

Sokka went hunting for food and when he came back began to cook along with what other supplies they had. Meanwhile, the benders after setting up camp began fortifying the area with their bending to better protect themselves from whatever was hunting them.

There was an unsettling silence as they ate their dinner as every sound made them all jump out of their skin. Finally, Sokka suggested they take turns watching over each other, which the other agreed too. It was no surprise he took first watch.

Sokka attempted to be confident with his sword and all as he puffed out his chest and was marching around the camp while the others slept. But even though he was acting brave and trying to act like he wasn't creeped out, it didn't change the fact he was!

Everything started pleasant enough when the moon or as he would always think of her Yue was in the sky and was there to keep him happy and company. But at the stroke of midnight, that changed. It was if the full moon swiftly became the new moon as it vanished from the sky.

Then all the traditional sounds of the night became nightmarish noises of chaos and torture. It's complicated to be courageous and stand your ground when thinking your hearing things like walking carcasses dragging dead bodies, explosions, or whatever other words your mind comes up within the dark. How anyone got through the next three hours was anyone guesses, but at exactly 3:00 am was when things took their darkest turn of the night.

An ominous voice filled the air a sound so evil so malevolent it made your blood turned to ice, and your heart stop beating. It seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere at once. Furthermore, it was singing a creepy song as it appeared to be advancing towards them breaking through their defenses as if it was mere child's play.

"Under the bloody full moon that lights never-ending skies of the perpetuating night. I've been tossing and turning with a nightmare more hellish then me!

It was worse than worse could be! It's scared to even me out of my wits, and I'm scarier then half a corpse falling to bits! Then I opened my eyes, and I realized the nightmare was all around me for it
was my reality!

I've been building my strength for over a thousand years! To become more powerful than all Spirits in all of the Spirit World!

Everyone will be forced to obey, and I'm here to stay! Turn your back on me? That will be your very last mistake!

Well, now it's my time to cast my curse to make you pay! And no-one shall getaway. Least of all the Last Airbender and his family, who are so-called saviors chosen by destiny. Do you think you have the power to outwit me?

Little Aang you and your family better beware. Anto is awake, and he's ready to play and slay! For in the dark of the night, evil shall find all of you! In the darkness of the night, you shall never see the dawn again!

My revenge against both worlds will be so sweet when my curse is complete! When the dark of the night and you and your family are forever gone!

I feel my powers have slowly reached their peak! I'm finally as handsome as I'll ever be! Now that the pieces are all in place I shall see you, your girlfriend and Lost Royal Family crawl into place!

So time to say goodbye to this world Avatar Aang and the rest of the gang. Farewell to all of you at last! You've been a pain in my ass too long!

For in the dark of night I'll make terror beseech you! In the darkness of the night, my evil shall brew! Soon you shall see true nightmares made real and in the darkness of the night all of you will be through!

In the dark of the night, evil shall find all of you! In the darkness of the night, all the terrors you feel will come true! The Avatar's and Royal Family's doom is at long last here!

My darling Aang it's sign it's the end of yours and the royal line! In the dark of the night! Come to me, my fellow brethren of evil, rise for your master! Let our glorious, evil light shine! Let's find them now and fly even faster into the dark of the night and then let them all be MINE!"

As soon as the song stopped, the walls of their defense collapsed and suddenly a swarm of blackish-red moths was attacking them, and there were so many they were quickly overwhelmed. They didn't even notice how four of them immersed inside their brains. Presently the same nightmare in their mind. Maybe the characters were different, but the theme was the same for each of them.

"The person they'd loved and lost stood over a body that laid motionless on the ground beneath their feet with either their bending or their weapon of choice in hand.

They felt themselves look on in bewilderment asking what was their loved one doing? When they got a closer look at the body, they'd screamed. It was their body. Their flesh was burned and seared. Their blood was also burned black. The stench that filled the air made their stomachs churn.

"Look at what you made me do," their respective loved ones would breathe, their voices sounded the same but different all at once.

"_?" they'd asked in a frightened tone. The loved one would rock slowly back and forth on their heels and toes, giggling like a little kid. "_what happened?"
The loved one would stop and slowly turn their head to face them. Their faces were covered in crimson blood that little by little drizzled down their face. There was a look in their eyes that they'd never seen before.

Their healthy happy eyes were a cold heartless. Everyone good nature had vanished from the warmth they once held. All they could see and feel was an unforgiving chill of ice and death.

"You made me do it, _ You made me kill you," the dead would reply and began laughing all over again.

Team Avatar looked on at their loved ones in fear. "W-what I do?"

At that point, their deceased loved ones would continue giggling as they waved their weapon of choice around.

"What did you do? Hahaha, what did you do?" they said as they tilted their head to lay it on their shoulder. Their eyes slowly changed from their standard color to crimson red.

"You know what you did, you little brat! You're the one that did it...ha-ha, I watched you do it!"

The four of them whimpered as tears fell from their cheeks. "What did I do?!"

Their loved ones glared at them with their bloodstained faces scrunched up in unmistakable unbridled anger and irrepressible fury.

"How about that? Hahaha, you still don't remember what you did to me? To everyone? Hahaha!"

Suddenly their eyes turned from crimson to hollow solid black.

"You killed them, you killed everyone, but you didn't kill me no...I was the only survivor, and I killed you. Hahaha! But you're still here...ha-ha, and you will die over and over until you never come back. I put all my love into you, and now it was for naught. Now DIE!"

The world in their minds swirled again, and a new nightmare took the place of the old one this one even more hellish than the last.

"Each member of Team Avatar found themselves walking through what could only be described as dark woods. However, the bark of these trees was black as the wood of dead trees. The leaves were a dark, sinister red and black. The skies above were as red as blood. The ground beneath was a dark revolting green, along with some patches that were dead brown.

They continued to walk through the landscape until they found someone. It was and under them laid the bodies of all the others. All of them were covered in blood and burns.

Each of them stumbled backward with their bodies trembling with fear. Never in either the human world or Spirit World did any of them ever feel so helpless, so weak...so...scared. What they're seeing before them was everything they loved dead and gone...forever!

"Tick tock. Time is fleeting on your clock tick-tock history is ending on the clock," their other self said in a mocking singsong tone of voice. They little by little turned to face their other-self. Their hearts threaten to come out their throats if it hadn't been swelled shut with fear unable to scream.

"Who and what are you?!" they cried once they could speak again trying to get a hold of themselves. The other self-titled its head as if confused. As if they didn't understand that they were the ones being talked too. "What did you do to my family… you…you …you sadist?!"
Their dark half laughed manically. "Who needs a family or who needs love? All you need is fear, is death! Hahaha."

Everyone worked up the courage to stare at the dark side of themselves. "You think that's what it means? To take innocent people's lives for no godforsaken reason?! The only time I will ever take a life if it was meant to save anyone I love. No, I would rather my own life be taken then one of my family, to protect my home! Even if it costs me my life!"

Their dark sides laughed manically once more before taking out their weapon of choice and yelled: "Then die!"

They gasped as they all fumbled to defend themselves, but there were nothing and their dark halves weapons be they bending or a sword pierced their guts. They gasped and coughed up blood. Their eyes wavered as their dark halves gently laid them on the ground. They breathed their dying breath.

"So this is where it ends, huh. I'm sad that it ends, but I'm grateful for all that I've done to sacrifice and succeed in my time. I love you all…goodbye." They thought as slowly their eyes closed for one last time...

All of sudden there was a burst of brilliant light, and all of them heard the echoing of thousands of voices of a thousand past Avatars speaking as one. They all said in one commanding voice.

"GO! YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE! LEAVE THIS PLACE AND GO NOW! YOU SHALL NOT HAVE ANY SOULS TONIGHT BLACK SPIRIT!"

And an outraged voice screamed back in a cursing voice. "You all got lucky tonight! You won't be so lucky next time! Mark my word, Avatar! You and your friends will fail in your quest! And your souls and the Royal Family will be MINE!" and everyone fell into blackness.

The next morning everyone woke up in agonizing pain and to see everything around them had been destroyed and was in utter chaos. If that wasn't proof enough something had transpired last night the creepy boot prints and the claw-like scratch marks all over their bodies in threes was!

Each of them somewhere on their bodies had three prolonged deep bleeding claw-like scratch marks. Furthermore, when Katara attempted to treat them, her waterbending didn't work! That shocked them all because Katara was the greatest healer any of them knew and they never heard of waterbending failing to heal anything!

"I've never seen my waterbending fail to heal anything! I don't know what left these marks on us, but for some reason, I can't heal them!" she said in a trembling voice as she tried again and failed again to heal the scratch marks on Sokka's back.

"Then what are we gonna do? These hurt as if they're burning! And they'll leave scars!" cried Sokka who also didn't want to add this could leave them maimed and unattractive if someone saw them.

He had them down the length of his entire back, Katara down the length of her right arm, Toph her left leg and Aang across his stomach. Someone was trying to send them a message, and this was personal.

All of the sudden heliotrope butterflies came out of nowhere and descended upon the group. Four of them landed directly on the gang's wounds, and as soon as they touched them, they vanished spontaneously. As if they were never there. The fifth butterfly was sitting on top of a book
radiating rather blindingly unmistakably seeking to get their attention. Not one not to take a hint
Aang went and got the book the butterfly was perched on.

"Encyclopedia of Myths, Spirits and the Spirit World Thus Far"

Everyone gathered around, and he opened the book, and the butterfly then flew up and created a
gust with its wings causing the pages to flip rapidly till it came to the middle of the book.

"Chapter 31. Alanna the White Spirit of Life and Anto the Black Spirit of Death?" Aang read
aloud, worried as unquestionably everyone else was. Still, the butterfly was glowing brightly, and
it meant he was supposed to read it. Taking a deep breath, Aang started to read out loud the chapter
before him.

"Alanna and Anto are two of the oldest spirits of our world having being born at the beginning.

Alanna, the White Spirit of Life, is the Daughter of the Spirit of Light Raava, who only a scarce
few know is the Avatar Spirit itself. Alanna has no father and like her mother symbolizes all that is
good and positive in the world man and spirits.

Her powers center around light, love, life. She is accountable for all of creation, has exceptional
healing abilities, and her blessings have excellent shielding capabilities as well. She is also able to
shapeshift into many forms.

All her forms are of noble animals of virtue, enlightenment, and passion. Her true form is that of an
ethereal elegant noblewoman with butterfly wings. She frequently is associated with butterflies as
well.

Her home in the Spirit World is in Limbo Valley is her gorgeous shimmering palace called
Keaparaberu and her health and powers depend on the vitality of the world and the quantity of
positive energy and life in the world.

The Sisterhood of the Dawn is the Chosen Children of Alanna, whom she chooses to be her
acolytes and do her work in the world of man. They defend the innocent, fight the darkness and
help bring light, love and hope to those who have been victimized by those that worship the ways
of Anto the Black Spirit.

Anto is the Black Spirit of Death. He's the son of the Dark Spirit Vaatu, the mortal enemy of
Raava. He has no mother and is the exact opposite of Alanna in every way. He flourishes on
corruption, hatred, unenlightenment.

Though he does bring about death he frequently strives to bring about an irregularity and looks for
humans to be his 'champions” to further plunge the world into an imbalance to feed his
unquenchable appetite and fulfill his father's dark agenda.

He can likewise shapeshift except all his forms are of death omens, his capabilities related to
wickedness, chaos, and nightmares. His home in Limbo Valley is a wasteland, and a palace made
up of ruins called Zan.

In his true form, Anto looks like 7 foot tall, bone-white skin, dressed black and blood red with his
yellow ocher cat-like eyes demon. On his chest is the emblem of a blood-red winged star and he
carries with him always his sword and whip which he uses to collect souls for the dead.

Anto doesn't like to feel cheated and if he feels you've cheated him nothing will stop him from
trying to kill you personally.
Alanna and Anto will continue to do their endless dance as will their parents. Although now and then, extraordinary souls get caught in the crossfire. Especially if these souls have a significant destiny that could turn the tide for both the fate of humanity and spirits and help either of their parents significantly.

Pray for Alanna's protection for if Anto is after you or you'll not survive devoid of the help of Alanna."

Closing the book everyone was just speechless Now they knew what they were up against. This was a matter of life and death. For the very spirits of Life and Death would determine the outcome of their quest themselves. Not just Iroh's fate but their fate and that of the Royal Family.

Oh boy, how did things go from looking so bright to downright looking so bleak in a blink of an eye?
To Be Lost is To Be Found

To Be Lost Is To Be Found

Somehow someway the gang managed to make it to their objective of Hira'a without additional assaults from the unrelenting spirit of death. They disembarked in a copse of towering magnolia trees two miles from the village so not to shock the villagers but also to conceivably not attract even more trouble.

As it was evident from the other attacks and that sinister voice of the Black Spirit himself that he was after the souls of both Team Avatar and the Lost Royal Family. Consequently, if they wish to be fruitful in this critical furthermore extremely significant endeavor including securing the Royal Fire Nation line didn't end they'd to be extremely cautious moreover observant at all times.

Everyone at that moment in time was still encountering severe tremors along with lingering aftereffects from Anto's attacks on them. The attacks had left a profound and traumatic impact on them psychologically, bodily as well as emotionally. Therefore they weren't sure just correctly how to continue at first. Fortuitously for them, it appeared that Xiaoying and the Sisterhood had previously anticipated this wouldn't be a straightforward mission and that Anto would seek to put an end to their expedition.

Therefore they'd gathered and packed all their equipment for them with all the essentials including more than a few emergency bewitcheries and wards to assist them in this treacherous crusade they had embarked on. After all, they'd beheld one of the illustrations of Anto's shapeshifter forms.

It was a monstrous 7-foot tall bipedal jet black were-cat. The illustrate declared this was his battle form and also said this little rhyme underneath it as a warning. "His fangs are sharp. He likes your taste your party better move it posthaste!"

"So guys do we have a game plan? Now that we are here?" asked Aang attempting to be his chipper self, although there was no fooling anyone. He shook still with his brush with death, possibly more then the others had he had more close calls with death than others.

"Well, the first thing in order is to blend in. At least we won't have to steal clothes this time. Seems my little godsisiter one day to be goddaughter's mommy went out of her way to make us the most fashionable outfits for this mission," Sokka laughed merrily as he opened one of the many wooden chests they had and pulled out chic tailored made outfits for each of them.

"Also looks like the Sisterhood didn't miss a beat either apparently," Katara responded cheerfully with a broad smile illuminating her attractive features as she picked up some tinier boxes. She opened a gold jewelry box with designer jewelry that would flawlessly accessorize everyone outfit.

After she had handed everyone their matching accessories, she then bent down to get a small flat box marked with Aang's name in Rei's handwriting. "This one for you, Aang. It seems Rei only made one thing for you. Don't know what it is though," she said in a puzzled voice as she handed him the box.

He looked entirely confused as he slowly opened the box and then let out a quick chuckle. They wondered why he was laughing till he pulled out what was in the box. It was a wig made from authentic hair from her salon.

It was considered stylish and made him look surprisingly sexy and fit his head so ideally. No one
would ever guess he was wearing a wig they think it was his natural hair and again all he'd need was the headband to hide the tip of his arrow.

It turned out what Saura had packed them was documents written in both in printed and the new form of writing that the Sisterhood had developed for Toph. It involved a series of raised bumps that for her would translate into a language she could read.

Jointly the Order and Sisterhood had both been working for the past two years along with Team Avatar since the war ended extremely hard to improve handicap people or other disabled people everyday lives given how awful they had seen they had it during the war.

Based on how the Beifongs had been way too overprotective of Toph to the point, she mainly wasn't even permitted to walk by herself. They didn't desire other parents to be that overprotective ever again. That it gets to them that they didn't allow their children freedom furthermore independence. So for two years, they worked to change that. By instead, provide the means to communicate and empower themselves.

As a result, Toph had spent a long time in correspondence with Healer Yang coming up with this written language for the blind. There was also now a formal sign language for the deaf, and the Mechanistic was already working harder to make better wheelchairs and other prosthetic for people like his son Teo.

So passing out the scrolls Saura had written for each of them she'd written them a cover story along with short but incredibly detailed and insightful knowledge into Fire Nation pop culture dealing the love of theater, music, literature, fashion and other topics of conversation that were likely to come up, so they weren't flying utterly blind like last time.

She also included an incredibly long list of proper manners and etiquette in ones home and at meals, in case they're invited into one's home for dinner which was also highly likely to happen on this mission and there was no reason to be disrespectful to anyone and jeopardize the achievement of the mission!

The last thing they'd gotten before they could move forward was a diamond vial filled with an unfamiliar colored fluid, a sunstone, including a list of instructions on a ceremony to perform from Healer Yang.

They left that bit to Katara to perform reckoning as a waterbender and a native healer doing a spiritual cleansing would be right up her alley. Katara did make some protest that at first and was full of the doubt since her healing powers had failed to heal Anto's marks on their body before.

Still, she ultimately gave in, and after studying the instructions thoroughly four times to make sure she understood them she then proceeded to do the spiritual cleanse one by one on everyone from Aang to Appa and Momo before doing a self-cleansing on herself.

"Okay, I'm pretty positive I've relieved us of all negative spiritual energy. Consequently, we should be purified thoroughly of all poisonous energy and influence also. Hopefully, my waterbending helped and didn't hinder the method."

"Well, I certainly do feel a lot lighter like all the heaviness from being an attack by Anto lifted, and I can breathe again, Katara," Aang admitted thoughtfully, and she beamed feeling like she had done it right after her faith in herself shaken so severely.

"Okay, now that we've done all the spirit cleaning magical junk, can we get this show on the road? We've already lost at least three days because of one pain in the butt spirit! So we better get our
"Right, okay, Sokka, which way is to the village from here? Plus, are you sure Momo and Appa are going to be protected here? Because I'm not leaving them alone out here with that mad spirit out here hunting us!"

"Well, the village is two miles due southwest of where we are. But as for Momo and Appa, I don't know how we can protect them with us gone," the Water Tribe boy confessed honestly to the Avatar who looked on the verge of breaking down again at that news.

"Why don't we crack open that Encyclopedia again then? There must be a chapter on how to ward off evil spirits. Duh!" Toph suggested as she rolled her blind eyes.

"Good idea, Toph," as Aang using his Airbender speed rushed over and got the Encyclopedia and started to read aloud to his friends who listen with rapt attention to what the book said.

"A variety of gemstones can offer person protection from evil spirits. Among them are black tourmaline, agate, bloodstone, emerald, labradorite, black onyx, and peridot. Of these, the black tourmaline is the most effective.

Another thing you can do is burn sage. You can buy it at various healing shops or even burn sage incense. Open all the windows, light it up, walk around the house, asking the ghosts to leave.

Various herbs are recommended to help cleanse the home of evil. A few that are easier to obtain are anise, amaranth, basil, cacao, cayenne, chamomile, clove, cumin, dill, and fennel. Each herb has a specific use and tackles different kinds of hauntings. Use wisely.

Ghosts and evil spirits tend to stay away from people with clean auras. So how do you keep your aura cleansed? Yoga. White sage. Copal. Incense. Get at least 15 minutes of exposure to sunlight each day." Aang finished reading aloud and closed the Encyclopedia.

"Well? Did Kishi pack any other gemstones that happened to be one of those names? Or by chance did Xiaoying or Healer Yang pack any of the herbs or sage?" he wanted to know immediately.

Turned out the answer was yes. There was a second jewelry box full of nothing but the gems as mentioned earlier along with a chest overflowing of the herbs and sage again with a list of directions with how to correctly use them in protecting someone.

So Aang using his firebending lit the sage incense and then using his airbending allowed the whole area for at least a mile get saturated with the sage until it would chock an ostrich horse.

Toph using her earthbending delicately arranged a large circle of the gemstones in a protective circle and in the order that was recommended in the scroll that had the instructions on them. Meanwhile, inside the ring, Sokka and Katara made sure there plenty of the herbs scattered about to keep both Momo and Appa safe.

Once they'd taken care of making sure the last bit of protection they're at last ready to go forth and enter the village. By now it was two hours past noon as they finally came into the town.

To their surprise when they came into the village they initially didn't see anybody at first. Questioning where everyone was when they suddenly heard the sound of young voices coming from the center of town.

They headed over to the sound of the voices and came to an outdoor theater where the were rows of benches made to look like beautiful dancing dragons. Two incredibly sexy teenagers on stage
 seemed to be entirely caught up on whatever play they were doing they didn't notice them at all.

The boy was very tall with a rather sexy looking body. He had shoulder-length curly raven black hair, smooth alabaster skin, thin arched eyebrows, slanted cinnamon-brown eyes, and a strong jaw.

He was dressed very casually with his hair in a traditional topknot and the rest of his long raven curls cascading down to his shoulders and a cadmium red feather at a jaunty angle in his topknot with a matching one around his neck. His clothes were a short-sleeved deep v-neck carnelian colored shirt with falu red pants and new open-toed sandals with wrist bands of both reds mixed.

The girl on the stage was also tall at least 5'7 with a fit curvy body that was well-endowed. She had wavy copper-colored tresses, possessing a face with an ageless quality, elfish features, and cinnamon brown eyes and smooth alabaster skin.

Even standing on a temporary balcony, they saw her outstanding beauty. Her waist-length wavy copper-color hair had styled in a super cool way. A topknot with an elegant bun at the back of her head with the rest falling in cascading waves. She'd used some hair accessories made from both sunburst pearls and persevered fire lilies string through her hair three times as it went down.

She also did this with her earrings, necklace, and bracelets. Her outfit was in two tones of amaranth and sky magenta, which was a sleeveless vest, over a crop top, maxi skirt and flats.

Right now the girl on the balcony was speaking to the boy below her, and she was pouring her heart and soul out to him, and for some reason, everyone couldn't tell if this was acting or for real.

"My dearest Kazuo, by the first fires of the dragons! I feared you wouldn't make it tonight! Not with my father doubling the guards after he almost spotted you the night before last!

Why must our love be so consider forbidden to our families when true love burns brighter the flame that is the sun? That true love is, in fact, the eternal sun a torch of fire that never burns out?"

The boy below was on his knees below and serenaded with romantic words "I do not know why the concepts of what is views as honor or dishonor, or what some see as right or wrong mix with tradition. Then is warped by hate within the minds of those who say they know love and love us my beloved, Aiko.

I only know they do not realize what we have is stronger than even the powers of the Avatar himself. A thousand shirshu couldn't track our love or broken with a thousand swords.

I know that for all the talk of honor, tradition, right and wrong? It is those whose cursed blood flows in our wrong veins, and we are right for what is beating in our chest right now cannot be wrong. For how is the heart ever wrong when love is never sin and the most right and purest thing in all world?"

The girl on the balcony walked to the edge of the balcony. She plucked a flower and sniffed it once. She replied to the boy beneath her balcony. "I know the words we speak our truth, but if I'm in danger or something should happen, how do I know you'll come for me? How do I know we shall always be together when so many try to rip us apart?

Even try to bond us to another? How do I know when I fear even if they force the Fire Lord to break us apart? How do I know nothing will break us apart?"

The handsome young man rose and with such firm conviction pronounced each word with passion and devotion
"Listen to my words and the song my heart sings to you and know from this I vow and know I mean they're true beloved," and then sank onto one knee and sang to his beloved.

She stood on her balcony under a painted background of a moonless sky. He began to sing the ballad in the story.

"I hear the wind call your name. It is the sound that leads me home. It sparks up the fire within me the flame of true love burns, and I know its too I will always return.

No matter how long the road is, I'll always come home. Because wherever you are in my home. For wherever you stay, I'll find my way too you. I follow the rivers, and I'll chase the sun soaring like the Phoenix until I'm back where I belong.

I can't stand the distance, and I'll never dream alone! I can't wait to see you when I finally come home! Know this is true for the only road home always leads me to you!

In my hour of darkness, your light will lead me back to you! Pass the rivers of gold and past the very sun itself soaring higher than even Phoenix ever flew!

You are the one! For every sunset and all the lessons that ever learned, the most important I've learned is that I will always return to you!"

The girl smiled a romantic smile with tears in her eyes then jumped from the balcony into her beloved's arms and they kiss.

As they're kissing they suddenly became aware they weren't alone when they heard a lot of whooping and applauds and looking up they saw a group of four unfamiliar teenagers looking at.

They both flushed carmine and got out of their awkward pose and tried to look professional. Like they'd hadn't been using the balcony scene as an excuse to get in a forbidden make-out session which in truth was what they'd been doing.

"Hello," the teenage boy who was still blushing said in an awkward tone with half-wave.

"That was truly amazing! You two are WAY better than the Ember Island Players! Trust us on that one! We saw them one time and boy, are they terrible! They assassinated the Avatar and his friends' characters so bad, there still a lawsuit pending on it!" the youngest boy spoke with such enthusiasm as he praised them.

"Really? You think two country bumpkins are better than the most famous actors in all of the Fire Nation?" asked the girl, confused. Everyone knew the Ember Island Players were the most well know acting troop in all the Fire Nation. They got all the attention and stardom.

There no way someone gives two 18-year-old kids that kind of recognition no way. But he was frank as he went on telling them why he hated their play so much based on the Avatar. How it was fallacious with the details, having a girl play the avatar, again the character defamation and how pretentious everything looked. It was beyond sucky and didn't even feel like real acting, and of course, the ending sucked.

"Well, thank you so much for your compliments...?" the boy asked looking for his name.

"Um, my name is Kuzon. These are my friends Katara her older brother Sokka and our friend Toph. We are students at Fire Nation Capital University." Aang explained using part of the cover story that been in the script the Sisterhood given them. No need to announce to everyone the avatar was in town!
"Really? Did you come to a humble little nobody village-like Hira’a from the Capital? Why?" asked the girl trying to see what their angle was in all this.

"Well, we just enrolled at the University this year you see. And we're taking Professor Kami class. He's a teacher of anthropology, and he's giving each member of his class an assignment now that war over you see," Aang began to explain again attempting his to do own acting and knowing he wasn't nearly as good as these two were.

"What kind of assignment?" the boy actor wanted to know curiously.

"Well, he wants his students to rediscover the true Fire Nation culture lost during the 100-year war. So he's assigned different groups to go to different locations throughout the Fire Nation. To relearn their cultural origins and various topics to do with the area."

"Okay, so why did he assign you four to our village?" the boy asked again curious to see what led these four to his humble home.

"We were assigned here to learn about the history of Fire Nation theater but also Hira’a connection to the Royal Family given the recent eighth anniversary of their passing," Aang spoke in a rush. It was amazing he didn't airbend out of panic.

"OH that," the two teens looked a little abashed about something before speaking again.

"We really should introduce ourselves and show you proper hospitably. After all, we can help you with your research as our family, the expert in both. Well as much as you can get," revealed the girl sheepishly.

"My name is Kazuo, and this is my fire lily Aiko," the boy started to introduce themselves when Sokka interrupted in a slightly rude tone.

"I thought you guys were acting a few moments ago. You telling me you weren't?" he asked confused.

"No, no, we were acting. We were rehearsing for the first production of our favorite story, "The Promise of the Fire Lily." explained Aiko laughing merrily as she was thinking, "Here we go again," "We get this all the time. My birth mom and Kazuo's mom LOVED the theater and Fire Nation literature so much they named us and Kazuo's little sister Kioko after the characters in the story."

"Oh, so you were acting, but you just are also using your real names at the same time. That must be a little weird," Katara noted at that little curiosity but took it in stride. People could name their children whatever they wanted for whatever reason. After all, Yue had been named after the moon.

"Not as weird as people can't get over the fact we just happened to grow to look like our namesakes. Some people grow to look like their pets, thankfully we didn't grow to look like our pets!" laughed Kazuo so hard it looked like he was in stitches from how much he was smiling.

"Yeah, I don't think we want to look like a fox-hawk or a rabaroo, Kaz. But no, it's just pure coincidence is all. Though speaking of our pets, do you see a lilac and pink fox-hawk anywhere? Kai usually stays with us while Ting-Ting keeps an eye on Kioko when were out," Aiko asked in a worried voice.

"I think I hear something snoring loudly in the fourth row on the left side," Toph said, and Aiko rushed off the stage and found her pet. "Hey, Kai! Wake up, sleepyhead! We've got guests!" as she picked him up and cradled him in her arms.
The fox-hawk slowly woke up, scratched his right ear before looking alarmed at who he saw and tried to get away before Aiko settled him down. "Kai, behave! Don't you start acting naughty now! C'mon, let's find Kioko and then give our new friends a proper tour of the village and then dinner."

"Knowing my sister as I do, she's sneaking her make-out session with Shun in the prop warehouse. I mean, she said she was going with Umi for a 'fitting' that was over an hour ago!"

"Yeah, and that's about the time Shun was supposed to come and fix the backdrop for the set. Let's get them all before Dad finds out, and we will be forbidden from dating for a month for 'dishonoring' ourselves!"

As the two Fire Nation teens lead the ways Aang couldn't help but ask, "Excuse me but what's wrong with kissing? I mean, your what 17 years old?"

"18 actually but our parents forbid us from having a make-out session. They don't want us to get too serious and then go too far we dishonor ourselves," Aiko explained in short.

Team Avatar didn't say or do anything as the two teenager actors lead the way. They got to the prop warehouse, which had something blocking the door, preventing it from being open. Amorous noises were coming from inside, and Kazuo muttered, "Kioko," and kicked the door hard, and there was a scream as two teenagers fell over into the already messy room.

One was a teenage girl and the other a teenage boy. The teenage girl had cascading chestnut locks, sharp nose, sculpted features, cinnamon brown eyes, and flawless alabaster skin. Her beautiful hair in a topknot with rest falling over her right shoulder.

She wore a sunburst yellow lightweight cardigan over an amaranth pink sundress with a flower embellished into the skirt and a choker with pink diamonds decorating it with matching bracelets and flats.

Her boyfriend had light suntan skin, honey-colored eyes, with brown sugar colored hair and well-sculpted features. He also was handsome with his longish hair, and a coquelicot sleeveless vest over his lava red shirt, pants, and wristbands and rings of fire tattoos on his biceps.

There was a pit-patter of feet, and someone else emerged from the side entrance of the warehouse looking somewhat guilty under Kazuo's gaze. She had the same light suntan skin, honey-colored eyes, with brown sugar colored hair and well-sculpted features. But was dressed in a very cute in her byzantine colored slip dress accented with her gold and pezzottaite jewelry and her long braided pigtails.

"Kazuo! I... I know..." but Kazuo raised his hand look at the trio hiding in the warehouse.

"Umi, you don't need to cover for my sister and your twin brother. I mean hello me and Aiko were only rehearsing the balcony scene, so we have the excuse to make-out ourselves.

Either way, you and Shun better get home. You both neglected your chores for a week! If you want to be allowed to hang out with Shun or us to go another date with Kioko, you better get home now."

"Got that right! If we don't get those chores done right now, we won't be allowed to see you three in the play on Saturday! Don't want to miss that! Come on, brother haul butt! And for Fire Fire sake wipe the lipstick off!" as she threw a silk scarlet handkerchief at him and wiped off Kioko's bright pink lipstick off his face.

"See you both later!" as the twins exited stage right.
"What was all that about?" Team Avatar wanted to know not knowing who was who or what the heck was going on at all.

"Ugh, my boyfriend and his twin sister like us have to make sure to complete all their chores or they can't hang out with us or go out on dates. By the way, Kaz who are the four strangers?" grumbled Kaz's little sister as she straightens her cardigan and got off the ground.

"They are four students from Capital University. That new professor we heard about through grapevine Professor Kami sent them here to research both the theater and Hira'a connection to the Royal Family."

"Oh, I guess they'll want to talk to Dad then. But as Mom would say, proper manners first. Besides, Dad won't be home till after he's done attending Kiyi's parent-teacher conference with Ms. Lal."

"Yeah, we know that, Kioko. So let's show them around town. That's after we find Ting-Ting, who must be buried under all this junk. By the First Fire, does this place ever get cleaned or organized?" Aiko asked aloud as she threw up her hands.

"Um, we could help you clean it up if that made you happy. My brother is the best organizer you ever have seen, and you could tell us a little about yourself while we work?" suggested Katara respectfully.

The trio looked at themselves and shrugged, "Well, Dad is constantly moaning he can't find anything in here. Okay, let's make this organized. Do you have a plan of attack?" Kazuo asked Sokka who was grinning like tiger seal.

"Kaz one thing you should know about Sokka he's got at least SIX plans handy all at once!" Toph informed him as she hit him the arm as they all started to clean things up.

Sokka may not know anything really about drama or Fire Nation theater; however, he was accommodating when it came to getting things organized. To him, this was no different than when the Water Tribe held their weapons by name, size, shape, and style or where things should go for food storage.

So roughly within two hours for the first time in Hira'a history, the prop warehouse was ultimately cleaned up properly. Everything was duly put away and organized in an orderly fashion that made sense.

The three Fire Nation kids whistled appreciatively. "Dad gonna be so happy about this! He's like wanted it this way forever! C'mon let's give you a tour of the rest of the town and then get you a drink at Ms. Zalika and Mr. Iye before we got home for dinner?" suggested Kioko as they left.

"So to recap what you're were telling us while we're cleaning and organizing. You've lived here as long as you can remember?" Katara inquires to them as they left the warehouse and made their way towards the main village.

"Well, "As long as we can remember doesn't necessarily translate to the norm, Katara," admitted Kaz hesitantly as he held some brush out of the way for the girls.

"What do you mean actor boy?" Toph asked, suddenly looking in his general direction. She couldn't see him but was trying to tell what he was talking about.

"Well, it's like this Toph we aren't originally from Hira'a," Aiko began to clarify what they meant as they stopped just short of the firebending school.
"You're not? You mean you weren't born here?" Sokka asked in astonishment, and Aiko shook her head sorrowfully before elaborating.

"The three of us and our mother came from a village far away and forgotten. Evil spirits cursed it. Someone or somebodies generations ago must have done something highly offending the spirits because they placed a curse on the village and the land.

For the next several generations curse after curse plagued the village, just endless suffering and pointless death. It got to the point half the mothers were dying in childbirth while half the children were stillbirths. That's how it was for my mom. She died in childbirth, so my mom's best friend raised me."

"But then came the final Ten Plagues. The worst Ten Plagues the spirits could rain down on the village to finish off everyone. We barely escaped and only by some miracle made it here.

But we were so ill and near death we slipped into a coma and our father Noreen found us and cared for us. We spent a long time in a coma, and when we woke up, we found we lost a lot of our memories from both the fever and being in a coma. A final curse from that village we came from," Kioko explained to them their tragic story.

"After we awoke and recovered Noreen legally became all three of our father and married Mom, and we became a family, and then our true lives started. So for us, life began truly eight years ago." Kazuo finished describing their story.

"Wow, that's one of the most heartbreaking stories I've ever heard. To have so much pain and anguish in your life and then lose half your life in the process." Katara couldn't believe it. How many tragic stories did the world hold? How many did she have to hear about in her lifetime? She didn't know how many more her tender heart could take.

"It's not that a big deal. Hira'a is home, and we're happy. Two years after living here, our little sister Kiyi was born, and our family was complete. So we're all happy. And we've got the best pets in the world.

we don't dwell on the past. We live in the moment and the here and now." Aiko assured them as they came tea shop and ordered some tea and cookies.

"So we told you about our life stories. Why don't you tell us a little more about yourselves? Like what did you do before you got accepted into the Fire Nation Capital University?" Kioko wanted to know as she munched on her cookie.

"We lost our mother in the war, and our father fought in the war," Katara replied. If they wanted to succeed and not tip off anyone who they were or especially tip-off Anto, they couldn't reveal who they were.

"Sorry to hear that Katara. Too many people all over the world lost their lives and souls in that pointless war. I wish we could do more than say we're sorry for your loss. Like we could truly make it up to you somehow," Kazuo admitted as he sipped his tea slowly.

"Yes, wish we could do more to ensure that the Fire Nation indeed left a legacy of love for future generations and not ever again a legacy of bloodshed. But there nothing we can do, Kaz.

I mean we've all wanted to do something for years to help the Fire Nation and better the world. But alas we've done nothing and have no power to do so sadly," Aiko admitted in defeat.

"Yeah, the closet we came to do anything for the Fire Nation was two years ago when we honored
the royal family. Princess Ursa and her children along with her friends by performing "Phoenix Heaven"

It's a play as well as a ballet. Princess Ursa and her best friends and true love all performed in when they're 16 years old. The village honored their memory when Fire Lord Ozai wouldn't honor them by performing it.

Well, to be perfectly honest we did. I was the actress who performed Agnimitra, and Kazuo and Aiko did the ballet. We pulled out all the stops to honor Princess Ursa, Prince Zuko, Princess Azula, and Lady Akiko during the Summer Solstice." Kioko admitted with some pride in her voice.

"Dad said we did a great job and if the royal family been watching they would've said we did them proud," Aiko recalled with a proud smile of her own.

"Yeah, it was an amazing feeling to honor them and do that performance that hadn't been done in 21 years," Kaz paused and looked at four kids with them. "Are you guys taking notes or gonna be able to remember this all, or should we be writing this down for you?"

"Oh! Sorry! We're just so district by your charming village and making friends with you all that we forgot about taking notes. But don't worry, Sokka and Toph are very good and remembering. I'm sure they won't forget the important information we need for our assignment, will you guys, right?" Aang emphasized with a forced smile.

"Yeah, no problem, Aa...I mean Kuzon, won't forget anything for the paper! You can count on me!" Sokka quickly mended his words.

"Don't worry, Twinkle Toes! I never forget the voice. I'm blind but not deaf. I only choose when I don't listen, but I do hear everything."

"Oh, are you gonna be using that fantastic new writing system they invented for blind people to read? I heard it's going to be part of the modern world the world leaders are trying to build.

It would be nice to contribute something like that to the world. Or at least something to help some people who've been victims or hurt in some way by society," Kaz sighed heavily.

"Kaz? You don't mind if I call you Kaz, right?"

"No, I don't, Kuzon."

"You sound like you want to make a real difference in the world. Like, do something big and important. Is there a reason for it?"

"Just some feeling more per se. I have these feelings inside of me that I should be helping people, especially for children who have been hurt to protect them. Just feeling inside my heart. But can't say more than that."

"I want to help orphans or children who've been abandoned. Again just gut feelings can't say more than that," Aiko added in a sort of mysterious way.

"I want to help confused people. Who doesn't understand what love, family, and friendship are? Who might lose their humanity because their minds have been twisted and their souls all but were stolen? That's who I wish to help," Kioko expressed in own funny mysterious way.

Team Avatar looked at the three Fire Nation teens who sighed as they paid the bill before saying one more time. "We don't know why we feel so strongly about some of the things we do."
We have strong feelings and opinions about specific subjects. REALLY STRONG. And all of us have just wanted for as long as we can remember what to do something big and help others." Kazuo revealed as he leads the group to their house.

"Still we couldn't leave the safety of our home or leave our parents and little sister. Our place is here. Still, I don't know it's weird when your heart and mind say two different things." Aiko shrugged as they continued to walk home.

"Yes, it is. But don't think we regret our lives here. We truly love our family and our home and wouldn't change any of it for any reason. C'mon Dad and Kiyi should be home by now!" Kioko was smiling now as they quickened the pace.

When they got to the humble home, everyone was ushered inside. "Mom! We're home! And we brought guests!" called out Kazuo and out of the kitchen came a decidedly plain-looking woman compared to the beautiful teenagers.

"Hello, welcome to our humble home. My name is Noriko. I guess it's a good thing I had a feeling dinner was going to be much larger tonight. So that why I made so much extra," she smiled sweetly.

"Mom you always know if we have guests before we do!" teased Kioko as she knowingly looked at her mother.

"Oh, a woman has her secrets, Kioko. So let's get to accommodate our guests, shall we? Kazuo, make sure the dining room is properly prepared? Aiko makes sure to give Kai and Ting-Ting their bath and are groomed so they're proper for our guests? Kioko, please make Kiyi ready for our guests?"

"Yes, Mom," the three teens fell into line obediently and did as their mother said.

"Is there anything we can do to help you, Noriko?" asked Katara courteously and the woman smiled tenderly.

"Oh, as a good host I should be entertaining you. Though if you wish, you can help in the kitchen by finishing making the food. Do you four need a place to sleep? Sadly Hira'a doesn't have an inn. We'd be happy to put you up for your stay. It's no problem. We've some extra blankets and sleeping pallets in the hall closet if you do decide to stay," she offered.

"We'd be honored to be guest in your home, Madam Noriko. We'll make sure to do our fair share of the work to earn our keep. It's the least we can do for your generous hospitably." Aang said with a bow.

"Yeah, like anything we can do to help, we'll do it. I think I'll get some water from the water pump then go help your husband some," Sokka told Noriko and Toph not sure what to do.

"Um, if you'd be so kind Toph, I really could use some help with the laundry right now. I got so caught up expecting guests I didn't get around to bringing it in or folding it."

"Sure me and Twinkle Toes can do that no problem. No problem. C'mon on," as she yanked him by the collar as they went outside.

"I can't believe we're on a mission and right now we are on laundry duty! Twinkle Toes, how did we get into this mess? How is this helping us find the royal family?" demanded Toph bitterly as they went and got the stuff off the clothesline.
"Well, they did say they had the most knowledge, and it gives us a place to stay Toph. Would you rather be out in the cold or rain?"

"Okay point taken. But something odd about this family," Toph grumbled as she ripped the linen from the clothesline down.

Aang jerked up suddenly from what he was doing when she said that. "What do you mean?" he asked perplexed by her remark.

"Don't know but I feel something slightly off when they're talking earlier. Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko were talking passionately about a subject that would seem quite personal. I can feel all their bodies physically reactions. But it was weird."

'What was weird about it?" Aang got as close as figured was safe to get to Toph who didn't like people invading her personal space.

"Like they have a physical and emotional response to something deeply personal. Very traumatic and be painful memory. But as far I as I could tell from their words, they have no memories of such things happening to them, and yet their body reacts as if experienced it countless times."

"Are you saying it's like their heart remembers something but their mind doesn't?" Aang asked her to clarify if what she was saying.

"That be the only way to put it Twinkle Toes. It's sort of reminds me of what we experienced in Ba Sing Se with Long Feng and his Dai Lee and their brainwashing. But they're just suppressing memories.

Almost like the memories were taken right out of their head. But their hearts never forget. Also, something about Noriko tells me there more to her then meets the eye too. She is not telling the whole truth about something, either." Toph just summed up what she could from her unique observation skills.

Aang and Toph kept what they said to themselves as they went back inside and were introduced to six-year-old Kiyi, who was a charming and precious little girl. She seemed very attached to her necklace and her doll who she named after herself.

After getting halfway through dinner and making the necessary smile talk, they got to the point of them being here. Again using their cover story as an opening they got Noreen to talk.

"Not many people are around anymore who remember Ursa or her best friends Xiaoying and Sakiko. But there are some stories you can still hear from now and then. But virtually no one knows Ursa came from this village.

Seeing how it's custom that marrying into the Fire Nation Royal Family you are supposed to forget your past and become more like a mere possession of your husband and no longer a person.

But from those who can remember Ursa along with her best friends were inseparable like their mothers and grandmothers before them. They're more than best friends they're sisters to the point it was like they're linked at the soul. At least that how the village talks about it from the few who can remember them." Noreen spoke about Ursa in her younger days to captivating days.

"Everyone remembers Ursa for her kind nature and her beautiful smile. And she and her love Ikem should've had a storybook ending. I wasn't here at the time, but their tale is so tragic.

From what I learned she was forced to accept Ozai's hand in marriage, she wasn't given a choice.
This was right after she agreed to marry her true love. They'd planned to seek out her best friends whom she hadn't seen in three years." Noriko recalled the story the village told.

"From what the village remembers Ursa forced her love away to save him from Ozai and then Ikem in heartbreak left the village never to return. He went to the one place if you want to go die you'll surely meet that fate." Kazuo informed them.

"Where that?"

"The Forbidden Valley, of course, it's boundaries the edge of the village. There is all kind of stories of monsters, spirits, and stories, if you walk in you, don't walk out. It's suicide to go in there!" Aiko explained how it got its name.

"Only the brave, foolish or brokenhearted go there and all meet the same fate. None return and all you hear is their ghosts who come back to haunt the village on Day of the Dead along with the other monsters," Kioko explained the rest of the story.

"Please stop talking about that scary place, please!" Kiyi cried, and her mother held her tightly.

"Sorry about that, Kiyi," as her mother kissed her forehead. Turning back to the gang, "But as you can see, that's why it was so tragic. No one knows for sure what happened to the Royal Family after all those scandalous rumors, then you have what happened to poor Ikem and then the unknown fates of Xiaoying and Sakiko. It's all over tragedy." as Noriko said this everyone couldn't help but catch a faint glow around her neck.

It was just for a split second, but it was enough for everyone to notice her locket finally. Katara decided to be the one to ask about it. "Noriko?"

"Yes?"

"I've never seen a locket such as the one you're wearing. And our professor's twin sister is a famous jewelry designer. Her name is Kishi, perhaps you have heard of her? She's quite famous throughout the Fire Nation and now spreading throughout the Four Nations that war over."

"That name sounds vaguely familiar. Likely some of her trinkets have made their way to Trader Kito's trading post. But if you're asking if she designed my locket? No, she didn't. This is a family heirloom, it's been in my family for over a hundred years and was a gift to the family. One of my ancestors saved someone's life a long time ago, and they gave them this locket as a token of their gratitude, and it's been passed down the family line since then." Noriko explained her locket origins.

"Oh, it just looks like something she would've designed is all."

"Sorry but it's not."

"Well, if you don't mind, we're going to take a short walk through the town and talk to a few more people to get a little more feedback from people for the paper, and we'll be back to sleep." Aang excused them from the table.

"Alright, if you get back really late there a key under the lantern. We could give you a starting point. Hope you wake up in time for breakfast." Noriko replied as she and her family began to clean up dinner.

"We'll be here for breakfast. I promise." Aang promised to the kind family and with honorable
bows they left.

"Well, they sure are sweet family. Lucky, too, given all the tragic things to happen to them." Sokka admitted once they were out the door.

"Yeah, a happy, loving family. You don't find many blended families that know the meaning of family. They truly are a happy family."

"They are hiding something," Toph said in dark voice.

"What? What kind of dark secret could such a happy family be hiding Toph?!" demanded Katara angrily.

"I'm not sure but something fishy is going on with that family. I don't know what it is! But their words and their body reactions don't match up! Ugh! This is so frustrating!"

"What the heck are you talking about, Toph?" Sokka asked confused.

"I don't know what it is! But I think they are lying, but they don't even know they are lying! I think the only one who isn't lying is the six-year-old! Like she's out of the loop! But everyone else they are hiding something! The husband knows the most! That I can get clearly!

But his wife? And her kids?! I don't know how else to say it, but their minds don't know something, but their hearts do! And I'm not so sure about those pets either! I can't see them, but I could feel their stares on us, and their body reactions were just as strange as those wolves Anto sic on us!"

"So what do you think it all means? Because none of what you said makes any sense at all, Toph!" both Water Tribe siblings said in unison surprised they even were speaking that way.

"I think there only one place we're going to get answer guys. And that's the Forbidden Valley. C'mon!" Aang stated as they hurried to catch up to him as he hauled hoof to that forbidden place to seek the answers that eluded everyone else for eight years.
The Forgotten Valley

It was twilight by the time the gang ultimately approached the Forgotten Valley. It was identified by a giant wooden sign informing them this was the spot along with a surprisingly ample warning regarding how those who walked in don't walk out. There were also numerous other ungainly marks and other graffiti from years of villagers who either had added advice or else confirmed their death signatures.

"Forgotten Valley? Charming name, really and look what it says here, Aang. "All who enter take heed, for their memory will be forgotten forever indeed. Peril awaits all who enter this valley who have no respect, so you best trek back. You have been warned." Sokka read aloud the huge old weather-worn sign. He gulped down a lot of trepidation after seeing that.

"Sokka stop being a scared chicken-cat! We have got a job to do! We are still in a serious time crunch. So buck up already!" his sister told him firmly.

"Katara in case this somehow got obliterated from your short term memory we have got the Spirit of Death after us! Furthermore, we are about to waltz right into a place we're told people to go in to DIE. Forgive me for thinking this isn't the best idea!" he shot back at her furiously.

"Hey, will you two knock it off! Please? You're not a bunch of babies anymore! Geez! You did help end a war, you know!" snapped Toph irritated with them squabbling so much. Man, what bee had flown up to their butts? Sheesh!

'Guys, can we all stop arguing, please? I think we can all acknowledge if we give in to despair or start exhibiting negative energy that it will draw in Anto. At least that's what I believe we can gather from the chapter on him and Alanna from the Encyclopedia. Plus the reason why Healer Yang felt it was indispensable she left us with the tools to do spiritual cleansing to protect ourselves better," Aang pointed out reasonably.

"Okay, Aang got a good point. We unquestionably want to keep our energy positive and clean moreover most unquestionably not to give into fear. Hopefully, that's blinding his senses for now, and he can't track us. At least let hope that how it works.

Given none of us primarily myself personally understood how any of this spirit mumbo jumbo magical gobbledygook ever worked. Although if this what Healer Yang and Aang's Avatar senses are saying will work, then I say let's go with the flow and hope it works out!" Sokka summed up for everyone winsomely.

Taking several deep calming breaths before everyone took their first footsteps into Forgotten Valley. The second you traversed the threshold into the Valley, you could feel this area was positively alive. This place had so much energy that it was twofold. It wasn't just the traditional energy that you find from everything growing. This place was most unmistakably a spiritual hot spot. This place was prospering with a power that was similar to the Spirit Oasis of the North Pole or the Swamp.

As they were leisurely hiking into the shadowy, twisting pathways shrouded in strangeness and obscurity. The place was positively creepy, magnificent and commanding all at once.

Katara was the first one to speak as a strange sensation overwhelmed her after they walked for
about half an hour. She put her hand on one of the trunks of the ancient trees, and an odd
expression expanded across her face, and she exclaimed: "Oh the Ocean and Moon!"

"Katara! Katara, what it is?!" everyone abruptly turned around to look at her and the alien face she
was making. They couldn't accurately put into words that would best describe what the expression
she was wearing was about.

"It's so strange it's a feeling, but it's more than a feeling," she began to vocalize what she was
seeking to explain but couldn't quite word. "I've forever been able to bend water, but this is
different."

"How? Is it different, Katara?" everyone was not quite figuring out what she was talking about at
all. None of what happened to them so far on this adventure had made a lick of sense, to be honest.

"I feel it. Not feel it like I sense it. I feel it in my heart and soul. Like it's a person. Like I'm one
with its spirit. As if I AM THE WATER. ALL WATER IN THE WORLD. Like I can suddenly
talk to water as again, it has a soul, and I'm one it's speaking too."

"What are you trying to say, Katara? You the Spirit of Water or something?" Aang questioned with
his eyebrows scrunched in confounding as was honestly everyone else faces in confusion.

"I can't put it into any other words except I feel as if the essence of water itself Aang has presently
flowed into my body and I'm now one with it. Like it was lurking here for some reason, and now
we are bonded," and then they took a look at the face Katara was making and looked at the tree
she had touched.

Aang rapped the tree and realized it was hollow, so he requested Toph to investigate. When Toph
did, she had the same reaction as Katara did as if she was abruptly now inhabited by the soul of the
earth itself.

Toph revealed this "Forgotten Valley" was doing both the Spirit World and Earth a tremendous
favor. Somehow beneath the whole valley buried subterrene, this valley could draw the world
poisons to it. Then they're purified and then they sent into spiritual portals back out to various parts
of the world.

"So I presume the valley and the creepiness would make sure no-one disturbs this place so it can keep
the world Eco-system in balance if that a secret job of it. But if that's one "Forgotten" secret of
this Valley. Then what's up with all these faces on the plants and animals?" Sokka asked as sure
enough there was creepy kind of faces all over the place.

"Yeah, someone unmistakably loves faces, but this place is more than the secret keeper to stop the
world from having contamination destroy the planet. This place has quite a few secrets, Sokka.
Let's try and find the heart of the valley. That should give us the answers we seek." Aang
recommended as they continued on the path.

They only walked about ten more feet before Sokka did something that might not have been the
brightest of ideas. He took out his sword and made a slash mark on a tree trunk.

"Sokka! What are you do?!" cried Aang in shock at his friend who looked wholly unrepented from
his action just now.

"Look, I'm not about to get lost and die here. I'm going to make sure we don't get lost, so I'm
marking the path. Got a problem with it?"

"Yes, I do, Sokka! Didn't you learn anything back in the Swamp?! Or when Ha-Bai took you?!
Spirit locations must be given the respect they deserve! They are sacred and the in-between our world and the Spirit World!

Showing disrespect only leads to trouble and upset the Spirits! Do you want some angry spirit to come after us? When we already got the Spirit of Death after us?!” Aang screamed at him emphatically.

"Yeah, Sokka, you're supposed to be the smart one! Besides, weren't you listening to Toph and myself?! This palace is alive in ways you can't possibly conceive! It's got a heart and soul!

Plus there that warning there for a reason! We want to make it out alive we must show respect! So don't touch anything else with your sword! Or I will shatter it! I swear I'll break it!” vowed Katara to her brother who didn't like how scary she looked.

"Okay, okay, I won't do it again! But how can we make sure we don't get lost then?” he asked practically.

"I'll take care of leaving markers, Sokka! Just don't hurt the Valley in any way!" Toph answered as she went over to a rock and using her earthbending transformed it by inscribing it with symbols of the four nations.

"Okay, at least will be able to backtrack now. So let's keep going now. So let's get going and pay attention to where we are going." Aang was glad there was some compromise between them.

They agreed that every 15 minutes that Toph would mark another rock to help them keep track of their movements. Sokka tried to lead the way by following the stars hoping it would lead the way.

Sokka was in the lead with his sword still at the ready for any danger, Katara and Toph were still undergoing some peculiar spiritual metamorphosis the deeper they went through the twisting path and as for Aang, his face muscles were hurting from the constant changing expressions he was going as they passed everything with a face.

Yet after two hours of traveling all, they'd got for their troubles was feet covered in blisters and a lot of twigs in their hair. It seemed like they'd been walking in circles given the fact to their disgust they had returned to the beginning.

"How is this even possible? We should've been in the heart of the valley! How could we've walked for two hours only to end up back where started without moving any further at all?” Sokka wanted to know given he'd been trying to determine that for the past two hours.

"It's like the Valley knows we're seeking answers and is keeping us from finding them!” Katara admitted to what the problem seemed to be.

"How can the Valley be smart enough to know what we are seeking, Sugar Queen?"

"I don't know, Toph. How about you explain what you and I have been experiencing inside both of us? And don't deny you've been feeling it too!"

"Okay, so maybe I've been feeling like there something inside me, Katara. Not that I like it. But still, spirits are so...ugh! I can't even say what I think!" Toph pouted she couldn't scream the obscenities she wanted to say as she sensed whatever was now inside her wouldn't like it.

"Guys, calm down, please!” Aang tried yet again to be the peacemaker. Why did it seem some days he felt somewhere between a camp counselor and a hostage negotiator? Especially when it came to his friends?
Why was being the Avatar so troublesome? Why was keeping the balance so difficult when just being a kid was tough enough? Keeping relationships together was difficult; keeping your family together was tough. Just normal life was complicated enough! Throw in the fact you had to keep the balance of the world? Seriously?

How does one find balance in themselves? Isn't life hard enough without adding to it? Family, friends, love, work, and so many other things? Really? This is why he didn't want to be the avatar at first, and he had long ago suspect many other avatars felt the same way.

That just being normal was hard enough without having to add to it. Still, right now Aang once again had to accept he was the Avatar and he had to keep his family together and still accomplish the mission he was given all for the sake of keeping the world in balance.

But still, seriously why did a 14-year-old kid have to do this? Normal teenagers? All they had to fret about was acne, clothes, friends and if they got caught sneaking out late at night to go out see their crushes!

Normal kids aren't asked by the leaders of countries to find their missing families and find themselves in a spiritual location with the spirit of death swearing to kill them because it felt cheated!

At that moment, Aang just sank to the ground and spread his arms wide and said out loud, "I wish we all could be normal."

That got everyone to stop fighting and look at their friend sprawled out on the ground. "Aang? Are you okay?" Katara asked him softly as he layout on the ground. He stared at the heaven above for a long time and then answered to the sky but not looking up to her face.

"No, Katara, I'm not alright. We've been through thick and thin, and we are family. I wouldn't change that. However, I can't help but still long for a sense of normalcy. Like right now I wish we could be regular kids. I'm exhausted of being the Avatar and all of this fighting and arguing. Wouldn't it be great if you could pretend to be someone else and no one ever knew who you were?

That you could become someone else and then you wouldn't be burden with the responsibility of your old life? Just be someone else and live the life you desired? That must be great to have a second life and start over!"

"Well, how would anyone do that, Twinkle Toes? How could anyone completely vanish without a trance and get a brand new life? You got a new life when you reincarnated into the next nation in the cycle."

"I don't mean that, but I think I'm feeling what the royal family must have been thinking eight years ago. They came here thinking of starting over. They wanted to forget a painful and abusive past. Wouldn't that be wonderful if they got their wish? A second chance to start over as brand new people and live the kind of life they always dreamed of? Not have to be the royal family?"

"But Aang even you were told and had to accept you can't run away from who you are. That we must accept who we are. You are the Avatar, and the Royal Family must be accepted; they are who they are." Katara told him as he finally sat up.

"But still Katara, haven't you ever wished you could be someone else? I mean, we heard how messed up their lives were, and we heard how bad the Legion was. Who wouldn't give up anything
to be given a do-over? A second chance?"

"But Aang that's still not even possible. There just no way to get a second chance like that. It's just not possible. Nothing can make that happen." Sokka told him seriously.

"Maybe, Sokka, maybe not. I think there only one way to know for sure. But we still have to find the one who can give us those answers, and I think I know a way to get them."

'How that, Twinkle Toes? Your past lives got the answers?"

"No, but it never hurts to ask politely."

"What?!" everyone exclaimed in shock as Aang walked forward about 15 feet and then bowed in Airbender style and spoke in the most well-mannered way you could imagine.

"Spirits of the Forgotten Valley, I Avatar Aang, humbly asks for your guidance and help. I promise myself and my friends mean you and this land no harm, and we shall not defile this sacred place and pay you and all within this Valley proper respect.

We merely respectfully ask for your assistance to aid us in our quest. So if you would please send us a guide to take us where we need to be, we'd be ever so grateful. Thank you very much."

For a few moments nothing happened and then suddenly instead of moonlight breaking through the treetops it was the radiant golden sparkling sunlight. A beautiful song that was filled with love and life resonating throughout the Valley and once it enters their hearts it filled them up with such life they felt as if they'd just been born.

As if the sunlight was a spotlight was a most magnificent and beautiful bird any of them had ever seen. The size of a swan with a long luxurious tail and abundant plumage on its head and singing like a voice out of a dream with eloquent azure blue eyes and they swore it could smile.

One look at is the noble creature, and they knew this was their ticket to finding the answers they sought. The bird sang one long note and started to fly, and they all ran as fast as they could to keep up with.

The bird was as graceful as she was beautiful and kept at an even steady pace as she flew. She kept checking to make sure they're keeping pace with her as she led them through the mysterious twisting paths.

What should've taken hours only took a few minutes as they seemed to reach the destination she had in mind, but the bird seemed terrified by something unexpected? She had brought them to a large crystal blue pond.

But clearly, she hadn't expected to see a monstrosity fighting an old female waterbender who was defending a man wearing a strange wooden mask over his face. Team Avatar took a quick look at what was going on.

It was an enormous ophidian of some kind with golden eyes the size an Earthbending Fight Ring. Its iris glowed so intensely you think everything for the rest of your life is tinted gold. The monster's ridged forehead and tapered snout made it look an eel than a snake as his hide glistened with the patchwork of red and black. Even from where they stood they smelled his stale breath and long perfect rows and rows of sharp teeth.

Yet they all saw the distinctive emblem on the chest of the beast and knew this was Anto! Even though they'd lost the two previous battles, they went right into battles hearts blazing ready to take
on the Spirit of Death again.

The old woman waterbender had been using the flowers like ice disks to defend herself and now stumbled to the ground and as Anto was about to swallow her whole Katara pulled off a move she has never done before.

She somehow caused it to rain down hail that began to bombarded Anto with hail that felt like repeated ice cannonballs hitting him. And if having ice cannonballs were bad so were iron ones as Toph used her seismic sense to sense the iron in the ground and gathered it into giant cannonballs and kept smacking him with it.

Sokka had gone to protect the down old Water Tribe and managed to awake them enough and get them to cover while Toph and Katara continued with the cannonball attack.

Aang had headed to the sky and was trying to force a storm to occur so natural lightning would occur. He'd never learned how to do the rare high-level technique of lightning, but he knew enough about storms how natural lightning was made.

So using his bending he quickly conjured up a thunderstorm and seeing how water doesn't mix with lightning, and it hits the tallest thing first Anto had inadvertently put himself in the perfect place to be a target.

He let out his bloody screech when the lightning bolt hit him as shrieked and flailed as Aang flew swiftly downward from the turbulent skies and joined his friends on the moistened terrain. Anto was still smoking as he glared with pure hatred at them again as he seethed sinisterly, "Clever, Avatar, clever, this round goes to you. But I still have your soul in the end." as the stupendous ophidian escaped into the shadowy woodlands still smoldering like something that been on the campfire too long.

"Do you think he'll come back?" Katara asked in an apprehensive voice even as she used the increased energy in her to calm the storm overhead with a flick of her wrist.

"If he does, we'll be waiting. Though we barely prevailed this time, Katara. Furthermore, that was only because we caught him by surprise. He wasn't expecting us at all. Plus, I'm willing to bet those funny feelings inside you and me gave us an edge. Neither of us done bending like that before. Doubt we could do it outside this place again, Sugar Queen."

"Toph's right. He was caught off guard as he was entirely focused on who was previously here. Therefore his attention wasn't focused on us, and I think your spirit magnified bending did greatly assist us as it did mine.

I don't think we would've stood a chance otherwise. Still, let's find out what's going on before he does come back." Aang advised everyone as they looked over their shoulders as Sokka was now leading over the old Water Tribe pair who had been the ones the Black Spirit been attacking.

"Thank you for saving us from that monstrosity. In all the time we've been hiding in this valley, we've never encountered the likes of him before," spoke the old woman in a gracious voice. The man didn't say anything but merely nodded his head.

"You're welcome. But that was no ordinary monster, I'm afraid. It was Anto the Black Spirit of Death." Katara explained morosely as she shook the older waterbender hand.

"Anto?! Oh, I can't believe death is coming for my brother and me now! Not when we've waited so long and are so close for what we've fought so long and hard for!" the old woman looked outraged.
rather than worried about what just transpired, so that raised a few eyebrows.

After all, no one knew why two Water Tribe people were in a Fire Nation Spirit Valley, but then again they didn't know who they were or why they were there either.

"Excuse us perhaps we should back up some and introduce ourselves and explain how we all ended up here," suggested Sokka to which everyone nodded. That would be logical as well as the polite thing to do given the circumstances.

"That would be a beneficial idea, child. Why don't you four go first?"

"Well, I'm Katara, and that's my brother Sokka, and we're from the Southern Water Tribe."

"I'm Toph Beifong, and I'm the world greatest Earthbender!"

"And I'm Aang the Avatar."

'The Avatar? Here? Of all places? Maybe you could help us!' exclaimed the elder woman as if all her dreams had finally come true at last.

"How could I help you...?" asked Aang reaching for their names.

"Misu and this is my brother Rafa. We're from the Northern Water Tribe. Years ago, in our youth, a tragedy happened. You see me and my brother were as different as night and day. I was well-behaved, attentive, and followed the rules. My brother, on the other hand, was the exact opposite. He loved to misbehave, adventurous, and break the rules. He especially loved to take things just for the sheer fact he could.

One day, his luck ran out, and his face was disfigured, and I being who I was studying for hours on the way to fix it since our healers could not. I came across a powerful spirit who could grant a person a new face. She alone had the power to heal my brother."

"But she could only be found in the Fire Nation, couldn't she?" Aang guessed, and Misu nodded solemnly. "I had to learn to use waterbending as a weapon in secret as our laws forbid women to learn it for combat.

"Formerly they don't do that anymore," Katara informed her which shocked the older woman of what had changed from her youth.

"Well, they did during our time, and then we snuck in during the war and have been here for years waiting for her to come to one of the three pools to grant Rafa him a new face. But alas, no luck. Although we've noticed something peculiar in the last eight years. It's the strangest thing next to you showing up you and Anto I mean."

"What have you notice that is 'peculiar'?" Aang asked anxiously hoping this would lead them in the directions of the answers they seek for their quest.

"Well, young Avatar, after living in this valley so long you get a feeling for things and notice things. We've never seen spirit we seek, but frequently we've seen what appears to be small gatherings in different locations throughout the valley.

We never can get close enough to see or hear what going on distinctly. However, from what I've witnessed, it seems two women and two small animals frequently meet and talk. Never in the same location and never for longer than an hour and a half."
"Two women? Two animals? Talking in a valley that people are too scared to enter?" repeated Sokka in skepticism. He was looking around everyone, and thinking are these two people still sane after being in this place for so long?

"Who in the world could they be? Moreover, what are they talking about? Also, why would they change locations all the time? Do they always talk at the same time?" Katara asked curiously and emphatically to Misu who answered the younger waterbender question the best she could.

"It's late at night. Never during the day, always at night."

"You think one of them is the spirit you seek?" suggested Toph who thought that should've been the first thing they thought of.

"Possibly but the spirit we seek wasn't described as a woman in the book I read about her. From what I can tell, the two women look quite human, and the animals look very normal as well."

"Well, there only one way to get answers to all our questions. We need to call up the spirit who calls this valley home. Give me some room I'm going to try and contact her." Aang said as he got into a meditation position.

Everyone backed up as Aang took a few deep breaths and in few moments his arrows were glowing, and Aang's spirit had left his body and was looking everywhere for the spirit of the Forgotten Valley.

He abruptly felt himself being beckoned underwater. He swam till he was deep underwater and heard a voice that seemed to be reverberating. "Who has the audacity to trespass on my home? Who is seeking to FORCE me to appear? Who is desecrating MY HOME?" she demanded furiously, and Aang gulped.

"I'm Aang the Avatar. May I ask whom I'm speaking too?"

"I'm the Mother of Faces, Avatar Aang. AND YOUR NEXT FEW CHOICES AND THEIR ACTIONS THAT FOLLOW THEM COULD EITHER SAVE THE WORLD OR DOOM IT!"

Misu- Kirby Howell-Baptiste-Maya- A Dog's Purpose

Rafa- Pooch Hall- Al- A Dog Purpose
Spirit Pact

When Aang returned to his body, and the spirit subsequently arose from the brilliant cerulean pool of water everyone present took a both a big inhale of air and then immediately kneeled to the ground in respect. Sokka had to yank Toph down hard for considering she couldn't see what was in front of her, which she made sure to punch him hard in the arm for. He grimaced with tears in his blue eyes but kept it inside so not to disrespect the dominant spirit in front of them.

The Mother of Face was a rather intimidating sight, and it was apparent she wasn't in a generous mood at all. She had several faces on her tangled plant-like figure, and though you couldn't see their eyes all the lips were in irritable scowls.

She spoke in a majestic voice, but it unquestionably confirmed she was in great annoyance furthermore not at all happy with the current circumstances. She appeared only to notice Aang and therefore addressed her words undeviatingly to him.

"Avatar Aang you have disturbed me and had the audacity to trespass within my home realm in the Spirit World. Even if the Avatar is the bridge between worlds, this is a most serious breach of good manners.

The Spirits do expect the Avatar to have that at least. Common courtesy. I do not care if you are still a child. All things do deserve respect, and no one should invade one's home for any reason. Do you understand?" she demanded sternly to the 14-year-old child who was quaking in his boots, but he succeeded in nodding.

"I meant you no insolence, Mother of Faces. I did ask both in humility and out of respect of this valley. If anyone could aid us in our quest. However, now it's not just my friends and me who require help," as he gestured to Misu and Rafa and the Spirit turned slowly to gaze at them.

"You want a favor is that it?" she questioned him crossly.

"Actually two. I would greatly appreciate it if you could grant Misu and Rafa's request to give Rafa a new face and then if you could please be so kind to answer some questions that might aid us in helping save Fire Lord Iroh's life and keep the Fire Nation from falling into anarchy."

"Avatar Aang I only grant one favor per season. I've not broken this rule under any circumstance, and I shall not break it now. You brought me up here so you must choose," her regal voice informed the young child who looked like he been blown over not realizing what she just said.


"What favor do you wish me to do? Heal this man face? Or answer your questions? I will only do one and only one. Don't try to bargain or haggle with me. The answer will always be the same. One favor that is it. So what do you choose?" she reiterated what she meant to the hapless perplexed boy in a firm tone of voice.

"What how can you expect him to choose?!" demanded Sokka outraged from the peanut gallery.

"Yeah, both are equally important, and neither is more important than the other! It's not right to make him decided what more important!" shouted Katara furiously!
Toph wanted to shout too at the spirit, but she again was feeling something peculiar from the spirit. She couldn't get a good read on her since she was still standing in the water and anyway, she found reading spirits for truth and lies wasn't exactly straightforward.

But in her gut, she was feeling the spirit was testing Aang. As if making an impossible choice, she was attempting to see if he was worthy of the answers he sought. This was a test of his character and if he could make an impossible choice. Therefore she remained silent and see if Twinkle Toes could figure it out on his own.

Aang was going through all the options in his mind and fighting with his heart. Trying to decide what was more important. Misu and her brother had languished for years waiting practically in vain, and Anto had attacked them as well.

Seeking to end their lives before they could make up and go home and be a family again. The bond between family and forgiveness was extraordinarily significant, and they had waited so long and jeopardized everything to be here to mend their relationship.

On the other hand, Iroh was dying of a broken heart, and the Fire Nation would be leaderless and fall into anarchy if the Lost Royal Family wasn't found. Yet couldn't he see them another way without asking this spirit for help? Still, she was his best chance to fulfill this mission, wasn't she?

Finally, he hung his head and looked at the spirit. "I've made my choice."

"Then which favor do you wish me to do? Answer your questions or heal this man's face?" The Mother of Faces asked the boy Avatar as everyone held their breath waiting for Aang to answer.

"Heal Rafa's face. He and his sister have risked everything to be here, and they nearly died in their quest. For all, they sacrifice their wish should be honored."

"Aang?! How could you...?" Katara and Sokka whispered in disbelief as Misu and Rafa walked forward.

"Thank you, Avatar, we are eternally in your debt," Misu replied appreciatively as she helped her brother forward and took off his mask and to everyone shocked he had no face at all!

"Wait for a second! I've seen this before! Your brother isn't deformed! Koh stole his face!" exclaimed Aang before he could stop himself.

"What?! What did you say Avatar Aang?" demanded the Mother of Face emotionally and again the young boy turned to the powerful spirit and explained.

"Rafa lost his face to Koh! He's this big ugly bug like a spirit who steals faces! I met him once in the Spirit World! He either does it for enjoyment or who deems needs punishment!

He even took the face of one of my past lives loves to punish him for not doing his Avatar duties. He wanted to kill him for it but didn't do it because to do so would kill his love."

There was a moment of silence, and then the Mother of Faces spoke, and her tone was strange. If one had to use a word to describe the emotion, it would be melancholy.

"Koh isn't his true name, Avatar Aang, His real name is Scolopendro, he changed it to Koh after the death of his father and the stealing of his first faces a millennium ago."

"How do you know that?" Aang asked in confusion. Why would a spirit change his name, and why would this spirit know this anyway? And why did she sound sad? Why did she care at all?
"Because I'm his mother and he partly blames me for his father's death which I played an indirect role in," she replied as a single large tear fell from one of the faces and fell into the pool of water.

"Wait...Koh has a mother?!" Aang was confused and not sure he heard her right. And also thinking he needed to brush up on his manners if he did hear her right.

"Of course he has a mother! Everyone has a mother except for Anto the Black Spirit of Death!" snapped the spirit violently.

"Care to explain this story?" Aang said as he attempted to defuse the situation and to hope it would help the spirit calm down if she could let it out.

The Spirit looked like she did want to get this off her chest for a long time but first things first. "I will but first to grant your favor. Let me return what my son took," as she pressed her hand to Rafa's face and there was a golden light, then she withdrew her hand, and Rafa turned his sister and said, "Hi sis, good to see you again."

"Rafa! How I missed your face and voice!" as the two siblings hugged tightly.

The Mother of Faces many faces smiled and then there was shimmering light and then all of a sudden she was gone. In her place stood an unusually tall gypsy woman.

'Wait I know you!' Misu exclaimed as she recognizes the silhouette

"You recognize the human disguise I use when I venture into Hira'a then. I call this form "Madam Masuku." the name is after my late husband. Masuku Healer of Deformed," she answered before turning back to face Aang.

"I believe I owe you answers and why I've done what I've done and how my son ended up this way. And I think I can still tell you your answers. Come closer to the water to see the story."

Aang and everyone crept towards the water and looked into as Madam Masuku explained what took place a millennium ago.

"My family powers always dealt with faces in some manner or another. I created them. My son could take them. My husband Masuku could heal them. But a millennium ago, a tragedy struck, and it broke the family apart and led my son to change his name and what he became. Both to steal faces as punishment but because he missed me."

"What? Why would he steal them because he missed you?" Aang questioned, and the spirit woman in human form gestured to the pool again.

She gestured to her family and pointed out her husband who looked like a humanoid feline with vivid locks, in a lavender-gray tunic with shoulder pads and purplish faceless mask with phosphorescent lime green eyes.

The bewitched water showed how countless people came to her husband, and with a single touch of his hand, he healed any congenital disability, scars or any other imperfection on the face or elsewhere on the body.

Everyone thanked him and appeared to be extremely grateful as well as polite. But then something changed. A young couple was bringing a young boy who was disfigured, but this wound was not a congenital disability, but someone had hurt the boy and mutilated his face beyond recognition.
"This was the day everything changed. The day the couple brought their young boy to my husband to heal him and he couldn't," as they watched and saw Masuku's touch couldn't heal the boy's mutilated face and the parents looking quite outraged furthermore demanding an explanation.

"What wrong? I thought your husband could heal any injury or disfigurement? Why couldn't he heal this boy?" asked Katara not understanding what the problem was.

"Child there are some wounds that go deeper then the flesh some go all the way to the soul. And those can't be fixed by any healer's touch," the Spirit woman informed her in a depressed voice.

"I don't understand. Did Anto injure him? Since I couldn't heal those scratch marks and those unusual butterflies had to do that," Katara asked still confused by what she was seeing and hearing.

The spirit lady lamented loudly before continuing with the poignant account of her past. "In a manner of speaking, yes. It was a spiritual wound, yes. Spiritual wounds are a two-way wound. They are both physical and spiritual. They wound flesh and soul alike." which she could see unquestionably confused the group before her for several moments and yet she could see the young Avatar's mind putting it together slowly but surely.

"You mean they come from things like abuse, don't you? Things that break the heart and soul? So the scars are on the inside? And you can't heal the scars of the soul, can you? If a physical scar is inflicted on the flesh and then scars the soul, then it's all twisted, isn't it?" Aang suspected as he thought about the Royal Family and the scars they bore.

"Yes, Avatar, you are correct," she congratulated him for his insight and went on with the explanation. "Spiritual wounds can't be healed for once the heart and soul been scarred from things like abuse and trauma only the person who they been inflected to can heal thyself.

It's terrible how Anto influence others by whispering that sort of behavior into people mind to causes others to do those vile deeds to dispense the pain of any kind on others, but he does.

That boy was a victim of terrible abuse and the parents didn't realize it till too late. Furthermore, they wouldn't listen to my husband about what kind of injury he had and how it couldn't be healed by spiritual means or by a healer touch. They swore revenge for his 'empty promise.'"

"They got it didn't they?" Aang asked gravely to which the spirit woman nodded with her eyes wet with tears as the magical water showed the group the rest of the story.

'Yes, and it killed my family. They sought me out and tricked me into giving them new faces under false pretense and then went back to my husband and destroyed his spiritual anchor. What link him to this world and it killed him.

Koh, as you know him, was so outraged he stole their faces and blamed me for the loss of his father whom he was very close with. He changed his name and went far away and began to steal faces as punishment for those who did wrong.

But now I hear he does it because he misses me but is still too proud to come to me and make amends and sadly I don't know how to make up with him."

"Family shouldn't blame one another for something like this. It no more your fault that your husband was killed, then its Katara's fault her mother died. This is no one fault. The family belongs together. Forgiveness and love are what you two need," Aang tried to console the spirit woman who allowed the young boy to touch her with his soothing touch.

"Yes, I know you are right young Avatar, I know. How I have longed to see my son once more and
finally, at last, makeup with him. But alas I don't see how that's possible, and I guess that what lead me to do what I did..." she started to say before screams where heard as something burst out of the water and wrapped its coils around the Mother of Faces human form trying to squeeze her to death.

"Mother of Faces? I should've known you were involved! Oh, I savored it so much, taking your cherished Masuku to his grave! It was so much joy to orchestrate his death and observe you and your son split apart! Now a son will eternally rue not making up with his mother!

The torture! The agony! Oh, it's all so delicious! And the immense power boost it will grant me will give me the strength I need to triumph in this battle! Not even that stupid Alanna will be able to help these wretched souls now!" Anto laughed as he squeezed tighter.

But he wasn't just seeking to squeeze her to death, his body in her pool was sheer poison to the water! He was striving to destroy her spiritual anchor and make sure she was going to expire for good!

No time to stop and think this through. There was only time to react. Sokka was the first to charge forward and attempt to stab Anto's black and hairy heart by taking a running leap and sinking his blade into the symbol on his scaly chest.

However, all he got for his efforts was blisters to his feet and his sword almost melting! It appeared Anto's body was absolute poison, furthermore poisonous to the touch. He produced turmoil and devastation wherever he went, but his touch was malignant as well.

Therefore, physical contact was a defiant no-no! Toph and Katara again tried once more to call forth that spiritual power boost however it appeared they had used it up from the preceding battle and were back to normal strength.

Still, Sokka was shouting out orders on how best to attack and find his weak spots if he had all this time Anto was laughing crazily at them saying he'd finally take one soul down.

Aang all this time was just frozen. He was not thinking, moving, or breathing. It was like he was having an out of body experience, which he was! Right now his spirit was in contact with another more powerful spirit who was talking very rapidly with him.

"Listen to me Aang. You can't win this fight on your own. There is only one way to win this fight." this anonymous but an authoritative divine voice was telling him emotionally.

"Who are you? Who am I speaking with? Why do you feel so familiar and yet I don't know you?" he asked in bewilderment and surprise.

"I can't explain right now, but you and everyone else knows me! I'm everywhere at once! I'm part of everything! And you and I are close. Practically family!" the voice that was most undoubtedly female replied to him.

"I don't understand, but what do I need to do to save Mother of Faces from Anto?" Aang asked in a frighten and compelling voice.

"Call the one person who CAN save her. A mother loves her children she will do anything to protect them, correct?" the woman asked him as if he already knew the answer.

"Yes, are you saying..." he started to say, and she replied hurriedly.

"Summon Koh. You have the power to summon ANY Spirit from the Spirit World and bring them forth. A mother will protect her child with her love, but a child love for their mother is just as great.
Only Koh right now has the power needed to defeat Anto. His love for his mother is the key to winning this fight!" she urged him with great desperation in her voice pleading with him to do this.

"But he'll just steal everyone faces!" yelled the young avatar back.

"No, I promise he won't and he can't if swears to take human form after Anto dealt with. In the form of a human, he can't do that. Trust me on this. Come, there's not much time. We have to call him now!" the female assured him again desperate in her pleading.

"How do I call him?" Aang asked in uncertainty.

"Call him with your heart. Show him with your heart's eyes what is going on. Hurry!" she again answers with desperation, and then a calming took over as they both settled down in the resolve of the plan.

Aang closed his eyes and let the world around him dissolved and focused all his powers and energy to send one thought to one of the most dangerous spirits in the Spirit World.

He felt his own heart's light connect with this ominous spirit's dark heart and flood it with what he was witnessing and feeling at the moment. He immediately thought one thought over and over in his head. "Koh, your mother's life is in danger. Anto is trying to kill her. She needs you. Please come. Please, I beg you. Please." Aang begged in his mind over and over again.

Aang felt some peculiar sensations stir up in his soul and mind although before he had time to process any of it he was knocked conscious as Anto's long tail knocked him off his feet and stared him down.

"Well, well little Avatar! You'll soon fail in your mission! Soon this Spirit will die! And with it any hope of completing your task! How does it feel to fail? And know you will be responsible again for so much destruction, misery, and agony?

You made the wrong choice and know all that suffering and death is on your hands' child! Murderer!" he laughed with sadistic pleasure as he squeezed the woman again who looked quite blue and the pool of water looked just like toxic waste.

Everyone was battered and bruised and lost hope when suddenly there was a shimmering light in the center of the pool and Anto let out a scream as dropped the Spirit Woman.

Katara and Sokka gallantly sped forward to transport her to safety while everyone else gawked in wonder as to what hideous monstrosity had emerged from the pool. It was seemingly in an unbridled rage, and it was the ugliest thing anyone had ever seen.

But it was currently locked in lethal combat with Anto as they fought viciously with each other. It was a life and death duel, and each was willing to play a little dirty to get the upper hand. But finally, the ugly thing pinned Anto to the ground and whispered a threat in a sinister voice.

"If you EVER threaten my mother again, I WILL take you face! Even if I know, it's suicide, and it kills me! Now get out of here and NEVER come back to this Valley ANTO!" threatened the voice.

"Fine! She's not worth it! I'll still get what I want in the end! I'll still collect the souls I came for one way or another! But you're still pathetic! You'll regret not taking my face even if it would lead to nothing but your death!" and with that, the colossal serpent disappeared and griffin size raven reappeared and flew away into the night.

The appalling thing snarled once, and then a light flashed and standing in the place of the ugly
thing was a slender pale-skinned man dressed in black. He made powerful strides over to the woman cradle in Katara's arms. Katara was shaking her face was covered in fear as this man approached and even Aang felt he should shout out a warning, but then another voice cut him off.

"Don't fear young Avatar. No one is in danger of losing their face, isn't that right, Scolopendro?" called out a remarkably familiar voice from the treeline.

"Only two people would know that's my real name or that when I take human form, I can't steal faces. My mother and you, Alanna." the pale skin man in black spoke up as he looked up with Koh's default face.

Only then did the owner of the beautiful voice emerge and everyone lost their breath from the breathtakingly attractive woman in white with the human size butterfly wings on her back.

"Would you prefer your chosen name or your real name? Which right now isn't of concern. Your mother is grievously ill. Anto has nearly stolen all her life force! We need to heal her physical body and heal her spiritual anchor, or she will die," the noblewoman with wings replied in a melodious soothing voice.

"I can't lose her Alanna, not like my father!" the pale-skinned man shouted back at her.

"I'll assist in saving her, but I think you know what I want from you in return, Scolopendro."

"You want Mother and I to reconcile, don't you?"

"Yes, if you two reconcile, I'll have enough power to help the Avatar and his friends. Please, both worlds depend on this. You and I know this. Please do your part so I may do my part, and they may do their part for the Grand Design."

"Okay, it's not like I don't want my mother's life saved or us to reconcile. Do it."

"Good," the elegant woman then locked her azure eyes on Katara and glided effortlessly over to her. "Katara, please give me your hand, and together we shall heal her," the White Spirit of Life instructed the stunned Waterbender. Katara did as she was told and gave her her hand and they ran their right hands over the spirit woman's body healing her.

The Spirit of Life glowed with life and smiled radiantly. "Good, now for the second part. Avatar Aang?" she turned to face Aang, who pointed to himself as if someone else had his name. "I'll need your help to cleanse Mother of Faces' spiritual anchor. Follow me," as she glided down to the pool and the stumped 14 years old followed.

"Now call upon your past lives. Also the power of energybending. Together we will cleanse the toxic energy from this pool together. Hold my hand. Trust me. We can do this together."

Again not sure what was going on but doing as she said he called upon the power that the Lion turtle had taught him and together they healed the pool of the toxic energy that Anto had poisoned it with. Then she slowly turned to Mother of Faces, who was slowly regaining consciousness, and she asked weakly, "What happened?"

Strolling over, she ran her dainty fingers through her friend's hair and talking in a soothing voice as she spoke to her. "Anto is what happened, I'm afraid. He tried to demolish you so that his power would grow and also so that Avatar Aang would fail in his mission. I requested Aang to call on the one person who could save your life and also help strengthen my power to aid him in his quest."

"Hello, Mother," spoke a vaguely familiar voice in the shadows and the woman looked up scarcely
believing what she was hearing.

"Scolopendro? My beloved son, are you here? Tell me I'm not dreaming!" as she struggled to stand.

"Rest, Mother, you need to rest. Anto's touch is deadly, and you'll need to rest for a week in the Spirit World if you are going to grow strong again. I fought tooth and nail to save you. I cannot lose you like I lost Father. I will not lose my mother as I lost my father!" Koh was adamant about as he made his mother lay back down.

"Scolopendro? I'm sorry about that. I didn't mean to cause your father's death. If I had known..." as he put his finger to her lips to shush her.

"Mother... please. I've had a millennium to think about things and realize the truth. Moreover, seeing what Anto was doing to you and realize the truth. Everything from Father's death to what I've done and what led to this moment is all apart of the Grand Design, and we've all been played by Anto," he growled angrily, and now she laid her hand over his.

"That scoundrel loves to break families apart. It doesn't matter if its humans or spirits. The more pain, anguish, and champions he can create to be his tools, the happier he is. Isn't that true, Koh?" asked Alanna and Koh's human form hung his head in shame.

"Realizing you've been someone's tool for a millennium and he's only grown stronger by destroying your family and wants you to wallow in anguish after killing your mother? Not a good feeling at all Alanna," he replied in a small voice.

"Which is why we must stop him here and now and try and restore balance! He's still too strong and upsetting the balance! I fear it's coming to a head and no one will be prepared for what's coming if we don't find a way to counter him soon," she answered back with bitterness in her voice.

"Excuses us but we seem to be out of the loop with your spirits," Sokka interrupted as it showed all of Team Avatar was getting a little fed up with not understanding what was going on.

"Yeah, what are you crazy spirits yakking about? And what does it have to do with the royal family and us and everything that is going on? We have a right to know since we've been getting sliced up by that psycho since starting this crazy mission!" Toph stated in a furious voice.

"It would be nice to have the full picture and not this vague idea that we are just pawns in some game of Pai Sho that we don't even know the rules too," Katara admitted to the powerful spirits.

"Very well, you do have a right to know as your all part of this. You three stay here and protect this land and Misu and Rafa. Avatar Aang, you are taking a trip with us to my home." Alanna informed him swiftly.

"Wait for what? Where are we going..." but before he could say more he felt himself forcefully yanked from his body and the next thing he found himself standing in the courtyard of a shimmering palace.

The palace was sitting on top of a hill with a high wall of green turf. Inside was a wall of trees with leaves of green, blue and silver and further ahead was high gates of gold which were fasten shut and facing the east.

This place seemed like a private sanctuary of beauty and peace as he walked around solemnly. Everything was quiet from the fountain in the middle of the garden to even the silver apple trees that gave off the loveliest smells he'd ever smelled.
Flying around the palace grounds were birds slightly larger than eagles with saffron breast, scarlet crest, and purple tails. Then Aang turned around to look at the palace itself, and he couldn't help but feel in awe of its beauty and wonder.

With its ivory roof and long halls with peacock feathers hanging on the walls, how the eastern door faced an impossible contained sea. This palace was indeed a place of light, love, beauty, and life.

It was then the doors opened, and Alanna came striding out with her two other guests. The Mother of Faces was using crutches to get around and again it looked like Koh was behaving.

"I see young Avatar your taking in the delights of my home of Keaparaberu. In your honest opinion, how is it to your liking?" Alanna asked Aang whose smile told her everything.

"I've never seen a more beautiful place or so full of life! Everything here is just so amazing!" he answered her question honestly to which she beamed joyfully.

'Thank you. Limbo Valley was one of the first places created after the Dawn of Time. When both the World of Sprites and Man was breathed into existence. I get half the Valley which is solely my territory, and Anto cannot cross into it.

So wherever the sunrise hits are my side. Where the sunsets and the moon rises is his. Also, the River Sutikusu and Temple of the Magic before the Dawn of Time are holy and areas of neutrality. They have got a potent enchantment that neither of us can defile and thus must obey. To discrete either would backfire on both of us, our loved ones and both the world of Spirits and Man.

Though with Anto he thinks every single rule can be bent not broken but doesn't understand a rule can only be bend so much till it is broken and doesn't get that you must take your oaths seriously or it will end up backfiring seriously."

"I'm afraid I'm still really out of the loop here," Aang answered again honestly, and the Spirits could see the boy was utterly clueless to what the hell they were talking about. Was the basic common knowledge that lost to the world nowadays?

"Come with me then and I'll elucidate what Anto has been doing for centuries and how its impacted so many lives that it leads to such an imbalance and why we had to act to save one family life that in turn plays a large role."

The group was led through the beautiful land the very heart of the valley were sat a peculiar but fascinating pagoda over an equally exotic and gorgeous river that divided the valley equally in half.

Inside was a magnificent marble table that Aang first thought was some Pai Sho table. He suddenly realized it was a different kind of game. One half of the table unquestionably represented the world of humans. The other showed the world of spirits.

However, alternatively, of Pai Sho tiles there was scattered about this foreign table were moths so red they're almost black along with heliotrope butterflies. Moreover, it didn't seem equally balanced at all. Plus, it seemed the moths were steadily killing the butterflies and taking more space on the table. It was unnerving that what it was and Aang didn't need to fully understand it to know it wasn't good news.

"I don't understand what am I looking at?" he asked as he pointed to the table with the moths and butterflies and everyone let out a sigh before they explained its meaning to him and what was really going on and how the fate of everything was tied to this table.
"This stone table is just one example of the Grand Design young Avatar. How we are all connected and the true balance of everything. How one action affects us all. Light and Dark, Life and Death, Good and Evil." Alanna explained as she spread her arms wide dramtical and Aang only shook his head.

"I still don't get it."

"Then let me explain in a way you might get what exactly our parents do and what Anto and I do and then that might clear it up." Clearing her throat, she began to explain what the grand design was and her voice was as beautiful as she was.

"This world through which we wander,
Is wonderful and strange.
The only truth we could know,
Is that everything will change.
Like the rain the fills the ocean,
Like the storm that shakes up high.
We are all a part of The Grand Design.
The Spirit World has been our home forever,
That's where Anto and I belong.
We were born to Raava and Vaatu,
And we filled this world with songs.
We must fight for what we believe in,
what is yours and what is mine.
We are all a part of the Grand Design.
The land no more belongs to us,
Than the eagle-hawk owns the sky.
We must fight for our survival,
If we don't, we surely die.
We are one with what surrounds us,
Friends to all we see.
Yet, we are Spirits. We take away what we see,
as dishonorable and greed.
The one thing we will surely learn,
As we walk the path of time.
We can rise above,
We are Spirits, the masters of...
We are all a part of The Grand Design."

" I get there a bigger picture going on here, and it's what you call the Grand Design? That it's part of your parents and you do. And it ties all spirits and humans and the world together?" Aang started to understand what the Spirit of Life was attempting to teach to him.

"Everything is part of the Grand Design Aang. Everything and everyone. We all must be in balance, but some people believe they know better than Grand Design. And in that disbelief and ill way of thinking set it way off balance," she sighed softly and took a moment to regain her composure looking at all the moths on the table to help him understand their symbolic meaning.

"Anto and his father think they know better than the Grand Design and thus have spent all their lives trying to rise above it and make it there own. They wish to create a world without hope, love, light, and life.

They wish to slaughter my mother and me thoroughly. To create the ultimate imbalance. They've
spent all their time since their creation to try and achieve this goal. Vaatu has done it by doing battle with you and my mother." Alanna described in a soft voice with much patience feeling that she needed to be very patient with Aang.

"Huh? I don't know any Vaatu or your mother..." he started to say only for her to interrupt him.

"My mother is the Avatar Spirit," she cut him off. "She chooses in each life who is the Avatar, and thus she lives inside you and all who came before. She wants each of her champions for her own reasons.

Just as I choose my Sisterhood of the Dawn for my reasons to oppose Anto. Anto fights so dirty. He's not just satisfied to carry people to death. No, no, he desires more then he should have. He craves mass destruction, chaos, and mayhem! He desires pain, anguish, grief, suffering endlessly. He LOVES humans who can be his 'champions.' The weak mind, souls of darkness, people who are human demons, Aang. Those who can in essence 'sell him their souls' and become his tools to further his own agenda.

Murderers, abusers, the most ignoble impurities of humanity! Those who celebrate corruption and don't have virtues of any kind young Avatar. They are his disciples and the ones who carry out his dirty work to create an unbalance in the world. They are the ones who further his goals and by extension, his father's goal, which is to cause my death and my mother's death and end the Avatar and end the world." Alanna enlightened the young Avatar what the real deal was going on long before the Avatar came into play the real battle for the souls of humanity. And how the children of the Avatar Spirit and it's mortal enemy were locked in this enteral battle for the fate of everyone.

"What does this have to with my quest?" as this was still a lot to swallow all at once and was going over his head and again they had to go gradually with him to understand everything that was going on.

"Why do you think Sozin went from a loving, friendly boy who loved to joke and have friendly duels with Roku and then 12 years later wanted to conquer the world and then ended up murdering his best friend and brother in flames?" Alanna asked him in a quiet voice not quite meeting his eye as she asked this.

Aang paled with realization, and he shook his head and like "No, no, no, your not saying."

But the White Spirit of Life nodded, "Anto took advantage of Sozin's weakness. Planted the seeds of jealousy and envy and slowly groomed from behind the scenes Sozin into his perfect champion.

These were thoughts Sozin already had at the back of his mind. Anto is the evil voice in your mind. You shouldn't listen too. The one your consciousness tells you to ignore but he's got that silver tongue of his!" she looked so furious at what the son of her mother mortal enemy did, and it was her job to keep in balance, but it was getting harder every day.

One war had been stopped yes. But the actual war never seems to end, and well now, this is way mother and daughter needed to work together to help humankind better itself so when the real battle came to both man and spirit didn't fall. And there were still souls to save and help save all souls weren't there? But she had to explain that to this boy first didn't she?

"So your saying Sozin was just a pawn to Anto? Did he take advantage of Sozin's weak and vulnerable heart? And brought out his dark side?" Aang asked as he now understood why Anto and Alanna were so essential and why it was important these two extremes were kept in check and how it was tied to him to help. For the sake of both worlds and the souls of all.
"Yes and then kept whispering his silver tongue to him and finally stole all of Sozin's humanity together till Sozin had wholly sold his soul to Anto and thus began the 100-year war by committing murder.

Aang murder splits the soul apart. It's against human nature, and when someone willingly and knowingly chose to end another life, its the most inhuman act one can do. It tears the soul in two and takes away your humanity.

The more acts of violence and death in this world? That only makes Anto stronger. The 100-year war? It was his feast! Anto became like a parasite and attached himself to the Fire Nation Royal Family and kept the war going and only got stronger from the following three genocides. The Air Nomads, the Dragons, and the Dragon Guardians.

The more pain, misery, and death his champions caused the more powerful he grew and the weaker I became, and there was little I could do. I tried my best to help Avatar Roku and his family and their friends live, knowing they'd played a more significant role down the line. This is why I ensured Ursa, Sakiko, and Xiaoying were born. But Anto wished to hurt them as well and try to undo my hard work to protect them.

He forced both Ursa and Sakiko into unloving marriages. He caused Sakiko to die in childbirth, which left her daughter Akiko to become an orphan and endure abandonment and neglect, which is unforgivable to do a child. But it was to punish me for helping one line of the Dragon Guardians survive.

He made sure Ursa was abused, and her children were abused as well. Zuko taking the brunt of it while trying to turn Azula into his ultimate weapon of destruction by planting a demon seed in her.

He also tried to make sure Xiaoying line couldn't be continued by giving her an irregular cycle and making it impossible for her to find love.

Again, all their sorrows were to punish me for trying to protect the three lines and honor their vow of friendship, which was about love, light, and life. Even so, I vowed to do all in my power to help all of them."

"Wow."

"It was the reason I sent my apprentice Yang and her friends to the capital to protect Ursa and all the children who were there. I knew Xiaoying would also protect them. Those children had to be protected at all cost, and I'd give up my own life to protect that family from Anto! Especially from the ultimate price he was trying to do them."

"What price? What was he trying to do to the Royal Family that you would not allow happening to them?"

"Mother of Faces told you about spiritual wounds? I vowed on my life and honor to make sure it never came to that."

"It almost did come to that, and you know that Alanna. If we hadn't intervened when we did!" Mother of Faces finally spoke up.

"What are you two talking about now?"

"Ozai and Anto were the same. Anto pretty much had merged with Ozai. They were of one mind and body. Ozai was his spiritual anchor in the human world. Akiko wasn't wrong when she called him Death because Death took up residence in Ozai's body."
"Ozai was possessed?!" Aang was surprised at the same time not to know Ozai and the Spirit of Death were the same. How was that so shocking after meeting both of them in person? They weren't at all different, and he barely survived either of them, and clearly, these two were two peas in a pod!

Mother of Faces and Alanna nodded. "Spirits can only live so long in the human world without spiritual anchors. We can only hold human form for so long. Either we give up our immortality, or we bond with a human temporarily.

Anto was already a parasite attached to Royal Family. Ozai was his perfect match on every level. They're precisely alike right down to their black and hairy hearts!" Alanna explained as she remembered sensing Anto presence so actively in the palace the few times she'd been there and yes that night eight years ago.

"If I hadn't helped Ursa and the children escape that night eight years ago they all would have faced fates worse than death! Ursa would've had to abandon her children and likely made to forget them forever. Zuko and Akiko would've been scarred and their love all but destroyed by death to further punish them, and Ursa and Azula would have become nothing more than a sociopath, just a tool for Ozai to use." Alanna explained the fate Anto wanted for the Royal Family and how she went out of her way to prevent it at all cost.

"So that explains a lot about the war. Why there was so much abuse and evil going on in the Royal Family. And only a few good people? I take it you had more influence on Iroh's family?"

"Yes, I got to Iroh first, and yet his soul was already poison to Anto somehow out of all the wrong people in the royal line Iroh had a pure heart and Anto wouldn't be able to attach to him, but I ensured it. I think that's why he made sure to murder both Kimana and Lu Ten.

To make sure the one bright light in family line suffered for being born good and then he could kill all the children and Ursa one no-fail swoop and well Anto be set for life. The Fire Nation would've won the war in a few years, and it is perfect for him and his father, and then my mother and I die, and well, it was just perfect."

"And then you messed it up for him with the Sisterhood, Xiaoying, and then I guess you Mother of Faces?" now finally seeing where this story tied in with his quest for Fire Lord Iroh and how everything was indeed connected.

"Yeah, we threw a wrench in the works for him as did you and your friends by helping put things back in order and helping to right some of the wrongs and giving people back their hope.

We protect the Royal Family by myself making sure they got to Hira'a undetected and Mother of Faces granted them all new faces and new minds so they would be protected."

"Wait! New faces and new minds? So they wouldn't remember who they were at all?" Aang asked for clarification.

"No their minds wouldn't but their hearts would. I could only erase their memories, but their powers and natural talents would remain the same. As for the heart? The heart never forgets. You can make the mind forget something the heart can't be made to forget ever." Mother of Faces explained what she had done and how it had worked.

"So when you say their powers and talents would remain the same..."

"Akiko was already born with mighty spiritual powers due to the circumstances of her birth, Avatar
Aang included two-spirit animal guides who helped her learn to control those powers.

We gave them back to her and Zuko and Azula under their new identities as pets who would re-establish contact with them to train them in their real powers once they reemerged and teach them." Alanna explained what they had done to keep the children and their abilities safe.

"Alanna also has a way to keep Ursa safe with a gift she gave her on the way home, don't you?" Mother of Faces asked her with arched eyebrows.

"Yes, I give all in my Sisterhood a special jewelry piece that connects them and me and has some of my power in it. I granted Ursa the same when I made her a locket from one of my jewelry pieces and Xiaoying's special White Lotus Tile."

"Wait! You're saying the Lost Royal Family is Noriko, Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko?!" Aang suddenly made the connection. Their story, what Toph had said and their pets it all fit into place like pieces of the puzzle.

"Yes. And they must remain safe as you can see Anto's plague is still strong. If you are to take them back to Iroh that a choice they have to make Aang. But they do have a role to play in the world of the future, and it may help there be more life than death," as she pointed again to the table.

"You need more butterflies then months, don't you? More life then death, and they play a role in doing that?" 

"So do you and your friends and so do your descendants. Which is why Anto can't get your souls. We are at the cusp of a turning point after 100 years of bloodshed. Right now it could go either way. Saving this family could strengthen the side of good and help the future for the side of life and life.

If they die and so do all of you? Anto and his father and the rest of the world both Spirit and Man will fall, and then the darkness yet to come will never be in proper alignment to come.

This is all a turning point. We have got a chance to better all lives and significantly weaken a spirit that becomes too powerful who lied, cheated and destroyed too many lives and thrown so much out of balance that we've precious little time left to try and put it in the right order before the more significant battle comes.

There so much at stake right now. The souls right now in the present and those yet to come, Avatar Aang. For this generation and all those again to come. So if we are to do this, we must handle this with special care.

Anto won't give up so easily, and he must be beaten, and he cannot have any souls, or else everything will be loss and your defeat of Ozai will be for naught!"

Songs tweaked by Japananimegirl
A Difficult Choice

Aang was still absolutely shell-shocked from all that was just unveiled to him by the White Spirit of Life. He had constantly presumed he was like the most significant person in the world is the Avatar, looked like he wasn't.

Looked like he and this entrancing woman who said her mother lived inside were the most significant people in both worlds. Furthermore, only contemporaneously could they preserve the balance of both worlds and the Grand Design together.

Although Alanna was also speaking about something even more valuable than just the balance of the worlds. She was speaking of people souls. The very essence of life and death. How could he not see that was like one of the most important if not the most important balance of all?

Alanna could perceive for herself she'd overwhelmed the young child avatar. Still, he had to understand. There was the balance of the world yes. On the other hand, she was intended to preserve the balance of life and death. keeping them in check furthermore by extension the wellbeing of humanity's souls.

It's what she and her mother's champion were destined to do for all time. It's what Vaatu and his son Anto and his champion in each life sought to undo. It was the reason why she did what she did and the reason why her mother as the Avatar did what she did every life.

Nevertheless, at that moment in time, Alanna's luminescent azure eyes gazed at the child before her and could only feel great sorrow for him. Sorry for how much had been stolen from him in his young life. He lost his people, his innocence, his own childhood and the very right to normal life by being given a burden no child should have to be given.

However, the timeless dance would continue in a neverending cycle. It oppresses her every day the way her heart and head filled with thoughts of more people losing so much. Never knowing or finding out what life was all about. Thus many more lives would lose the chance to live and she couldn't take that anymore.

"Alanna are you okay?" asked Aang as he looked at the spirit who said she was the daughter of the one who she claimed lived in him. For someone who was the spirit of life, she seemed right now so lifeless.

"I'm just extremely exhausted and depressed, Aang," she whispered softly as her wings drooped as she said this to further reflected her words and mood.

"I didn't think spirits got sleepy or for that matter down in the mouth," he tried to joke to cheer her up.

Looking up at his goofy grin she had to smile too. "Even now with your innocence along with your childhood stolen from you even now, you can still joke? Be even a little lighthearted? You surprise me."

"It's the way of my people. We were always looking at the glass half full instead of half empty. You know look at the bright side of things?" he emphasized the philosophy of the Air Nomads which made a lot of sense.
"How I miss the Air Nomads," the butterfly-winged woman let out a longing sigh. She gazed back at the table at her butterflies with a special smile as if remembering a golden memory. "Whenever one was born it always made my powers increasing by half give you all lived life to its fullest. You all were such free spirits. Your optimistic energy was my nectar," she was even behaving like a butterfly as she spoke these words.

"I lost a great deal of my power when your people died Aang. I wept for hours and it took me many weeks to recover following three genocides. I gain power from life, love, light and all that is positive.

Losing all three of those people? Well, I was incredibly sick for a long time. The world lost a great deal of life during the 100-year war. Now you know why it was more then it appeared to the humans."

"I don't think anyone ever realized this was truly a matter of hearts and souls or a battle of the Spirits of Life and Death and that it's not really ended even two years later," the 14 year old boy confessed as he danced around the lady again to try and make her feel the sensation she had lost a 100 years ago.

They two of them did do a short dance for a few moments that brought such joy to her heart and gave her some much-needed strength. It also made her smile as bright as the dawn that brings hope each day it shines anew. Laughing gaily she even fluttered off the ground a few moments before touching back down and became a bit more serious although seeking to sound a little more cheerful this time around.

"Because human hearts aren't so easily changed, young one. Just because the battle is over doesn't necessarily mean the war is really over. What you and your friends think of as peace Avatar Aang?" Alanna started to speak as she gestured for them all to pull up a seat as they'd been standing too long even with that short dance break a moment ago.

They all took a seat and out of nowhere a gorgeous tea set made of the purest white porcelain rimmed with an ornament of pink roses and lilacs plus the most amazing butterflies materialized. The air was soon filled with the most alluring fragrances as the tea served itself to everyone present which was very impressive indeed.

Alanna took a few sips of tea looking again like a proper noblewoman other than her magnificent butterfly wings. Once they'd all invigorated themselves with a tea that was only second to Iroh's mystery tea she resumed what she'd been about to say.

"That's better. All that talking and singing left me pretty parch. Spirit Tea is quite satisfying, but no one best the master that is Iroh and even I know that" she giggled like a little girl to which they all laughed happily about in agreement.

"So you were saying something about peace?" asked Aang as he made sure to show proper manners to the spirits who all seemed to have a thing for good manners and he wasn't about to show insolence again.

"You and your friends? You all have been thinking for two years is the same thought. "Amazing what peace can do to people's spirits?" Am I not mistaken in that line of thinking?" she questions the boy who nodded she had the right train of thought. She took one more sip of spirit tea before setting it down and telling Aang the truth of his and Team Avatar's misconception.

"Well, what you are actually feeling in the world right now is a victory not peace, Avatar. There is no true peace in the world yet. Especially not in the hearts of the angry and vanquished," she began
in a slow and steady voice the words of truth and wisdom that only come from one who's lived life and seen and learned from its teachings.

"Many hearts both human and spirit alike have yet to find what you call 'peace' this world has yet to truly find it. The truth is Avatar is even when we think we succeed we still fail. Human, Spirit and Avatar alike.

Because of the truth? The real truth that everyone so desperately needs to hear and heed? But the thing is people, spirits even the Avatar have refused to listen to the truth before, Aang. The problem is, Aang, again when one ignores the voice of truth? As you can see," she inclined her beautiful head back towards the stone table.

The boy avatar looked rather taken aback by her words. It was a slap in the face what she said. Like all, he'd done so far wasn't enough or worth anything. He didn't understand how could they not have peace yet? What did she mean? Why were there so many more lessons to learn still? Ahh, this was so annoying! Still couldn't get answers without asking questions.

"What do you mean by all that? That I've not achieved peace yet? How could I've already failed when we won? What truth hasn't the world heard yet? Have you ever failed to listen to the truth? Every failed any of you?" asked Aang tensely as he sipped his tea to which the rest of his new friends all nodded.

"Yes, Avatar, did you not see what happened up there or how I got injured or why I and my son were estranged? We didn't listen to the truth either and we've failed. Everyone does fail there no getting around that." Mother of Faces chuckled amusingly at the boy's obvious question with such an obvious answer.

"Do you know why I hate Anto so much for what he did to the Fire Nation Royal Family and what this 100-war cost me, Aang? You know what it really cost me personally?" Alanna asked in a quiet voice as she set down her teacup once more and looked him straight in the face.

"No, I don't. I've heard about so much loss from so many people but I don't know what it cost the Spirit of Life. Tell me what did it cost you and was it even more of the reason for all of you to protect the Royal Family as you have?"

Alanna took a deep breath as she spoke the words she had long to say to this boy who cradles her mother within his soul. She spoke both to him and her mother. "For 100 years, the words of truth failed the world, Aang. If the words of truth couldn't stop Anto and those he influenced to end the war then you couldn't stop him at all.

A hundred years all the lives that were lost by one and all from all the four nations the hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children that all died? It broke my heart and nearly shattered my soul. And if the last of the remnants of a vow of love and friendship die? If you and your friends die? My heart shall break and I'll weep again but be no more.

Both I and you along with all the spirits have great power. We are more than capable of taking a weapon out of someone hands or you as you discovered even taking someone's bending.

Why together we could possibly remove the weapons and bending from all people in the world so there would truly be peace by ensuring there be no war. Maybe I could even use my powers to their zenith and possibly take the words out of every angry and hateful person in both worlds.

But I don't and neither do you. And I think you know as well I why neither you or I have done just that. Not in this life nor since creation started. Why we do what we do forevermore? Why do you
"Think that is?" she finished her speech by asking him a question of philosophy.

Aang was able to answer in a heartbeat after all he'd learned and seen he knew the answer and didn't need further prompting. "Because if we did that if we truly used all our powers to their zenith there be no freedom of any kind. And the last thing either you or myself as the Avatar want is there to be no freedom. Life is about freedom. It's our job to make sure freedom exist and to protect life."

"And again people will always have a free will Avatar along with the rest of the spirits. And again with that will be choices. Now I don't deny what I told you is the truth because it is. Anto did do everything I told you. He helped ignite the war and did influence it. Furthermore, he and Ozai were one. I didn't lie about that.

But still, at the end of the day, everyone still has to make choices. And you can still choose to listen to the truth. You do have the power to not listen to Anto and choose a better fate for we do all end up choosing our own fate in the end for good or ill," she reminded him of what she and Anto truly stood for.

"I don't remember who told me this. It was such a long time ago. I think it was may have been Gyasto. See I don't remember hearing about you before this trip but I think maybe just maybe Gyasto tried telling me about you when I was really really little and I didn't listen or don't remember because I was so little."

"I think it is the latter in your case, Aang. I'm sure you've heard me when your small but so much has happened you simply forgot like a forgotten dream."

"Well, I think Gyasto told me this when he did tell me about you and Anto. Mind you this very fuzzy as you said like trying to recall a forgotten dream, so don't get mad or anything if I can't recall it all perfectly."

"We won't."

"Okay, I think I was like 4 or something and he was trying to tell me all which you told me right now and I think I barely remember asking what was the point of it all? And he told me sometimes it's about people hearts. How you and Anto deal with people hearts and souls. How you give a heart life and he takes it away. He said hearts can change in an instant and each heart must be given that opportunity. It's just," sighing. "Some hearts are dead long before the person has died," Aang finished as he looked as if he was looking at something very far in the distant past.

Perhaps he now was remembering how many times in his many past lives how many hearts he had encountered that had changed or hadn't changed. How many times choices that had lead to fate whether they be for good or ill. How many times both Alanna and Anto's dance had influenced his own.

"Which again leads us back to your quest and what this particular dance means for the here and now?" Alanna spoke up again softly as if they needed to be reminded of it.

"Yes, you think we could talk about that back at your palace and not in this temple? I feel safer there."

"My thoughts exactly. Koh, you feel you can help your mother to the guest room?"

"Yes, I can help her. Lean on me, Mother," as both mother and son walked out of the temple and back up to the palace with the White Spirit and Avatar in tow.
Alanna led them to a guest room fit for a queen and made sure that the Mother of Faces was comfortable before turning again to the young avatar. "She's still extremely weak and fragile from Anto's assault. She'll have to stay here in my palace to thoroughly heal from his deadly touch."

"For how long?"

"A week which is all the time you have Avatar Aang."

"What do you mean, Alanna?"

"I'm sorry your in this position once more, child. But the fate of the worlds and all future generations rests upon your shoulders again. Lives and souls are at stake."

"Meaning?"

"She means," coughed Mother of Faces violently and her son quickly brought water to her lips to sip. She sipped it slowly then continued on, "If you really want me to return the Royal Family their true faces and memories, you have to see if it's worth the risk and if that's what they want."

If Aang had been thrown before now he really was completely bewildered. Why wasn't either of these ladies being simply straightforward with him? What was with all this talking in metaphors, riddles and all these cryptically meanings? Monkey Feathers could someone just say flat out what they meant without talking so funny?

"I don't understand. You have just been telling me how important it is to keep them and myself and my friends safe. That we cannot allow Anto to take our souls and if we live that it somehow benefits the future and will considerably empower you and even out things."

"Now you're telling me that not the right thing to do?" he demanded in an exasperated voice that unquestionably showed he was getting a little exhausted of being talked to in this peculiar manner.

The three spirits could undoubtedly see the boy was getting weak and the brain was reasonably not able to handle any more soothsayer style speaking even if the way they spoke was a bit more natural to them. Therefore they attempted to speak a bit unostentatious even if it was difficult.

"Let's see if we can simplify what we are talking about, Aang. The point both myself and Mother of Faces are attempting to make is simple. All things in life come with risk as they do a price young Avatar. So the bottom line is we need to know from you is this. Are you willing to risk everything? or is it worth the risk at all?" Alanna trying to simplify what she meant.

Holding up her right hand a sphere of dazzling pinkish spirit energy she showed him one possible future to see. He gazed his beautiful light gray eyes into it as she described what he was seeing cupped within the palm of her hand.

"Is it worth the risk of returning the Royal Family to their previous lives in the hopes they can positively help the world achieve true peace? That they along with you, your friends and future descendants can strengthen my powers by creating a sufficient amount of light, love, and life in this world? Therefore we can subsequently undo enough of Anto's powers so we can win the inevitable battles to come?" which at this point she snuffed out this future in her hand.

Then her left hand opened kindling another flame of spirit energy only this one was the darkest and ugly shade of purple he'd ever seen as she once more spoke the words that reflected the future she was presenting him.

"Or is not worth the risk and leave things as they are? Let Iroh die a broken heart? The Fire Nation
fall into anarchy and go into more uncertainty futures and risk Anto only gaining more strength and furthering upsetting things that your future incarnation and descents won't be able to combat because I won't be there to help out?" as she closed her hand on this future as well.

Then all three spirits said in unison at once. "That's the difficult choice you'll have to make, Avatar Aang. You and only you can make it"

"Me?" Aang pointed to himself getting weak in the knees and to his surprise, Koh pulled up a chair before the boy fell to the ground and hit his head on the queen size bed.

"No one said it be easy, baby but they just promised it to be worth it in the end." Mother of Faces spoke soothingly from the bed where her son was still busy caring for her.

"I already made one impossible choice! How do you expect me to make another?! How do you make an impossible choice?!" his hands covering his face.

"Because we have to make impossible choices every day, sweetie. Every day each choice we make could seem impossible. Everyone from the great leaders to the lowest beggar must make an impossible choice every day." Mother of Faces reminded him kindly.

"It doesn't seem like you have had to make one from what I can tell," he spoke slightly rudely taking through his hands.

"Avatar if I could right now I'd take your face but I won't. I already promised I never take your face. But my mother's been faced with many impossible choices. And you've already seen her have to make them as have I!" snapped Koh irritably to the boy.

Aang looked up as once again he was given another lesson to help with his mission. "Yes, choosing to forgive and reconcile can seem like an impossible choice. Letting go of one's anger and mending bonds can seem like an impossible choice. Telling someone the truth can seem like an impossible choice. Choosing to help or not to help can seem like an impossible choice. See? We make an impossible choice every day and in every way," Mother of Faces pointed out just what impossible choice she and her son had made right in front of him.

Aang hung is head in shame not seeing how something so simple could seem so impossible. He did recall how hard it was for Katara to let go of her hate and not kill the man who murdered her mother. Still, it was hard at times to recall simple choices of everyday life can be impossible.

"I thought the most impossible thing I had to choose in my life was whether or not to kill Ozai or not. No one seems to get I couldn't do that not even my past lives. And it was only by sheer luck that the lion-turtle showed me another way," as he was now rocking back and forth on his chair as if he couldn't sit still.

"No, that wasn't luck, Aang, you needed the answer you seek to end a war without bloodshed so why wouldn't someone help you by sending the answer you needed your way?" Alanna spoke once more in her cryptic way but this was easy to figure out.

"You sent him my way, didn't you? The lion-turtle?" he demanded to the noblewoman spirit then glowed with such radiance she lit up her whole side of the valley.

"I heard your prayer and merely guide him to you. You had to figure out on your own how to use the tools and knowledge he gave you to end the war. I merely provide the words of truth." Alanna replied simply with a shrug her wings fluttering and glittering.

"Well thank you for your help, Alanna. Now again what do you wish me to do? Since I know I'll
have to return to the mortal world soon. What do you wish me to do?” he asked in a weary and
drained voice.

"We've to stay here at my palace for a week to gather our power and strength as well as help
Mother of Faces heal. But whatever fate you decided we will stand by. Just call us with your
heart."

"So that means what exactly?"

"Take this week to get to know the Royal Family and then look into your heart to decide what
future is for the better and then ask them what they want. Again their minds don't recall they're true
selves, but the heart doesn't forget and never lies.” instructed both Alanna and Mother of Faces.

"Is that all you can suggest?” obviously wishing for more than just that.

"Watch your back and stay alert for Anto and remember again he's sure to try to kill you, your
friends, the Royal Family and that means Iroh if the time limit passes. So just watch your back,”
warned Alanna as she walked and placed her right hand his forehead and her face scrunched up.

"Hmm, not all of Anto's dark energy was cleansed from you from his nightmare moths and I sense
despite Katara's best efforts the cleansing wasn't performed perfectly. Here take these beauties
back with you,” as she placed four small heliotrope butterflies in his hand.

"What are these and should be very careful with them?” he notices they seemed to be alive.

"Yes, very careful with them. Once you get back to your body these butterflies will fly into each of
your hearts and thoroughly cleanses your bodies from Anto's moths' nightmares as well as purify
your energy.

That's what's been hindering all of you plus it is making it easier for him to target you. You've been
slightly contaminated by his touch this will cure that. Be safe young Avatar and we shall see you in
a week," as she bent down and kissed his cheek which left him turning fuchsia.

Abruptly everything around him slowly disappeared in a swirl of lavender, pink, gold and white
and all of a sudden he was back in the Valley in his body looking at his friends and the Northern
Water Tribe siblings.

"Wow that was some trip!” he swayed a bit like he was drunk or coming down from a high. Still,
he managed to not fall over and before anyone could ask a single question the tiny butterflies flew
from his hands and into all their hearts.

They felt they're enveloped into the warmest of hugs at the same time just had the most luxurious
bubble bath not even noticing the faint pink aura around them as the cleansing was completed.
Once the warmth left them they finally could speak again and immediately everyone asked what
happened to Aang in the Spirit World which he'd been gone for the last hour in.

"Really? Didn't feel like an hour."

"Just tell us where you were and what that butterfly lady had to say to you!” Sokka demanded
though it had lost its edge.

"Sokka Alanna is the most attractive and generous spirit you've ever met. She's what life is all
about and all the good things that make life worth wild. Her home is a place of beauty, serenity and
gives you both insight and makes you see what truly matters in life. Not to mention she's a very
good host and her tea not so bad either, though even she admits Iroh makes the best tea in the
"world of humans or spirits," he added with a giggle.

"Well, Twinkle Toes besides pretty ladies and tea parties what did she actually tell you?"

"She explained what the Grand Design is to me. How it truly shows how everything is connected in a much large picture then even we imaged. How we are connected in ways we couldn't possibly comprehend.

How her and Anto balance out the extreme of more than Life and Death but all that comes with Black and White. What is considered White and Life she controls and maintains the balance of and what is Black and Death he controls.

But they are locked in an eternal dance over the fate of very souls of humanity and people they call their 'champions'. Not just for the balance of the two worlds but for the fate of all worlds

She explained Anto throughout time has influenced many great acts of evil, chaos, destruction, and death. To further his own agenda, power, and his father's ultimate goal. And she and her mother have tried to counter it with their own champions.

But Anto latest champions nearly destroyed Alanna and her mother for good and would've succeeded in killing them and forever destroyed life in ways you couldn't imagine."

"What are you speaking about, Aang?"

"Katara, it was Anto who helped start the 100-year war. Anto was the one who whispered his silver tongue poisonous words into the weak-minded and vulnerable heart of Sozin until he could fully possess him. Then he remained apart of the Fire Nation Royal family and only grow more powerful from the three genocides and the perpetuating cycle of war and all atrocities that came from it.

He found his perfect host in Ozai and all the pain and suffering that was inflicted upon the Lost Royal Family was just to be the icing on Anto's cake. For him to destroy those three children and end Roku line permanently as well as the lines that were a vow of friendship?

It would ultimately kill Alanna and be the greatest act of evil since Avatar Roku's murder. Plus then within a few short years without my return, the Fire Nation would've won the war and then Anto and his father would've been unstoppable and there be no hope at all for anybody. No life at all in either this world or the Spirit World. All good would vanish and everyone souls would be forever corrupted by the Black Spirit."

"Wow, it would've been the biggest spiritual wound! Everyone would have been wounded is what are you saying by this? A wound so deep no one would recover?" Katara asked in horror and her boyfriend nodded.

"Anto still seeks even now to finish the job. Which is why if we are to fulfill our quest we must somehow incapacitate him with greater power by making Alanna strong enough to finally diminish him to normal strength.

So there a chance the world can truly have peace and those all future generations have a shot to win the battles yet to come and their souls will be full of love, light, and life."

"Okay, Aang wasn't expecting that at all when you got back from your trip to the Spirit World. Nope, not at all to hear that doozy of a story. Sorry wasn't expecting to hear about life and death and peoples souls. Why do we get all the nutjobs and weird stuff happening to us?" Sokka asked aloud to which Toph answered.
"I guess we're just lucky that way, Sokka."

"Well do you even know where the Royal Family is so they can play a part in helping the world build the world back up to peace and do this miracle?" Katara cut back in to which her boyfriend who nodded.

"Yes, I know who they are as we all do. But even both Alanna and Mother of Faces both agreed they must choose to return to their former self and assume that destiny. They told me their minds have forgotten but their hearts haven't."

"What do you mean, "Minds have forgotten but their hearts haven't?" that makes no sense Aang!" Sokka exclaimed as he ran his hands down his face. Man, did he need a serious vacation from all this freaky junk?

"It makes perfect sense, Sokka! He's talking about the family we encounter, aren't you, Twinkle Toes?!" Toph guessed with a grin on her face to which Aang nodded.

"Yeah, they confirmed it. They've been watching over them and protecting them all this time. Though I'm not sure how the husband fits into all this. They didn't explain who he is or if he really knows the truth. But the little girl obviously has no clue being born after the events that changed them."

"If all this is true then it explains how they've stayed hidden for the past eight years. But still what are we going to do now?" his girlfriend wanted to know to ask before anyone else could.

"Well, first we got to go back to the house for breakfast and then go check on Appa and Momo. Then we got a week to figure out a plan. That's all the time we got because it will take that long for Mother of Faces to heal."

"Just to be straight here. She's the only one who can undo what she did in the first place?" Sokka asked feeling he was the only one who got logic in the first place.

"Yes, she the only one who can turn them back into their true selves but only if they truly want it. She made it clear she can't do anything by force," Aang informed his friends.

"Well if you have some place and a quest to continue then you must go your way and we must go our way young Avatar. That a shortcut back to the village," Misu gestured to a path to the right.

"Thanks, Misu. Will you and your brother be able to get back to the North Pole alright?"

"We'll be fine now that we've got what we came for and we thank you for your great sacrifice to help us mend our bond and saving our lives. Thank you," Rafa told them as he bowed in respect.

They all bowed in return and each went their separate ways to face a new day. The Gang made sure to change back into their Fire Nation clothes before returning to the house and only managed to get an hour of sleep before the crowing of a rooster-pig woke them up.

Noriko was the first one up and could see her guests looked like they hadn't gotten a decent night sleep. "I guess you really stayed out pretty late to get as much as you could for your paper huh? Very studious I take it?" she asked as they mumbled and tried to hide the dark circles under their eyes.

"You could say that," yawned Aang to the woman he now knew was really Princess Ursa.

"Well, why don't you four sleep a bit longer. I'm sure my children can give you a more proper tour
in the daylight after you've gotten a bit more sleep. Besides they've got some chores to do anyway.

I'll make sure they won't wake you and I'll have a late breakfast ready for you after you get a little more shuteye. Till then sweet dreams," as the other gratefully went back to sleep.

They slept through Kioko getting her little sister Kiyi ready for school or walking her to school. They slept through how Aiko helped her mother make breakfast and make sure to keep some hot for their guest. They slept through Kazuo as he did almost all the chores in the house from the dusting to the mopping to going to pulling the weeds from his mother's flower garden. They slept through Noreen saying he was going to see how things were coming along for the play that Saturday.

By the time they did wake up, it was nearly lunchtime but Noriko and her teenager kids paid them no mind.

"You must have been really worn out from your trip from capital here and really trying very hard to get all you need for that paper your teacher assigned you. That real dedication. We admire that," was the answer all three of the forgotten Royal children told them as they all sat down to lunch.

"Yeah, it's really important to make sure the paper is accurate as possible and we gather as much information as possible," Aang informed them as he tried to look at the three teens without trying to look odd.

It was weird for all of the group now that they knew these were the Lost Royal Family and the faces they had weren't their true faces. It was just really awkward. Here they were sitting eating egg rolls, fried noodles and koumiss like normal people and yet it was still with royalty.

It was amusing to see how Kazuo who they now knew was Prince Zuko was feeding little bits of food directly into the mouth of Aiko who was really Lady Akiko. Kioko who was really Princess Azula merely smiled amusingly at it and teased them in a friendly way.

This was a direct contrast to how they'd been informed they had acted like as children. That there had been lightheartedness or frivolity. That Azula was heartless and callous. Furthermore, there three of them were always at each other throat. Here they were happy to be in one another company and actually were loving to one another and acting like real brother and sister.

That two girls who used to be sworn enemies were now like sisters and could laugh all night. Like they'd be at a slumber party doing each other nails and braiding the other hair or something.

"Well enough with lunch. Do you want to learn more about the town?" asked Kioko as she tried to fix her hair.

"Um sure but we've to check on someone first. Do you have some extra pet food?" Aang asked and Kioko gave a most generous smile.

"Did you leave your pets out in the rain somewhere? That's not a good idea!"

"Well, our mode of transportation might upset and causes a panic in the town. You see he's kind on loan and we didn't want to upset the town by showing up with something that might cause a ruckus," Aang tried to fabricate and Kioko could tell he was lying.

"What animal could you have possible been loaned that would cause such a ruckus that you thought you needed to hide him in the woodlands? The Avatar Sky Bison?" she quipped and then saw them freeze and she saw their face and smacked her head.
"You're not serious? Was this an act of good faith of the Avatar? Was he trying to help with the rebuilding efforts and offer to give you a ride or something?" asked Kioko if that was the case.

Katara quickly answered for them. "The Avatar was the one Professor Kami asked to drop his students one by one to their destinations for their project. But he had some business to take care of along the way and told us to take care of his bison and lemur till he finished up with it."

"Well nice to know he trusts you with something that important. Is that you were out so late last night? Trying to make sure no one would discover the Avatar's animals and think he was here in town?" Kazuo asked and they all nodded.

"Yeah, that would cause an awful lot of ruckus if our town thought the Avatar was here or is on a top secret peace mission for the Fire Lord. No wonder you didn't want to mention it. No problem we can totally keep this a secret. Why don't we got help you feed the bison and lemur and find a better place for them to stay till the Avatar comes back to take you home?" Aiko suggested constructively.

"You won't tell anyone you saw them or who dropped us off?" Katara asked cautiously.

"It's no one business and we don't need to make it's anyone. Besides if the Avatar needs to stay low key for a peace mission we don't need to interfere with that. C'mon let's go feed some hungry animals." Kazuo said as he started to fill a pack with a lot of food.

Once they got to the hiding spot the three Fire Nation Royals who didn't realize they were royalty smiled at the bison and lemur who took an instant liking to them. It may have helped the presence of the spirit animals.

"You two must have been famished and lonely being here all night. Here little guy. Mom may grow a lot of flowers but she also grows amazing greens," Kioko as she put down her wicker basket and offered Momo some veggies.

He looked over a head of cabbage, a zucchini, an artichoke, some peas, an onion, and a turnip. He seemed unsure of what to eat. "Here let me make it easier for you, Mr. Adorable," as Kioko did quick finger motions and she pinpoints fire was so fast they didn't see her slice and lightly grill everything before passing it back over to Momo.

He sniffed it once before diving into to devour his dish of wonderfully cooked vegetables. Meanwhile, both Kazuo and Aiko were feeding Appa both the vegetables along with some apples, mixed berries, and few watermelon slices. He looked like he was enjoying his own meal.

"He's really friendly and got a wonderful spirit I can tell that. He's truly a magnificent animal." Aiko spoke as her hand touched the arrow on Appa's forehead and for a moment she seems to space out.

"Hey you okay, Aiko?" asked Sokka who was closest to her as he shook her and then she seemed to come out her trance. Shaking her head she smiled. "Sorry, I guess I was just daydreaming about all the happy memories he must have made with Avatar Aang. How their spirits must be so tightly woven together. Excuse me," as she walked away for a moment to breath.

"What was that about?" Sokka whispered out of the corner of his mouth to Katara who shrugged.

"Don't know but something really strange happened when she touched Appa's arrow. Don't know what though."
"Well she's not telling the whole truth about something, I can tell you that much," whispered Toph sensing that Aiko who was really Akiko had experienced something greater than 'daydreams'.

After feeding Appa and Momo lunch and relocated them closer to town but still hidden from view and in a patch of heather they felt everything was secure they started to head back into town. They're halfway back to town when Aiko started taking a different path that led them away from the village.

"Um, where are we going? You seemed to be a little lost?" Sokka called out from the rear as they took a time-worn path up a hill till they came to an old wooden gate overgrown with ivy.

"Don't know why but something tells me we need to be here. Call it a gut feeling but we need to be here," Aiko called back to the others as she went to gate slowly opened it but not before lighting some special incense sticks.

Also, she, Kazuo, Kioko all bowed at a small little altar where a golden statute sat reciting a prayer before they proceed further. It didn't take the others long to figure out this was a cemetery.

Both old and new graves were strewed about in the small but well-kept graveyard. There were two things at each grave. A golden lantern with a candle burning on a hook hanging over it and at its base was a rather large and unique flower.

The flower was so big it was actually two feet tall with long red petals that reached over the graves like rainbow arches to provided protection. The three teens seemed to look at the strange flower in awe and reverence.

"What kind of flower is that?" asked Katara in awe by it herself.

"Well, it's called a Dragon Dew Flower. It's about as sacred and symbolic as the Fire Lily, to be honest. It's got its own story that just as sad and tragic but as meaningful." Aiko informed them who had no idea of the Fire Nation Lore. Despite all the notes from the Sisterhood they still hadn't really taken it all in.

"Tell us please," they all asked at once in eager voices.

"Well, the Dragon Dew Flower didn't appear till about 100 years ago. When the first Dragon and Dragon Guardian fell in battle after Sozin began the tradition of having people earn the title of "Dragon" by conquering both Dragon and Dragon Guardians" Aiko started and they could see and hear this story seemed very personal to her for some reason.

"After the death of the First Firebender and his Guardian, all in what would become a genocide all the Dragons and Guardians wept all night long as did their leader who had mysteriously disappeared as the story goes.

Their leader who wasn't present though felt the heartache a thousand times worse then anyone else and she begged the Spirits for someway that her sisters and the dragons could both be honored in death and find true peace and that no-one would ever desecrate them again.

So the story goes some powerful spirit no one is sure which one began to plant Dragon Dew Flowers at the site of every fallen dragon and Dragon Guardian throughout the Fire Nation. Those spots were consecrated and never could be defiled and the flowers would never die.

And yet still people started to try and desecrate them anyway and not honor the flower and those who did die horribly. Soon only grave sites had the flowers and then it became far and in between as more and more dragons were no more.
Till at last Hira’a cemetery became the last know cemetery to have the flower grow here which now seems to protect all the graves. As far we know no-one connected to the Dragon Guardians but if one is here her spirit was so powerful she wished to honor the whole village as thus all the graves have such a flower protecting them in life and death.

"Wow, that's quite a story. Really quite powerful." Toph admitted impressively and she couldn't even see the flower but she could 'see' all the graves even if everyone in the Fire Nation was burned to ash.

"Yes, but we are here to ask for the blessing from the ones who must be honored the most in this graveyard. Come," Aiko led them up a path to the most beautiful grave in the whole graveyard.

This was carved out of blood-red stone with golden writing. It had twin dragons decorating the top holding a white lotus tile with a carpet of various wildflowers all nestled under a beautiful cherry tree.

"Who is buried here? Why is important you receive their blessing?" Katara wanted to know.

"Because their family wasn't treated nicely and when the village truly wants to honor the royal family they come here and ask their late family members for their blessing and good fortune," Kazuo explained as he pointed to the names written on the graves.

The gang didn't recognize the names at all but could at least figure out these were the Royal Family maternal relatives who had kept the pact of friendship for all those years. This was their final resting place.

"Would you join us in prayer? Asking for their blessing that the show this Saturday will go off without a hitch? And whatever else you might need a blessing with?" asked Kazuo and seeing no objection everyone sank down and prayed.

Aang's prayers to these three deceased loved one's souls were they could give him the strength and wisdom to do what was right and help everyone out in the long run.

The next few days flew by as fast as a phoenix chases the sun and everyone could at least see for themselves it looked like the Royal Family had really built a happy life for themselves and better their lives.

And yet there was still the question do they risk everything and restore the Royal Family to the way they were? Or do nothing? It was a very difficult choice even knowing the consequence and what was at the stack on both sides.

They hoped they have a clearer mind to make that choice after seeing the play on Saturday when the deadline came. They'd been given seats of honor in the front row. So they're all sitting with both Sokka and Toph hogging the popcorn eating it like slobs and Katara and Aang looking very nice and polite. At Aang's feet was a chest and he was wondering if would have to open tonight or not. Still, he just wanted to enjoy the show and decided on that later.

The play started an hour before twilight and the first person on stage was Kioko who looked ravishing in a stunning strapless imperial red silk gown.

She was in the center of the stage and spoke with confidence as she addresses the audience. It seemed a little of her old self was showing through the facade she been wearing for the past eight years.

She spoke with all the power and skills of a true princess. "The story I'm about to tell you is both
sweet, tragic and true. It's about two families in the Fire Nation who feud and fight and hate each other very bitterly. From one family of firebenders and military excellence comes Kazuo the other wealthy non-benders merchants Aiko.

These two fell in love the moment they met and the more they fall in the more their families feud and fight. No one wishes them to be together though that is their aim. "I'll love Kazuo forever!" vows Aiko "No matter his family's name." In the end, they find a way to join forever in love, honor, and bliss. Kazuo and Aiko die together after one final kiss.” and she walked off stage.

The first act presents Kazuo's family. It showed how his family took being perfect in both militaries and in firebending extremely seriously. How this was the most important thing ever.

To look and act perfect and never show flaws, weakness furthermore forever do things according to plan moreover never question your superior who gave you an order. You just did as you're told and did it perfectly.

It showed the only person that Kazuo could consider a friend or a confidant was his younger sister Kioko who could see her brother wasn't exactly fitting the mold their father wanted for his eldest child even though he was approaching manhood.

She warned her brother he'd better shape up before the Summer Solstice Celebration or he'd be really sorry. Since he knew their father's temper was always the worst when they'd to appear before the Fire Lord on that day.

Kazuo rejected what their father wanted. As those were his wants and desires. Things he wishes to see fulfilled never asking what he wanted for himself. And he wasn't wanting to betrothed when he turned 18 to just any girl he wanted true love.

Second Act.

Aiko with her parents who had the same extremely high expectations. They expected her to behave like a proper high society woman and do what she was told never minding what she wanted or thought for herself. Unlike Kazuo, she was an only child without a friend or a confidant and wasn't looking forward anymore then he was to being simply betrothed by her parents choice. She wanted to find true love.

Third Act.

The Summer Solstice.

It was at the Fire Nation palace and everyone was having the time of their lives at the party except two souls who were bored to death and wanting to get out of the party. Using their own cleverness they managed to ditch their families/escorts and found themselves in the private gardens of the palace and bumped into each other.

They looked into each other eyes and felt something they'd never felt before and casually they started talking all night in a way they'd never talked before. Gradually they started walking through the moonlight gardens till they came to the turtleduck pond under a cherry blossom tree that started to shower them with blossom.

Then holding each other hands they started to sing to each other.

"No more talk of darkness,
Forget these wide-eyed fears,
I'm here, no one will harm you.
My words will cuddle and calm you.  
Let me be your freedom,  
Let daylight dry your tears,  
I'm here, with you, beside you,  
To help you and to hold you.

Say you'll love me every waking moment,  
Fill my head with images of peaceful times.  
Say you need me with you now and always,  
Promise me that all you say is true.  
That's all I ask of you.

Let me be your shelter,  
Let me be your light,  
You're safe, no one will touch you,  
Your fears are far behind you.

All I want is freedom,  
A world with no more fights.  
And you, always beside me,  
To hold me and to help me.

Then say you'll share with me one love, one lifetime.  
Let me lead you from your sadness.  
Say you need me with you, here beside you.  
Anywhere you go, let me go too.  
That's all I ask of you.

Say you'll share with me one love, one lifetime,  
Say the word and I will follow you...

Share each day with me, each night, each morning.

Say you love me.

You know I do.

Love me, that's all I ask of you!" as they kissed.

Then there was intermission followed by the next act with the two new young lovers sneaking about trying to see each other only for Kioko to find out about the love affair and swearing she keep it a secret.

After this act came the balcony scene the gang walked in on. This was even better than before.

After the balcony scene came the next act when both families found out about the affair and were furious with their children. Saying they shamed their families and dishonored them. The lovers declared their families had long dishonored themselves and flee.

The next act has the two teenage lovers fleeing for their lives with Kioko slowing both families down even if it might cost her her life. She only wishes her brother and his love to be happy and free.

They finally make it to the Fire Falls and first is to smear poison on their lips for one last kiss. And then just in case, the poison doesn't finish them off or their families try to give them an antidote.
they take out daggers and plunge them into their hearts. They die together holding hands as their blood seeps all over the empty meadow.

The final act.

Kioko comes back out to do the final narration. "My brother and his love's bodies could not be separate no matter how hard anyone tried so they're burned to ash together. The next day at the Fire Falls a new flower that no one had seen before grew from where their blood had stained the land.

The Fire Lord himself came to see it and he and his wife the Fire Lady after hearing the tale of the two teenage lovers and the senseless feud declared that the families in an act of penance were to end their feud and then built a monument out of gold to honor their fallen children who understood what true love and honor was about.

He also decreed from now that anyone whoever made the Promise of the Fire Lily shall do it in honor of my brother Kazuo and Aiko. So they forever remember what the lived and died for.

For never has there been a tale of more woe than this of Aiko and my brother Kazuo," she finished as the curtain closed and the reopened and everyone in the village and Team Avatar gave them a standing ovation.

While most of the village was heading to Zalika and Iye to celebrate the stars felt like going home for a nice quiet dinner at home. They invited Team Avatar back to join them.

They agreed seeing how this was the moment that could change everything. Aang couldn't help but feel some sense of irony. He'd just seen a play about daring to risk it all and now he was daring to risk it all and yet would he really do it or not?

That was still the unanswered question as they headed back to the house with that answer to be answered very soon.

song tweaked by Japananimegirl
Remember who you are

Remember who you are

It was a modest and unpretentious home-cooked meal. Even though the atmosphere should've been lighthearted furthermore happy the tension was so thick even Sokka's space sword would've fragmented if he'd tried to cut it.

Aang was taking a long look throughout the humble house he and his friends had spent the past week in with the Lost Royal Family. Remarkably unassuming, so humble, so quaint. It was just your mediocre every day home. Nothing extraordinary and yet this simple little residence in this all but overlooked hamlet contained the most extraordinary secret in all of the Fire Nation.

Aang kept rapping his right fingers on the low wooden table apprehensively while his left hand kept stroking the long wooden and jeweled chest of memories that Iroh had entrusted to him sitting on his left side. Aang had no idea what beloved treasures Iroh, Xiaoying or the Sisterhood had inserted inside the chest however he comprehended they were extremely significant.

Yet again he wasn't sure what to consider or feel or what he should choose. He only knew whatever his choice it would've critical outcomes for both the worlds of man and as well as the spirit world. Furthermore, it would either make Alanna's capabilities grow exponentially or Anto's endowments develop even greater than ever before. Therefore, either way, it could make one of two spirits more dominant and the destiny of man and spirit rested with a single choice.

Either way, his adolescent mind, and loving heart couldn't make that choice all on their own. Consequently remembering the information that Alanna herself had advised him so strongly on back at her magnificent palace in the Spirit World, he strongly felt the only way to know for unquestionably what life path was the correct one to take was he had to ask the family themselves what they desired for themselves.

He was so lost weighing all these deep profound thoughts in his head he didn't practically hear someone address to him. Noriko who was actually Ursa looked up from washing Kiyi's face and gazed at the young Avatar whom she didn't know and spoke, "Kuzon? Is something the matter?" she questioned out of concern for the boy.

"Huh? What?" Aang as he came back to reality for a moment to remember where he was as he looked up at the plain face woman. Her face etched with great concern of a woman who was a true mother.

"Is something the matter, dear?" she asked once more her pretty voice heavy with anxiety. "You haven't touched your meal and I was just wondering if something was the matter. After all, didn't you say this morning you and your friends would be leaving come morning when the Avatar returned to take you back to the capital?"

"Yes, of course, he's coming back in the morning. We've to return to the University to give our report to Professor Kami," he answered hastily to the noblewoman who again didn't know the truth.

"Well, I do hope we were able to give you all that you needed for it. Is there anything else we can offer you that you need for it before you depart in the morning?" inquired the compassionate lady with a sympathetic smile.
Aang would never know if it was mere coincidence or if it was fate she had asked that particular question. Nevertheless, he took that opportunity to ask them the burning question.

"Yes, Noriko, there is something that would make our paper perfect. If you, Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko could all answer a few questions honestly for me then we've all we require for the paper," he replied back to her cautiously.

"Us? What do you require of us to answer for your paper?" demanded the three perplexed teens as the put down their chopsticks and stared at the boy with a somewhat confused look on their highly attractive faces.

No-one in the room noticed how abruptly pale Noreen was growing or how his breathing was becoming irregular at that moment as the young 14-year-old boy pressed forward with his questions. Everyone attention was on the royal family and Aang. Everyone kind of forgot about everyone else in the room. Only at that moment were Aang and the four royal family members he was about to question.

"Tell me honestly," Aang began casually with as steady of breath as he could before he lost his nerve completely. "Are you four absolutely happy? In your hearts of hearts are you sincerely happy here? Are you positive this is where you belong? That you are truly happy, where you belong and home and that you would prefer for no other life than the one you live right now?"

"Kuzon what kind of question is that? Why would you ask such a question?" laughed Noriko at the boy in amusement. Still, the boy's gray eyes were huge and noiselessly pleading with her and children for answers.

"Please just answer the question. Look into your hearts and answer the question. Please, I need to know," Aang was really insisting with needing this answered and the family seeing he was insisted thought about it for a moment before they replied.

"I'm content if my children are happy and safe. I'm happy if I'm with my husband. As long as I'm with my family and we're safe and happy then I'm happy, Kuzon," Noriko replied to the boy sincerely.

"Same goes for me, Kuzon. If my family is with me then I'm happy and as long as I've my fire lily at my side then I'm home. Where my heart is that is my home and everything that gives my heart a reason to beat is right here in this room," Kazuo informed the boy speedily.

"Same goes for me, Kuzon. I concur with my mother and my true love. Home is where the heart is and the people who give your heart a reason to beat."

"Ditto. My heart and soul wouldn't be alive at all if not for the people in this room. Everything we are is right here in this room. We are happy, safe and at home with our family. Where else could that be? Your home is where your heart is. That means the people who give your heart a reason to beat and fill your heart and soul with love.

Everyone who does that right here in Hira'a. Where else would we have to go to find those to give our life meaning or fill us up with love?" inquired Kioko as if he was being ridiculous.

Aang knew they're speaking from the heart for indisputable no doubt about was lingering in his mind at all. They were being a hundred percent truthful with him. It looked like he would've to leave them as they were. Forever as someone else and let the Royal Family remain 'dead'.

"Thank you for your time. We shouldn't keep you any longer. C'mon guys we should get going.
Thanks for all your generous hospitality. Glad you're all so happy. We hope you remain happy," as Aang gradually started to get up and turn to leave when a voice abruptly shouted loudly. "STOP!"

Aang froze and turned ever so nonchalantly around as did the rest of the gang in the direction of who spoke. To their great surprise, it had been Noreen the only one they'd not been sure of. He was trembling like a leaf in the wind and looked rather outlandish. He had the expression of a man who had carried the burden of a terrible secret too many years and wishes to confess his guilt at last.

"Stop! Please just stop! Don't go!" he again stated loudly to the group startling everyone in the room with his proclamation. "I know who you and your friends actually are. Furthermore, I know who sent you and the reason why. I also acknowledge I cannot conceal the truth one more day. It would dishonor a sacred vow of friendship. Furthermore, I can't be parsimonious any longer moreover deny the hearts of those who love them as well by keeping silent.

Please tell them the truth! Please tell them who they actually are! For the sake of their loved ones. Tell them who they really are even if their minds have forgotten I know their hearts haven't. Please just tell them the truth that others haven't forgotten and I've been burden with for eight long years," implored Noreen and everyone was gaping at him in a stunned manner.

His family was thinking "What is Dad/my love talking about?" Team Avatar was thinking "Who is he really and how does he know the truth?" Aang was thinking "Thank you."

Deliberately Aang turned around and untied his headband then lifted the wig off his head to proudly reveal his sky blue arrow tattoo to one and all in the room. "My name is Aang and I'm the Avatar. I was sent by Fire Lord Iroh, Grand Yon Xiaoying and Healer Yang of the Sisterhood of the Dawn to find you four."

"Us? Why?!" they asked astonished at this revelation.

"Because you are the Lost Royal Family," he replied matter-of-factly.

"WHAT?!" they shouted in incredulity at his claim.

Dead silence filled the room for a moment. No one moved a muscle or breathed it was like someone had just frozen time itself and everyone was just waiting for it to start again. Suddenly the voice that had shouted "Stop!" was the one to start time again.

"It's true, my love. Your real name is Ursa and your children are Prince Zuko, Princess Azula, and Lady Akiko." Noreen responded tiredly looking relieved he could ultimately say it out loud. Following almost a decade of suppressing the truth, it was ultimately acknowledged. Now he was finally free to sing like a caged bird and be set free from his burden that been eating him alive all this time.

"This is some bad joke, right? Where the punchline?" Kazuo asked looking around the room and every one as if to ask for sanity to return to their simple lives. But then Kai and Ting-Ting spoke up again shocking one and all in the household as they too just wanted the truth to be know. The day had finally come and it was time for them to remember at long last.

"It's true! Your real name is Ursa and your children are Prince Zuko, Princess Azula, and Lady Akiko." Noreen responded tiredly looking relieved he could ultimately say it out loud. Following almost a decade of suppressing the truth, it was ultimately acknowledged. Now he was finally free to sing like a caged bird and be set free from his burden that been eating him alive all this time.

"This is some bad joke, right? Where the punchline?" Kazuo asked looking around the room and every one as if to ask for sanity to return to their simple lives. But then Kai and Ting-Ting spoke up again shocking one and all in the household as they too just wanted the truth to be know. The day had finally come and it was time for them to remember at long last.

"It's no joke! The reason we're given to you was to assist you in controlling your actual powers! We're actually Akiko's spirit animal guides given her true birthday is the Summer Solstice and she was born with spiritual powers. In actuality, numerous powerful spirits have been protecting you four for years!" Kai revealed in a rush and Kiyi yelped in surprise. "When did our pets learn to talk?!"
"We're not ordinary animals, Kiyi! We're Spirit Animal Guides from the Spirit World. Furthermore, we have only been disguised as pets in order to help your older siblings control their extraordinary powers so they wouldn't be found by the one who had driven them into hiding in the first place!" Ting-Ting asserted loudly to the confounded family.

"After all it's not every child who is like Zuko and Akiko who are symbiotic and can bend flames of true love like mated dragons or born with spiritual powers. Or like Azula with prodigy abilities. Therefore required special teachers to assist them in mastering their capabilities so consequently, they wouldn't be discovered!" snapped Kai impatiently.

"Who slipped something into our drinks? This is a really bad dream isn't it?" Noriko asked in a terrified tone and Noreen shook his head as he placed a reassuring hand on her lap and sought to speak soothingly to her.

"No my love. Eight years ago you and your children scarcely escaped with your lives from the capital when Ozai attempted to murder Zuko and Akiko and you struck a deadly bargain with him. The Spirit of Life herself gave you that locket you've worn since that day. She personally escorted you here and then another spirit gave you four new faces and memories. You've known her as Madam Masuku." Noreen recalled what transpired eight years ago to his family who looked again like this was an extraordinarily bad joke.

"If you absolutely want evidence of your genuine past then here take a good look at these. I was informed by those same two spirits your minds wouldn't recognize these items although your hearts would. Your loved ones told me to deliver you these items to encourage you to remember." Aang airbended the chest onto the table and opened it and then airbended the stuff out of it.

The four of them studied at the multiple objects tentatively. In front of them were various items of great significance from their past. Ursa's diary, Zuko's knife, Akiko's diary, amulet and even her rightful inheritance of Dragon Guardian armor and sword, Azula's charred doll, a small gold jewelry box full of jewelry given to them, teabags full of Iroh's mystery tea, a fire flower, empty perfume bottles, a sunstone, some old books, an old music sheet with lyrics to an old song.

There was something from each of their loved ones of the past. Something from Iroh, Xiaoying and all of the Sisterhood. Highly significant souls who had all loved, honored and cherished them and gone out of their way to protect them all at great cost.

"Why does all this seem like something from a forgotten dream?" the four of them all whispered at once as they turned the items over and over in their hands as if trying to remember them. Their false faces had the strangest of expressions on them as if genuinely seeking to remember what their hearts were telling them was the truth even if their minds had different memories.

"Mommy? Big Brother? Big Sisters, what's going? Daddy, what's going on here? Who are all these strange people? What's going on? Please tell me!" cried Kiyi in a panic as her daddy picked her up and put her in his lap.

"I'm sorry Kiyi but before you were born your mother and older brother and sisters were the Royal Family and they've forgotten that. Now we're trying to help them remember that," her daddy attempted to explain that to the bewildered six years old who of course at that age was too naive to understand it.

At that moment the cherished treasures of their forgotten past seemed to be helping their heart remember and persuade them to believe Aang's words as truth something unforeseen occurred. A deathly cold chill filled the room. The unmistakable presence of death filled the room and then
something came crashing down from the ceiling at the same time the room exploded into an inferno of blackish red flames.

Screams were drowned out by the roar of flames and the beast who had crashed in front of them. A seven-foot-tall bipedal jet black werecat with a blood-red winged star on his chest.

"Thank you so much Avatar Aang! You've exposed my victims for me! Now I can annihilate you all at once and finally finish what I started! I will end Roku's line! End the Dragon Guardian Line! Furthermore, if that girl won't be my new champion then I can make indisputable she dies as well! Then as the added bonuses, I will take everyone souls in this room back to Zan and torment you in the Spirit World in a thousand different ways! Then finally that stupid Alanna and her mother will be lifeless and I and my father will be triumphant!" he smirked so sinisterly with blood dripping from his fangs with the insane look in his golden eyes.

He was so preoccupied with his soliloquy he wasn't prepared for the sneak attack when Sokka's boomerang hit him dead on from behind or at that moment Kai and Ting-Ting start to thump him and rack him with their talons and feet.

"Sokka get Noreen, Ursa, and Kiyi out of here! Get them outside and protect them with your life! Katara and Toph go back him up! I'll stay here with Zuko, Akiko, and Azula to deal with Anto!" screamed Aang his orders which everyone followed pronto without questioning any of them.

Sokka, Katara, and Toph did get their three assigned people outside to the garden and sought to escape but found their escape route cut off by Anto's wolf pack who looked like they'd been upgraded to version 2.0.

"Okay Sokka you stay back and protect them, Toph and I'll handle the pups! Just get ready to fight to the death! I'm not ready to die but if that's what Anto wants its what he'll get!" Katara yelled to her brother who drew both his sword and his boomerang with a defiant look in his eyes.

"Bring it on! I ain't going down without a fight!" he planted his feet firmly on the ground ready to fight to the death like a true Water Tribe warrior.

"Me either! I ain't rolling over and dying! I'm dying on my feet! Now," cracking her knuckles and spitting Toph said, "Let's see how tough these little puppies really are!" and the battle was on as the wolves howled once and started running full on at Team Avatar.

Inside the house, Anto had got his second wind and manage to smack the two small spirit animals unconscious and was snarling at the four teenagers in the room. He was relishing the look of fear in the three Fire Nation teenagers eyes.

"Who are you?! What do you want with us?!" they demanded to him looking so fearful too frightened to fight back. He like that in his victims made them so easy to torture and then collect.

"I've unfinished business with you and your mother, though I relish when I make my prey suffer a bit before I play with it. Therefore take great pleasure in seeing how your lives should've been for the past eight years!"

And out of nowhere three black moths shot out and flew rapidly into their heads and another one snuck outside and struck Ursa and they all fell to the ground screaming in pure agony seeing the nightmare that life would've been for them if they hadn't escaped.

Ursa's worst nightmare was playing out in her mind's eye. Her breaking her vow of both friendship and being a mother. Choosing to accept Ozai's terms and leave her children behind and then accept
the Mother of Face's deal but forget all three of her children forever just so SHE COULD BE HAPPY!

Zuko and Akiko were being tortured by a nightmare of further torment of some Agni Kai were both were scarred in more ways than one, years of pain and separation, then just more agony and suffering till finally perishing at the hands of Zuko's sister.

Azula's worst nightmare was her seeing herself become nothing but a walking weapon losing her humanity completely. Willing to murder a child, willing to murder her friends, brother, his love and then lost in the madness.

Again none of them in their minds recognize themselves as these people consciously. On the other hand, the agony of these tortures was authentic enough to cause them a sufficient amount of pain. It was like an out of body experience for them. Like seeing yourself without knowing you're seeing yourself. Moreover, it was killing them from the inside out.

While they're being tormented Aang was dueling Anto in the house. "What did you DO TO THEM ANTO?!" demanded Aang furiously as he sent an airbending slice at him to which the werecat dodged effortlessly.

"You are still so feeble and pitiful Avatar. Don't have the heart to kill your enemies!" chuckling.
"Not that I can truly die! You can't kill the Spirit of Death! Although I'd like at least a challenge! To see you actually be able to kill! Seeing how you have so much blood on your hands!" he taunted the boy.

"The higher path and more human path is to choose life, Anto! An animal kills cause it is hungry! A human has the ability to choose whether or not kill! Valuing life is a strength, not weakness!" as he tried to imprison the demented spirit in a stone enclosure which did no good as Anto simply used his powers over chaos to destroy it like it was nothing.

"You sound too much like that holier-than-thou Alanna! All her stupidity about mercy and the powers of the heart and the better nature of humanity! HA! Humans will always give in to their darker side every time! No one is capable of rising above their dark primal instincts! Not now, not ever! They haven't done it since I was born no matter how many times Alanna tried to speak her ridicules "Words of Truth!" She and her lame Sisterhood have all tried to spread messages and you, her mother champion all have failed humanity countless times!

Face it! Humanity will never better itself and that's why I and my father will continuously win! And when I finally kill you, your friends and the Royal Family the world will kill itself in sympathy of death so great it will be the sweetest lullaby ever!" he imperiously rejoiced his dark wishes aloud.

"You're really full of yourself you know that? Your ego out of control!" as they continued to duel as Aang as he used the elements but wouldn't get into the Avatar State nor would he use them in a lethal way. He didn't kill Ozai and he would never take a life no matter how much Anto was trying to goad him into becoming a killer. He wasn't a killer and never would be.

Suddenly Anto lunged at Aang and pin him to the ground at the same time outside everyone else was pin by the wolves in the exact same way. About to be given the killing bite. The Royal Family was going to perish from their psychic torment Anto had given them.

Just then a beautiful voice cried out. "NO! It will not end this way!" Ursa's locket burst open with luminosity so bright it was blinding and from the butterfly gemstone a whole flurry of butterflies
broke loose and entered everyone's heart and the most gorgeous voice began to sing loud and clear a song that was giving them renewed strength and power.

"I am not a stranger to the darkness, "Hideaway," they say "Cause we don't want you broken." I've learned not to be ashamed of all my scars, "Runaway," they say "He'll never accept you as you are." But I won't let him break me down to dust, I know that there's a place for us. For we are glorious, When the sharpest words wanna cut me down, I'm gonna send the brightest light, gonna drown them out. I am brave, I am tired, I am who I'm destined to be, this is me. Look out 'cause here we come, And we're marching on with the beating war drums We're not scared to be seen I make apologies, this is me Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh

Another round of sharp words hits my ears, Well, fire away 'cause today, I won't let the shame sink in. We are bursting through the barricades and, Reaching for the sun (We are warriors.) Yeah, that's what we've become (Yeah, that's what we've become.) I won't let him break me down to dust, I know that there's a place for us, For we are glorious, When the sharpest words wanna cut me down I'm gonna send the brightest light, gonna drown them out I am brave, I am tired, I am who I'm destined to be, this is me. Look out 'cause here we come And we're marching on with the beating of war drums. We're not scared to be seen, I make apologies, this is me. Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh, This is me. and I know that I deserve your acceptance, (Oh-oh-oh-oh) 'cause we are like two sides of the same coin. (Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh.)
When the sharpest words wanna cut me down,
I'm gonna send the brightest light, gonna drown them out.
This is brave, this is proof,
This is who I'm destined to be, this is me.

Look out 'cause here we come (Look out 'cause here we come),
And we're marching on with the beating of war drums (marching on, marching, marching on.)
We're not scared to be seen,
I make apologies, this is me.

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down,
I'm gonna send the brightest light, gonna drown them out.
I'm gonna send a bright light,
Gonna drown them out.
Oh,
This is me!

It was more than enough to give everyone the energy to fight back. After hearing that song they all felt Alanna had imparted them at least a tenth of her power and thus, in turn, their bending or fighting skills had reached their zenith. It was then for the first time in eight years the Royal Family was allotted to show precisely what they were capable of.

Anto was hit with a massive, intense and powerful wave of blue, gold and pink fire that sent him flying outside the house. Before he had a chance to recuperate from that a ring of miniature suns kept coming in hard and fast from various directions while lightning was making him dance a little ditty.

Next, after he scarcely avoided the lightning and started charging toward the prodigy bender twin phoenixes swooped at full force knocking the wind out of him. Growling he looked up towards his helpless prey where a dragon of fire that looked like Roku's dragon Fang was curled protectively encompassing the non-benders behind Sokka with floating weapons of fire. It seemed the children had admittedly mastered how to become absolutely powerful benders during their time in hiding.

Still, this didn't make Anto any less cocky. Instead, he threw back his head and laughed in a more demented manner before he transformed back into his true self with a blacker sword the Sokka's in one hand and a black leather whip in the other. Even in his true form didn't make him any less threatening or scary looking however everyone was closing in on him.

"Your imbecility is so exceptional it's making my day! You honestly believe just because you've got a tenth of Alanna's powers that's enough to defeat me? You are all morons! All of you!" he cackled in a diabolical way even though he was cornered by one and all.

"You're the one that trapped, Anto! We've got you back literally in a corner and forced you out of your shapeshifter form and you seemed to be desperate to me!" Aang observed coolly at he, his friends held their weapons at the ready.

"You still don't get it, do you child Avatar?" insulted the Black Spirit. "You still don't get who and what I am? I already told you I can't be killed! I'm unstoppable! I'm the Black Spirit of Death! As long as humanity gives me what I need I'll be unstoppable!" he chortled making them all lose a slight bit of confidence seeing him look so confident.

He stopped his devilish laughter and looked Aang dead in the eye and told him straight out. "And for your information, I've had the last 100 years to gain enough power to be all but omnipotent! All the depression, agony, hatred, turmoil, waste, corruption? The symphony of death? All the sins that
were committed? How many countless people sold their souls to be me? How infinite souls still belong to me? Ha! You'll never have the power to defeat me!

Even all of you still belong to me! I may not have taken your souls yet but all of your hearts still belong to me! Humanity never changes! Not now and not ever!" and he kept chuckling about it in the way any lunatic would.

While everyone else was still steeling themselves for an onslaught on the deadly spirit Aang's mind was swiftly working to make the connections. Anto was arrogant to the max and like most scoundrels were so arrogant had already divulged the secret to his own downfall thinking no-one is intelligent enough to figure it out.

Aang was quickly remembering everything Alanna had revealed to him back at her palace about the Grand Design, about herself and Anto, including regarding the words of truth, impossible choices, hearts changing moreover what she herself and he had never done on humanity behalf and why furthermore also what Mother of Faces had said about spiritual wounds.

Suddenly the picture became crystal clear and he understood the secret of how to vanquish Anto and secure the future the one Alanna had desired all along. One where the Royal Family could return to their loved ones. Furthermore, give Alanna the strength she required to help better the future for future generations to combat Anto's future evils for the inevitable showdown between their parents and the fate of all lives.

"Guys! I know what we have to do to defeat and get rid of him for good. Or at least make him go away for a seriously long time!" Aang declared loudly and the Black Spirit looked him in skepticism. What was this boy up too?

"What's your idea Twinkle Toes? Does it involve crushing him to bits?" Toph asked hopefully.

"No, it's so simple. He's already given us the answer but we weren't paying attention." Aang started to reveal the simple answer they'd been oblivious to from the start.

"Say what? What are you talking about Aang?" called out Sokka from behind him. He was known for his plans but he really wanted to know what Aang was seeing which he himself the plan guy couldn't figure out.

"We've to listen to the words of truth and heed them by making an impossible choice and then mend all our spiritual wounds so he will no longer have any power over any of us because our hearts will have changed!" Aang exclaimed loudly as if this was so obvious which only made everyone stare at him.

"Um, Aang care to explain that in a language we can understand?" Katara asked him clearly showing everyone needed a translation.

"We've to forgive those who have wronged us plus ourselves furthermore sincerely mean it. We've to let go of our hate and anger in our hearts so he's got no power over us only then can we defeat him if he's got no power over us!" Aang simplified what he meant to the confound group of people who were all still transfixed on the satanic spirit standing in front of them.

"No! Don't listen to him! He's wrong! Don't listen to him!" shouted Anto desperately after Aang spoke. Suddenly they realized if he was telling them that then Aang had hit the nail on the head of what was the key to defeating him.

Growling deeply Anto sent a giant wolf at Katara who he knew hadn't forgiven Yon Rha for
murdering her mother. She swore she never forgive him and thus he'd always have the power of her. That burning hate. No one would ever forgive a murderer. A murder was unforgivable. This girl would belong to him forever! She never let it go!

Katara could see the wolf coming at her at lightning speed and said loudly as the wolf was closing in. "My mother Kya did the ultimate act of love by giving her life for me her daughter. She wouldn't want me to live in hate. She would want me to forgive. I finally forgive Yon Rha for murdering my mother," as she covered her head as the wolf pounced and then dissolved into thin air showing that Katara had absolutely forgiven the man who had murdered her mother at last.

Anto cursed vehemently and then quickly sicced a wolf at Toph who'd never forgiven her parents for how they treated her. Toph senses it coming and said. "I forgive my parents for being human and making mistakes. They loved me and may not have listened but they are only human. One day we shall reconcile. I forgive them for their mistakes." Just like Katara's wolf this wolf also vanished just before it could attack her.

Anto was now really cussing up a storm and he sent two wolves at Sokka who blamed himself for Yue's death. Sokka was ready and before the wolf got in the striking distance he said. "Yue was a beautiful, brave and selfless woman who gave her life for this world. I will not feel guilty any longer for a woman who gave her life for the world. I forgive myself because it dishonors her sacrifice," and again the wolves vanished into thin air.

Aang proclaimed loudly before Anto could attempt to attack him. "I forgive myself for running away. I forgive myself for how my actions caused so much pain and suffering for the world. I forgive myself for the death of my people. I've done all in my power to earn this world forgiveness and I'll do that for the rest of my days to continue to make up for the misdeeds I've done," and the rest of the pack vanished into nothingness.

"NO!" howled Anto with veins throbbing in his bone-white skin. Still, he wasn't about to give up. He snarled and said menacingly "Do you think you're enough to bring me down?! Because I still have power over them!" pointing a long claw-like finger towards the royal family with triumph in his golden eyes. "They can't even remember what was done to them! How can they forgive those who were done them wrong?! I still have all the power that the Fire Nation Royal family has given me for 100 years!"

Noreen stood up and courageously yelled. "Their minds don't remember, Anto but their hearts do! Please look into your hearts and forgive those who wrong you so we can defeat him!"

"Be quiet you stupid man! Your words mean nothing! You are nothing!" screamed Anto violently at Noreen believing his normal silver tongue would work its magic.

However, Anto's silver tongue's bewitcheries had failed. The family listened to their husband and father's words and all who'd tried to protect them for so long and then dug down deep to try to remember with their hearts what was done to them even if their minds couldn't. Trying to find the power to defeat this evil creature and do what must be done to finally be safe forever.

Kioko spoke first sensing what she'd been sensing for a long time and based on that nightmare Anto gave her. "I forgive myself for my past actions, Anto. For if you wanted me to be your champion I must've been rather nasty before. But I forgive myself for who I used to be. I've changed and I'm a better person now. So I forgive myself."

Next Kazuo and Aiko spoke as one, " Our destinies are forever tied together. We forgive the ones who sought to tear us apart and wounded us. Who attempted to destroy both our love and lives. We may not remember it however we forgive those wounded us the most as they did it together and
our pain is one."

"And I forgive myself for not being able to protect my children better. Or if I had chosen that nightmare you showed me for not loving them enough. I forgive the one who hurt all of us. It does no good to live in anger or hate. Only to live in love. Therefore we forgive the one who did us the most harm and led us to where we are now," spoke up Noriko bravely and confidently as the family stood together united as one.

When they stood together and united their words seemed to be like a death sentence to Anto who dropped his weapons and fell to the ground and was contorting in pure agony. "NO! You can't mean that! NO! Spiritual wounds can't be healed! No one ever forgives! No one ever listens to "Alanna so-called "Words of truth!" Hearts don't change! NO! This is impossible!" as they all could see intense waves of energy ebb out of him quickly and now he was the one who was screaming bloody murder.

It was then Ursa's locket burst open again and in another flurry of butterflies emerged the noblewoman White Spirit of Life Alanna who gracefully strolled over to Anto as she was smiling over him.

"Anto we meet at last again," she said in a simple soft voice.

"Have you come to gloat, Alanna?" he hissed as he lay on the ground in his vulnerable state as he scowled hatefully at her.

"No, Anto, I just wanted to see for myself you realize the words of truth. That yes humanity is capable of hearing them. That humans are capable of forgiveness, change and embracing love instead of fear and anger. That you realize the power of the human heart and spirit and that hope and peace are possible. That hope sees the invisible, feels the intangible and does the impossible. And that's why you'll never knock me down."

"You think this is the end? That I won't find another champion? That I won't come back stronger than before?" he challenged her in a weak voice that sounded like a sick cat.

Sighing softly Alanna looked at her mortal enemy with pity he couldn't stand and replied. "Anto I know I can't change who and what you are. You will do what you do for all time. Just as I shall do what I was born to do for all time. All gathered here understand that. But we also understand now there are ways to avoid giving you power. Now I think it's time you return to your home palace in Zan on your side of Limbo Valley for a long vacation."

She waved her right hand and opened a portal to his side of their home valley. He got the message and crawled like a wounded dog with his tail between his legs into it and the portal sealed shut with the words of banishment across it.

"Well, he won't bother humanity for several decades now. Not after this defeat," she said cheerfully. She looked extremely relieved that for now her dance could be put on hold for a while. Furthermore, she could do a bit of living herself for a while. Just stop and smell the roses now that it appeared Anto was back at normal strength and things were gonna be okay for few decades.

"Which will give the world a good chance to recover and everyone to play their part to be ready for the next great evil to come. Now to unfinished business," spoke a second familiar voice. Looking up they saw the familiar human form of Mother of Faces approaching from the Valley. She was smiling widely as she and Alanna hugged and turned to the Royal Family.

"Well done all of you. Not many could figure out how to defeat Anto or send him packing. Or
make the hard choice to let go of their hate and anger and forgive.” Alanna told them proudly.

"Yet all of you did and we are proud of all of you. But now to the most important matter. Noriko, Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko would you like to return to your former lives? Would you like me to return your former faces and minds? If not I do have the power to wipe this whole evening from everyone's minds till it's naught but a midsummer night dream. So what is your wish?” asked Mother of Faces in as kind a manner as she could.

The four of them looked at each other and thought about all that had happened in just the last hour before they all said at once. "Please return us to who we use to be."

"Okay," as the Mother of Face changed back into her proper form and then opened her hand was four shimmering faces she'd kept safe for eight years were spinning. "Hold still. This may be a little uncomfortable. I've never returned a face I took away before.” she warned as they braced themselves.

Everyone held their breath as the Mother of Faces carefully places the true faces of each Royal Family member back on to the proper face. As she did something astonishing even to her followed. It was essentially like a spell as a song was heard as their faces and memories were return for one and all was heard as this was done.

"Zuko: I was caught up in dad's expectations,
He was trying to make me live his dream,
But I caused him so much frustration,
And mom only wanted the best for me.

Azula: He wanted me to show one interest,
To always keep a big, bright, smile.
Be that powerful, perfect, little princess,
But I'm not that type of child.
And this storm is rising inside of me,
Don't you feel our worlds collide?
It's getting harder to breathe,
It hurts deep inside me,
Just let me be,
Who I am.
It's what you really need to understand,
And I'm so happy to know that he's been locked away.
But he tortured me,
And I couldn't break free,
So, I cry and cry but just won't get it out.
My Silent Scream.

Ursa: Tell me why you're putting pressure on me,
And every day he'd cause me harm.
That's the reason why I feel so lonely,
Even though he held me in his arms.
Wanna put me in a box of glitter,
But I'm just trying to get right out.
And now you're feeling so so bitter,
Because I defied you.
And this storm is rising inside of me,
Don't you feel our worlds collide?
It's getting harder to breathe,
It hurts deep inside me,
Just let me be,
Who I am.
It's what you really need to understand,
And I hope so hard for the pain to go away,
And it's torturing me,
But I can't break free.
So, I cry and cry, but just won't get it out
My Silent Scream.

Akiko: Can't you see how I cry for help,
Cause you should love me just for being myself?
I'll drown in an ocean,
Of pain and emotion,
If you don't save me right away.
Just let me be,
Who I am.

All: It's what you really need to understand,
And I hope so hard for the pain to go away,
And it's torturing me,
But I can't break free.
So, I cry and cry, but just won't get it out,
The Silent Scream,
My Silent Scream!"

They all fell to the ground unconscious after the song concluded and no one was sure what to do for the moment. All they could do was hold their breaths still and give them a moment to wake up.

Songs tweaked by Japananimegirl.
Returning Home

Everyone was left speechless that it was extremely eerie following the shocking furthermore climactic climax with Anto the Black Spirit of Death. Lying on the exposed soil essentially as if they were sleeping and dreaming in ecstasy was the Royal Family.

No one except Alanna the White Spirit of Life dared approached them. She bent down to exam each of them extremely thoroughly before she signaled to Aang to advance. She smiled lovingly to put his and his friends' anxieties moreover qualms to rest instantly.

"They are fine, there is no damaged that was done, they're simply in a spiritual coma," the attractive lady revealed to the anxious teenagers encompassing her.

"Spiritual coma?" Aang questioned in a confused voice. He looked at his friends who all had the same confused look. None of them heard of such a thing before.

"Normal coma is sort of a disconnect between mind and body and particularly deep sleep," the snow-white spirit began to describe the condition and the difference to the group. "Spiritual coma the spirit is what is disconnected from the body and is sort of in a state of limbo so to speak. In this limbo state is undergoing a transformation of sorts. A rebirth and cleansing," she seemed to pause for a moment thinking how best to explain this. After a few more moments she continued on.

"I had my Sisterhood put the children in their earliest spiritual coma in order to help them recover when they fled to positively cleanse them of the sadistic and morose circumstances they grew up in. The origin of their journey of rehabilitation, if you may.

When Mother of Faces gave the family their new faces they experienced their second spiritual coma to transform themselves into their new identities. Consequently, now they're in this coma again to convert back into themselves." Alanna explained in the uncomplicated of terms what was going on.

Thinking about it for a moment Aang kind of got a comparison analogy to use what he thought she meant. "So is this like how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly?" he asked as he saw so many butterflies when it came to Alanna.

"That's one way to think of it yes. This spiritual coma I believe will last only till the daybreak graces this world once more. Which doesn't leave us much time to prepare."

"Prepare for what exactly?" the young Avatar asked the beautiful woman again in confusion.

"For telling the world the truth? Their story must be told and if anyone gonna is told the truth first it should be Hira'a. They are gonna want to know why the family leaving and why Noriko, Kazuo, Aiko, and Kioko are no more."

"That makes sense dear Alanna. Only just how do we propose we do that?" inquired Katara as she came closer to the elegant spirit woman.

"There is but one way we do things here in Hira'a, young waterbender. When we tell a story we do a play about it," spoke up Noreen coming over holding his young daughter Kiyi's hand.

The little six-year-old was unquestionably bewildered furthermore still not understanding all that
was going on. Katara promptly scooped up the child and used all the skills she had from her years of taking care of small children in her village to help the confused and slightly traumatized child.

"I can babysit Kiyi while this play is being set up and perhaps help her understand better was going on. I'm sure your really confused aren't you?" she asked the child who was clutching her necklace and doll tightly.

"What happened to Mommy and my big brother and sisters? Who was that scary monster?" the little girl asked clearly not understanding at all what was going on.

"Listen Kiyi you and I are going to spend the rest of night together. Your mommy and big brother and sisters are napping. But for now, I'll be watching over you. Let's go play and talk," Katara said in her natural maternal voice and Kiyi knew she could trust the girl.

Aang and Noreen could tell instantly if anyone was gonna be able to help Kiyi understand what was going on and be able to through the ordeal of tonight it is Katara. Her motherly instincts and protective nature was just the thing.

Therefore with Kiyi being well taken care of that left who was gonna watch over the slumbering Royal Family and who was gonna help with preparing this play? Sokka and Toph ended up agreeing to stand guard over the comatose family back in the ravaged house while Aang, Noreen, and the Spirits went to prepare the play.

At the crack of dawn, the entire village of Hira'a was awoken and directed to come to the theater for a particularly significant play. This surprised the village as no play was schedule and never was one at the crack of dawn.

There wasn't even time to fix snacks for the event by Ms. Zalika and Mr. Iye. Still, everyone in the village showed up a little sleepy-eyed but they showed up and took their seats.

Noreen who had bags under his eyes as if he hadn't slept stood on the center of the stage and waited till everyone in the village was seated before he spoke. He seemed to be choosing his words with great care.

"People of Hira'a please know this village has been my one and only home. All of you are more than friends you are my family. As we are all family to one another. But I'm afraid that in a few days time there will be a few family members who will leave and never return."

"What?!" was the collective gasps and Noreen calm the crowd down.

"The reason why will be told today in a play. This is a true story that is full of every emotion possible. It's such an unimaginable story full of grief, happiness, hardship, faith and everything in between that most of you will not believe it.

Just know everything you are about to see is true. Furthermore, know this is the reason why some members of the family of Hira'a must leave for good. I only ask you to remain silent as the play is performed and wait till it ends to speak."

He then slowly walked off stage. Everyone gaze was transfixed on the stage where now a peculiar glittering mist arose. The mist smelled like wildflowers no one could identify and abruptly an eruption of the most gorgeous brilliant phosphorescent butterflies sprang out of the mist.

"Over a 100 years ago there were five friends," started a beautiful voice no one heard before but held some type of captivation. No-one could tell where the voice was coming from as it seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. All they saw in the mist was five figures of
who looks slightly familiar as if they had seen them before. Two males and three females.

"Two names are well known. One was Sozin and the other was Roku. What so few know is the two were closer than brothers even shared the same birthday. Brothers in all ways except blood. What fewer known was the names of three unique and attractive women who were as close as sisters whose fates were tied to these souls.

Ta Min was bound to Roku by the red thread of love. Her best friend Surya was tied to him by giving him his animal guide the Dragon Fang. Her other best friend Xiu Mei was tied to him with a secret that would aid him and future Avatars in years to come.

At Avatar Roku's wedding Roku, his wife, and her best friends swore a vow of eternal friendship for themselves and all who descended them. They never knew that vow was witnessed or a blessing to the White Spirit of Life Alanna whose power grew considerably from such vows when sincerely meant.

But another spirit was attending that wedding and would cause pain that would last for the next 100 years. Anto the Black Spirit of Death had chosen his champion in Sozin. Whispering his silver tongue and charming words into Sozin's mind and preying on his weak and vulnerable heart.

This poisoned Sozin's mind, body, and soul and led to the first act of war. The murder of Sozin's once brother in flames Avatar Roku." The village watched in silent enchantment as whoever was acting this out in the mystic mist showed these events.

They had no way of knowing this was combing the powers of Alanna's butterflies and Mother of Faces' mask to show the events of the past. The butterflies were, in fact, the spirits of the people of the past themselves and the mask helped give them corporal form within the boundaries of the mist.

Alanna continued on with the narrative. "After the murder of Avatar Roku, the truth of his wife's friends was revealed. His wife best friends were, in fact, the leader of the Dragon Guardians and the Grand Yon or second in command of the Order of the White Lotus.

Knowing the next on the chopping block was the Air Nomads, the Dragons and Dragon Guardians they made the heart-wrenching decision to go into hiding to protect themselves from Sozin and his descendants and to escape the genocide to come.

Their daughters, Rina, Xiaoli, and Kiku never lost contact keeping in touch through letters delivered by a White Lotus Dove written in Dragon Guardian Code. Though they would visit each other every summer. Otherwise, Xiaoli and Kiku were on the move.

Very late in life, Alanna blessed the women with daughters of their own born a week apart. Their daughters were Ursa, Sakiko, and Xiaoying. All three of them carried the great beauty and valor well-known in their bloodlines." again the memorized crowd watched as the story unfolded little by little. They watched again the events of childhood that a few knew or had heard about as the three girls grew up wondering what this was leading up too.

"Then one day Ursa who found the happiness of true love was stolen away by Fire Lord Azulon and his son Prince Ozai. Forced to protect her fire lily Ikem by making him go away she was forced to start a journey of hell.

Once she got to the capital a journey of pure agony began. Told she was to disregard her past and everything and everyone in it. That she was no more then Ozai's property. It would've broken Ursa had she not managed to smuggle her diary that her friend Sakiko given her as a child.
But that was the only link and escape she had from the endless cruelty she was made to suffer at the hands of Ozai. It was a loveless and abusive marriage from the start. Ozai was a monstrosity oblivious to the whole world was the host body of Anto the Black Spirit of Death.

Not a surprise especially as they were one and the same in every which way. Ozai would abuse Ursa in every conceivable way imaginable as he did to his children. First trying to cast out his son Zuko for thinking him not a bender.

Then seeking to turn his daughter Azula into a living weapon by stripping her of humanity and striving to encourage the growth of a demon seed in her that desperately needed to have exorcized.

He also abused his son true love the adopted daughter of his brother and wife because of Ursa wish that her son would not turn out like him and her son and his love could have the happy ending that both she and Akiko's mother were denied. Ozai simply told her he would treat them as if her wish was true.

Ursa only had a few true friends to help her through this time. The secret society The Sisterhood of the Dawn; the Chosen Children of Alanna who were sent to the capital for the very reason to protect her and the children. And finding her long lost friend Xiaoying when her son Zuko met Akiko daughter of Sakiko but only to learn Sakiko died giving birth."

Again the narration showed the years of abuse going on as these events were showcased in the mist and everyone in the crowd was extremely pale and barely breathing seeing what actually took place at the royal palace and to the royal family.

The abuse was just plain appalling. Hearing it's bad enough but to witness it? Seeing it happening before you to a helpless woman and even more to children who can't do anything to protect themselves? It's just sick!

"Then Anto decided he was gonna put in motion his ultimate plan for ultimate power for his own sick agenda. He first took the soul of Crown Prince Lu Ten leaving the Dragon of the West Iroh to forever grieve for his only son.

Then made Ozai dishonorably request that Iroh is stripped of his birthright and he is made Fire Lord instead. Fire Lord Azulon was so furious he made unthinkable command. He commanded that Ozai kill his own firstborn. To know what Iroh felt."

Everyone in the audience was in shock as who knew all this? There had been rumors for years but was this really the truth? That Fire Azulon would actually order his own son to kill his own child? But they didn't have time to think about as the magical voice continued on.

"But to kill one was to kill two. As Zuko and Akiko were bound by love's red thread. If one died both died and while Ozai had no heart both a mother and a true father would pay the price at the loss of two sons lost and a daughter.

Ursa learned this from her daughter Azula who showed her humanity for the first time in a long while. Making sure her daughter was aware of her love she went to Ozai and struck a deadly bargain with him. Deadly untraceable poison in exchange for the children lives.

He agreed on the condition she leaves forever and never returns but she couldn't take the children with her. Ursa knew she could never leave her children alone with this monstrosity. She deceived Ozai by telling him she needed time to prepare the poison.

She then called up her friends to help her through secret means. With the help of Xiaoying and the
Sisterhood of the Dawn Ursa and her children escaped that night never to be seen again."

Again everyone was wondering how did this voice know the truth and where was this going? And
what did it have to do with their village? They just watched as the mist swirled as the narrated
continued.

"The royal family was aided in their escape by the White Spirit of Life herself. Alanna personally
escorted them to their destination while also giving a gift to Ursa. A magical locket which held a
ten tenth of her power.

Ursa and her family also had other people help them disappear forever so they could remain safe
forever. Ursa and her family when they reached their destination encountered Ursa's true love who
had undergone his own transformation in the years she'd been gone.

He'd acquired an entirely new face and a new name and told her about the spirit who had done it.
He then convinced her that if he had gotten a new life then she and her children could have the
same second chance if they found this same spirit."

The village couldn't tell for sure what was going on in the mist now and then were surprised when
a second beautiful voice took over the narration now. They thought they recognized it but couldn't
place it.

"The family traveled to a forbidden place and searched for months for this spirit until they found
her. Ursa pleaded her case which touched the spirit who would normally only grant one face.

She granted them all new faces and memories. She gave Ursa a face as plain as she was beautiful
and the children were given the faces of the characters they'd chosen their new names to be.

Then both Alanna, Mother of Faces the spirit they sought help from as well as two-spirit animal
guides told Ursa' true love what to do in order to protect them forever. He accepted the burden he
was given. He married his love and raised the children as his own eventually him and Ursa as her
new self having a child of their own. For eight years all was peaceful and well."

There was a long pause and the two women spoke as one. "Then on the eighth anniversary of the
'deaths' of the royal family Fire Lord Iroh suffered a heart attack. This wasn't a normal one. It was
brought on by eight years of grief, pain, and agony. But the emotional problems would eventually
lead to the physical heart failure if they didn't heal thy spirit. The only way to do that was to cure
what ailed his heart. To do that Iroh sent for Avatar Aang and his friends to find his lost family.
They sent out on their quest but trouble came in the form of Anto the Black Spirit of Death."

The gang watched as now the gang was portrayed themselves showing the battles they fought
with Anto to show he would stop at nothing to kill them and make them fail at the mission.

The gang took over for a while narrating also reenacting their parts, "We fought Anto and tried to
fulfill Iroh's dying wish. With a lot of help, we came to where we sent. We quickly befriend a few
natives who eventually sent us to next place we had to go to unravel this mystery.

We fought Anto again and saved the Mother of Faces and helped her reconcile with her son and
mended the bond between a brother and sister. Then Alanna took me to her home in Limbo Valley
and told me the truth about everything.

I was given a week to decided what to do. In the end, I asked the Royal Family whose minds
couldn't remember but hearts could what they wanted to do. They answered and I was gonna leave
them alone. But then Ursa's husband told me to stop and tell them the truth which I did. Then we
fought Anto one last time and defeat him through the power of forgiveness.”

Now the mist disappeared and Noreen's family appeared on the stage. Faces they'd grown up with for the last eight years. But they seemed rather apprehensive about something. Taking a deep breath they started to sing.

Noriko started off singing

"If I live to be a hundred,
And never see the seven wonders,
That will be alright.
If I don't make it to the big time,
If I never win an award,
I'm gonna be just fine,
'Cause I know exactly who I am," with her son taking the next verse

"I am Ursa's son,
Raised in the image of my father,
And when the day is done,
My mom is still my biggest fan.
Sometimes I'm clueless and I'm clumsy,
But I've got friends who love me,
And they know just where I stand,
It's all a part of me,
And that's who I am," his love began to sing next.

" So when I make a big mistake,
When I fall flat on my face,
I know I'll be alright.
Should my tender heart be broken,
I will cry those teardrops knowin',
I will be just fine,
'Cause nothin' changes who I am.

I am Ursa's "daughter"
The spitting image of my mother,
And when the day is done,
My mama's still my biggest fan.
Sometimes I'm clueless and I'm clumsy,
But I've got friends who love me,
And they know just where I stand,
It's all a part of me.
And that's who I am"

Followed by Noriko's daughter

"I'm a saint and I'm a sinner,
I'm a loser, I'm a winner,
I'm am steady and unstable,
I am young but I'm able.

I am Ursa's daughter,
Raised as the spitting image of my father,
And when the day is done,
My mom is still my biggest fan.
Sometimes I'm clueless and I'm clumsy,
But I've got friends who love me,
And they know just where I stand,
It's all a part of me,
And that's who I am.

Then all the children."

I am Ursa's son/daughter
Raised in/as the spitting image of my father/mother,
And when the day is done,
My mom is still my biggest fan.
Sometimes I'm clueless and I'm clumsy,
But I've got friends who love me,
And they know just where I stand,
It's all a part of me,
And that's who I am!"

As the song concluded all four reached up and pulled off their faces to reveal they're true faces for the first time in eight years! Everyone was gasping even Team Avatar to see what the Royal Family looked like as they only saw some old pictures Iroh had shown them from their beach house on Ember Island.

Ursa was still stunningly beautiful, it was true she was a beautiful as her fake face had been plain and the only difference now was she had a few small wrinkles now otherwise she looked just the same.

Zuko looked like a teenage version of Ozai to be perfectly honest. However, at least he looked like he was human, unlike Ozai who no one would mistake as human. Given anyone who was in the same room as he could tell he didn't have a heart or a soul. Zuko was exceedingly sexy with his long black hair and beautiful golden eyes. Enough to make a few hearts go boom.

Akiko had truly gotten the goddess-like beauty of her family. The well-sculptured features, flawless alabaster skin, and the stunning almond shape jade green eyes with her thick waist length jet black hair in a high ponytail.

Azula's long hair was in a traditional topknot with two long bangs framing her heart-shaped face which made her look a lot like her mother. But it was her eyes that had changed the most since she was a child. As a child, one could say it was her mother face with her father eyes looking out. Now they could say it was Azula's own spirit looking out and this one held a demon no longer.

Still, the crowd couldn't speak at all. So presently everyone who just told the story came out onto the stage front and center and Noreen decided to speak. "So now you know the true story of what happened. What started the war, what choices were made and how it all connected to a vow of friendship, how it also involved the Spirits of Life and Death and what really happened to the Royal Family," he sighed loudly.

"And now you know why we've got to leave Hira'a forever now. Zuko and Akiko are next in line to rule the Fire Nation and the Fire Nation will fall into anarchy if they don't take the throne. Also of course if the whole family doesn't return one man will die of a broken heart and more friends will soon die of a broken heart. So we will be leaving in five days time. We just felt the village should know first before the rest of the Fire Nation is told this story." Noreen revealed to the dumbfounded community
Subsequently, the spell was broken and the first ones to speak were their neighbors. "Wait for a second! You guys are leaving forever?! Never ever coming back?!” cried Umi in disbelief standing straight up and looking at her friends' real faces for the first time.

"Well, Umi, the Fire Lord, and his Lady do have to stay in the capital, for the most part, to take care of the Fire Nation,” Zuko kind of hedge. He wasn't sure what to say to the village now that they knew he was the heir apparent to the throne.

"Well, if you three are going away forever then your not leaving Umi and me behind! Friends don't abandon friends and I'm not leaving my fire lily! I don't care what your name is or if your princess or not! I'm not leaving you!” Shun directed towards Azula who seemed unable to meet his eye.

"Shun," Azula looked down at her feet uncomfortably obviously not wanting this to happen.

He got up and walked over to her and took her hands in his, "What? Just because you remember your a princess now I'm suddenly not good enough? Is that it?” he asked her. Really was it because he was a nobody from some backwater village and suddenly he wasn't good enough for a princess?

"It's not that, Shun. And no I'm not worried about others would think of you. I'm worried about what others will think of me.” Azula confessed tearfully.

"What about you? You're beautiful, smart, kind, and 100 amazing things,” he started to tell her all the amazing things about herself and she tried to stop him.

"Did you not see the play? I was a monster as a child. How can you love me now? Knowing who I was?” she cried not able to meet his eyes at all.

It was then he surprised her as he cupped her face in his hands and kissed her and began to sing which was surprising as it was a known fact that Shun wasn't a good singer. Sure he was okay at playing music but he couldn't carry a tune in a bucket.

"I see you,
I see you.
Waking from a dream, I see you,
My light in the darkness, breathing hope into a new life.
Now, I live through you and you through me, enchanting,
I pray in my heart that this life never ends.

I see me through your eyes,
Breathing new life, flying high.
Your love shines the way into paradise,
So, I'd offer my life as a sacrifice.
I live through your love.

You teach me how to see all that's beautiful,
My senses experience a world I never dreamed of.
Now, I'd give my hope to you, I surrender,
I pray in my heart that this world never ends.

I see me through your eyes,
Breathing new life, flying high.
Your love shines the way into paradise,
So I'd offer my life, I'd offer my love, for you.
When my heart was never open,
(And my spirit never free),
To the world that you have shown me,
But my eyes wished to envision,
All the colors of love and of life for evermore.

Evermore,
(I see me through your eyes),
I see me through your eyes,
(Living new life flying high),
Flying high.

Your love shines the way into paradise,
So, I'd offer my life as a sacrifice.

And live through your love,
And live through your life,
I see you,
I see you"

"Oh, Shun!" as she leaps into his arms and kissed him for the first time with her real face.

"So am are we coming along or not?" demanded Umi to the Zuko and Akiko talking to them no different then she had before. So apparently to the twins them being royalty didn't bother or change things at all. What a relief.

"You'd have to ask Aang he's our ride," Akiko informed her looking towards the young Avatar in question.

"I don't know if Appa can carry so many people and that amount of luggage, to be honest. Besides, don't you need your parents okay?" he asked in a sensible voice.

"They have their parents, okay to travel with their friends and we wouldn't get in the way of love," Hinata spoke up as she came upon the group.

"And as I'll be escorting you all back to the capital I can give some of my strength to Appa so he'll be able to handle more then he normal could, Aang. It's not a problem really," assured Alanna thoughtfully.

"Then I guess the only thing left to do is plan the biggest farewell party and help you pack up!" clapped Ms. Zalika and turned to the village. "We need to give them a farewell fit for royalty. So we'll break up into groups. Some help them pack up, others help prepare the farewell feast, others get the entertainment ready for departure! Let's get to it!"

The gang didn't know what to expect but they're amazed how swiftly the close-knit community could accept the bizarre truth or help the royal family pack up to leave for the capital or throw a last-minute shindig together to send them off.

Though five days later it was a barbecue luau party on the beach with lots of singing, dancing, firebending, and abundance of food. It was the embodiment of a summer beach party and summer fun time

The next day after the blowout farewell party they were the final goodbyes as they boarded Appa and said goodbye to what had been home for so long and followed Alanna in her swan form back to
The trip back to the capital took less time than either trip to Hira’a had taken. Alanna had warned them all ahead of time to wait till she had had the chance to tell their loved ones back at the palace of their arrival so she could settle everyone down. To make it less uncomfortable for them all so that the transition could go as smoothly as possible for everyone involved.

Once the Capital City was within eyesight Alanna put on a burst of acceleration and then flew gracefully into the Royal Palace then transformed in front of the Fire Lord himself shocking him a great deal however her beauty and serenity were enough to calm him just as swiftly avoiding a fatal heart attack.

"Please Fire Lord Iroh I mean you no harm, I’m Alanna the White Spirit of Life. I bring you only good news. Your family has been returned to you. I only ask you don’t overwhelm them when they touch down in half an hour. They’ve been through a lot in eight years and the past several days alone been very traumatic," she spoke with the grace and practice of one who was just as regal and respect as any of noble birth.

"I assure you, Lady, I understand what you’re saying very much," Iroh spoke to her as he would anyone. Rich or poor, man, woman child of any nation. Made no difference to him she was a spirit. Iroh was one to judge others on their character, not birth and he was also one to always respect the spirits.

"I do have a second bit of advice I think you should heed," she relaxed her posture a great deal. It was easy to talk to a man who treated you like a friend and would be the one to invite over for tea later. She had always wanted to try the master of tea brews.

"What that, noble Lady of Life?" he asked in his easygoing and benevolent voice as he did offer her some of his amazing tea which she took in delight and sipped with joy. He could tell she’d been dying to try it.

"Thank you for tea. All that flying made me very parch and everyone in the world of man and spirits says you are the master. So thank you for giving me the gift of tasting it at last," she compliments him to which he blushed.

"Lady sharing tea with a fascinating strange is one of life true pleasure. But compliments are welcome all the same. But you were saying about my family?"

"Yes," putting the teacup down and wiping her rosy lips and fanning her wings a bit, "As I was saying dear beloved Iroh. Given again all the circumstances I would advise against at this time making Zuko and Akiko Fire Lord and Lady. Please understand they just got their true faces and memories back to them, dear Iroh.

They need time to rediscover themselves and get comfortable. Also, the whole family still requires some healing that I feel only my apprentice Yang can help with before either can take the throne.

You do understand what they went through as children and now having lived two very different lives and getting reacquainted with royal life? Would you not agree it’s not wise for them at this time to be put in charge?" she asked him in the gentlest way possible.

Stroking his beard he looked at the spirit noblewoman who created all the life in the world. He already knew just looking into her brilliant azure eyes she cherished his family as much as he did. Furthermore, he could sense she had done a great deal for them. Consequently, he knew she would not be saying any of this if she did not think it was in their best interest.
"I do see your wisdom in this Alanna. I've studied a great deal regarding the subject spirits furthermore been on my own spiritual quests. What's more, I know as the Spirit of Life you wouldn't advise me on such matters if you didn't have my family best interest at heart," he replied back to her as he refilled her cup of tea with a generous amount.

"I see them as members of my own family, Iroh. I love them that much," she confessed to him, "I've been very close to family and Ursa's friends family since they made that vow at Avatar Roku's wedding. I would never see any harm come to them. That's why I went to such length to protect the family lines since the time of your grandfather and when Anto made him murder Roku. To be honest Iroh I've become close to many humans over my long life but not many have I consider kin before. Your family is part of a very special to me and some of the very few that I've personally touched and wrapped themselves in my heart. Not a lot have done that in my long life I will be honest."

"Well, I know what the power of love and family can do to you. As well as the power of the love of a child. Therefore I shall heed what you have suggested. A welcome home celebration and only naming Zuko and Akiko has official heirs will all that be done. Is that acceptable?" he asked with a loving kindly smile.

"Yes, I think that will do nicely. But again don't push them or overwhelm them, Iroh. Slow and steady, please." as they clicked their beautiful dragon pattern teacups and downed their delicious tea in one gulp.

"Very well. Can I see them now?" he asked as they drew their little chat to a close.

"Yes, they are in the courtyard. I'll escort you there myself," as she offered her arm and he took and they slowly walked outside together.

Everyone else was running quickly hearing they had arrived. Only when they saw the Fire Lord and Spirit of Life they stopped running and took it slow as well. Outside in the courtyard, everyone was disembarking gradually and taking in the sights leisurely trying to really take it in.

"So this is your home?" Umi was asking the three teens as she looked around at just how unlike the capital was from Hira'a. She and her brother were having the same reaction as their friends had when they saw Hira'a for the first time.

"Yeah, this is where we born. It's a lot showier inside, well it was. If they haven't changed anything, that is," muttered Azula playing with her hands apprehensively.

"I hope the turtleduck pond still in the garden. That was always my favorite place." Zuko spoke up as he was now able to recall his childhood memories.

"Yeah, it was always like a small sanctuary. You know seeing this place again it is almost like seeing it for the first time again. Zuky do you remember how my first day here went?" Akiko asked her love who chuckled.

"Let's see? Xiaoying got annoyed at the guards who didn't accept a letter with Uncle's royal seal on it so they made him come outside just so he could tell them, yes, in fact, you were his adopted daughter, then you and I ran into each other arms, followed by crashing into Ozai which scared the crap out of us.

Afterward, Mom told us to go to my room where you had one of your spiritual powers moments that you didn't understand. Then we jumped on my bed and had a pillow fight which we both lost.
Then breakfast, followed by a tour of the palace and you stood up to Azula who was bullying Mai and Ty Lee and then we had mystery tea and cookies and Mom read to us the Ember Tales for the first time.

Isn't that how it went down?"

"Yeah, that how everything happened," Akiko laughed gaily at their ability to now remember their true memories and recall them as if they were just yesterday.

"I was such an awful child," lamented Azula softly. She spoke with regret in her voice."I can't believe now having met him, that I actually said Zuko should've let Anto take your soul when we first met on Ember Island."

"Azula it's okay. You're a different person back then. You're better now." Akiko assured her with her hand squeezing her shoulder reassuringly.

"I'm not still the "Demon?" Azula looked into her jade green eyes.

"If I'm not still the "Orphan or Zuko's not "Zu-Zu" or Dumb-Dumb" Akiko chuckled back to Azula enjoying seeing life in Azula's eyes that weren't there the first time she saw them.

"No, I think we left that behind years ago," Azula assured her with a nod.

"Good, now all of you look your best I think we've got old friends to meet up with," their mother told them as the doors opened and their loved ones came out to greet them. Soon the courtyard was flooded and it was what you expected the reunion to be like. There was tons of hug, kisses, and exclamations on how much they'd grown up or how much more attractive they looked along with some introductions going about between new family members and old friends which all that last about an hour.

There were some awkward moments as well like when Azula offered her full apologizes to Mai and Ty Lee for her immoral and dishonororable behavior towards them when they're children and the hope one day to earn their forgiveness. This left Mai and Ty Lee jarred seeing Azula like this. Even after what her father put them through and with the Sisterhood helping them heal and find their own forgiveness they're shocked at Azula apologizing and asking forgiveness.

"I know I'm not worthy of your forgiveness but I'll do everything and anything for it. I'm just sorry for what I was a child. I just hope one day I can make up for it." she had her head bent low as if she couldn't look at them or she'd be burnt into cinders by their gaze.

"Azula?" Mai said her name in her normal deadpan way and Azula raises her head slowly to look at her old friends face.

"Yes, Mai?" she was cringing knowing she was about to get what she deserved for her actions as a child.

"Yeah, you did a lot of nasty and unforgivable things when we were kids. And so did your old man. And so did we as his Legion of Black Flame," she started to say again in her normal emotionless way that Azula now remembered from when they were kids.

"You must really hate me and want to stick one of your knives in me for it," Azula lowered her head waiting for the blows to come.

"No, we are just feeling sorry for you and know what you went through, Azula. If you went through the hell we went through the well how can we not forgive you?" Ty Lee chirped brightly
to their old friend who they had grieved for and missed for the past eight years.

"Huh?" she looked up in surprise at this. She was confused by Mai and Ty Lee's words or why they'd even be willing to forgive her or give her a second chance.

"Azula your father was monster and abused everyone he came into contact with. You only acted how he raised you to behave and we only acted how we were trained. It's taken a lot of healing and help from the Sisterhood but we're getting through the trauma that was done to us," Mai started to explain to her old friend.

"And we know you'll get through it too with help as well. So who is the boy checking you out? He's got one awesome body!" Ty Lee was drooling a little and Azula smiled not a cruel smile but a happy smile. She motions for her boyfriend to come forward to meet them.

"Mai and Ty Lee I'd like to introduce to my boyfriend Shun. Shun these are my childhood friends, Mai, and Ty Lee," as everyone shook hands and both healing and forgiveness were on the rise.

While Azula was having this moment Ursa was having her moment with Xiaoying and Yang as well as meeting Xiaoying's little girl Xiang who was quickly becoming best friends with Kiyi.

"She's absolutely adorable Xiaoying! You and Piandao must be extremely proud!" Ursa was gazing at the little girls admiring the other necklaces.

"Yes, she is my pride and joy. I also don't find displeasure with our choice in her godbrother one day godfather being Sokka." Xiaoying laughed happily as Xiang was taking Kiyi over to properly introduce her to Sokka and explain their connection. Kiyi also seemed to be telling her how Sokka helped save her from the bad man. Their mommies just smiled at this.

"Yes, he's a fine young man the way he helped protect us from Anto. He's a great swordsman. Though I'm not so sure about his sense of humor or his love of meat being so powerful." Ursa admitted thinking about Sokka being a guest in her home for a week.

"Well, those traits aside he did past the test and being friends with the Avatar is not a bad deal you have to agree, right, Ursa?"

"No not a bad deal. So what can little Xiang do so far?" she asked in eager curiosity about her best friend progeny.

"She's master the basic of ninjutsu so far, Piandao will start her sword training when she is nine. I insisted that she be at least nine before he starts her on sword fighting. I can handle things like teaching about cooking or having a sense of fashion which has always been a part of the family. But too many nightmares of with her swords. So he said he settle for nine. I guess I was the only one to get a good loving husband out of all of us." She sighed thinking how her two best friends ended up in loveless marriages because of one damn spirit.

"Well, I got lucky the second time around, Xiaoying. So don't feel too bad. I just wish Sakiko had lived to see how beautiful and wonderful Akiko has become. She's such a strong and amazing young lady and makes Zuko so happy." Ursa sighed so happily looking lovingly at her adopted daughter and Xiaoying goddaughter the only one never to know her own amazing mother.

"I'm positive she can see just fine from her side of things, Ursa. You said yourself. Moms are forever. I'm certain Sakiko's been watching from the Spirit World all this time over her daughter and is proud you kept your promise to raise her in her place and likely extremely happy that she and Zuko are fire lilies. What I can't believe is I delivered Kiyi and didn't even know I was
delivering your child!” exclaimed Yang in shock as they all laughed.

"To be fair Yang Alanna was in your body to throw you off the trail. Though does she have new orders for you now?" Ursa wanted to know curiously and her old friend nodded with her face breaking into elation at what those orders were.

"Yes, I'm supposed to help your family heal from all you've been through. The rest of the Sisterhood is already dealing with the victims of the Legion of the Black Flame and helping them recover from their trauma. That leaves me to help you heal. I'm looking forward to the challenge. It will give us a chance to reconnect and for me to help those I consider family. I consider this a great honor," she spoke with pride in her honey voice.

"Well, I couldn't imagine anyone else I ask to help us heal then you Yang," as Ursa couldn't imagine anyone else she wanted to help her family heal through all the trauma they'd been through then someone she considers to be like a sister to her.

While that conversation was going on Zuko and Akiko were having their own conversation in private with Uncle who they'd been eager to see again since regaining their true memories. It was a particularly special moment for them to be reunited with him. Awkward but nice at the same time.

"You two look so well grown and so happy. I hardly recognize either of you," as Iroh couldn't stop staring at how grown up his second son and only daughter were now that they're eighteen and not ten. They couldn't stop blushing over the fact either.

"It's not that big deal, Uncle. For eight years no one could recognize. After all, we had different faces." Zuko reminded him with a chuckle still just happy he could remember this amazing man and they could regain their bond.

"Yeah, but we're happy to have our true faces back. Still, it's a lot to take in. I just hope Zuky and I will be good leaders. I mean I still want to know everything about my side of the family of course. And yes Noreen raised me but don't think I'm still not your daughter as well, Uncle and..." Akiko began to trail off before her father held up a hand to stop her and gave them a calming smile.

"Please, you two calm down some and listen to me."

"Yes, Uncle?"

"Both of you are neither the son or daughter of Ozai or Zhao that much you both know, right?" and they nodded their heads in agreement.

"You also know it's alright to have two fathers right?" he did ask them and they looked confused. On one hand, Uncle had been their true father on the other hand so had Noreen for the past eight years. They had been worried since getting their memories back how Uncle might feel or if they'd betrayed him in some way. It looked like he was trying to put those fears to rest.

"You mean it's okay that Noreen is our father as well as you?" Akiko asked confused and hopeful too.

"I never said I wasn't okay that you both had a good man to raise you. So if you have another man who is also your father that good to me. You are still both my second son and daughter and you always will be. But that also doesn't change that fact you are also his children as well. But when it comes to family and love there always enough to go around," he replied in his wise and easygoing voice and they felt instantly better knowing it was okay to love them both as their fathers.

"Thank you for being understanding, Uncle. I think this will still take some time to get used too for
all of us." Zuko told him obviously still anxious about being back here at the palace.

"Also you both should know you'll not be taking the throne right away. On the advice of a dear friend of yours, she said till you've all healed and readjusted you two should not take the throne. I do agree. Therefore, we shall simply have a welcome home celebration and officially name you as the heirs to be. Is that something you two can handle?" he asked in the way they remembered him doing as children that made them feel safe and loved.

"Yes, Uncle we can," they replied appreciatively that they wouldn't immediately take the throne. It was a relief as neither of them was ready to take the throne. Last week they just did a play. It wasn't easy to go from doing a play to ruling a whole country. They would need a lot of time before they were ready to do that.

"Good. Now I do have a bit of advice for the two of you when both do take the throne."

"Oh what's that, Uncle?" they asked the old man who been their true father as children, though he would always be their father as much as Noreen was. Like he just said love didn't have limits and there was always enough to go around.

"My wife Kimana wrote this song and sang it as a lullaby to Lu Ten before Ozai murdered her. Yes, we got a confession out of him for the crime. Here it goes," he took a breath and sang quietly so it only reached their ears.

"The stars are very beautiful, above the palace walls,
They shine with an equal splendor, still above far humbler halls.
I watch them from my deathbed, but their bright entrancing glow,
Reminded me of the family I thought I lost so long ago.

The royal crown of bright gold rests lightly on my brow,
I once thought only of the rights this crown would endow.
But once I took the crown, which I had received from my brother,
I found it heavy on the heart, though light upon the head."

Pausing for a moment he turned to his daughter and sang the next verse to her.

"Although you will be the head of state, in truth you must be humble,
A true Queen knows her people fed before she sits to feast.
A good Queen knows her people safe before she takes her rest,
Thinks twice and thrice and yet again, before she makes a request.

For they are all your children, all that you swore to defend,
It is your duty to become both Queen and trusted friend—
And of your children high and low, from beggar to above,
The dearest is your Heralds, who return your care with love.”

Pausing again he then turned to his second son and then sang the following verse.

"The dearest are your Heralds, swift to spring to your command.
Who will give you aid and fellowship, who always understand
That land and people first have needs that you may not deny—
So you must send your dearest friends to danger—and maybe to die.

A friend, a love, a child—it matters not, you know indeed,
That you must sacrifice them all if there should be the need.
They know, and they'll forgive you—doing more than you require,
With willing minds and loving hearts go straight to grasp our fire.

Then looking at both of them he finished by singing the final verse

"Those tears that burn your eyes are all the tears you can't shed,
The tears you weep in silence as you mourn your Heralds dead.
Oh, spirits that dwell beyond the stars, if you can hear our cries—
And if you have compassion—let us send no more to die!"

It was a beautiful song and lesson about what as to come in the future all wrapped up in one.
Shortly after this everyone went into the palace for a night of good night sleep. There was still much to do. Xiaoying with the help of her daughter had to get everyone outfits ready for the Welcome Home Celebration, Kishi had to get the accessories ready to go with them, Rei the styling figured out, Saura the music whilst Kami was busy recording everything for the history books.

Team Avatar was doing their part to help wherever they could but for the Royal Family, they couldn't sleep. They couldn't feel truly at peace at the palace or the capital until they dealt with their last demon.

It was the middle of the night when they all met in the shadowy corridors that they hadn't been in since they escaped eight years ago. All wearing hoods they soundlessly made their way to the Fire Nation Capital Prison.

They made their way deliberately to the most secure cell in the whole prison. Then took a deep breath and opened the iron door into the darkened prison cell where a lonely prisoner was slumped against the wall. He looked disheveled, pathetic and defenseless and yet this was monster who had tortured and abused them all for as long as they could remember. Why they escaped and hidden with new faces and memories for the past eight years.

"Who there?! What's going on?! I demanded you answer me!" he barked like a rabid dog in that still evil sounding voice they still remembered so well. Even if he wasn't the host body any longer for Anto he was still so much like him.

They crossed the threshold of the room and before entering the pale moonlight and lowering their hoods he gasped as he recognized them and looked as if he was seeing a ghost.

"Hello, Ozai. Been eight long years hasn't it?" was all Ursa said to him and his flabbergasted face.

"YOU! How is it possible?!" Ozai screamed as he looked at all them with blood and rage in his mad eyes.

"It doesn't matter how it's possible Ozai. All we want you to know is this. After this moment we will never think of you again. But we are quite certain you will think about all four of us every single day for the rest of your life," Ursa informed her ex-husband in soft delicate tones.

"And how long might that be?" he asked fearing they were here to murder him.

"Don't worry Ozai we are not here to bestow onto you the same courtesy you showed us. We have a far different punishment in mind. One that will be a far worse punishment than anything you did to us."

Laughing he looked at them as if they were weak. "What could you punish me with if you're not gonna hurt me?" he wanted to know. "You won't kill me so what could you do that is far worse?"
"You'll just have to listen to it and see how this tortures you every day and night and you'll not escape it. Not in your waking hours or in your dreams." Ursa replied cryptically.

Ozai narrowed his golden eyes. What were they gonna do that was so appalling that he never be able to escape it? What was this punishment that is far worse than anything he ever imagined?

Akiko concentrated with all her might and called to any spirits who were listening to come forth. The room was suddenly getting quite dark as the spirits she was summoning were coming through the small portal she'd opened and if that wasn't creepy enough the mix of the blue, gold and hot pink flames and crackling lightning dancing about was only adding to the fear factor.

"What is going on?" and for once there was a tiny sliver of fear in Ozai's voice.

"Making sure this message is loud and clear, Ozai," Ursa said as she paused for a moment before her beautiful phoenix-like voice came out of her lips and she started to sing.

"Ozai...
Can you hear me?
Do I reach you?
Are you even listening?
Can I get through?

There's a part of me that's desperate for changes,
Tired of being treated like a plot,
But there's a part of me that stares back,
from inside the mirror.
Part of me that's scared I might be caught,
That I wasn't right,"

Then his worthless son started to sing in his powerful voice as the golden flames flared up as he sang his notes loud and clear.

"I've been afraid,
ever standing on my own,
I let you be the keeper of my pride.
Believed you when you told me,
I was nothing on my own.
Listen when I say,
I swear it here today,
I will not surrender,
this life is mine.

His favorite child his once demonic daughter who lost her demon seed long ago blue flames and lighting no longer fueled by anger sang like her mother told her ex-father in song.

"Amazing how you conquered me,
Chained me in servility,
and made me see,
The world the way you told me to,
But I was young and didn't have a way to know the truth.

Born to live your legacy,
existing just to fill your needs,
A tragedy of this so-called "family",
That you have turned into a joke.

But I don't intend to suffer any longer,
Here's where your plan falls apart,
I'm shattering the memory,
that kept me split into pieces,
That stood between my mind and my heart.
This is where I'll start.

I'm not your pet,
not another thing you own.

I was not born guilty of your crimes.
Your riches and your influence,
can't hold me anymore.
I won't be possessed,
burdened by your royal test,
I will not surrender,
this life is mine.

Then the Last Dragon Guardian who was so much more then she appeared to be looked at the man
who had hurt her so much for loving a son he hated so much.

"Shame that it took so long,
to rescue me.
From the guilt you used,
to tie me to your family tree.

I guess your training failed,
you're not in charge I'm free.
Your patriarchal prison won't hold me.

Now, this conversation's finally over,
Fire Lord, now we're done,
I've pulled myself together now.
My mind and heart are one,
Finally one."

Then the four of them sang as one.

" I'm not your pet,
not another thing you own.
I was not born guilty of your crimes.
Your riches and your influence,
can't hold me anymore.
I won't be possessed,
burdened by your royal test,
I will not surrender, this life is mine!"

And with that, all the power and craziness disappeared and all that was left was five humans in a
prison cell.

"Goodbye Ozai," they all said as they walked away without looking back even when he called after
them. He ranted and raved calling to them. He wanted them to come back and face him. But the true punishment he has to live with for the rest of his life? The thing he never escapes from that haunt him for the rest of his days? That he no longer had power over his victims. Their lives were now theirs. That was his suffering for the rest of time. To know for the rest of time not only didn’t have his firebending but he no longer had any power over his victims and they had forgotten about him. But he would have to remember that fact for the rest of time! That he had power over NO ONE ANYMORE!

A week later the whole Fire Nation was told the whole true story of what had happened to the Fire Nation Royal Family. From start to finish from what happened with Sozin and Roku all the way to how they were returned to the Fire Nation Capital.

In comparison, the Capital party came very close to matching Hira'a farewell party but the family agreed they'd enjoyed Hira'a farewell party more then they enjoyed their welcome home party. The only thing they liked about it was truly being reunited with their family and loved ones.

After all the celebrations and naming Zuko and Akiko official heirs to the crown they had all gone to the gardens next to the old turtleduck pond for some good old mystery tea and cookies.

It would take some time to accept the capital as home again, take longer to prepare for Zuko and Akiko to accept their roles as the next leaders of the Fire Nation. But at least they wouldn't have to do it alone. They had their friends and family and even Team Avatar on their side and even the Spirit of Life Alanna wouldn't be far away.

Also finally they could be safe and happy. Finally love had returned and finally, everything was going to be okay. The future was looking bright and finally, maybe life could begin anew for their family and the world. One could only hope.

The end.

Songs tweaked by Japananimegirl.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!