### A Flame In The Dark

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#### Summary

The Fire Nation took everything from him, his revenge will be bloody! Yulizan lost his family through the hand of the Fire Lord and has sworn revenge! But at the same time, he has a noble mission: The Spirits have elected him the Protector of the Avatar, the world's destiny is in his hands!

#### Notes

Hello and welcome to "A Flame in the Dark", my first fanfiction for "Avatar - The Last Airbender".

Some information regarding this story: I have also written this story in German. If you want to read it, check the German fanfiction website, you should find it pretty easy.

Since the German version was quite successful, I decided to translate the story into English. I'm pretty sure all you English speakers/readers out there will like it just as much as my German audience did.

The story has 50 chapters, this first chapter can be seen as an introduction for my OC and his background, but there are also some parts that will be relevant to the plot later on in the story.

Well then, I hope you'll enjoy the story. Leave a review with your opinion and/or questions if you want/feel like it.
With that said: Have fun reading.

See the end of the work for more notes.
"You can kill us, but you will never win!" A whirr. A scream. A thud on wood.

The memory of the worst day of my life has manifested itself in my head for all time.

I see the horrifying pictures in my mind over and over again, they come at me, attack me, try to devour me, try to break me!

But my soul is strong! I will not let them break me! Every time I drive the dark thoughts away, I grow stronger!

I need the strength! It is my biggest support for the task destiny has imposed upon me, a task I have committed myself to fulfill until my death. It is the will of the Spirits. They chose me to fulfill this duty and their decisions are to be followed.

Now almost four years have passed since that fateful black day and I am not what I was back then anymore. I've recreated myself, my strength, my wisdom, my determination, I have reached complete control over all these things with the help of my master.

My past does not actually imply what I have become.

My birth didn't indicate anything special, 82 years had passed since the appearance of the Great Comet when I arrived in this ruthless, broken world.

For already 82 years, my country had been in this pointless war which it had started itself. The world was slowly falling apart, almost nobody believed that the war was ever going to end.

Despite this misery that had struck the entire world, I never actually noticed anything of it for the time being. My parents did their best to grant me, my two sisters and my brother a carefree childhood.

This should work for many years, I lived a happy and comfortable life. But in the tenth year of my life, I experienced for the first time that change is a big part of life and will always play a part in it.

I was playing in the woods right outside my hometown when I discovered something underneath a tree. It was roundish, jet-black and smooth like the pillars of a temple.

At first, I thought it was just a special stone, but when I held it into the sunlight, I discovered that something was inside, a little animal to be precise.

I was not able to tell what kind of animal it was, but I definitely realized that I was holding an egg.

Since I didn't know if it was dangerous, I eventually decided to not take it home with me, but instead to hide it in a cave I had discovered a short time before.

After that, I searched for a scroll about animals in the library of our house and consequently found out that I had found an actual dragon egg, even though dragons were considered as extinct for a very long time already.

I decided not to tell anyone about my find and to watch over the egg until the dragon would hatch.

Some people would surely call me crazy, considering I was staying this close to such an unfamiliar
and possibly dangerous creature voluntarily, but I had read that young dragons were actually
tamable, even by humans.

From this day on, I visited the cave every day, until the dragon finally hatched after three weeks. It
was pitch-black, had little grey horns and bilious green eyes.

I had informed myself extensively about a dragon's eating habits in its different periods of growth,
so I fed the little dragon, who ate directly from my hand.

This was routine for quite some time, the dragon grew steadily and eventually started to grow too
big for the cave.

Over time, I had informed myself about the species of my dragon and discovered that he apparently
possessed two special powers: Adaption to the environment to camouflage itself on the one hand
and the ability to communicate with his tamer on both a vocal and a mental level on the other hand.

The latter eventually turned out to be true, as my dragon started talking to me and asked for
permission to leave the cave, he wanted to fly. I granted him the wish under the condition that he
would only fly while camouflaged, I didn't want anybody from the town to see him.

Thus, from now on, the dragon began to fly in circles over the forest for most of the day, only
returning to his cave for the night. By that time, I had also decided to give my dragon the name
Pagan.

One day, Pagan encouraged me to try and ride him while he was flying. I gave it a go and after
some initial difficulties to stay on his scaly neck, I eventually became a genuine dragon rider.

Despite this new experience, my life remained pretty comfortable. That however changed four
years later.

I had spent some time in town, meeting with one of my friends, but when I returned home, both my
parents and my siblings were not there.

Just as I wanted to start looking for them, I saw many people exiting their houses and walking
towards the market place. I melted into the crowd and eventually reached the market place as well.

But what I had to witness there froze the blood in my veins to solid ice: The crowd stood right in
front of a big wooden pedestal. And on this structure, my father, my mother, my sisters and my
brother knelt, their hands and feet bound.

I tried to scream, but didn't manage to utter even a single word when I saw who was standing in the
back on the pedestal: It was Fire Lord Ozai himself, a sword in his hand.

He stepped forward and began to speak, about how the crimes my family had committed had been
revealed at last and how there was only one penalty for high-treason: Death!

My father shouted at the Fire Lord, but he showed no emotion, save for a diabolical and sadistic
grin, and decapitated my father with a single strong blow. My mother screamed loudly when my
father's head hit the wooden ground. Only a few moments later, my mother's head followed, then
my sisters'.

I tried to reach the pedestal as fast as I could, but too late: With that diabolical grin still on his face,
the Fire Lord also decapitated my brother.
The moment my brother's headless body dropped onto the wooden floor, I reached the pedestal. The Fire Lord looked down, right into my eyes. An incredible rage began to fill my body when I saw the infinite evil in the monarch's eyes.

I screamed as loud as I could: "You will pay for this! One day, I will find you and then slice your throat!"

The Fire Lord began to realize that I was also a member of the family he had just executed and ordered his soldiers to kill me. But thanks to the massive crowd and with large amounts of luck, I managed to successfully evade the soldier's spears and disappear into a small alley.

I eventually reached my home without any pursuers, went into my room and started to cry, and I cried for a very long time. I had just lost my entire family in the span of a few minutes, they were dead, would never return, I was completely alone now.

At this moment, I swore to myself: One day, I would kill the Fire Lord and avenge my family!

That's when I remembered my father's last words. What exactly had he meant by that? I went into his study and found a scroll that was conspicuously placed on the table and bore an unknown seal.

I unrolled the scroll and started reading, but what I read was more than impressive: In the scroll, my father revealed his membership in a mysterious order which pursued a special goal: Ending the war and restoring peace in the world! Apparently, this order already existed for several thousand years and had always operated in the shadows, directly affecting and shaping the history of the entire world many times in the process.

My father addressed all of his children in the scroll, whoever of us would read this should take his place in the order and continue our family's task. On the back of the scroll was a map depicting the route to an old monastery in the mountains, the order's headquarters.

I took the scroll's content in and eventually realized: I had to follow my father's last wish and join this order, it was my destiny!

Some time later, I packed the few things I still possessed and then headed to Pagan's cave in the forest.

I told him what had happened to my family and how things would continue for us now. He replied that no matter what would happen, he would stay by my side, since a dragon never leaves his master!

I described the location of the monastery to him and we began our journey.

A few days later, we eventually had found the monastery. It was an ancient complex with multiple buildings that looked like they had been carved right into the mountain itself.

I stepped in front of the large gate, but before I could knock, it opened on its own. I stepped inside and walked across the big courtyard, right towards the apparent main building.

When I entered it, several old monks wearing long white robes welcomed me. They said they knew who I was and the reason I was here. They explained many things to me and accepted me into the order as a novice.

They said that I had many things to learn and assigned a master called Kyzel the Old to teach me. He was an old man with a long white beard, but apparently was one of the best teachers in the
order's ranks.

And so my training began. During the following months and years, I learned everything I know today. One day, the grand masters tested me and finally appointed me the rank of master.

With this rank, I also had earned the privilege of knowing the order's codex that every master had to follow: The main goal of the order was, as I already knew, the preservation of peace in the world. But there was a second big goal I hadn't learned about so far: Since its founding, the order also had the mission to protect the Avatar, who was seen as the greatest peace keeper. Whenever a new Avatar appeared in the world, the order elected one member which then became the Protector of the Avatar.

In one of their visions, the grand masters had seen that the war was about to experience some drastic turns, which appeared to be connected with the appearance of the new Avatar. They had waited for the word of the Spirits and then finally elected the Protector.

Their election fell on me! I of course was surprised, but accepted the honor without questioning, since one simply does not question the word of the Spirits.

I now had a mission which would define my entire life from now on. From this day on, I waited for the day on which my mission would truly begin.

The wait is finally over! The big day is here! The Avatar has returned! My task is now to find the Avatar and protect him or her during his or her mission to restore peace in the world!

But despite this honor that destiny has imposed on me, I will never forget my main goal in life: I will find and kill the Fire Lord and all his subordinates, it's the only way for me and my family to find the peace we deserve!

The revenge fills me, it's everywhere in my body, it shapes my actions, it won't calm down until I have achieved my goal!

The honor, it surrounds me, it controls me and keeps the revenge in rein. I have to carry out what is quite possibly the most important mission in the history of this world, I will succeed or die!

Even through the darkest days and the blackest nights, my flame burns, always!

I walk in the shadows to bring light into the world!

My name is Yulizan Huyan!

I am an Assassin!
I was in a state of deepest meditation when it happened.

My eyes were closed, I was kneeling on a blanket right in front of the great stone sigil inside the monastery's temple, my hands on my thighs, when I felt it.

Suddenly, the temple's stone floor began to vibrate, followed by a noticeable humming and then whistling sound.

I felt a strange wind springing up in the temple, it eventually became faster and faster, filled all corners and rushed around the pillars; the humming also became louder.

I opened my eyes, turned around and saw it: The eyes of the statues that depicted the venerable Avatars, which stood on both the left and the right wall of the temple in little alcoves, glowed with a bright, almost stinging white light!

Immediately, my thoughts became focused on one thing: The time has come! The Avatar has returned!

I stood up from the blanket, smoothed my robe down, left the temple and walked over to the Great Hall.

When I entered it, I saw the Grand Masters, who had already taken their usual seats at the farther end of the hall.

I walked through the large room, took off my hood, which I had pulled up habitually for the short way from the temple to the hall, and eventually sank down on one knee a few meters in front of the Grand Masters' pedestal.

The old Grand Master Lao Zhu, our leader, spoke: "Rise, Master Yulizan."

I did as I was told. The old man continued: "You know why we have come together here today?"

"Indeed, I do, Master.", I replied. "The day has finally come. The Avatar has returned to this world."

"Exactly. I think you know what this means for you now?"

"Of course, Master. The Spirits chose me to become the Avatar's Protector."

"Good, so you are aware of the great honor that rests on you."

"Yes Master, I'm ready to follow my destiny."

"I am sure you will do that. But now, to get to the main reason for our meeting: We finally were able to locate the Avatar's whereabouts using the Map of Light."

"So, where is he?"
The Grand Master beckoned an adept over, he was carrying an ancient-looking scroll.

He handed it to the old man, who unfolded it on the table in front of him and the other Grand Masters.

It was a map of the world, with many little white markers in many different spots. I of course knew that this was the Map of Light, a gift the Spirits had made the Order thousands of years ago. It showed the exact location where every Avatar had first stepped foot in this world.

The most prominent marker was pretty close to the Southern Water Tribe, where the Air Nomad symbol was glowing particularly bright.

I looked up from the map again and said: "So the Avatar is near the Southern Water Tribe. And he is an air bender. But how is that possible? The Air Nomads were completely eradicated by the Fire Nation a century ago."

"We have no real explanation for it either so far.", Lao Zhu said with a serious look on his face.

"But no matter how an air bender managed to survive, he's the new Avatar and therefore will play a pivotal role in this war. We have already seen in our visions that the war is about to experience some major turns of events and you, Master Yulizan, will also be a part of this."

"I know of the visions, Master, but I won't do anything except following our codex and my mission."

"That is laudable, young Master. But I think you should try to lose as little time as possible and set out to the Southern Water Tribe, the Avatar could already be in danger without us knowing."

"Of course Master, I will equip myself with everything I need and then head out immediately."

"May you walk in the shadows, Yulizan."

I made a quick bow and then left the hall.

I returned to my quarters in the eastern tower to prepare my equipment. I was already wearing my white master assassin robe which was bedecked with red and gold adornments. Attached to the robe's sleeves were my two extendable wrist blades, the Assassins' signature weapon.

I went over to my wardrobe, opened it and looked at my weapons with a feeling of pride: Two katana swords, crafted from the finest steel, the handles were decorated with both my family's and the Order's sigil. My black ebony wood bow, along with the leather quiver that held many different types of arrows. My little crossbow, along with many types of bolts. Two additional daggers. A belt with throwing knives. And finally a small leather bag containing many phials with all kinds of different mixtures.

I equipped everything and then checked if everything was fixated correctly and also if anything possibly restricted my movements.

After that, I also practiced my bending abilities for a brief moment.

I created a small white flame in my right and a tiny bolt of purple lightning in my left hand. This type of fire bending had once been discovered by the founders of the Order, we Assassins were the
only people in the entire world who knew of it.

White fire was the hottest form of the common flame and the only one without an origin in the sun. Purple lightning had a higher charge than common white lightning, it usually only appeared during intense thunderstorms with strong rainfall. After long studies and lots of hard training, the Old Masters had eventually managed to control and later create this kind of fire and lightning themselves.

The training to learn these forms of fire bending was a very long and difficult process, but I had actually mastered the art eventually, albeit under hellish pain very often, which also left many wounds and scars on my body.

Satisfied that my bending was also working as it should, I left both my room and the tower and set foot on the large courtyard once again.

I looked to the sky, put two fingers into my mouth and uttered a sharp, loud whistle. Only seconds later, I noticed the well-known silhouette above me, he eventually landed right next to me.

I stroked his scaly head, he visibly enjoyed it and eventually said: "Hello, my friend, what's the matter?"

"The day has finally come, Pagan! My mission begins! The Avatar has returned."

"Oh! Great things lay ahead of you, I can feel it already."

"I know, my friend, I'm pretty sure this task will bring me to my limits, but I have to try everything to succeed, the Spirits demand it!"

"And where exactly is the Avatar?"

"Near the Southern Water Tribe. Don't worry, I will most likely sense it when we're close to his exact location. I think you should prepare yourself for the cold down in the south." I couldn't help but grin about my last sentence.

Pagan took my remark in good humor and slightly nudged me with his snout: "Dragons need to be prepared for everything. I'm sure some cold weather won't affect me at all."

"Whatever you say, my friend. But now, let me get up there, we have to set out!"

Pagan lowered his head and neck to allow me to mount him. I took my usual place right between his horns, knocked my right foot against his scaly skin and he rose to the sky, immediately turning southwards.

We had a longer journey ahead of us, but at its end, I would finally be able to begin the mission which would now shape my life. I felt a certain sense of excitement, but it was soon replaced by determination. I was ready, willing and able to protect the Avatar. With his abilities, the war would most definitely break out in a new direction in the close future, which would then allow me to get closer to my main goal.

I reached into my robe's collar and got out my mother's medallion, which I had found in our house before I had left it. I held the piece of jewelry tight, closed my eyes and thought of them all.

In my mind I said: "Don't worry, soon you will be able to rest in peace, I promise!"
Pagan turned his head and looked at me with his bilious green eyes. I smiled and told him to continue his flight. He pulled up his arms and legs close to his body and increased his speed. Now almost as fast as a cannonball, we continued to head towards the Southern Water Tribe.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: In the middle of the cold
After about half a day, we slowly but surely reached the frigid climes of the southern world.

Below us was nothing but water and lots of icebergs, the air had started to become chilly as well, small clouds of steam emitted from our mouths and noses with every breath. I pulled my hood into my face even more, to stop the cold wind hitting my eyes, while hoarfrost had started to form on the tips of Pagan's horns.

"Definitely not my favorite climate.", I mumbled with slightly chattering teeth.

Pagan replied: "You're telling me! But what can we do about it?"

"You're right, we'll probably get used to it sooner or later."

Suddenly, I felt something. I closed my eyes and saw an image appearing in my mind: A spherical iceberg, a boy, a flash of bright light! We had to be close.

I told Pagan: "We're close to our destination. Look for a spherical-shaped iceberg or something similar." Pagan immediately started looking downwards, as did I.

A few minutes later, I saw it. I tapped Pagan on the head and pointed towards my discovery with my finger.

"There! That has to be it!"

Pagan had seen it too, he began to slowly sink lower and eventually landed on the large sheet of ice. He had to use his claws to cling to the ice or else we would have slipped into the water.

Once we finally had come to a halt, I jumped off the dragon's neck and took a look at what we had found: We were standing on a big ice floe whose most significant feature was right in front of me: A giant, split sphere made of thick ice.

I stepped forward and examined the right half's edge. It was perfectly smooth and pretty sharp, whatever had caused the splitting had not happened that long ago.

I searched for any other clues on the rest of the floe and eventually found something: In the middle of the split sphere, something brown was lying. I squatted down and picked it up.

I looked at my find reflectively: It was a tuft of hair, most likely animal fur. I grinded it between my fingers. It was very smooth, the tips looked tousled. There was only one animal with this kind of fur: A sky bison, a typical Air Nomad animal. Now it was clear: This had been the Avatar's, an air bender's, hiding place.

I returned to Pagan and said: "This is the place! The Avatar was most likely trapped inside this iceberg!"

"But where is he now?"

"I don't know yet, but I will in a couple minutes! Please be quiet for the time being, yes?" Pagan
I knelt down on the ice, took a handful of snow and let it trickle through my fingers. Then I closed my eyes and concentrated all my thoughts to this place here.

I saw it right in front of me: Two members of the Water Tribe, a girl and a boy, a second boy with no hair, a giant animal, a small village consisting of some huts and ... a great, obscure mass of dark energy heading towards that place.

So that's what had happened, the Avatar was most likely in that village. But what was that mass of dark energy? I would probably find that out sooner or later, but one thing I already knew for sure: Should they only lay a finger on the Avatar, I would immediately send them into a world of eternal suffering, right in the darkest parts of the Spirit World!

I stood up again, went over to Pagan, who had remained quiet the entire time, and told him:

"I know where we need to go. Just look for a small village. Come on, there's no time to lose!" I jumped onto Pagan's neck, he rose to the air and we flew away from the ice floe.

Only a couple of minutes later, we had already found the village. Pagan landed at a safe distance atop of a hill, which proved to be a perfect vantage point, as one was able to look over the entire area without being seen by the inhabitants of the village. I squatted down on the summit of the hill and began to observe the village.

Pagan's head appeared next to me shortly afterward, he asked: "And you're sure that he's down there?"

"Pretty sure, all clues are indicating it. However, I still really want to know what exactly that mass of dark energy is..."

Pagan said: "Well, during your meditation, I spotted something in the distance that looked like a large ship. Maybe that was it?"

"Possibly. But then the question is: What is a large ship doing in such a calm region?"

Pagan didn't know an answer to that, but he wouldn't have been able to tell me anyway, because something was happening in the village right now.

Three people emerged from one of the huts: A young man with a short ponytail, clad in a blue fur robe, a girl, also wearing blue clothes, and a conspicuous bald boy who was wearing yellow and red-colored robes and also had a blue tattoo in the shape of an arrow on his head. That had to be him! The Avatar! I had actually found him!

But I wasn't able to properly plan my next step, because only a short moment later I saw a giant black ship heading directly for the village's coast. I stood up and waited how things would unfold.

Shortly afterwards, the ship stopped. A gate opened at the bow, a couple of masked Fire Nation soldiers stepped out, followed by someone whose face I knew very well, even though I had never actually seen him in person before. But the long ponytail and of course the enormous red scar on the left side of his face made it more than obvious: Prince Zuko himself, the Fire Lord's son, was standing down there in the Water Tribe village.
I immediately felt the familiar anger starting to boil up in my body, but I was able to get it under control very quickly and calm down again.

What was the prince of the Fire Nation doing in such a secluded corner of the world? All I knew was that the Fire Lord had once dishonored and then banished his son, but that alone was no reason for him to be here.

I had been so engrossed in my thoughts that I almost hadn't noticed that the Avatar was now confronting the prince. My focus shifted back to the village, which was currently illuminated in a bright, yellow light, as Prince Zuko had now started to throw fireballs at the Avatar, who was able to block them. I was tempted to simply run down into the village and help the Avatar, but my sense of reason held me back.

But then, suddenly, the Avatar dropped his staff, it looked like he was surrendering himself to the prince.

"What is he doing?", I asked myself.

The Avatar was tied up and then taken into the ship. The gate closed and the ship drove away into the same direction it had arrived from.

I sprinted back to Pagan, jumped onto his neck and said: "Go! After them! We have to help the Avatar!"

Pagan shot up into the sky lightning-fast and started chasing after the ship.

Even though we were flying pretty fast, I noticed that we weren't alone in the sky: The Avatar's sky bison was flying beneath us, the boy and the girl from the village on his back.

"Are they also trying to reach the ship?"

"We're going to find out!", Pagan said while his eyes changed color, from green to blue, the signal that he had activated his camouflage.

We had reached the ship pretty quickly, but before I was able to jump down onto the deck to rough up the soldiers, I saw the Avatar, who wasn't tied up anymore, running on the deck, closely followed by Prince Zuko. The latter was randomly hurling fireballs at the Avatar and eventually managed to corner him at the edge of the ship.

The Avatar was about to raise his staff when one of the prince's attacks threw him over the railing, right into the icy water! My eyes shot wide open, the Avatar was in danger!

There was no way I would fail my mission this quick, I was ready to jump into the water myself to help the boy, but what happened a few seconds later was absolutely breathtaking: The Avatar arose from the sea, surrounded by a column of water! His eyes and the arrow-shaped tattoo on his head were glowing as bright as the markers on the Map of Light. This had to be it: The legendary Avatar State!

He flinged large fountains of water right at the soldiers on the ship, flushing most of them overboard this way. Shortly thereafter, the glowing stopped again and the Avatar sank right into the arms of the Water Tribe girl, unconscious. She and the boy heaved him onto the bison's back and they flew away. I gave Pagan the sign to follow then, he obeyed immediately.
After we had diverged from the Southern Water Tribe quite a bit, the bison finally slowed down its flight, Pagan did the same.

I said to him: "Now there's no doubt! That boy really is the Avatar!"

"And what exactly are you planning to do now?"

"Well, apparently he and those two from the Water Tribe are pretty decent fighters on their own. I think it's enough if we follow them inconspicuously for the time being, observe what they do and where they are going. When the time is right, I will reveal myself to them."

"Sounds good, and what exactly are we doing next?"

"We follow the bison and look where they are going next. Then we'll see."

Pagan was satisfied with this and continued to follow the bison through the evening sky.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Following the Avatar
Without exactly knowing where they were going, we followed the Avatar and his two companions the whole night.

I would have been able to sleep without any problems, as Pagan would have been able to follow the bison on his own, but the constant tension never actually let me become tired in the first place.

In the early morning hours, I finally spotted our flight's apparent destination: We had reached rugged mountains with one particularly high mountain holding a massive building complex: The Southern Air Temple!

"Ah! The Avatar most likely hails from here.", I said quietly to myself.

But how was that possible? All Air Nomads had been killed by the Fire Nation at the beginning of the war. Unless ... I had a strange suspicion.

I told Pagan: "You know what I'm thinking, my friend? I think the Avatar was trapped inside that iceberg for many years."

"But how is he alive then? Wouldn't he be starved or suffocated at some point?"

"Don't forget: He's an air bender, he most likely used some kind of special bending technique to keep himself alive artificially. That's the only explanation I have so far. But I think we will find out sooner or later."

In the meantime, the Avatar's bison had landed in the temple's courtyard.

I instructed Pagan not to follow them, but instead to land on another mountain close by for a good view over the whole area. The dragon followed my order and soon landed on the flat, grass-covered summit of one of the mountains surrounding the temple.

I dismounted him, went over to the summit's edge and sat down with my legs hanging over the edge into the air. Pagan lied down himself and curled up.

From my travel bag, I fetched a small loaf of bread and a bigger piece of meat which I cut in two using one of my daggers. I gave one half to Pagan, who devoured it at one bite. I cut out some pieces from the bread for myself and ate them together with my half of the meat. So we sat there on the mountain, waiting and seeing.

Nothing happened for quite some time, but then, I suddenly felt a strong stinging pain in my left hand. It was so bad that I had to clench my teeth to keep myself from screaming.

Pagan noticed that something was wrong and asked: "What's the matter, my friend?"

I wasn't able to answer him in the first moment, but I could already guess what was the cause of the pain.
I turned my hand and saw what I had thought: The little tattoo on my ring finger in the shape of the Assassin Order's sigil, which I had received during my appointment as Master in a special ceremony, was glowing in bright red!

I of course knew the meaning behind that: The Avatar Cycle was fully active again! Something down there in the temple must had caused the Avatar to willingly enter the Avatar State for the first time, restarting the cycle at last!

Even though the pain was still quite strong, I looked down at the temple and saw the confirmation of my thoughts: Bright light was coming out from one of the windows.

Shortly after, the light stopped again, as did the pain in my hand. I precautionally poured some water over my finger, to dampen the remaining pain a little more.

Sometime later, the Avatar and his companions exited the temple again. I got my telescope out from my bag to see what they were planning next.

I only noticed one difference: A little animal was sitting on the Avatar's shoulder, from the looks of it, it was a winged lemur, another typical Air Nomad animal.

After the bison rose back into the air shortly after, Pagan and I continued our flight as well, always following the Avatar and his companions.

We finally seemed to leave the southern regions of the world, drawing nearer to the Earth Kingdom.

While I had never been in the world's largest country personally, I of course had read and heard many interesting things about it.

After another day, I spotted the Avatar's next destination: From the middle of the ocean rose Kyoshi Island, an island created by the Avatar of the same name a few hundred years ago.

But still I was unable to make head nor tail of what exactly the Avatar was planning. From the Old Masters' stories I had learned that the Avatar always had one main goal: Mastering all four elements. And I was pretty sure that this young Air Nomad had not done that yet.

But if he wasn't able to bend all four elements, then why wasn't he searching for someone to teach him?

Many questions were wandering around in my mind, but I was sure that at least some of them would be answered sooner or later.

I told Pagan that we would stay in the air this time, I didn't want to risk being discovered by the island's inhabitants, especially because Pagan's camouflage wasn't working as good on the ground as it did in the air.

Therefore, camouflaged from any suspicious views, we started circling over the bay the bison had landed in.

"What are you planning, boy?", I thought to myself when I saw the Avatar getting rid of most of his clothes and jumping into the water.
Only seconds later, I got my answer: The young air bender was riding on a giant koi carp.

Even though I would have classified this as a pretty dangerous situation in most cases, I decided not to intervene, since the Avatar actually made a pretty safe impression.

However, that changed abruptly a few minutes later!

After the Avatar had safely returned to the shore, he and his companions were ambushed by several people wearing green robes and face paint.

That was the signal for me! I instructed Pagan to fly over the island as low as possible, he obeyed immediately.

As he was rushing over a couple of tree crowns, I jumped off!

Safe and silent, I landed in a treetop, pulling my hood deep into my face.

I skillfully reached for my bow and an iron arrow before sliding in between two boughs, from where I was able to overview the whole scene: The Avatar and his companions were completely surrounded by their attackers.

I tried to take a closer look at them: All of them were wearing loose green robes with armor plates, as I had already seen. The faces were painted white, with red and black markings around the eyes. On the head, all of them were wearing a crown-like headband with adornments and, to my amazement, all of them wielded fans as weapons.

That's when I realized: Their appearance was inspired by Avatar Kyoshi, which meant that they were the Warriors of Kyoshi, an order founded by Avatar Kyoshi herself to protect this island. But why were those peace keepers attacking the Avatar? I was tempted to finally reveal myself to the Avatar to protect him, but soon after, the warriors put their fans away and led the Avatar and his companions away.

Even though the danger seemed averted, I still wanted to send a message! I nocked the arrow, aimed for a tree next to one of the warriors and shot! The arrow whistled through the air, penetrated the tree's bark and got stuck there.

I pressed myself against the trunk my own tree but still continued to observe the scene. The entire group had turned around, the apparent leader of the Warriors of Kyoshi send two of the girls to investigate, most likely where the shot had come from.

I realized that I had to react and get out of here as fast as possible. I climbed back up into the tree's crown until I had the clear sky above my head again. But how should I call Pagan? Whistling would most likely blow my cover. Gladly, I didn't have to think for long, as I saw the familiar shadow above me only a few seconds later.

Pagan broke his camouflage for a short moment, allowing me to mount him without a problem, and then returned to his original height.

He asked: "And? Did you find out something?"

"Yes, the people I saw were Warriors of Kyoshi. They should not be of any danger, even though they cornered the Avatar for a moment. I fired a warning shot with my bow to show them what
would have happened had they really attacked."

"But wasn't that a little risky? You could have been spotted!"

"Sometimes one has to take risks, my friend. If one stays careful the entire time, one will most likely miss important chances."

We circled over the village the warriors had led the Avatar's group into for the rest of the day.

However, nothing conspicuous happened, except for the fact that the Avatar's male companion was apparently very interested in the Warriors of Kyoshi, even going so far as to wear one of their armors to be trained in using the fan by the Warriors' apparent leader.

The next day was pretty hot, literally: Fire Nation soldiers attacked the island!

Pagan and I had already discovered the ships early in the morning, after that, Pagan had dropped me off on the island once again.

Just like yesterday, I was sitting in a tree, ready to ambush the approaching Fire Nation patrols.

I didn't have to wait long for the vanguard to appear. It was a small group, only five soldiers, all were wearing the distinctive armor with masks and were armed with spears.

I decided to conduct some psychological warfare, to unsettle the following troops. I reached into my potion bag and got out a small phial filled with a dark green liquid. I waited for the soldiers to come closer to my tree and then threw the phial to the ground.

It broke with a little cracking sound, but the effect was enormous: From the forest ground, multiple thorny tendrils shot up and launched themselves at the soldiers, subduing them without any problems. They pierced through their bodies, crushed them or even pulled them into the ground. After two minutes, the spectacle was over and I looked at my work with satisfaction.

As there were no other patrols in sight so far, I felt safe enough to utter a small whistle, sitting on Pagan's neck again a few moments later.

From the sky, we saw the Avatar and the Warriors of Kyoshi handling the rest, driving the soldiers off the island again.

The next day, the Avatar and his friends said goodbye to the island's inhabitants and continued their journey. Pagan and I followed them, deeper into the Earth Kingdom's heart.

Maybe there would be a chance for me to reveal myself to the Avatar soon, even though my work as a silent observer was going well. But at some point I really had to try to accompany the Avatar personally and completely legitimately.

It was all a question of time and circumstances.

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter: The first of many
We continued to follow the Avatar's group through the Earth Kingdom.

Slowly but surely I began to doubt if this secret chase still made sense. Once I had revealed myself to the Avatar, I would be able to make his mission clear to him fairly easy.

But continuing to follow a boy, who maybe didn't even realize the importance of his destiny, without any kind of plan? That definitely wasn't something I planned to do for a longer period of time.

The next day, the Avatar and his companions headed straight for their next destination, and it was a big one! Amidst the sandy and rocky mountains, on a single mountain, towered the giant city of Omashu! I had read many things about this legendary pyramid-shaped city and its history, but seeing it in all its greatness with my very eyes was an entirely different experience!

Ruling over this small city-state was, as I knew of course, the old king Bumi, a ruler described as very eccentric, but also very respectable and honest. Thanks to him, the city had remained peaceful almost all the time during the last few years. I was pretty sure that if the Avatar and his friends planned to stay in the city for a little while, they would be in no kind of danger. When I watched them entering the city without any problems, I was completely convinced of my assumption.

Convinced enough to make a decision. I told Pagan: "You know what, my friend? I think the Avatar is safe for now. I think we can take a day off. What do you think?"

Pagan blew out a small cloud of fire from his nose in approval, I rubbed his head in response.

"Just fly over the country for a little while, I'm sure we'll find a nice place."

Pagan darted off, away from Omashu.

Shortly after, we flew over a big forest which had a lake next to it. I made Pagan aware of it, he thereupon initiated his landing immediately, slowly descending onto a sandbank.

I jumped off him and looked around: Behind us was the forest, a large grassy area in front of it which eventually merged into sand and finally the crystal clear water of the lake.

I took a deep breath, the fresh forest air felt very pleasant in my lungs. I decided that we would stay here for the rest of the day.

Pagan was also happy with that, especially after I told him that he could fly around everywhere he wanted, if he stayed camouflaged over inhabited areas and would only hunt wild animals. He promised me that nothing bad would happen, but I remained skeptical, even after his departure.

In the past, it had occasionally happened that Pagan dropped back into his basic instincts, resulting in him killing and eating every animal that crossed his path. Unfortunately, sometimes those included pigs or other farm animals, something I couldn't tolerate! I had raised him all by myself, I
had trained him like a pet to make sure that he knew how he had to behave himself.

Even though Pagan had already reached his full body size, for a dragon, he was still very young, the oldest dragons had reached ages of many human centuries. Pagan was only eight in human years, which for a dragon was still early childhood, but despite that, he was already very strong and ready for battle, even though he had not been able to show this yet, but I was sure that day would come eventually.

I unfastened my meditation mat from my belt and unfolded it on the sand. After that, I took off all my weapons and clothing, put them down next to the mat and eventually waded into the lake slowly but surely.

Although most people claimed that fire benders couldn't swim, that was wrong. Well, at least myself was able to swim, it had been part of my training actually. An Assassin always needed to be mobile, be able to overcome every obstacle, from a wall to a body of water like a river or lake, we were able to reach every place!

After the cold of the water made me wince a little at first, I eventually got used to it pretty quickly and started swimming. My powerful body glided through the blue waves, I gave it my all and became faster and faster over time.

After about half an hour of continuous swimming, I was floating on my back in the middle of the lake exhausted, looking at the sky and the clouds. It was such a nice world we were living in, just why did it had to be destroyed by such a pointless bloodshed?

I quickly shifted my thoughts to something different, otherwise I probably would have heated up not only my mind, but also the water around me. I swam back to the shore, laid down on my mat and fell asleep shortly afterwards.

The next morning, I woke up to the feeling of warm air blowing into my face. I opened my sleepy eyes and saw Pagan's head only a few meters away from my body.

I sat up and said: "Good morning, my friend. So, did you use your time well yesterday?"

Pagan nodded and replied: "Yes, I found a big herd of dog antelopes and ate my fill. But there's something way more important: Shortly before dawn, I flew past Omashu again and saw the Avatar's bison taking off. The Avatar seems to have left Omashu again."

I was on my feet in a flash, slipped into my robe, hastily buckled on my weapons and jumped onto Pagan's neck.

"What are we waiting for then? Let's go, we have to catch up with them again!"

I didn't need to tell Pagan twice, only seconds later we had left the lake and the forest behind and followed the Avatar with maximum speed.

Only some time later we had closed up to them again and the game continued.

In the afternoon, the three travelers set up a camp once more, which meant another break for Pagan and me as well.
The Avatar and the girl from the Water Tribe separated from their other comrade shortly afterwards, walking deeper into the forest their camp was in.

I told Pagan to stay where he was, but still remain ready for action the entire time, in case I would need his help. I quickly climbed the nearest tree and followed the two by jumping from tree to tree, always making sure that they didn't hear or see me.

After a few minutes, we spotted someone: A young man, about one or two years younger than myself, wearing typical Earth Kingdom clothing, therefore most likely an earth bender. This theory proved to be true only seconds later when he started to hurl rocks through the air. I grabbed the bough over my head and pulled myself to the next level of the tree; I didn't want to risk that some stray rock hit me and possibly blew my cover.

The Water Tribe girl had taken initiative in the meantime and walked up to the earth bender, but he suddenly seemed frightened and ran away. Shortly thereafter, the Avatar said that he wanted to follow the young man.

"And what exactly are you hoping to achieve through this?", I asked myself in my mind while I continued to follow the two.

After a little while, we arrived at a village, which at first glance seemed like any other, but with the big difference that it was teeming with Fire Nation soldiers everywhere! I actually had the feeling that there were more soldiers than inhabitants in this village.

The Avatar and the girl meanwhile had followed the young man into a building, I followed them by jumping onto the roof unseen. I heard voices from within, but it was impossible to understand actual words from my current position. An idea came to my mind: I put my hand on one of the roofing tiles and heated it up. After a good minute, I was able to remove it and subsequently put my head onto the exposed wooden roof. Among other things, I was able to hear the words "earth bender", "prison" and "father".

I tried to create a plausible connection between those words; after a few minutes, I had my version of the events they talked about: The Fire Nation soldiers apparently seemed to arrest all the earth benders from this village and then took them to a prison, with the young man's father being one of said earth benders.

The Avatar and his female companion left both the building and the village shortly after, returning to their camp, I did the same.

The next morning, I woke up relatively late, but as soon as I was up, Pagan came rushing towards me.

"Careful! Not so fast, my friend. What is it?"

Pagan told me that the young earth bender had been arrested last night and that the Water Tribe girl had disguised herself as an earth bender to be thrown into prison herself to save the young man. Now they both were held captive in the prison, which apparently was located offshore.

Even though my primary mission was to protect the Avatar, I had a feeling that I should save the girl, my mind told me she was important and I simply couldn't ignore such a thought.

Pagan flew to the prison. It was a giant complex completely crafted from metal, most likely to
prevent the earth benders from using their powers.

In the big courtyard, where all the prisoners currently were staying, I discovered the girl, together with the young earth bender and an older man, most likely his father.

Soon after, the girl climbed onto a small platform and started talking. Because of the distance between us I wasn't able to understand her, but she most likely tried to encourage the prisoners. But this didn't seem to work, as most of the prisoners turned around and walked off.

Pagan flew to another part of the prison, he wanted to show me the reason for all the suffering that was happening here. We flew to a great tower, stopping right in front of the highest floor. I immediately noticed him: The evil in his eyes, the diabolical grin, the posture. All proof of a pure sadist, this man enjoyed seeing others suffer.

"Who is he?", I asked, with a little anger in my voice already.

"The prison's high overseer. He has command authority over everyone and everything here. Sometimes he punishes and tortures prisoners just for his own enjoyment."

Pagan's last sentence filled the cup to the brim! This man stood for everything bad that the Fire Nation was displaying in this war, the pure disdain of humanity.

My goal was clear now: I would kill this man and give the prisoners back their freedom. But the Avatar should still not identify me, I already had a plan for that.

The next day, the situation escalated quicker and worse than I had thought:

The Avatar and the Water Tribe boy had now come to the prison as well and had collected a large amount of coal which the Avatar had sent to the courtyard through the prison's ventilation system. The girl took initiative again and tried to encourage the earth benders to fight back, because with the coal they weren't powerless anymore, but they seemed like they just didn't want to.

Camouflaged, Pagan flew over the courtyard as close as possible, I was able to hear the talking.

The overseer laughed and then spoke to the girl with a sinister voice: "What exactly did you expect? Those animals' volition got broken a long time ago, there's nothing to save here anymore! You will all die in here, you hear me? Die!"

That was my moment!

I pulled my hood over my face as much as possible and also reached for the red scarf in my collar, which I pulled over my mouth and nose, leaving only my blue eyes still visible. That's how I wanted to make sure that the Avatar, should he actually come up here after all, wouldn't identify me.

I gave Pagan the signal to fly towards a small pedestal that was located a little away from the crowd but still was fully visible from nearly everywhere in the courtyard.

I took a deep breath and then jumped off the dragon's neck!

A few seconds later, I landed on the pedestal in a squat, my left hand on the pedestal between my boots, my right hand stretched out to the side.
Everyone in the whole courtyard had turned their heads towards me when I had landed. The overseer was staring at me as if he was seeing a ghost.

He shouted: "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

I said nothing, but instead simply stood up and showed myself in my full size. When the overseer noticed all my weapons, he seemed to realize the danger, but it was too late: I had already drawn my bow, nocked a steel arrow with a jagged head and shot!

Before the overseer even had time to react, the arrow hit him right in his right eye, pierced through his skull until the tip reappeared at the back of his head. Blood splashed from the wound when the overseer fell backwards, groaned twice and then went limp.

Both the prison guards and the prisoners looked at the overseer's dead body in shock, but then everything happened quite fast. The earth benders suddenly found their confidence again and started using the coal against the guards. I watched the whole spectacle from my spot on the pedestal.

When all the guards were defeated, all the prisoners turned back to me, mainly the Water Tribe girl and the young earth bender. I looked back, raised my hand and created a fiery Assassin Order sigil in front of me. While the prisoners looked at the symbol in astonishment, I walked to the side of the courtyard, where Pagan was waiting, floating over the water surface.

We flew away to a safe distance, Pagan asked: "Was that it? Have you finally revealed yourself to the Avatar?"

I pulled the scarf off my face and replied: "No. For one thing, the Avatar wasn't even there, and for another thing, no one else was supposed identify me, this wasn't the right moment."

"So, what do we do now?"

"I just performed the first assassination of my crusade, I have to meditate about this. Back to the monastery!"

"And what about the Avatar?"

"While I'm at the monastery, you can fly around freely and keep an eye on the Avatar in doing so. Should anything suspicious or dangerous happen to him, you immediately come back and get me there."

"All right, I will do that."

After a few hours, we once again arrived at our home. Pagan dropped me off in the courtyard and flew away again immediately.

I returned to my room, took off most of my equipment, knelt down and began to meditate.

I reflected on the events since our departure, most notably about the assassination I had just performed.

One more time, I swore to myself: This little insignificant prison overseer only had been the first of many that would fall victim to my blades and flames. I will find them all, kill them all, it's the will of the Spirits, it's my will, I will give myself, my family and the entire world the peace we deserve!
Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Spectral stuff
I used most of the following time for meditation, but also to train my fighting and bending skills and to refresh my knowledge in the monastery's big underground library. Pagan returned to the monastery every evening and reported what he had discovered or observed during the day.

In a few days was the Winter Solstice, a very special day, for me as well. On the day of the solstice, the real world and the Spirit World were as close as on no other day, close enough so that it was possible to enter the Spirit World.

But the Assassins knew a secret that we guarded like gold since we knew that many people would try to abuse this knowledge: The Spirit World was not only the home of nature spirits and other strange beings, but also of the souls of the dead. Therefore, it theoretically was possible to see and even talk to people who were already dead, if you actually made it into the Spirit World in one piece.

Since I had been appointed the rank of Master, I had tried to perform this hard and exhausting ritual on two occasions already, as I really wanted to see my family again. But every time, my body hadn't been able to handle the exertion, I always collapsed and therefore woke up from the meditation before I was able to manifest myself in the Spirit World.

But I had a good feeling this time and also was prepared much better, it just had to work this time!

Pagan reported to me that the Avatar and his friends were apparently planning to travel to the temple of Avatar Roku in the Fire Nation. I decided not to intervene and instead began to prepare for my meditation.

Eventually, the day of the solstice arrived! I waited the entire day for the sun to finally start sinking towards the western horizon. I was sitting on my mat in my room in Lotus position, clad in just my cloth pants, eyes closed and all my thoughts and willpower focused on my goal: Reaching the Spirit World.

The harder I concentrated, the more I felt my soul slowly drifting away. I was approaching the critical point, came closer to the Spirit World's gate. The sweat started to run over my forehead, my breathing became noticeably faster, my fingers practically clawed into the flesh of my thighs.

"Now the most important step.", I said in my mind.

I tried to relax my body, to make it weightless. This was the point where I always had failed before, my body had always cramped up even more instead of relaxing which then ultimately had led to a circulatory collapse.

But not this time. I suddenly felt an endless lightness around me, it was like I was flying through the sky on a cloud. I exerted myself as much as I could and eventually managed to open my eyes!

The view was breathtaking. I had made it! I was standing on a clearing in a dense forest. The world around me looked pretty normal, with the difference that everything was tinted in a light blue color.
So this was it, the legendary Spirit World.

I looked down and immediately saw that I was wearing my robe and all my weapons. I didn't even question this, I was in a completely different world, everything could happen. Since I didn't exactly know where I was, I decided to leave the forest and then see where that would lead me towards.

After I had left the forest behind me shortly afterwards, my heart almost skipped a beat when I saw where I was: I was standing right in front of the walls and the great gate of my home town! I couldn't believe it at first, but then I realized the meaning of this: The Spirits apparently had heard my wish and now wanted to give me the chance to see my family again.

I entered the town through the gate. There was nobody to be seen, everything was deserted. While I was wandering through the lonely streets, I noticed that there apparently was no weather in the Spirit World: The sky was blue and clear, not the slightest breath of wind was blowing. Eventually, I reached my destination: The house of my childhood.

I entered it and carefully walked into the great hall. I stopped when I felt a little breeze and saw the fog slowly creeping across the floor of the entire room. As I wasn't sure what would happen, I drew one of my katanas to defend myself against any possible attackers. Since I was one with the Spirit World during my meditation, I would be able to actually attack someone here and not just swing through the air, like some people would think.

But it wasn't an attacker that emerged from the fog, it wasn't even just one, but five, five figures that started approaching me while slowly taking shape. When they were only a few meters away from me, I recognized them: They were my parents and siblings. My arms lost their power, I dropped the sword, started running and hugged my mother as tight as I could, I never wanted to let go of her again. But after a few minutes, I eventually did and also hugged my father, my sisters and my brother, while also teasingly tousling the latter's hair.

My father said: "Son, I am so proud of you! You followed my wish, you're well on the way to give our family back the honor it deserves."

I replied: "Thank you, father. It's hard, but I'm convinced that I will succeed."

My mother now rose to speak as well, she said: "Of course you will, you're my son, you can do everything."

Now I finally started crying and hugged my mother again. But suddenly, the world around us began to quake.

"Oh no! The Spirit World is collapsing, the solstice must be over!"

I wanted to say goodbye to my family when I saw their figures already fading into the distance.

My father shouted: "Make me proud, my son!", then they disappeared completely.

I tried to run after them, but for some reason tripped over my own feet and fell to the ground.

I opened my eyes and saw nothing but stone. I turned onto my back, saw the antique wood carvings on the ceiling and realized that I was back in the real world. I sat up and looked down: My whole torso was covered in sweat, my dark blonde hair even was sopping wet.
"How long was I out?", I asked myself while I stood up and started looking for a towel to dry myself up.

While I scrubbed my chest and back, I thought of my experience. It had been nice, very nice. Of course, I wished that it could have lasted a little longer, but I was sure that I eventually would get another chance to travel to the Spirit World and see my family again.

During the next days, I continued my schedule of training and collecting knowledge while reducing the meditation routine a little bit, my soul and my spirit truly felt fresh and ready for new adventures after my trip into the Spirit World.

Pagan also continued his reports, day after day. This way, I learned of a water bending scroll which the Avatar and his female companion had bought and also of a group of rebels, even though I rather would have classified them as terrorists, there was no other word that would have been more fitting to describe this group and the acts they committed which Pagan told me about.

For a short moment, I seriously considered to pay this group a visit, I probably would save a lot of innocent lives this way, but eventually I decided not to waste my time like this, there were more important things waiting for me after all.

Lastly, Pagan also told of how the Avatar had managed to reunite two rival communes who were living in a big canyon. I was happy to hear this, apparently the young air bender finally began to understand his destiny.

A few days later, Pagan arrived at the monastery at a much higher speed than usual, which made me realize that something was wrong.

Pagan landed in the courtyard hastily and reported with a nervous voice: "The Avatar has been captured by Admiral Zhao of the Fire Nation!"

I was immediately alarmed. Zhao was a glib fellow who used anything in his power to give himself leverage, I had put him on my imaginary list of people I would eliminate a long time ago.

I asked: "Were his companions not with him?"

"No, the Avatar was cornered by Yuyan Archers while he was in the forest by himself."

I of course knew of the Yuyan Archers, the best archers the Fire Nation had ever trained. But I was sure that none of them had ever encountered an Assassin and his abilities.

"This is going to be a nice little game of cat-and-mouse.", I thought to myself before saying to Pagan: "Well then, let's go save the Avatar!" I jumped onto Pagan's neck and we flew away.

Some time later, we reached the prison the Avatar was held in. Pagan landed in the forest surrounding the prison with sufficient distance to the complex, to not give the Yuyan Archers any chance to spot us. After all, their eyes were considered to be sharper than those of a hawk, had we landed too close to the prison, they would have attacked us immediately.

I readied myself to infiltrate the fort. I told Pagan to stay in the air while camouflaged until I had freed the Avatar. Pagan rose into the air, I pulled my hood and my scarf over my face and headed off.
While approaching the fort, I thought: "So this is it, I will reveal myself to the Avatar tonight."

I wanted to spend some thoughts on how he would react, but had already reached the fort before I was able to do so.

It was a large complex with archers stationed everywhere on the battlements. Definitely too many to neutralize them all, I realized, which meant that I had to take the hard route: Sneaking through the enemy lines without alarming anyone.

In the shade of the forest, I snuck up to a larger tree and started climbing it while pressing myself against the wood as close as possible, I didn't want to provide any archers with a target. When I reached the top of the tree, I was able to overview the entire complex. The most distinctive features were the courtyard with the large gate and a sole tower in the back area.

"That's where he has to be", I thought.

But how should I reach that place unseen? On the way that I would have taken in any other situation, there were at least twenty archers waiting around every corner. Normally I wouldn't have stood any chance, but then I discovered something: Underneath the rooftops, which were reaching a little over the edge of the building, there were wooden boards placed in close distance to each other. They looked thick and strong enough to hold me without breaking and were heading directly to the side of the main building that was facing the tower.

I looked at the spot on the roof that was closest to my vantage point. I seemed to be lucky: Only a single archer was standing there right now, most likely because this side of the building was looking towards the forest and the soldiers apparently weren't expecting an infiltration from this side.

"Well, tough luck, my friends! An Assassin always finds his way.", I thought.

I drew my bow and pulled out a thin arrow with a four-spiked head from my quiver, nocked it, aimed and shot. The thin arrow flew through the air silent and fast as lightning before hitting the archer right into his unprotected neck. I immediately holstered the bow again, silently ran across a long thick branch and jumped right onto the roof edge gracefully. I quickly pulled myself up, looked around to check if anyone had noticed something, grabbed the archer's corpse and dumped it into a dark corner. I tried to pull the arrow out of his neck, but sadly the arrowhead had gotten stuck too deep, I had to leave it be.

After that, I looked for the boards that I had discovered and found them pretty quickly. I made a standing jump, grabbed one of the boards and pulled myself up. Headfirst, I now started climbed along the roof's edge on all fours. At one point, I had to stop and pull myself up into the darkness when another archer passed right underneath me, but luckily didn't notice me.

After a few minutes, I had reached my destination: From this side of the roof one could easily get into the tower by jumping through one of the windows. To avoid making sounds, I rolled off over my shoulder as I landed.

"The Avatar's most likely held on the top level.", I thought and started searching for a staircase, without stepping out of the darkness of course.

Shortly after, I had found the stairs and started climbing them, while also putting out all the torches that were hanging on the walls in the process to create more darkness.
Eventually, I reached the top level. I looked around, but nobody was there. I still remained hidden in the shadows however, just in case I would run into somebody by surprise.

After a few more steps, I finally seemed to have found what I had been looking for: A large door.

"This is it! He has to be in here!"

But before I could open the door, my view wandered to the ground where I discovered something: Scattered in the corridor in front of the door, there were the corpses of four Fire Nation soldiers. I took a closer look at the corpse right in front of my feet: He had two big slash wounds on his torso. I knew this pattern, it was similar to my own, he most likely had been attacked by two swords. The size of the wounds told that it most likely had been broadswords, not a thin blade like my katanas. But who or what had done this? And more importantly: Why? Well, I would deal with that later, now I had to free the Avatar.

But just as I wanted to kick the door open, I heard the distinctive sound of an alarm horn from outside of the tower.

"Oh great...", I said annoyed.

Now it would take all my skills to escape from this place alive. But the Avatar would most likely be able to help me.

I finally opened the door and immediately froze where I stood: In the middle of the room, there were two pillars with chains attached to them, but nobody was bound onto those chains! The Avatar was gone! Either he had escaped by himself or someone else had beat me to the punch. I was angry, but had no time to unleash my anger since I knew that the Avatar could already be anywhere. If I hurried up, I would still be able to catch up with him and his possible liberator.

I quickly ran to one of the tower's windows and looked down. Right underneath the window, there was a large haystack, most likely to feed the soldiers' riding animals. I didn't have to think much, I simply jumped!

I turned around in mid-air to land backwards in the haystack. To my luck, it was quite dense, I was able to climb out unharmed.

I saw that almost every single archer was heading towards the main gate, something must have happened there.

I ran towards one of the now unguarded walls, climbed it using little ledges and cracks and then continued running on top of the wall.

Shortly after I had reached the part of the wall that gave me a good view over the area in front of the main gate, and what an interesting view it was: The Avatar was down in the courtyard fighting some soldiers. Next to him stood a mysterious figure that was completely clad in black and wore a mask. When the figure turned around, I recognized the mask: It was the Blue Spirit!

In contrast to most people, who only saw the Blue Spirit as some kind of bedtime story, I knew exactly what was right in front of me here: The Blue Spirit had been the second identity of legendary Assassin Tao Pai-Zai, a master of the old arts who had died about 70 years ago. He had once crafted the mask of the Blue Spirit to spread fear among his enemies not only with excellent fighting abilities, but just by his appearance.

And now this mysterious stranger down there in the courtyard had adopted a legendary Assassin's
identity just like that, I could not allow this to happen, it hurt the honor of the Order!

I was ready to jump off the wall and literally dive into battle to help the Avatar when the stranger suddenly drew his two broadswords and put them right at the Avatar's throat.

The moment he had drawn the swords, I had thought: "Ah! It was him who killed the guards and freed the Avatar.", but when he put them at the Avatar's throat, I was shocked!

The Avatar's life was in danger and I wasn't able to do anything against it. The archers would immediately turn me into a pin cushion if I would show my face only for a second.

The masked stranger kept his swords at the Avatar's throat and started leaving the courtyard, walking backwards, through the gate.

When they were already a good distance away from the prison and I wanted to start following them, I suddenly heard the whistling sound of a flying arrow and eventually saw it flying from the battlements, hitting the stranger right in the mask, he collapsed immediately. Was he dead?

A cloud of dust appeared, most likely created by the Avatar. When the air was clear again, both the Avatar and the stranger were gone. I concluded that the stranger was still alive and the Avatar had taken him with him.

It looked like my task had basically fulfilled itself on its own, the Avatar was free and well. I returned to the deeper parts of the forest and whistled for Pagan, who picked me up shortly after.

He asked: "Were you able to free the Avatar?"

"Yes and no. Yes, he's free again, and no, it wasn't me who freed him."

"Then who was it?"

"A mysterious stranger, who was wearing the mask of the Blue Spirit."

"The legendary Assassin?"

"Yes, I don't know where he got the mask from, but it definitely wasn't the real one."

"So, what now?"

"Back to the monastery, the task is fulfilled. Then we'll continue our routine, you can fly your ways while keeping an eye on the Avatar and report to me should anything happen."

Some time later, we arrived back at the monastery. I laid down on my bed and thought. Who had that stranger been? Why had he been dressed up as the Blue Spirit? Why had he liberated the Avatar only to capture him again? Many questions started to pile up in my head.

At this moment, I made a decision: The next time I would meet the Avatar, I would reveal myself to him, no matter the circumstances. I just couldn't wait any longer, I wanted answers and certainty!

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter: A frivolous encounter
Bounty Hunter Escapades

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Lemons/sexual content in this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I continued my routine over the next days, but for distraction also spent some time on my hidden passion: The writing of scrolls. Over the course of time, I had often written about certain things and events I had witnessed during my travels, for example about certain animals and their behavior, what kind of combat tactic was the most useful in certain situations or just some antique knowledge from the Assassins' library that was neither dangerous nor secret.

Every day, I hoped that Pagan would eventually bring some interesting news, but for many days, the Avatar and his companions just seemed to travel from one place to another without anything unusual happening. I eventually actually started to become a little impatient.

Then, about one week after the failed rescue mission, Pagan finally brought some interesting news.

He landed in the courtyard and said: "Looks like Prince Zuko is now bringing out heavy calibers to catch the Avatar."

"Why? What is he doing?"

"He hired a bounty huntress from the Earth Kingdom to track down and capture the Avatar for him."

"Oh well, that sounds great! I think we should pay this lady a little visit, don't you think?"

Pagan nodded, lowered his head so I was able to mount him and then took off, heading towards the Earth Kingdom.

While in the air, I asked the dragon: "Do you know anything more accurate about this bounty huntress?"

"Only that she is accompanied by a quite big and strange animal."

"What kind of animal?"

"I don't know for sure, it looked like a mixture of a mole and a dog."

"Ah, a shirshu. That means we need to be careful, those things can be quite dangerous."

"Really? I doubt an animal like this would try and attack a dragon!"

"From what I've read in some scrolls, all I know is that they produce poisonous saliva that causes paralysis, but that's about it."

We stayed silent for a while, then Pagan asked: "You think you will be able to take on this woman?
She has to be quite the expert in her field of business if Prince Zuko turned to her for this job."

I had to laugh and replied: "My dear friend, have you ever seen me having problems in any fight?"

Pagan shook his head, followed by me saying: "See? Have a little more faith in me, and also, she's a bounty huntress, those people are specialized in capturing people alive, what is she supposed to do against me in an open fight?"

Shortly after, we reached the place where Pagan had last seen the woman and her animal. I dismounted him slowly since I didn't know what could potentially be awaiting us.

"And you're sure it was this place here?", I asked while reaching for one of my katanas.

"Of course I'm sure. She was standing right over there while her animal was sniffing the ground."

"Most likely to catch some kind of scent..."

I actually was quite sure that we wouldn't find anything here anymore, when suddenly from out of nowhere a whip came shooting, wrapped around my wrist and ripped the katana right from my hand. The sword whirled through the air and landed right in the hands of a young woman, who also had appeared out of nowhere. She had long black hair tied into a little knot on the top of her head and wore light, dark green-colored clothing. She looked at my katana as if it was a trophy.

I said loudly: "Hey! Give that back!"

A small but very seductive smile appeared on her pale face.

She replied: "Oh! Is that yours? A nice thing you have there. And I also like the sword."

Confused at first, I followed her gaze and looked down at myself. What I saw was quite alarming and embarrassing at the same time.

"That means nothing!", I said with the small rest of confidence I still had at this moment.

"Just give me back my sword and I let you live!"

She looked shocked, but most likely was just pretending to do so. She started grinning again and said seductively: "Come and get it!"

Of course I immediately knew that this was a trap, that's why I kept standing where I was while also pulling a throwing knife out from my belt unnoticed, eventually throwing it right at her with an incredible fast reflex. Even though I most certainly should have hit her, nothing happened.

I looked to the ground aghast: The throwing knife was just lying there, split in two pieces. The woman was still holding my katana in one hand, her whip in the other while still grinning seductively.

"Alright", I thought, "if you want to play, then let's play!"

I drew both my daggers and ran right towards her. She once again readied up to use her whip, but this time I was prepared and able to dodge her attacks.

I lunged out with the dagger in my right hand while jumping right at her, but all I hit were the metal sleeves on her lower arms. I lunged out with the left dagger to surprise her from the other
side, but she also blocked that attack and pushed me away with the power of both her arms. The push was strong enough to send my flying backwards while also going head over heels in midair. I eventually landed on my feet, quite impressed, she had more up her sleeve than I thought. But now it was my turn!

I sheathed the daggers, grabbed my second katana, took up my fighting stance and eventually made a slight hand movement to provoke her into attacking. She smiled again and ran towards me, katana in hands. A loud clanking sound erupted when the swords collided. We both pushed as hard as we could against the other, our faces came closer to each other, I eventually managed to force her to her knees.

"You're good!", I gasped, I didn't want to waste any energy with talking.

She replied: "You should see me when I'm evil!"

After those words, she opened her mouth and licked the katana's blade with her pink tongue. I was so shocked by this sight that I let my defense slide for a second, allowing her to throw me to the ground without any problems.

There I was now, defenselessly lying on the forest ground, she was standing over me, more precisely, she wasn't standing anymore either, she knelt on all fours right on top of me.

"What are you doing?", I said nervously.

"Showing you how evil I can be!", she whispered into my ear.

My eyes shot open, I was starting to realize.

I quickly looked to the side where Pagan tried to keep the shirshu on a distance, the animal repeatedly tried to attack the dragon with its long poisonous tongue.

After that, I turned my attention back to what was happening literally on top of me. The woman still had my katana in her hands, but suddenly, she just put it away. I tried to reach for it, but she grabbed my wrist and pinned it to the ground.

"No no no! Don't do that, OK?"

I wanted to protest, but suddenly felt something on my lips and then in my mouth!

"My dear Spirits! This is not happening, is it?", shot through my mind.

The bounty huntress was actually kissing me right now! I tried to make sense of this, but in the end, it led to nothing since my body just gave into its passion.

"Ah, whatever! I think I deserved a reward for quite some time now, didn't I?", I thought to myself resigned.

I eventually answered the kiss and started to explore her mouth using my tongue, causing her to moan lightly already, most of the sound got stuck in my mouth though.

I decided to take the initiative, grabbed her wrist using my free left hand, used a technique from weaponless martial arts and managed to turn her around. I was now on top of her, pinning her wrists to the ground.
We dug into the kiss again, but only a few moments later, I went a step further by removing my right hand from her wrist, placing it on her right breast and squeezing it. She moaned into my mouth again, I knew I now had her entirely under my control.

Next, I moved my left hand to her breast as well while breaking the kiss, only to place many little kisses all along her neck. She really seemed to enjoy it, the expression on her face told the entire story.

I pushed her light top up, freeing her well-shaped breasts. While my left hand started to massage and caress her left breast and nipple, my mouth wandered onto her right nipple. I now heard her moans in full volume for the first time, it was like music in my ears.

I continued to suck and massage with greater intensity, eventually stopping for a short moment to ask: "Happy?", she could only nod, the excitement had taken her voice away.

A few minutes later, I went down another level, folding up her garment and pulling down her wide pants, I was now able to see her holy spot. I was now grinning myself for the first time when I saw the shocked face she made when I removed her clothes.

Still grinning, I slowly approached the spot and eventually started to use the strengths of my mouth there as well. Her moans slowly turned into screams of pure lust, her whole body became light, just like sand running through one's fingers. I continued this whole game for about fifteen minutes, before she bent over backwards and a warm and sticky stream came flowing towards me.

I sat myself up and saw her exhausted but highly pleased face, she said: "Now it's your turn!"

Before I knew what was happening, I was on my back with her on top of me once again, even though she had positioned herself a little lower this time.

She folded my robe to the side and pulled down my cloth pants. At first, the air was quite cold, but I got used to it pretty quickly, I hadn't been able to hide my excited manhood for a couple minutes now anyway. I looked at her face, the seductive smile had returned.

Without any words of warning, she took my manhood and practically devoured it. It was an indescribable feeling, better than anything I had ever felt before. I wished it would have lasted forever, but after about ten minutes my body reached its limit and I unloaded the seed of my loins right into the throat of the bounty huntress. She looked satisfied when she cleaned her lips with the back of her hand.

"Not bad.", she said, "but the grand finale is still in store!"

She rose from the ground, only to sink right onto my re-excited manhood. Even though I had thought that there wasn't a better feeling than the one from before, I now probably had to reconsider that statement, because this was even better! The movement of her hips did indescribable things to me, it was like my whole body was on fire!

Shortly after, she slid off my manhood again to kneel in front of me on all fours, I immediately knew what I had to do. I led my manhood towards her holy spot and thrust right into her, which made us both moan. I started to thrust slowly and regularly, she moaned every time I re-entered her. My thrusts became faster over time, after fifteen minutes, my body reached its maximum for a second time, I unloaded my seed right into the deepest parts of her womanhood.

Shortly after, I was lying on the forest ground exhausted, her head on my naked chest.
"That was incredible!", I said quietly to her, "you're really better when you're evil."

"Told you!"

We kept lying in the grass for quite some time, then we rose and got dressed again.

That's when I remembered the real reason why I even tried to find her in the first place.

I asked her: "Is it true that Prince Zuko of the Fire Nation has hired you to capture the Avatar for him?"

She looked confused, but then replied with a cheeky voice: "Maybe. Why do you care?"

"Because I'm the sworn protector of the Avatar, and as such, I can't let him fall into the Fire Nation's hands!"

"I get it. You know what? I think I let this whole thing be, he paid me in advance, why should I even bother doing all this hard work now?"

She walked over to her shirshu, mounted it and prepared to ride away, but eventually turned around one more time and said:

"It was a pleasure to meet you. My name is June by the way, maybe we'll meet again one day. I would really like that..."

She licked her lips during her last sentence. I think I blushed a little under my hood, but I had no time paying attention to that, I looked after June, who was riding away on her shirshu.

"What a woman!", was everything I was able to think about at that moment.

After I had sorted my thoughts again, I whistled for Pagan who had flown away after his fight with the shirshu. I climbed onto his neck and instructed him to fly back to the monastery.

He asked: "How was it? Did you manage to stop the bounty huntress?"

"In a certain sense, yes."

"What do you mean, in a certain sense?"

"I don't have to tell you that!"

"All right, I was just asking"

"The most important thing is that she won't be a threat to the Avatar anymore."

Back in the monastery, I fell into my bed immediately, the day had been really exhausting, even though in a different kind of way than usual.

That night, I had the best dreams in a long time, they gave me the energy for the next couple of days, which would prove to be very important...

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter: Assassin meets Avatar
Revelations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

My little love adventure with June, the bounty huntress, had only been two days ago when Pagan brought home some good news: The Avatar and his friends were near a bigger city in the northeastern Earth Kingdom which currently was hosting a fire festival. Pagan had been able to overhear that the three travelers were apparently planning to visit that festival.

"Great!", I said, "that's the perfect opportunity to finally reveal myself to the Avatar."

"Why do you think so?"

"Two reasons, my friend: First of all, everybody is wearing a costume and a mask on such a festival, therefore I would not attract any attention and would be able to spy the Avatar out unnoticed, to find the right moment, and second, it's about time, I may have already waited for too long, I simply have to take this chance now!"

"Fair enough. Are we good to go then?"

I nodded, mounted Pagan's neck and we flew away.

A couple of hours later, we reached a forest near the fire festival city.

I dismounted Pagan and told him:

"Stay here, I'll most likely return together with the Avatar."

"And then what?"

"If everything goes according to plan, we will accompany the Avatar and his friends from then on, wherever they may go."

"Very good, then I will finally be able to save some of the energy I need for my camouflage"

"Hey! Don't get lazy now, my friend! You will still have to fly and I don't think it would be good for both our health if you fell asleep midflight."

"Yes, alright..."

After those words, I left Pagan alone and started heading towards the city.

While walking, I pulled my scarf over my face, today it wasn't just for hiding my identity but also my ticket to get into that fire festival.

I actually had been to festivals like this in the past, in my home town, my siblings had often persuaded me to accompany them and watch the strangest shows and stalls. I admittedly wasn't quite fond of such events, but occasionally they still could be pretty nice. But today wasn't for entertainment, I had to find the Avatar!
Eventually, I discovered the brightly lit city in the distance. The closer I came, the brighter the lights became, when I was only a few meters in front of the entrance gate I almost had to hold my arm in front of my face to not be blinded by the lights.

Two guards were standing left and right in front of the gate, but they weren't paying any attention to me or any another visitor entering the city, which allowed me to enter the city without any problems.

Inside, I made my way to the big piazza in the middle and looked around. Just like I had thought: Stalls everywhere, selling everything, from kitschy bits and pieces to food of any kind, everybody would make a find of some kind here. Between the stalls, there were fire artists at every corner, performing strange bending tricks. The whole place was lighted with many paper lanterns, all in all, everything made a really nice and peaceful impression.

I casually walked through the masses of people, noticing that I really didn't attract any attention with my combination of hood and scarf, even though the masks of most visitors were quite traditional, carved from wood and colored in odd patterns.

What actually surprised me was the fact that most people didn't seem to notice my weapons, I had left nothing behind and therefore was walking through the festival fully armed. The guards also didn't seem to care; just like the two outside the gate, the guards inside the city also never deigned to look at me.

I of course kept an eye out for the Avatar and his two friends the entire time, but even with my sharp eyes I hadn't been able to discover any of them so far.

After a few minutes, I passed another one of those fire artists, this one had a quite large group of spectators in front of his little stage. Since I still had no trace of the Avatar, I stopped and joined the crowd.

The artist, although I thought gleeman or even charlatan were better words to describe him, judging by his appearance, now announced his next trick, for which he would pick a person from the audience. He eventually picked a small person wearing a long violet-colored cloak and a mask which depicted a face with red cheeks. He led the person to a chair where he sat them down and also tied their wrists to the chair's arm rests. After that, he started the show.

He bent the fire in a very artistic manner, forming a golden dragon from the flames. I had to admit that I was genuinely impressed by this, the way he was moving the dragon around the person on the chair with only a small distance between body and fire.

The whole spectacle lasted for a couple of minutes when something suddenly changed: The dragon started to become unstable in his flight, I saw the artist sweating profusely.

"I don't believe it! He's losing control!", I thought and focused my gaze onto the stage so that I would be able to intervene if something bad would happen.

The dragon now became completely independent from its bender and shot frontally towards the person tied to the chair! I averted my eyes, prepared to hear the fiery impact.

But all I heard was a loud blast of wind. I looked back at the stage and saw a boy standing there, wearing a yellow and red mask with clothing of the same colors. I couldn't believe it at first, but I had made it! I had found the Avatar!

But I wasn't able to celebrate my success, because the crowd started screaming, all I heard were the
words "Avatar" and "guards". That was the moment I knew what would happen next.

I broke out of the crowd as fast as possible, ran into an empty alley and started climbing the nearest building.

From the rooftops, I had a good view over the whole scene: Guards came running from the right, the Avatar and his companions, the girl had been the person tied to the chair, fled into the other direction.

I followed them by running and jumping over the rooftops, about in between the pursuers and the escapees, keeping track of both parties.

But the inevitable happened: The Avatar's group ended up in a dead end, since they of course didn't know the layout of the city, where they got cornered by the guards. I stood upon the roof right over the alley and looked down.

"It's finally here, the big moment!", I said to myself in my mind, "now I will finally reveal myself!"

I took a last deep silent breath, drew two throwing knives from my belt and took them in both my hands and then jumped down into battle!

Just like for my assassination in the prison, I landed in a crouch between the Avatar and the guards. There I was, kneeling on the ground, keeping my eyes glued to the guards the entire time.

Two of them appeared to be quite courageous as they started running towards me, blades drawn. I remained calm, stood up from my crouch and hurled my throwing knives at them. Both blades hit directly into the guards' chest armor plates. Struck with shock, they kept running a few more steps before they dropped dead right in front of my feet.

The other three guards stared at their comrades' corpses aghast, then turned their gazes to me. But apparently they hadn't learned anything from the scene that had just happened, seeing as they charged right at me. I concentrated for a moment and summoned a ball of my white fire in both my hands. I raised my hands to the front and two streams of fire shot right at the guards, they ran straight into the inferno.

As they stood there, burning and screaming in pain, I didn't think twice. I extended my arm blades, rammed them right into the first two guards’ chests, then walked over to the last one, grabbed his head and twisted it to the side with full force, snapping his neck. All three dropped dead at the same second.

After the successful assault, I turned around for the first time and immediately saw the frightened eyes of the Avatar and his companions.

I decided not to talk for the time being and gestured them to follow me. At first they seemed very unsure, but still followed me eventually.

I led us through the narrow alleys and streets of the city, towards the main gate.

Shortly afterwards, we reached the latter, the two guards were still standing where I had last seen them. I gave the three friends a sign to wait, they obeyed.

I snuck along the city wall towards the gate while fetching a phial filled with black powder from
my bag. When I was in position right next to the gate, I threw the phial right in between the two guards. It shattered and a cloud of thick black smoke arose, which engulfed and blinded the guards.

I gesticulated the Avatar and his friends to start running, we headed through the gate and into the forest.

When we had arrived in the forest, my three followers were breathing heavily, while I was just standing there, my back turned towards them.

After a few minutes, the Avatar spoke up, he asked: "Who are you and why did you help us?"

I said nothing, removed both my scarf and my hood, then turned around and dropped to my knee.

The Avatar had a questioning look in his eyes, I said: "Avatar! It is an honor to finally meet you in person."

The girl now began to speak as well, she appeared to be outraged: "How do you know that Aang's the Avatar? And you still didn't tell us who you are!"

I stood up and spoke: "My name is Yulizan and I am an Assassin."

The Water Tribe boy asked perplexed: "Huh? A what?"

I replied: "The Assassins are an ancient order. Our goal and our duty is to preserve the peace in the world. We do that by fighting evil with all means necessary and by protecting the Avatar, the Highest Peacekeeper, with our lives."

I turned to the air bender: "I know who you are, Avatar, because the Spirits have told of your arrival. The Assassins possess lots of ancient knowledge unknown to most people. One piece of this knowledge is a map that shows the birthplace of every single Avatar. Since the death of Avatar Roku 100 years ago, we have waited in vain for the new Avatar to appear. When the day had finally come, one Assassin was chosen by the Spirits to serve the new Avatar as the Sworn Protector, just like the tradition says. The Spirits chose me and here I am."

The Avatar still had the questioning look on his face and finally asked: "So you're saying that you were chosen to protect me, doing what?"

"Your mission to give back peace to the world, Avatar, it is the duty the Spirits placed on you with your birth. You alone can end this senseless war that is destroying the world."

The girl spoke again: "And why should we believe you? You're a fire bender, how can we know that you're not secretly working for the Fire Nation to capture Aang?"

I lowered my head and voice: "You should know, girl, that not all fire benders have fallen for the corrupt illusion that has afflicted our once great country. You should know, I didn't become an Assassin just because I wanted to protect the peace. I had ... other reasons."

I had to turn away to suppress the tears at the thought of the worst day of my life.

The Avatar asked: "What reasons?"

"A couple of years ago, my whole family got innocently murdered by Fire Lord Ozai himself!"

When I said this sentence, I saw the girl putting her hands over her mouth in shock.
"I saw my father's head hitting the ground. It was the worst day of my life! At that moment, I swore that I would eradicate the injustice in this world! I found a message from my father, who also had been a member of the Assassins. I followed his last wish and joined the Order, I became an Assassin myself. The Fire Nation is my enemy, the peace is my goal!"

When I had finished talking, I had to sit down. Shortly afterwards, the girl approached me and put her hand on my shoulder: "I'm sorry, I had no idea that you had to experience the same pain as me and my brother did."

I looked at her: "What happened to you?"

I saw tears welling up in the girl's eyes, just like they had in mine.

"Our mother was killed by Fire Nation soldiers when we were still children, our father went to war, we don't know if he is still alive."

She started crying. Now I put my hand on her shoulder and said comfortingly: "It's alright. I know how it feels. At the first moment, you don't want to live yourself anymore and you will never overcome the sorrow completely, but there's one thing you always can do, and that is making the people you loved and lost proud by doing good for the world."

She looked at me and then suddenly hugged me. "Thank you.", she whispered in my ear. I awkwardly returned the hug for a short moment, after that she reached into her collar and showed me a necklace that she was wearing. It was a blue ribbon bearing the Water Tribe insignia.

"This is everything I still have left of my mother. It once belonged to my grandmother and is always handed down to the next daughter. When I wear it, I always feel close to my mother. But I'm sure you're not really interested in this..."

As an answer, I reached into my own collar and took my mother's medallion out, the golden plate holding the big ruby which bore my family's sigil in its molding.

"I understand you very good, I feel the same about this medallion. My mother has always worn it, except for the day of her death, when I found it in her bedroom. When I left my home town, it was the only piece that wasn't belonging to me that I took with me, it should serve as a memory and it does that until today."

We both looked up to the sky and thought of the loved ones we had lost before returning to the Avatar and the girl's brother shortly afterwards.

I asked the Avatar: "Well then Avatar, are you giving me the permission to accompany and protect you on your mission from now on?"

The Avatar replied relaxed: "Of course! I don't see any problem, what about you guys?"

The girl shook her head, the boy did as well, pretty uninterested however.

The Avatar looked back at me and said: "But there's one thing I expect you to do..."

I immediately replied: "Of course! Everything, Avatar! I'm at your service!"

The Avatar looked at me with a serious face and said: "Please stop calling me Avatar. I might be the Avatar, but I also have a real name. Call me Aang."
"Alright, Aang."

He pointed at his companions and said: "Those are Katara and Sokka."

At this moment, the little lemur landed on the young air bender's shoulder. "This little guy is Momo, and that..."

Suddenly, I felt a big thud behind me, I turned around and found myself face to face with the Avatar's sky bison. "...is Appa, my bison, we travel on him. Don't worry, he's peaceful."

I extended my hand and gently touched the giant animal's snout, causing him to blow air out of his nose, almost throwing me off my feet.

Aang laughed and said: "Don't worry about travelling, there's enough space for all of us on Appa's back."

I answered: "Very nice of you, but that won't be necessary, I have my own form of transport."

I put two fingers in my mouth and uttered a sharp whistle. Only seconds later I heard the familiar sound of flapping wings. Katara and Sokka looked to the sky in horror and tried to hide behind Aang when Pagan landed.

I tapped the dragon's scaly neck and said: "Good to see you, my friend."

Sokka was the first to find his voice again, he stuttered: "Is t-t-that a d-d-dragon?"

I replied: "Yes, this is Pagan, my best friend. I found him as a child while he was still an egg. I nursed and raised him myself, he is my transporter. Don't be afraid, he does no harm."

Just when Katara and Sokka breathed a sigh of relief, Pagan roared and breathed out a cloud of fire, this nearly caused the siblings to faint.

I said angrily: "Pagan! What was that about?"

My dragon companion laughed and said: "I'm sorry, it was just too tempting; this is the first time that I meet humans who are actually afraid of my mere sight."

"Just leave it be! We're now part of their group, we have to get along with each other. So no such jokes anymore, OK?"

Pagan replied slightly abashed: "Alright."

But only a few moments later, he got what he deserved: Momo, the little lemur, jumped on Pagan's head and started toying with his horns and his two beard whiskers. Pagan looked at me with pleading face, but all I did was grinning back in silence, I wanted to tell him: "That's what comes of it!"

After Momo let up on Pagan a few minutes later, Appa, the bison, approached the dragon. They both sniffed each other, before Appa licked Pagan's slim body with his giant tongue.

I asked Aang: "Is that good?"

The young Avatar immediately replied: "Of course! Appa seems to like him!" I was reassured, it looked like we all would most likely get along with each other very well.
My plan actually had worked! I had revealed myself to the Avatar and had joined his group! Now my mission could finally start to full extent!

From now on, I would accompany the Avatar and help him on his mission. Interesting times were ahead of us.

Some time later, we flew on together. Aang, Katara and Sokka on Appa, me on Pagan just next to them. I was sure that we would become a rehearsed team pretty quickly.

While we were flying through the night sky, I looked up to the stars, my mother's medallion in my hand. I held it firmly and thought of her, my father and my siblings.

In my mind I said: "Now it's only a matter of time, then you will finally be able to rest in peace, I promise!"

Get ready, Fire Nation! Team Avatar has entered the battlefield!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Don't play with fire!
From now on, Pagan and I traveled through the world together with Aang, the Avatar, and his two friends Katara and Sokka.

When we stopped in the evening of our first day together to rest for the night, I was immediately able to help my new friends: With the help of my bending abilities, I ignited a little white campfire.

We sat around the fire in our group of four while Pagan and Appa were already fast asleep.

Aang said: "Yulizan, can I ask you a question?"

"Of course, what is it?"

"Why is the fire you're bending white? Isn't fire yellow or reddish normally?"

"Well, that is due to my Assassin training. You know, the Assassins are present around the entire world, the Assassins of old originally hailed from all four nations, there even were some air bender Assassins."

Aang looked slightly shocked: "But us Air Nomads were always a peaceful nation, I can't really imagine that some of our people decided to become murderers just to protect the peace."

"Aang, the Assassins aren't just trained to kill, we're versatile, many of our members scattered around the world are passive members who act as informants and the likes, only a chosen few receive the honor to be trained in the monastery to become warriors. I'm pretty sure the air bender Assassins were scouts or something similar; you have to admit, your abilities are practically made for reaching most places unseen."

That seemed to make sense to Aang: "That's true, but still doesn't answer my question about the white fire."

"Like I said, the Assassins consist of members of all four nations, thus we always had many benders in our ranks. Over time the various benders developed new techniques helpful for their Assassin missions. The fire benders are the oldest part of the Order, they founded it millennia ago. Shortly after the foundation, during the construction of the monastery, the Old Masters discovered a special mineral inside the mountain the monastery was built into. They performed many experiments on this mineral and eventually discovered that it burned with a bright white flame when set on fire. They studied this form of fire for many years and eventually managed to control and later create it themselves. Since then, every Assassin who hails from the Fire Nation is trained in the arts of the white fire, no one else knows its secret."

Katara now asked: "Are the white flames special in any way? Or is it just the color that sets them apart from the normal flames?"

"Well, there is one big difference: White fire is about three times as hot as normal yellow fire. With the right concentration, it's even able to melt metal."

Aang and Katara swallowed in respect.
Now I picked up another topic and turned towards Katara: "Now I want to ask a question as well: How come that you and Sokka accompany Aang?"

Thereupon, Katara told me the entire story, how she and Sokka had found and freed Aang from inside of the ball-shaped iceberg, how they decided to travel to the Northern Water Tribe to find a water bending teacher for Aang and Katara, and of the many adventures they had already experienced on their travels.

When Katara talked about the liberation of the earth benders from the prison, she suddenly paused and looked at me.

She said: "It was you who killed the overseer, wasn't it?"

I nodded and replied: "That man stood for everything that corrupts the Fire Nation, I wasn't able to witness how he treated the people in that prison any longer."

Katara continued her story until she reached the point when I had rescued them in the city of the fire festival.

I had listened carefully and said afterwards: "So you're heading towards the Northern Water Tribe. Good, I honestly had been thinking that you have no real plan and were just travelling through the world completely aimless."

Aang said: "What do you mean?"

"Well, I've been following you three for quite some time now and always wondered what you were planning at certain places. But now that I know that you actually have a real goal, this should come to an end."

We shared a short laugh, then Aang turned to me again: "Tell me, Yulizan, if you really are such a good fire bender, couldn't you teach me fire bending then?"

I immediately replied: "I'm very sorry Aang, but this won't work for two main reasons. First, the Avatar Cycle dictates that you have to learn water first, then earth and finally fire. Trying to bend fire now already would probably be very dangerous. And second, my way of fire bending is reserved for Assassins, we're not allowed to teach it to any outsider, and even if it was allowed, the learning process with white fire is much more difficult than with normal fire, it would probably take you months to manage even the simplest of my techniques."

Aang looked to the ground slightly sad, but an idea came to my mind at that moment.

"But, if you really want to try to learn fire bending now already, I know a man who might be able to help you."

Aang's eyes immediately became bright again: "Who?"

"His name is Master Jeong Jeong, he's a member of the Assassin Order as well. Just like me, he turned his back on the Fire Nation, he now lives in a hut in a forest not far from here. He is one of the most powerful benders of the normal fire. He may seem reserved most of the time, but seeing as you're the Avatar I think he will train you."

"What are we waiting for then? Let's head off and find this master!"
Sokka, who had lain down in the meantime, groaned: "Oh, come on! It's already this late, let's sleep and go there tomorrow."

But because Aang couldn't be tamed anymore, Sokka eventually gave in. We packed our things, mounted our animals and flew off.

Only a short time later, we landed in the forest where Jeong Jeong's hut was located.

We had reached the latter soon after, but when Aang wanted to head inside straight away, I held him back.

"Wait, Aang! You can't just walk into a stranger's house!"

"But you said that you know him."

"Yes, I know him, but he doesn't know you, and you don't want to know what Assassins do with unknown intruders."

I moved my thumb across my throat demonstratively. This immediately convinced Aang, he quickly took a few steps back and left the first step to me.

I walked up to the wooden hut door, knocked three times and said: "Shadow walkers and warriors of light are my friends!"

That was the password every Assassin knew which we used to protect ourselves against enemies or traitors.

From inside the hut, a muffled voice said: "Come in, brother!"

I opened the door and saw the old master, he was sitting in lotus position within a circle of candles. I took two steps and sank to my knee.

"Master Jeong Jeong, it is an honor to meet you again."

"The honor is on my side, Master Yulizan. What gives me the privilege of your visit?"

"As you probably know already, Master, the Cycle is active again, the Avatar has returned and the Spirits have chosen me to be the Protector."

Jeong Jeong opened his eyes a little more and looked up: "That is a great honor that has been bestowed on you, Master Yulizan, but it doesn't answer my question about why you are here."

"Well, the reason for me being here is the following: The Avatar is here with me, he asked me to bring him to you so that you can train him in the art of fire bending."

"Has he already completed the cycle?"

"No, but he insisted on learning fire bending now already, and you know that the Protector has no right to question the Avatar's decisions, even when they might seem morally unacceptable."

"I am well aware of our order's traditions, Master Yulizan. Even though his current state of knowledge usually wouldn't allow it ... bring the Avatar to me, I will see what I can do."

"Thank you, Master, I will send him to you immediately."
Thereupon I left the hut and said to Aang: "Aang, Master Jeong Jeong is willing to see you, he will decide if he will train you. Always act very respectful towards him when you're inside, you understand?"

Aang was impatiently hopping from one foot to the other, I was pretty sure that he hadn't really listened to me.

He said: "Alright, no problem!", and headed towards the hut.

"Oh boy, this is going to be interesting.", I thought to myself as I sat down against a close by rock.

Katara came over to me and asked: "Is there something that aggrieves you?"

"Well, I just think that Aang isn't taking this whole thing as serious as he should. Is he not aware that the entire world's destiny is in his hands?"

"Of course he is, but don't forget, he's still a child on the inside, his behavior is all natural."

"I know that somehow you're right, but I still think that he should start concentrating on his mission a little more gradually."

Jeong Jeong had decided to at least introduce Aang into fire bending a little bit, which meant that we would stay near the hut for some time.

The master showed the young Avatar the most important introductory techniques, like the correct breathing or using the sun as an energy source. But it soon became clear that Aang wanted more, which however visibly grated on Jeong Jeong's nerves.

After two days, he finally said that he would show Aang something practical. The young air bender was overjoyed until he realized that the task was just to not let a leaf burn up. I remembered when I had to fulfill this task during my training, I had succeeded fairly fast, but Aang didn't seem to like the whole thing.

When Jeong Jeong told us that he would leave us alone for some time, I already smelled trouble.

And my instincts proved to be right: Shortly after Jeong Jeong had left, Aang created a little flame and tried to mimic the movements he had seen the artists at the fire festival perform.

The inevitable happened: He lost control over the flame and burned Katara's hands!

Luckily I was standing pretty close and was able to intervene by absorbing the flame and shooting it into the sky. After that, I ran over to Katara who was writhing in pain on the ground and tried to treat her injuries.

An idea came to my mind: I took a small bottle that was filled with water from a spring and gave something of the liquid onto Katara's hands. The water glued to her hands as if by magic and healed them in mere seconds.

We looked at each other surprised, she asked: "What was that? How is that possible?"

"I once read about this: Some water benders possess healing powers caused by certain events or influences. Looks like you possess such powers."

Katara stared at her healed hands in disbelief and then smiled.
But shortly afterwards, we heard fighting noise and rushed back to the hut.

I feared that there was an attack, which proved to be correct: Fire Nation soldiers had surrounded the hut in which Aang had hidden after his loss of control.

Katara and I hid behind a bush and observed the scene. I noticed that the soldiers were all standing next to each other in a straight line.

That's when I remembered something: During my training I had once learned a pretty complex fire bending technique which I hadn't been able to use until now, but that would change today.

I told Katara to stay hidden while I emerged from behind the bush, now standing right behind the soldiers. They didn't seem to notice me and instead continued to keep their focus on the hut.

Thereupon, I started to focus my breathing, created multiple fire strips in front of me, using the edge of my hand, which I then merged into a big horizontal fire blade, just as wide as the soldiers' line. I took a deep breath and then sent the fire blade towards the soldiers with high speed. They didn't notice a thing until the blade cut all of them in half at about the height of their waists. One second later, a dozen of bisected soldiers was lying in front of the hut.

Shortly after, Jeong Jeong returned, he had encountered Admiral Zhao in the forest and had dueled with him.

When he discovered the bisected corpses, he said to me: "You have my respect, Master Yulizan, you truly have mastered the fire blade technique."

Shortly afterwards, Aang emerged from the hut and joined us, an apologetical look on his face.

Jeong Jeong began to speak: "Aang, you didn't follow my orders and therefore did not just hurt your friend but also endangered all of us! Are you now convinced that you're not ready to learn fire bending yet?"

"Yes, master, I have learned my lesson. Fire is dangerous and destructive, it takes a lot of time to control it."

"At least you are recognizing your mistakes. Then you should also understand that you have to follow the cycle and first learn to control water and earth before trying the fire."

"Yes, master, I have realized it."

Aang turned to Katara: "I'm so sorry that I have hurt you, I never wanted to endanger you!"

Katara smiled and replied: "It's alright. Look."

She showed him her healed hands. Aang was amazed when Katara told him about her newly discovered healing powers.

Jeong Jeong now said: "Avatar Aang, you have to continue your journey towards the Northern Water Tribe. You have to find a water bending teacher and learn to master the element! With every wasted hour, the Fire Nation becomes stronger!"

"Of course, master, we will set out as soon as possible."

While Aang, Katara and Sokka packed their things, Master Jeong Jeong took me aside and said:
"Master Yulizan, this boy has a pretty strong will. I feel that this will put him in danger sooner or later. If that happens, you have to be ready to perform your duty or the world will descend into eternal darkness!"

"I know, Master, I will give my life for the Avatar if I have to. I will not fail!"

"That is the right attitude. But now set out. May you walk in the shadows, Yulizan."

"As may you, Master"

I whistled for Pagan, mounted him and we rose into the air together with Appa.

While Pagan was flying right next to the bison, I talked with my friends when I noticed a dark spot on Aang's wrist.

I asked: "What happened, Aang?"

"Oh, well, I think the fire has burned me too a little, but don't worry, I'm alright."

Katara and I exchanged looks for a second, then I handed her the water bottle. She gave a few drops of water onto the burned area and it became as good as new immediately. Aang looked even more amazed than before and even Sokka had to pay his respects for Katara's new ability. I just smiled silently and turned my eyes back to the front.

We really had no time to lose, Jeong Jeong had been right: With every day, the Fire Nation's power grew and grew, they killed more and more innocent people. This had to end! We had to do something!

So we continued our way towards the North with the goal to reach the Northern Water Tribe within the next days.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Technical progress
During the next days, our journey continued relatively problem-free, we didn't get involved in any fights or something like that.

When we stopped for our obligatory rest one evening, we came across a group of people sitting around a large campfire. We asked if we could join them and they allowed it.

Now the four of us sat in the circle around the fire with the other people and listened to an old man's stories.

I liked storytellers like him; in my childhood, my grandfather, who had died when I was seven years old, had often told me stories of his journeys around the world. Years later, after I had joined the Order, I found out that my grandfather had also been an Assassin.

The old man at the campfire told of many different things, but things only started to get really interesting once he started talking about the "air walkers", people who apparently were able to defy gravity.

Me and my friends bandied looks among each other, we all thought the same: The old man was most likely talking about air benders.

After he had finished telling his stories, he started walking around in the circle, to collect possible donations.

His stories had been pretty entertaining, that's why I was generous and handed him a gold coin when he was standing in front of me.

He thanked me politely, but as he wanted to continue walking around, Aang stopped him and asked: "You said you heard the story from your great-grandfather?"

"That is correct, my young friend, why are you asking?"

"Because it must be quite old then, right?."

"No, my great-grandfather saw the air walkers again only last week."

This statement surprised me so much that I choked a little on the water I had just taken a bigger sip of, resulting in me coughing quite hard multiple times while Katara was tapping my back.

When I had found my voice again, all I was able to say was a single word: "What?"

The old man apparently didn't understand what about this fact had shocked us so severely, but all four of us of course knew exactly what was going on: Apparently, there actually still were some air benders and they even were pretty close by!

I saw the excitement in Aang's eyes, he probably wanted to jump high up into the air in joy, but he managed to hold himself back, probably also to not unsettle the other people that were present.

We now all knew what would be our next and most likely final stopover before reaching the
Northern Water Tribe: The Northern Air Temple, that's where the storyteller's great-grandfather supposedly had seen the "air walkers".

The next day, we set off as early as possible to follow the trace as fast as possible. While we were flying, I looked at my map: The Northern Air Temple was pretty close to our original route, therefore we wouldn't lose that much time.

A short time later, the temple came into view and with it many people that were flying through the air, circling the large building.

I was astonished: Had the old man actually been right? It pretty much looked like it. But suddenly, Aang's disappointed voice pierced through my thoughts: "They're not air benders!"

Sokka asked: "How can you tell that already, you almost can't recognize anything from this distance."

"It's the way they are flying, that isn't the result of air bending, the movements look too artificial, too wooden."

"Wooden" was just the right word, I thought while I was looking through my telescope, watching those strange people a little more closely: Almost all of them wore green clothes, so most likely Earth Kingdom inhabitants, but then how exactly was it possible for them to fly like this?

Suddenly, Aang grabbed his gliding staff and jumped off his bison's back. I looked after him nervously and eventually spotted him following one of the many gliders.

As we started to reach some quite full skies while still slowly approaching the temple, I instructed Pagan to land in the courtyard as quick as possible. While my dragon had no problems whatsoever doing this, Sokka visibly struggled to lead Appa to land safely.

I kept my eyes out for Aang in the sky, I saw him in what looked like some kind of competition against the glider he had followed.

Soon after, both of them landed, whereby I noticed something: The boy who had flown with the glider was sitting in a strange wooden chair with rollers attached to it, his legs were covered in thick bandages.

"Wow! Looks like he can't walk but still has the courage to fly with that thing!", I said to myself.

The boy introduced himself as Teo, I paid him my respects for taking such a risk in his condition while Sokka seemed to be more interested in the gilder. Teo said that his father had built the glider and many other things.

He lead us into the inward of the temple.

Unlike my three friends, I had never seen the interior of an air temple before, therefore I was all the more curious to see what kind of old knowledge and art would await me. But all I saw was pipes, pipes and more pipes! They were distributed everywhere in the entire temple, went through walls, hung from the ceiling, led into the ground, the whole temple seemed like one giant machine.
Teo explained that his father used the warm air that surrounded the temple to fuel everything here. The pipes carried the air to every place where it was needed.

I was impressed. On the one hand, I've always been a supporter of technical progress, if it was used for the right cause of course. On the other hand, I thought it to be quite the shame that the old Air Nomad knowledge had been destroyed just like that. Sokka and Aang shared these different opinions of mine in their own views.

Teo led us even deeper into the temple, until we eventually reached a room that still looked pretty untouched. A statue was standing in the middle of the room, but we had little time to marvel at it, as it got destroyed by a big machine shortly after.

Aang became angry, an emotion I never had witnessed on him before. He created a large gust of wind that hurled the machine into the abyss.

The operator of the machine, who turned out to be Teo's father, told us his story after Teo had told him that Aang was the Avatar and Aang accused Teo's father that he had no right to desecrate this temple. A flood had once destroyed Teo's home village, his mother had died, Teo had been severely injured. As they were searching for a new home, they eventually had found the temple. Inspired by the Air Nomad paintings on the walls, Teo's father had built a glider for his son to once again give him a feeling of freedom and mobility.

He defended his attitude by saying that he just was improving what already existed, but Aang didn't really listen to his words. Sokka on the other hand was deeply interested in the man's inventions and even wanted to help him with his work.

Teo continued to lead Aang, Katara and me through the temple, showing us the animals that still lived here even after all the years and finally the large door that led into the temple's sanctum.

In the Southern Air Temple's sanctum, Aang had deliberately entered the Avatar State for the first time, as I had learned from Katara's narrative and the glowing of my tattoo.

Teo wanted to convince Aang to open the door with his air bending, but Aang refused as he wanted the temple to have at least one truly untouched place.

Shortly after, he left the building in a sulky mood, opened his glider and started circling the temple.

I walked over to Pagan, who, just like Appa, had calmly waited in the temple's courtyard the whole time, sat down on the ground next to him and told him what had happened.

I finished my narrative with: "To be honest, I can understand him; I would probably react in a similar way if someone tried to desecrate the monastery."

Pagan laughed and replied: "You don't actually believe that this could ever happen, do you? You have such good defensive measures, whoever wanted to desecrate anything would not even make it through the gate!"

Now I had to laugh as well and said: "That's right of course, and there's also another big difference: In contrast to the Air Nomads, we Assassins will never die out, we will continue to preserve the peace in the world for many millennia to come."

Shortly afterwards, Aang, Teo and Katara, who also had tried one of the gliders Teo's father had crafted, landed in the courtyard again.
Aang looked much more relaxed than before, when the three of them returned to the interior of the temple, I followed them of course.

A few minutes later, we stood in front of the sanctum's door once again.

I asked Aang: "I thought you didn't want to open it."

"I changed my mind."

Aang got ready and bent two sharp air blasts into two orifices at the bottom of the door. I heard lots of whistling and mechanisms as the air rushed through pipes, then the door opened.

But nobody had expected what we found inside. The room wasn't as untouched as we had thought. It was filled to the brim with weapons, many of them I had never seen anywhere before. For example strange metallic boxes with rollers and a big basket that had ropes and a large tarp attached to it.

I had little time to think about what else there was in the room, because Teo's father and Sokka came running into the room. Aang immediately confronted Teo's father with the weapons, which, as I noticed only now, bore the Fire Nation sigil.

All of a sudden, a large amount of anger began to boil up inside of me, this man was actually building new military equipment for this mindless war. I started marching towards him, my right arm blade extended and ready to strike, but Katara managed to hold me back.

Teo's father confessed that he had made a deal with the Fire Nation: The inhabitants of the temple would be left alone if he continued to build and deliver new weapons. He left the room again shortly afterwards, Aang and Teo followed him.

Sokka, Katara and I decided to leave the temple completely for now and thus made our way down to the courtyard again.

We talked about the events, I told Sokka and Katara the same I had talked about with Pagan. They agreed with me regarding Aang's feelings, but were unsure what he was going do next.

A few moments later, Teo arrived, he told us that his father had met with War Minister Qin of the Fire Nation, but Aang had provoked and eventually attacked the man. Now the Fire Nation was going to attack the temple!

Aang himself arrived soon after, he explained his plan to us: The Fire Nation would have to attack from the ground while the temple's inhabitants had the aerial advantage. Sokka thereupon revealed that he had helped Teo's father to improve the balloon, the thing with the basket and the tarp, it was now ready for battle! They also had built multiple bombs which would be of great use in the fight.

Even though this would be a battle-like fight, I actually would try to stay out of the action, mainly because I probably wouldn't stand a chance against those kind of machines anyway.

Some time later, the Fire Nation troops appeared, armed to the teeth with the weapons Teo's father had built, including several tanks, the metallic boxes with rollers I had noticed inside the armory. They were large vehicles with a thick metal shell that nothing could penetrate.

I also was pretty sure that the shell was strengthened in a way that even my white fire couldn't have melted it, but for that I also would have had to come into immediate vicinity of these monsters.
When the battle began, I mounted Pagan and we rose to the air, together with the other inhabitants of the temple.

I said to Pagan: "Now your time has come, my friend, show them the power of a dragon!"

I didn't have to tell Pagan twice, he roared loudly, flew over the enemy tanks and spewed an unhindered gush of fire at them. But even though the dragon fire slowed the tanks down a little bit, it wasn't able to stop them.

Aang and Katara, who were fighting on the immediate battlefield, didn't know what exactly to do more either and therefore left the frontline on Appa shortly afterwards.

The entire situation looked pretty bad for us until the balloon, controlled by Sokka and Teo's father, suddenly appeared in the sky. Because of the painted-on Fire Nation sigil, the tanks took the balloon for an ally and didn't attack it.

The balloon slowly floated towards a large chasm, I saw it disappearing behind some hills, then I heard an incredibly loud bang.

Pagan flew over the hills quickly where I was able to see what had happened: Something from the balloon had caused a massive explosion which had breached the lines of enemy tanks.

The attackers retreated shortly after, the people from the temple celebrated their victory.

After we all had safely landed in the courtyard again, Aang walked over to Teo and his father and told them that he now had understood that technical progress can be good. He was happy that they had found a new home in the temple and hoped that they would ensure the temple's preservation.

Before we said goodbye to the people in the temple to continue our journey, Teo's father wanted to talk to me in private.

"I have noticed that you are owning a large arsenal of weapons, young friend. I have a new invention that might be of good use for you. Unfortunately, I have not been able to properly craft it yet, but I have already drawn the concrete concept plans. Take a look at it."

He handed me a scroll that bore the plans for a new kind of weapon. It looked like a miniature cannon that one could attach to their wrist.

"And what exactly is this supposed to be?", I asked.

"This little device will be able to fire off little metal bullets, with the help of black powder, with immense speed, and all that from the wrist! Sounds like the perfect weapon for you, right?"

I nodded, even though this sounded like a pretty loud deal for me.

Teo's father took the scroll back and said: "I will continue my studies and try to craft an exemplar. If we meet again, I will tell you of my progress."

I nodded again and then returned to my friends. We bid farewell to the temple's inhabitants and rose into the air.
Fortunately our little detour had not costed us too much time, we were still on schedule. But we really couldn't allow us any more interruptions from now on, time was still not on our side.

We had to reach to Northern Water Tribe as fast as possible, I had a strange feeling that the next days would be packed with many events, in every way possible...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Team Avatar reaches the Northern Water Tribe
We continued flying northbound, eventually leaving the main land behind us and reached the endless ocean.

I had made a little precaution before we had left the Northern Air Temple to make the arrival at the Northern Water Tribe easier for me: I had changed the red and gold adornments of my robe to new blue and silver ones, I didn't want to be identified as a fire bender immediately since I didn't know how the Water Tribe residents would react to one. Until now, I had worn my country's colors with pride, but since it could endanger the mission here, I gave it up for now.

After three days, there was still nothing but ocean everywhere around us, and Sokka started to become impatient.

He pounded his fist on the saddle and said: "Come on! Fly faster or it will take us 10 more years!"

Aang tried to calm him down: "Let it go Sokka, we're all tired, but don't let your anger out by hitting Appa."

Sokka said some more things when I suddenly noticed something strange. I felt it clearly, there was something beneath us! I gave Pagan a signal on which he increased the gap between himself and Appa.

Aang wanted say something when my feeling proved to be right: Several men wearing blue robes emerged from the ocean, they created six blocks of ice out of nowhere, tying Appa's legs and causing him to drop into the water.

Pagan shot back down, I was ready to attack when I noticed the joyful look on Katara's face: "We made it! We found the Northern Water Tribe!"

I took a closer look at our assailants and noticed the Water Tribe sigils on their robes. I sheathed my katana which I had drawn during Pagan's nosedive. The water benders now had discovered Pagan and me and readied up to seemingly attack and freeze us as well, but Katara was able to hold them back at the last moment.

Pagan panted: "That was close! One second later and I would have been an ice block." I had to laugh at this comment.

The water benders led Appa, who had Aang, Katara and Sokka on his back while swimming in the ocean, and Pagan, who had me on his neck and was flying in the air right next to the bison, straight towards a giant glacier.

Shortly after, we reached a big gap in said glacier and what was inside that gap was truly breathtaking: Out from the ice, a massive multi-story city, completely built out of even more ice and snow, emerged. Pagan flew a bit higher to give us a better view over the whole city, it really was a beautiful sight.

But like with most things, there was a bitter aftertaste here too: Even though the temperature had
been quite pleasant during our flight, now it was even colder than it had been at the Southern Water Tribe. This time, no hoarfrost but instead solid icicles had formed on Pagan's horns, my face was scarlet-colored and burning from the cold, even with my hood and scarf on.

"Still not my favorite climate", I noted, "but who knows, maybe we will stay here long enough to finally adapt to it." Pagan agreed with me on that point.

We returned to our friends who in the meantime had reached the giant wall surrounding the city's entrance. I didn't see anything that looked like a gate, I asked myself how we would get in.

Just when I thought about simply telling Pagan to fly over the wall, the water benders raised their hands and created a large opening in the massive wall of ice, big enough for both Appa and Pagan to pass through. After we had passed the entrance, the water benders closed it again behind us.

Now we had officially done it! We had reached the Northern Water Tribe!

We were led through the various canals inside the city. Countless people were standing left and right, seemingly welcoming us.

Most of them were shocked at first when they saw Pagan, a full-grown dragon, but fortunately nobody panicked.

Pagan had to retract his wings quite a bit while flying with low speed or he probably would have hit something in the narrow canals.

It became quite critical when a boat came towards us on the canal. Pagan mobilized his strength, pulled his wings as close to his long slim body as possible to float over the canal's water without an obvious source of power, as soon as the boat had passed us, his wings went out again as far as the canal allowed it.

But the dragon still wasn't able to relax, because shortly after, Sokka landed right on his snout after falling off Appa's back. While Pagan helped the young man to climb back on board, I turned around and looked after the boat that had just passed us: A girl with snow white hair was sitting in it. I had to grin, I now knew why Sokka had kept watching that boat.

Our tour through the canals went on longer than I expected. When we finally reached our destination, the palace at the top of the city, it already started getting dark.

We were led into the palace and were introduced to the chief of the Water Tribe. I introduced myself as the Avatar's Protector, but of course concealed my Assassin background. When I revealed that I hailed from the Fire Nation, the chief, to my relief, reacted calmly and welcomed me and my friends at the Water Tribe.

To celebrate the arrival of the relatives from the South and the Avatar, a festival was announced. While Aang, Katara and Sokka immediately were very enthusiastic about this, I told them:

"I won't join you."

All three stared at me in disbelief, Aang asked: "Why not?"

I replied: "I don't like big festivals like this, too loud, too many people..."
I whispered my next words: "...it could endanger my disguise, I don't want anybody here to find out who I really am."

Aang immediately understood and said: "Alright. You saw where our quarters are located, right?. Just don't get lost in this big city."

I didn't understand the last sentence completely, since I already had turned around, leaving the palace.

When I stood outside again, it had gotten completely dark, the moon shone brightly up in the starlit sky. I of course knew that the moon had an essential importance for the water benders, as it directly influenced their bending abilities, similar to how it was for us fire benders with the sun.

Pagan was still lying in the large plaza in front of the palace's stairs, when I stood next to him, he opened his eyes for a short moment, they illuminated the night with their bilious green color, I stroked his horns which were now thawed again, fortunately the inside of the city wasn't as cold as the outer glacier. I told him to continue his sleep, I wouldn't need him for now. Pagan panted happily and closed his eyes again.

I started wandering through the nightly alleys of the Water Tribe city, looking around. As expected, everything was built from ice, most of the houses were pretty simple regarding their style, though still pretty big, probably to ease the construction. Even in this late hour, many people were still outside, none of them really heeded me when they passed me. I gently touched the blue fabric of my robe and nodded pleased, changing the adornments had paid off, nobody suspected anything.

After I had wandered through the streets, always following the main canal, for quite some time, I stopped, unfastened my meditation mat, put it down at the edge of the canal and sat down on it, it was meant to be a protection against the cold of the icy ground. I let my legs hang over the edge, a little above the water.

I pensively looked at my reflection on the calm water, which also reflected the moon and the stars. I looked up to the sky, observing the stars, there were so many of them, I never had seen so many of them before, at no other place I had been to so far. I thought about my family, myself, my mission, my destiny, my oath, my whole life essentially. In the meantime, I took my mother's medallion out of my collar and looked at it for the umpteenth time, the moonlight broke itself in the ruby, revealing the molded sigil inside the gem.

While I was engrossed in my thoughts, I heard somebody approaching me. I dismissed it as meaningless, as many people had passed by me in the last couple of minutes. But this time it was different.

I looked back at the water and saw the person that had approached me. She was standing next to me, I saw her reflection next to mine.

I stood up and looked at the person: It was a girl, only a little younger than me. She was wearing typical Water Tribe clothing, like I had already seen it many times today. Her long brown hair was tied into a long ponytail behind her head, the night sky reflected itself in her ice blue eyes. Despite the darkness, I was able to see her blush when she looked at me. Her eyes wandered towards my medallion, which was still hanging outside of my robe.

She spoke with a soft voice: "That's a really nice medallion you have there."
"Thank you. Say, did you watch me sitting here?"

The girl averted her gaze and scraped the snow with her foot. Then she said: "Not for long. I saw you sitting there when I walked past and thought that you looked ... cute, the way you sat there, so I stopped and looked what you were doing."

I was amazed. She had called me "cute". I decided to make her a compliment too: "If there's someone cute here, then it has to be you."

Her face turned even more red, I had to hide my grin.

I added: "I'm Yulizan, what's your name?"

She replied: "Runa, my name is Runa."

I took a step towards her and gently caressed her cheek.

"A pretty name for a pretty girl, how fitting."

She blushed even more after my touch and my words and wasn't able to say another word, however much she tried.

I put my index finger on her lips and whispered: "Quiet, you don't need any words."

I removed my finger and moved my lips onto hers. Her eyes shot open at first, but after a few seconds she closed them and gave into the kiss. For the next few minutes, we just stood there kissing, luckily nobody passed by us during that time.

After I broke the kiss, I asked: "That was what you wanted, wasn't it?"

She nodded and replied: "There are many boys here, but none of them is like you."

"Well, I have to admit, I'm not like most boys."

"No, you surely aren't.", she said and kissed me again.

We walked through the alleys together for a while and talked. Runa told me more about herself, for example that she would turn sixteen soon, reaching the marriageable age.

"My parents already chose a husband for me, I will marry him a few days after my birthday."

"But shouldn't marriage be about love? An arranged marriage doesn't sound like true love for me."

"But what should I do? It's our tradition and my parents are very strict about that, so I'll have to obey them."

Even though I wasn't happy with her decision, what was there that I could do? Unless ... an idea came to my mind.

As it was fairly late already, I said goodbye to Runa, but I told her that we would meet again tomorrow night, at the same spot as tonight. She was happy about that and so our ways parted for now.

I returned to the quarters that had been assigned to me and my friends, a big round building made from ice blocks, the Water Tribe people called them "igloos". I silently entered the room and saw
Aang, Katara and Sokka already sleeping on their thick sleeping bags. I laid down on my own, which was located near the end of the room, and fell asleep pretty fast.

When I woke up the next morning, Aang and Katara were gone, only Sokka was sitting on his sleeping bag, carving something.

I sat up and said: "Good morning, where are Aang and Katara?"

"Oh, the chief introduced Aang to a water bending teacher after the festival yesterday, they're probably already at the training.", Sokka replied without looking up from his work.

I thought about his words: Aang had found a teacher, we therefore had achieved our main goal for travelling here. Since I had nothing to do besides my date with Runa in the evening, I by the way had decided to not tell any of my friends about me meeting the girl, I decided to watch Aang's and Katara's training, if it was allowed and possible.

When I stepped out from the igloo, I saw them standing in some distance next to an old man wearing a blue robe, that had to be the teacher Sokka had mentioned. It looked like they were in some kind of big dispute, but I was standing too far away to understand anything and thought that an approach was unfitting in this situation. After Katara walked away after another loud argument and Aang was about to start training with the old man, I walked towards them.

Aang noticed me and greeted: "Good morning Yulizan, have you done everything you wanted to do last night?"

I wasn't able to answer, because the old man cut Aang off: "Who is this? You know him?"

Aang replied: "Yes, this is Yulizan, another friend of mine, you don't know him yet because he wasn't at the festival yesterday."

The old man greeted me reluctantly by raising his left hand. It was at this moment when I discovered something that made me freeze internally.

The old man said: "Would you please leave now so we can start our training?"

I had to risk it to prove it.

"Only if I can talk to you in private afterwards, Master...?"

"Pakku.", he replied, "Alright, but only if you leave now and don't interrupt the training."

I immediately walked away a couple of steps, returned to the igloo, placed my mat on the ground in front of the building, sat down on it and started a little phase of meditation.

Shortly after, Sokka emerged from the igloo, I asked: "Where are you going?"

"That...uh...is a secret.", Sokka replied awkwardly, walking away quickly, entering one of the many alleys.

I had a certain idea where he was heading, it wasn't an easy task to fool me.

I meditated for several hours until Aang and Master Pakku had finished their training.
When Aang passed me on the way to the igloo, I was able to see the annoyed look on his face.

Master Pakku was waiting where he and Aang had trained. When I reached him, he turned around, still that strict look in his eyes.

He asked: "What did you want to talk with me about, boy?"

Instead of a simple reply, I raised my left hand, the one with the Assassin Sigil tattoo on the ring finger, and said:

"Shadow walkers and warriors of light are my friends!"

The old water bender's eyes widened when he saw my finger and heard my words. He raised his hand as well and said:

"The Spirits are with you, brother!"

He directed me to follow him. While we walked through the deserted alleys, he asked:

"What brings you to the Northern Water Tribe, Master Yulizan?"

"Well, Master Pakku, as you know, the boy you are teaching is the Avatar. I was chosen to be his Protector."

The old man's eyes widened again when he heard my words.

I asked: "Tell me Master, what was that dispute you had with the Avatar and the girl from the Southern Water Tribe about?"

"Well, as you probably know, the girl is blessed with the ability of water bending, but the old traditions of the North prohibit teaching the art to women."

I was shocked: "How come? I don't know of any other tradition with such a significant focus on the gender. Don't forget, our order is very tolerant, many of the Old Masters were women."

"I am well aware of our order's history, young master, but here, the Law of the North is in force and has to be followed."

"Isn't there any other way to teach the girl the art of water bending? The Avatar looked like he wasn't able to concentrate properly without her in his vicinity, I don't want to risk that the Avatar might not learn water bending and therefore fails his mission of restoring the peace!"

"Well, I sent the girl to the healers to learn the art of healing for now. But I really don't know about any other possibility to teach her the art."

I thought and had an idea shortly after: "I'm sure you know that in the order, it is common for our disciples to enter a fight against a master before they get promoted to their next rank. Do something like this. We both know that the girl already knows the basics of water bending, let her fight against you, if she can validate her talent and actually defeats you, you have to commit yourself to train her alongside the Avatar."

Master Pakku thought about my words and eventually made a decision: "Alright, so be it! Tell the girl about it when you return to your quarters, I will be so kind and give her time to prepare herself."

"Thank you for your insight, Master, I will leave you now, may you walk in the shadows!"
"As may you!"

Thereupon I returned to the igloo, where I found Aang, Katara and Sokka sitting on their sleeping bags with sulking looks on their faces. I decided not to unleash unnecessary anger, that's why I kept my mood, which was actually pretty good, neutral.

I walked over to Katara and said: "Katara."

She looked up to me, that sulky look still in her eyes.

"What?", she asked snippy.

My answer was relaxed: "I know about the dispute you and Aang had with Master Pakku."

When I said the old master's name, Katara immediately wanted to start clamoring, but I raised my hand and she remained quiet.

I continued: "I just talked with Master Pakku, he is ready to teach you and Aang together, under one condition."

Suddenly, both Aang and Katara hung on my every word. I finished my speech: "You have to fight him in a water bending duel. Should you win, he will teach both of you."

Katara looked shocked and unsure, she asked: "And what if I lose?"

"Everything stays as it is. Master Pakku will continue to teach Aang, but you're not allowed to ask anyone here to teach you ever again."

"And when is that fight supposed to happen?"

"Tomorrow, at noon, on the courtyard in front of the palace."

At first, Katara was shocked again, then her face became determined.

"Alright, I will show this old sack what I'm capable of!"

"That's the right attitude."

I stood up again and headed for the exit again.

Aang asked: "Where are you going?"

"Got something to do!", I said while exiting the building.

It was time for my date with Runa. I found the place where we had met the night before pretty fast. Runa was already waiting for me longingly. When she saw me, she ran towards me, threw herself at me and kissed me.

I put her on the ground again and said: "Not so fast, we still have the whole night ahead of us."

She looked at me confused and asked: "What do you mean?"

"Come on, I'll show you."

I took her hand, led her through some alleys towards the outer parts of the city, the parts with less
ice and snow. There was, all alone, a little hut made of straw, I had discovered it during my ramble through the city yesterday, I had checked it and learned that it was currently uninhabited. After meeting Runa, I had cooked up a plan which would unfold in this hut now. I led Runa inside, everything was clad with cloth, furs and other things quite uncommon for a Water Tribe building. Runa looked around and asked: "What do we want here?"

I quietly replied: "Before your arranged marriage, I will show you the feeling of true love so that you have witnessed it at least once."

Runa's eyes widened when I grabbed her slim waist and pulled her into a tender kiss. She closed her eyes and returned the kiss. I lead our closely entwined bodies towards the large bed in the middle of the hut. When we reached it, I put Runa down and then climbed it myself, still connected to her in the kiss.

And so the night took its course. I showed Runa the feeling of true love, she enjoyed every second of it, I most likely gave her the most beautiful night of her life.

I woke up the next morning, with Runa's little adorable head on my chest.

She woke up shortly after and looked me in the eyes: "That was just ... amazing! I thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving me this night."

I kissed her tenderly instead of answering, but then I rose and started to get dressed again, I didn't want to miss the fight between Master Pakku and Katara under no circumstances. Runa followed my example and got dressed to, we left the hut together shortly after.

I accompanied Runa back to the spot we had met. We kissed one last time, she said: "I will always keep the memory of you in my heart, I swear that to you."

Thereupon she returned to her home and I made my way towards the big courtyard.

I arrived just in time, Master Pakku and Katara were just about to begin the fight. I stood next to Aang who was eagerly waiting for the duel to start, which happened only seconds later.

The water bending that followed was a true work of art, I was amazed by Katara, who apparently was stronger and better than I had thought and seen so far. She was able to keep up with the old master without many problems.

The fight went into the length, it was balanced the whole time. Then the decisive moment came: With the reflexes of a true Master Assassin, Master Pakku created a pyramid out of ice, trapping Katara and rendering her unable to move. That meant that Master Pakku had won the fight. Aang looked down to the ground depressed, I could feel his disappointment.

Master Pakku was looking down as well and picked something up. It was Katara's necklace, she had lost it during the fight. He looked at it closely and asked Katara where she got it from. Katara told him the same story she had already told me. After that, Master Pakku revealed that he was the one who once had crafted the necklace as a betrothal sign for nobody else but Katara's and Sokka's grandmother. He freed Katara and apologized to her, he had no clue who she really was, he also said that he would now train her alongside Aang. The latter was very happy and I also had to smile, everything seemed to take a turn for the better.

I looked to the side and saw Sokka together with the girl from the boat we had seen at our arrival.
Aang had told me that she was Princess Yue, the chief's daughter.

"I'm not sure if Sokka actually has a chance with her...", I thought and had to grin.

I went over to Pagan and rubbed his head before we watched Aang and Katara beginning their training together.

With a feeling of easiness, I said: "Pagan, my friend, I think good times are lying ahead of us."

I didn't know yet how wrong I actually was with that statement...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: The Fire Nation attacks!
During the next days, our life at the Northern Water Tribe was relatively nice and calm.

Master Pakku continued the training of Aang and Katara, the latter making a noticeably bigger progress than the young Avatar, which was probably due to the fact that she already had mastered the basics while Aang had to learn everything from the ground up, which looked like quite the challenge for him, the difference between water and air was bigger than he presumably had expected.

Most of the time, I was simply watching the training, but then one day, Master Pakku wanted my assistance. The students' next lesson was to throw orbs of water at moving targets. The master asked me if I could bend some flames and send them into the air so they could be used as targets. Of course I followed the order and took my position a small distance away from Aang and Katara, sending a couple of small fireballs into the air, a few meters over my head. Shortly after, the water orbs came flying, I had to pay double the attention, on one hand, I couldn't let any of my fires that wasn't hit by the water drop to the ground, on the other hand, I didn't want none of the water orbs to hit me.

I wasn't able to manage the second part, a water orb bursted mid-air and poured out its content right over my head. I was soaking wet, while Aang, Katara and even Master Pakku were laughing out loud. I ignored them and headed back to the igloo to dry up my clothes. I didn't have a complete second robe with me, but that was no problem. I would simply ignite a little fire, hang my robe over it and snuggle up into some blankets for the time being.

After I arrived inside the igloo, I ignited a little fire at the provided fireplace, took a little metal hook from my bag, rammed it into one of the ceiling ice blocks, peeled out of my dripping wet robe and hung it onto the hook right over the fire.

Fortunately, my undergarments had largely remained dry, only my cloth shirt had a few damp spots. I took off the shirt too, now only wearing my cloth pants and my boots still. I was about to sit down on my sleeping bag when I heard someone enter the igloo. It was Katara.

While still entering, she said: "Yulizan! Are you alright? You walked away so suddenly, I thought maybe..."

She stopped mid-sentence when she saw my naked torso and the countless wounds and scars covering it. She uttered a soft sound of shock, I tried to calm her down:

"Don't worry, I'm OK, I already survived much worse in the past, a little bit of water isn't going to kill me."

She slowly recovered her voice and said quietly: "Your body! What happened to it?"

While she was still speaking, she walked towards me, her soft fingers tracing my chest.

I replied: "Well, an Assassin's life is quite dangerous. Everything you can see here are relics of my training and all the fights I fought so far."
She looked at my whole torso closely and said: "You know, I now know a couple of things about healing. I could try to heal those scars for you."

I immediately replied: "No! The wounds and scars on an Assassin's body speak of his experience and are a reminder of the hard work and mistakes during his training. They are a part of me and will stay forever."

Katara nodded and then pointed to my right forearm: "And what is it with this writing?"

"Every Assassin has to choose a creed to live his life after when he is awarded the title of master. This creed is then tattooed onto his weapon arm, to connect it with body and soul forever."

"And yours is: Fighting is my destiny?"

"Yes, my life is all about fighting evil, I will never do anything else!"

Katara nodded again, then exited the igloo again, leaving me alone. I now laid down on my sleeping bag, took one last look at my robe which was slowly drying away and then turned my gaze to the ceiling. Like most of the time, I thought about many things, until sleep eventually took over my mind and body.

When I woke up again, I was still alone. I peeked over to the entrance, I saw that it was still daytime, I therefore hadn't slept for long.

My eyes wandered over to the fireplace. The fire had become smaller in the meantime. I stood up, walked over and touched my robe, it was dry again. I put out the fire, took my robe, removed the hook from the ice and put the robe back on again.

When I was ready, I stepped out of the igloo, where the shock immediately struck me: It was snowing, but not ordinary snow, no, this kind of snowfall was black! Even though I never had seen this kind of snow myself before, I knew what it meant from the order's scrolls: The snow was mixed with ash, turning it grayish to black. The cause for this were big emissions of soot and smoke into the air, which could only mean one thing in this case: Fire Nation ships were approaching the North Pole!

Shortly after, Pagan landed right in front of me, he looked nervous.

I asked: "What is it, my friend? What did you see?"

Pagan replied: "A large cloud of smoke at the horizon!"

That was all the dragon had to say, my suspicion was confirmed, the Fire Nation would attack the Northern Water Tribe.

I walked over to Aang and Katara and wanted to tell them my new knowledge, when suddenly the deep sound of a large drum broke the silence. At once, all members of the Northern Water Tribe were walking towards the palace. Since we didn't know what exactly was happening, we just followed them.

On our way, Sokka and Yue joined us, however, the princess walked away again shortly after, as it wasn't honorable for a princess to be seen alongside the common people in this kind of situation.
When we had reached the main hall of the palace, the chief was currently talking about what I already knew. He explained to his people that they would be going to war now!

However, the sages would ask the spirits of the moon and the sea for help. I was relieved, should the spirits really decide to help us, our chances would increase drastically.

The chief was also searching for someone to conduct a very important mission. Sokka immediately volunteered and was chosen. My feeling told me that he would regret this decision.

After that, Aang talked to the chief, I didn't understand most of it, but apparently Aang wanted to fight to protect the people of the Water Tribe. They could count on me in any case, if any Fire Nation infantry would make it into the city, they would be defeated by me! And Pagan was there too, the assistance from above.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang heard outside, everybody started running out of the building. I immediately saw it when I reached the courtyard: Giant fireballs were launched at the city, the attack had begun!

When another fireball was flying right towards me, I intervened: I mobilized all of my strength and sent an intense fire beam straight at the projectile, causing it to burst it mid-air and rain over the city as little chunks of fire. But even though I had stopped one fireball, even more were always coming.

I was looking for the rest of my friends when I saw Aang storming past me, mounting Appa and heading straight for the open sea. Aware that he was flying directly into the beast's open mouth, I ran over to Pagan, jumped on and ordered him to follow Appa as fast as possible. The dragon shot up into the sky and gave chase to the bison.

Shorty after, we saw the source of the bombardment, it exceeded my worst fears: About one hundred Fire Nation ships were heading towards the North Pole. I immediately was sure: We wouldn't stand the slightest chance in an open battle like this.

But Aang begged to differ as it seemed. He used his glider and landed on one of the ships in the front, disposed of the crew and destroyed the catapults with some help from Appa. But because of the sheer mass of other ships, this didn't make any kind of difference. The young Avatar seemed to realize the same, he and Appa returned to the city shortly after, me and Pagan followed them.

The water benders were able to hold back the attackers, they eventually retreated when the night broke in, apparently the Fire Nation was aware that the water benders were too strong during the night.

Aang was exhausted and said that he would not be able to win this battle alone. But Princess Yue had an idea: She wanted to ask the spirits for help personally.

But Katara was skeptical: "How do you want to ask the spirits for help?"

Aang answered instead of the princess: "All I'd need is a place to meditate in peace, then I can get into the Spirit World."

"Then I would propose the Spirit Oasis.", Yue replied.

I asked: "What exactly is that?"
"A place of peace, where a pond is located, in which two koi carps, the incarnations of the spirits of the moon and the sea, are swimming," the princess explained.

Aang said excitedly: "Then let's go!"

Yue wanted to lead us, but just when I wanted to follow her and the others, I saw someone standing in the distance.

I called after my friends: "Go on ahead, I will follow you!" and walked over to my discovery.

She stood by one of the larger canals and watched the sea. Her long ponytail was gleaming in the light of the almost full moon.

I walked closer to her and said: "Runa!"

She turned around and looked at me. Tears welled up in her eyes, she walked up to me and hugged me tightly. The tears began to stream down her face, I loosened the embrace and asked:

"What is going on? Why are you crying?"

She slowly regained her composure and replied, still sobbing: "My fiancé! He found out!"

"Found out what?"

"About us!"

"But how?"

"He came to my house tonight, he said he didn't want to wait until the wedding, he wanted me now! I fought against it, but he was too strong. He pushed me down to the bed, did things to me. When he touched me, he realized I didn't have the feeling of a virgin anymore. He insulted me, hit me, so I ran away."

I noticed only now that she had a large red mark on her cheek. I traced it with my finger and then kissed it gently. I embraced the still crying girl again and caressed her face and hair while saying:

"Don't worry, it's going to be alright, I'm here. He can't hurt you anymore."

She continued sobbing into my robe, I tried to digest what I just had learned. How could a man be this ignorant and see a woman only as cheap property? If this guy would ever cross paths with me...

My thoughts suddenly became reality, when I looked over Runa's head, I saw a young man, about my age, coming around the corner, heading straight towards us.

While still walking, he already shouted: "Runa!"

The girl jumped, broke away from my chest and hid behind me.

I whispered: "Don't worry, I will protect you!"

I made myself as big and intimidating as possible, showing off all of my muscular stature. The bastard that was Runa's fiancé headed straight towards us. When he stood in front of me, even though he was a good head shorter than me, he said straight into my face:

"So it was you! You took her innocence from me! You will..."
Instead of letting him finish his sentence, I struck him down with one single powerful punch. He cowered on the ground, holding his visibly bloody nose. I didn't even wait for him to say anything or to get back to his feet, but instead picked him up from the ground with ease, lifted him up a good one and half feet over the ground and then threw him over my shoulder, right onto the hard ice ground. He screamed in pain when he hit the ground.

"Be glad that I didn't use a lethal technique, you damn motherfucker!", I thought while walking over to him.

He tried to crawl away from me, but I simply grabbed his foot, pulled him back, lifted him up again, pushed him against the closest building wall and held him in place with my right arm on his chest. I was almost smoking with rage when I spoke with my darkest voice:

"Listen up, buddy! You can count yourself lucky that you're still alive! I only let you live because you were seemingly wrongly promised to this beautiful girl as a husband. Be sure to remember the following, and remember it good: From now on, you will treat her like the wonderful woman that she is, you will be a good husband, always stay loyal to her and never treat her as your property again, you got that?"

The young man was only able to nod slightly, but I wasn't finished.

"Good, because if you make only one mistake, I will find out, I will return here and..."

I extended my arm blade following my last word, it was only inches away from the fiancé's throat. He screamed in fear and nodded again. Then I let go of him. He sank to the ground, gasping for air. I went back to Runa, who had done nothing but watch in shock the whole time. When her fiancé was standing on his still shaking legs again and looked over to us, I said:

"Go home! I will bring her back in time!"

The young man ran away as fast as he could, without turning or looking back.

I turned back to Runa and looked her in the eyes. I scratched my head and said apologetically:

"I'm sorry, I think I kinda crossed the line back there, I didn't want to attack him this viciously, but..."

In the middle of my sentence, Runa put her lips on mine, I returned the kiss after a few seconds. So we stood there for a couple of minutes, kissing in the moonlight.

When Runa broke the kiss, she said quietly: "In two days, you did more for me than I ever could have dreamed somebody doing. How can I ever thank you for this?"

"By living a happy life. I'm pretty sure that after what I did, your fiancé is going to treat you like a queen."

We both laughed, then I accompanied Runa to her home.

When we arrived there, she said: "I can't do anything but thank you again, for everything you did for me. I really hope that one day you will find your luck as well."

"Don't worry, I will."

We shared one last kiss, then Runa entered her house.
I leisurely strolled back the way towards the big courtyard when my eyes went up to the sky: It started to dawn. Suddenly I realized: I had completely forgotten about Yue's guide to the Spirit Oasis, Aang could be in danger!

I ran to the courtyard as fast as I could. While I was running, I heard a large cracking and then breaking sound, the Fire Nation ships were slowly starting to pierce through the walls.

When I reached the courtyard, I saw Sokka and Yue climbing Appa, they were on their way back to the Spirit Oasis to look after Aang and Katara. I woke up Pagan, who had been sleeping soundly until now, mounted him and told him to follow Appa. Even though the dragon had only been awake for a few seconds, he was immediately ready and shot up into the air.

Shortly after, we had reached the oasis. It was just as peaceful as Yue has described it. Grass and bushes were growing around the pond in the middle, it truly was a special place for its location so far in the north.

But I could already see that something was wrong from a distance, because I only saw one person at the pond and, to my horror, it wasn't Aang but the stunned Katara.

I ordered Pagan to land immediately, jumped off his neck and asked the confused water bender: "Where is Aang?"

Katara wasn't able to construct an intelligible sentence, instead she only mumbled: "Aang...Zuko...meditation...abducted..."

My worst fears had come true: Prince Zuko had been able to abduct Aang and I didn't have the slightest clue where they could be. Surrounded by Sokka, Yue and Katara, I dropped to my knees at the pond, clenched both of my fists and pounded the grass before throwing my arms up towards the sky while screaming as loud as I could:

"AAAAANNNG!"

One thing was certain: We had to find him, as fast as possible! Otherwise, this battle and subsequently the world was lost!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Showdown!
During our flight in search of Aang, many things went through my head: I had neglected my duty as the Protector because of my emotions, even though one of the most important rules my master had always taught me over the course of my training:

"He who shows emotion in battle and war shows weakness. Weakness leads to defeat. Defeat leads to death!"

Because of me, Aang could possibly be dead, I would have failed my task, I would have no reason to live anymore, but above all I would have failed my family ... No! That must not be! Aang was still alive! He had to be! I would find him and bring him back, even if I would have to face the entire Fire Nation army doing so!

Meanwhile, our search had led us into a strong blizzard, I pulled my hood and scarf over my face as tight as possible, otherwise the large amount of snowflakes would have slashed my face, considering the high speed we were flying with.

We continued flying, Pagan kept his sharp dragon eyes out for any sign of Aang and Zuko. But the more time passed, the more we lost our hope.

Princess Yue tried to keep our mood positive by telling us that it was nearly impossible to escape through the pack ice. Katara thereupon replied that her greater worry was not that Zuko could escape with Aang, but that they would both freeze to death in this weather. I shared Katara's opinion, even though Aang had been in a state of meditation at the moment of his abduction, nobody without the right equipment was able to survive in this kind of weather without consequences.

Sokka tried to look positively at our situation as well by saying that Zuko would be smart enough to keep himself and Aang save from this weather. But the quite bitter taste in my mouth remained, the thought of Aang's death continued to haunt the back of my mind.

When the night broke in, we were close to completely give up our hope. While the weather had become a little better, we still had not even the slightest sign of Zuko and or Aang. I was sitting on Pagan's neck unenthusiastically, nearly every kind of hope had left me.

But my irrepressible Assassin will did not want to rest! Somewhere deep inside of me, a little spark of hope was still glowing.

I took my mother's medallion, it was warm because of my body heat, grabbed it tightly, looked up to the night sky where the full moon sat enthroned over the stars and thought as hard as I could:

"Please! Help us!"

At first, nothing happened, but after a few seconds, a gleaming bright beam of light shot through the sky, hitting the ground only a few hundred meters ahead of us.

My mood brightened at once, I called out to the others: "That's it! That has to be Aang's spirit!"
I immediately ordered Pagan to follow the light, the dragon dove down, closely followed by Appa.

When we reached the ground, I noticed that the beam of light ended in a little cave from which a strong gust of air emerged at the same moment. Shortly after, Aang and Prince Zuko were laying in the snow.

I immediately created a flame in my right hand, ready to charge at the Fire Prince, but at the same moment Appa landed next to the cave, Katara jumped off and was faster than me. She threw Zuko into the air using a large amount of snow before dropping him back on the ground, rendering him unconscious.

In the meantime, I had untied Aang's hands and feet. When the others were ready to head back to the city, Aang expressed his concerns for leaving Zuko out here in the cold alone and unconscious. After a short protest courtesy of Sokka, I took the prince's limp body, tied his hands and feet using a metal-enforced rope and put him on Appa's saddle. Thereupon we made our way back to the city.

On our way, my thoughts shifted back to the battle. How in the world should the water benders drive the Fire Nation back? To be fair, it was a full moon, a period during which the water benders could reach the maximum of their power, but in my opinion they would not stand a chance nevertheless.

While I was thinking, my eyes slowly moved back to the full moon, I was struck with shock when I saw that the moon had changed its color from white to blood red. I closed my eyes and tried to make it clear to myself: Something must have happened to the Spirit of the Moon at the Spirit Oasis, I could not think of any other reason for this horrible spectacle.

I looked over to the others, Aang and Yue looked like they felt something as well, Yue was hit so strong that her body was affected by it. She told us that the Spirit of the Moon had once given her life, she had been born dead, but her parents had put her into the Spirit Pond, offering her to the Spirit of the Moon, who thereupon had given her life and also her name, while also changing the color of her hair from brown to white. I was deeply stirred by this story, mostly because I had experienced the Spirits' power in person, I had changed my life for their will. Whatever had happened to the Spirit of the Moon, it had been an act of endless cruelty!

When we finally reached the oasis, a horrible scene met our eyes: Admiral Zhao was standing at the pond, holding the white carp in his hand. Next to him stood General Iroh, one of the most experienced and powerful members of the Fire Nation.

As soon as we had landed, Aang walked up to the admiral and commanded him to free the carp, otherwise he would cause damage to the entire world. General Iroh confirmed the Avatar's statement and actually seemed to prepare for combat, he probably wanted to be ready if the worst case was to happen. I realized the great danger as well and prepared myself for the case of worst coming to worst, pulling a throwing knife out from my belt and holding it in my closed hand.

After minutes of silence, at least it seemed like that, Zhao actually seemed to capitulate, he put the fish back into the pond. I remained vigilant nevertheless, I felt that the greatest evil was still impending.

And I was right! But what actually happened was worse than everything I had expected: Zhao fired a concentrated flame directly into the pond, killing the Spirit of the Moon! The sky darkened
immediately, the moon had disappeared completely!

I immediately jumped forward and threw my knife at the admiral. But because General Iroh had started to hurl flames at Zhao at the same moment, I only hit him in the shoulder.

Zhao blocked nearly every flame Iroh hurled at him and eventually created a small cloud of fire himself. When it was gone again, so was the admiral. Iroh walked over to the pond and retrieved the burned white fish.

Yue sobbed: "It's over! There's nothing we can do anymore!"

But suddenly, Aang started to change. His eyes and tattoos started to glow brightly, he talked with a monster-like voice:

"NO! THIS IS NOT OVER YET!"

Determined and like in trance he walked towards the pond and stepped into the water. What followed was breathtaking: The remaining fish began to circle Aang, increasing its speed drastically until Aang disappeared under the water. Shortly after, a thing as I had never seen before rose from the oasis. I didn't even know how to describe it, but it was clear to me: Aang had become one with the Spirit of the Ocean whilst in the Avatar State! The water spirit left the oasis using a little river, heading straight towards the sea.

I immediately realized: "This could work! The water benders may be powerless because of the missing moon, but the Avatar is no ordinary water bender!"

I was sure that with the Ocean Spirit's power, Aang would be able to defeat the Fire Nation fleet. But now I had to concentrate on my new goal: I had to find Admiral Zhao and kill him! He would pay with his life for the crimes he had committed against the entire world in this war!

I ran through the dark, battle-marked alleys of the city. My throwing knife ultimately had been good for something, as it had caused Zhao to bleed, resulting in a trail of blood on the ground, showing me the route he had taken. I kept running until I suddenly heard the noises of a fire bending duel.

I had to get a good overview, but how should I get onto one of the houses? I would not find any grip on the slippery ice walls. That's when an idea came to my mind: I drew my daggers, rammed them into the walls of the building right in front of me and started using them as climbing picks.

Shortly after I had reached the roof and looked down on the other side: Underneath me was a bridge on which Zhao and Zuko were dueling!

"How was he able to free himself?", I asked myself, but I had no time to think of an answer.

I watched the balanced duel for a couple of minutes, then the decisive moment came: Zuko dropped his guard for a few seconds, giving Zhao the chance to gain the upper hand. He towered over Zuko triumphantly, ready for the final blow.

That was my moment! I drew my bow, took an arrow with a large steel head and jumped off the roof! During the jump, which appeared to me as much longer as it actually was, I nocked the arrow and shot it! It hit the admiral, who was readying up for the blow, right in his chest! The arrow penetrated his torso, ran through it and then reappeared at the back. Zhao stopped mid-punch and sank to the ground, cowing in pain!
I had landed safely in the meantime and was now walking towards the fallen admiral. He was still cowering when he noticed me. When he saw my hooded face, which looked intimidating and terrifying in the darkness of the moonless night, his eyes went wide with shock. I grabbed his collar, lifted him up and pushed him against the icy railing of the bridge. With my darkest voice I said:

"Admiral Zhao! You have committed crimes against the entire human race and now the Spirits will judge you for that! You are only the first of many more to come! The whole Fire Nation will fall! This war will be ended, peace will return!"

After these words, I let go of him, took a step back and kicked the admiral in the chest with full force! He fell backwards over the bridge's railing, right into the Sea of the North. I saw him floating on the water, already dead, when suddenly a giant hand made from water appeared from the ocean, grabbing the admiral's body and pulling it underwater.

I moved my eyes over to Prince Zuko, who had simply sat silently where he was the entire time. My sharp eyes locked onto him, he also was a member of the faction that was responsible for the chaos in the world, he deserved death equally as much! I extended my arm blade and started to slowly walk towards him.

But while I was walking, I suddenly heard a voice in my head, loud and clear. I couldn't believe it at first, but it was my father's voice! He said to me:

"No! Let him live! He is an innocent victim of his actions, he will turn his back to the path of chaos, the Spirits have great plans with him!"

I thought about my father's words for a short moment before I decided to follow them, just as I had done when I had joined the Order. I retracted my arm blade, gave Zuko one final dark look, then turned around and left the bridge.

While I was walking through the city, I realized that the battle was won! Aang really had made it, the Fire Nation army was defeated! I whistled, Pagan picked me up and brought me to the others shortly after.

I heard of Aang's fusion with the Spirit of the Ocean, with its help, he had been able to defeat the fleet, but I also learned of Yue's sacrifice to bring back the Spirit of the Moon. Sokka in particular looked very sad and depressed, the princess's death had truly been a hard bite for him to swallow. I left him alone with his grief, since I knew this feeling all too well.

I went back to Pagan, we looked towards the horizon together, watching the sun slowly rising.

The next morning, Master Pakku revealed his plans to travel to the Southern Water Tribe to rebuild it. I told him in private that he should make sure that the area would be built in a way that would make it easy for the Order to watch over the city, something that would not be of any problem as he ensured me.

When I asked him about Aang's water bending training, he told me that Katara had proven herself worthy enough to be appointed the title of master, she now had the right to continue Aang's training. I was content with that and returned to my friends, who were standing on one of the palace's big balconies. We stood there all together and looked at the horizon.

I said: "A lot of things have happened so far, I would say, there's definitely no boredom in this
team, I now know that for sure."

We all laughed, then I asked: "What is our next step? I assume that we now have to find an earth bending teacher for Aang, am I right?"

The young Avatar nodded and added: "But there's still time for that."

I agreed: "That's right, and because of that..."

I whistled and Pagan appeared at the balcony, I mounted him.

My friends looked at me confused, Katara asked: "What are you going to do?"

"I will return to the Assassin monastery to meditate over the most recent events and also prepare myself for the following travels."

Aang asked: "And what if we need your help? How are you going to find us?"

"Don't worry, Pagan will fly freely during my stay at the monastery, he will keep an eye on you from the sky. If something actually will happen, he will bring me to you immediately."

My friends were reassured by that, I said goodbye to them and gave Pagan the signal for departure. While we were still pretty close over the city, I suddenly discovered something and told Pagan to stop one last time. Underneath us, on the roof of one of the many buildings, Runa was standing, she waved at me. I waved back until we lost sight of ourselves. When that had happened, Pagan increased his flight speed and only shortly afterwards we had left the Northern Water Tribe behind us.

At the end of the day we had reached the monastery. Pagan dropped me off in the courtyard and then took off again immediately. I went into the temple, knelt down in front of the big sigil and started meditating.

I thought over everything that had happened over the last weeks. Many things had happened but the most important part was that I had been able to eliminate the first important member of the Fire Nation's leading faction, the first step of a hard mission had been taken! But I felt it! I felt that this had only been the beginning of a long and hard adventure.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Fast as lightning
I spent the next days with even more meditating, I tried to balance my body and my soul again, to get ready for everything to come.

Pagan stuck to his mission and kept an eye on our friends during his flights. On the third day of my stay in the monastery, he brought home the message that Aang, Katara and Sokka had left the Northern Water Tribe and were now heading towards an Earth Kingdom base. As they were escorted on the way there, I saw no reason why they would need me and therefore continued to focus on my meditation and my training.

When I was not meditating, I practiced my fighting skills again and again, repaired my weapons and filled up my stock of arrows, knives and potions.

One day, I left the monastery to search for herbs and to hunt animals in the surrounding area to fill up my food supplies as well. I wandered calmly through the nice countryside, collecting useful herbs which I then dried and conserved using a steam fabric. I also used my bow to kill some animals which would give good meat.

After I had wandered for quite some time, my bag now filled up nicely again, I noticed that the sky started to darken, big grey clouds were drawing near.

"Oh good!", I thought, "it's been quite some time since I gave my lightning some freedom, this thunderstorm should be perfect."

I looked around in the area where I was currently standing and discovered a small mesa, which was sticking out of the grassland quite noticeable, at some distance.

"That should do it.", I thought and started walking towards the mountain.

When I had reached the bottom of the mountain, I looked for a way up, but I quickly realized that I had to climb. So I grabbed a rocky ledge with both my hands and started climbing up the stony pile. Some sharp edged rocks cut into my hands, my robe and my face were pretty dirty when I finally reached the flat summit. The sky was completely grey now and there was a pretty stiff wind blowing, especially considering the greater height I was in.

As I felt the thunderstorm approaching very fast, I acted equally as fast: I removed my dirty robe and positioned myself in the middle of the summit, the wind whipped against the naked skin of my torso, but I didn't feel it or its cold, I was too concentrated already. I focused my complete internal flow onto this mountain, this moment. I heard the first loud thunderclap and started.

I extended the index and middle finger on both my hands, my arms started moving in circles, followed by my whole body shortly after. The whole principle of lightning generation was based on a complex sequence of movements which all had to work like one big single move for the lightning
to develop properly and not discharge too early.

During their studies, the Masters of Old had discovered that it was possible to generate lightning relatively fast and unconventional in the middle of a fight, but this kind was a little weaker because the whole process of concentration was missing. The Masters had compensated this weakness of the "Impulsive Lightning", as it was called, by learning how to control the stronger purple lightning. Purple Impulsive Lightning was just as devastating as normal white lightning with concentration process.

During my training, I had suffered from multiple burns on my whole body whilst training how to control the lightning, as it really was extremely difficult to gain and maintain control over them. But in the end, I had mastered the great power which I was about to set free, right here on this mountain!

My movements started to become faster, I felt the tingling of electric charge running through my body, it wandered from my center over my torso into my right arm. I increased the movement speed to another level, the tingling became more intense with every second. After a good two minutes, I stopped my movements, thrust my arm out towards the sky and uttered a shout of power as the intense purple lightning shot up into the grey sky. The wind whipped around me like there was no tomorrow, but I withstood it!

The lightning unloaded into the sky for a good minute before it disappeared and forced me to my knees. It had been more tiring than I had expected, but it had been worth it! My body had felt that rush again, it was a great feeling.

Normal lightning bolts now began to flash through the sky, the thunderstorm had arrived. I knew that a proper thunderstorm would also bring rain, but I wasn't keen on getting wet and soaked, therefore I slipped back into my robe and climbed down the mountain hastily.

I was too far away from the monastery to reach it in time and I couldn't count on Pagan, depending on where exactly he was at the moment, it could take him about an hour to reach me.

Fortunately I had discovered something on my way towards the mountain: A little lake, relatively close by, with a cave-like rock formation right next to it, big enough to set up camp underneath it. I started walking faster, as I really didn't want to get into the rain.

A couple of minutes later, I was already able to smell the rain in the air, I had reached the lake. I dived under the rock formation when the rain broke through and started pouring onto the countryside without restraints. I sat down and calmed down, I had made it, I was safe and dry.

For the next hours I sat there in the little cave, eating some of the supplies I had collected and watching the rain pattering onto the surface of the lake. I thought about the others and what they were doing at this moment.

As an answer, the pain in my left hand suddenly started again, my tattoo was glowing bright red once again.

"Oh no! Aang has to be in the Avatar State, not good!"

Even though it would have been my duty to search for him immediately, I wasn't able to do so, I was trapped here you could say.

Luckily the glowing and the pain stopped only shortly after, I was relieved.
As the rain was still coming down when the night broke in, I had no other choice but to spend the
night here. I took off my robe and weapons, put them down next to the little fire I had ignited not
long ago, took my mat, put it down as well and laid down on top of it. The swooshing of the rain
and the fresh air put me to sleep pretty fast.

When I woke up the next morning, the first thing I noticed was that the rain had stopped. The
morning sun was glowing bright and nice over the lake, everything looked as peaceful as there had
never been a thunderstorm.

I stood up, stretched myself and started picking up my belongings. I put my robe back on and
collected my weapons.

While I was doing that, I eventually realized it with shock: One of my katanas was missing! I had
placed them both on top of my folded robe the other evening, but now the left one was missing!

I simply couldn't believe it, I actually had been robbed! But instead of getting infuriated, my
thoughts immediately shifted towards the new goal: Finding the thief and my sword!

When I stepped out of the cave, I immediately started to look around extensively. And I actually
found something: On the moist muddy ground, there were footprints! I followed them a few meters
until they seemed to head directly into the lake. I asked myself if the thief had actually swum
through this little lake instead of simply walking around it.

While I was thinking, I suddenly felt a light breeze and heard almost silent footsteps behind me.
Instead of immediately turning around and attacking, I acted like I didn't notice anything, I wanted
to lull the intruder into a false sense of security. The steps slowly came closer and closer, I could
almost feel my assailant's breath in the back of my neck.

Then, with the reflexes of a Master Assassin, I grabbed my remaining katana, unsheathed it, turned
around in the same motion and attacked! A loud clinking sound erupted when metal met metal.

I raised my head to look into my assailant's face, but what I saw took me by complete surprise: The
assailant was June, the bounty huntress! I had to restrain myself, otherwise my jaw would have
dropped.

She had that seductive smile on her face again while we were standing there, sword to sword.
That's when I finally noticed: The sword she was holding was my second katana, it had been her
who stole it.

She kept smiling and said softly: "Nice to see you. Told you we would meet again."

This time, I was prepared for her little games, that's why I answered: "And under this kind of
circumstances too, I'm starting to believe that you have developed quite the interest for my sword,
right?"

"More than you think...", she purred and licked her lips.

I knew what this was leading towards, I tried to play along: "You know, I have developed a new
interest as well ... for balloons!"

With these words, I removed my left hand from the handle of my sword, moved it onto June's left
breast reflex-like and squeezed it. A small moan escaped her mouth, but she held her position. I
smirked while my thumb was moving towards her nipple and began to massage it through her light
cloth top.

She moaned again, louder already, but still managed to say: "Oh, you want to play again? Then let's play!"

She suddenly reached back with her leg, my reaction came far too late when her right knee connected with my most sensitive region. A nasty pain ran through my body, I wasn't able to keep my sword up, it escaped my grip, I went down.

Shortly after, I was on my back once again, my wrists pinned down to the ground, June on top of me.

"Well, great!", I thought to myself, "she took you by surprise again, stuff like this normally shouldn't happen to a Master Assassin!"

But at least I was immediately ready to take the initiative this time. Before June could even lower her head, I had already turned her around. I smirked, this time it was me who made the first move. I pressed my lips onto hers and immediately tried to enter her mouth with my tongue, she granted me entrance and started to explore my mouth with her tongue as well.

Compared to last time, I decided to move things a little bit. Without breaking the kiss, I stood up, lifting up June in the process, she pressed herself against my body, we started undressing each other. When we were both completely naked, I carried her, still pressed against me, over to the lake and stepped into it. The water was a little cold at first, but nice and clean.

I put June down, standing in front of her inside the lake. I reached down and splashed her with water. At first she jumped a little, but then she tried the same on me. After a few minutes the two of us were completely covered with water. I went over to her and kissed her again, then my head slowly started to move downward.

My first stop was her chest, I put my mouth onto her right nipple and started to lick and suck. She started moaning even louder than before, it was finest music to my ears. After a few minutes, I changed sides and started sucking on her left nipple. I also started using my right hand, I put it onto her right breast and started to knead and massage it while also shifting to the nipple sometimes. We both enjoyed it thoroughly, I literally felt that in my whole body!

Eventually I went downwards even further, my head was now on the same height as her dripping wet loins. I used two fingers from my right hand and slowly caressed first her pubic mound, then a little further down until my fingers were ready to enter her. At first, I made slow back-and-forth movements, but then increased my speed with every passing moment.

Her face was filled with pleasure, I wanted to play with her as long as possible, therefore I removed my fingers after a few minutes and placed my mouth on her holy spot. I explored every detail of the area with my tongue until I found the right spot. I licked said spot intensively, her face became filled with even more pleasure, I realized that she probably could not hold herself back much longer.

After two more minutes, she reached her climax, bent over backwards and a large amount of warm and sticky fluids streamed into my face.

I looked up into her face and asked: "Satisfied?"

Instead of answering she knelt down and grabbed my best man who had been in full size for quite
some time now. She took him into her grasp and started stroking him slowly but surely. I immediately felt the strong feeling of pleasure running through my body, it was as wonderful as every time.

I also felt the difference: June already had the experience, she knew certain tricks and techniques to create maximum pleasure. Runa on the other hand had most certainly been a virgin, since I had the initiative almost the entire time during that night, but well, that night hadn't been for my pleasure, unlike this moment right now!

June had taken the next step in the meantime, he was now in her mouth. The feeling of pleasure was increased even more when I felt her warm smooth tongue. I had planned to last longer this time, which I eventually managed to do when I unloaded my seed into her mouth after ten minutes. She swallowed all of it, looked me in the eyes afterwards and said: "You know what you have to do!"

She turned around and presented her big well-formed bottom to me. I stepped behind her, took my best man and let him enter her holy spot. Our union made us both moan, she continued when I started to thrust into her rhythmically.

My thrusts became faster over time, after about ten minutes I turned her around, lifted up one of her legs and began to thrust into her from the front. I once again saw her pleasure-filled face, she already had to hold back her climax again.

For me it was no different, I increased the speed of my thrusts quite a bit and whispered into her ear: "Together!"

All she could do was nodding slightly, but I understood. My thrusts became even faster and after one more minute, we both reached our climaxes at the same moment!

After our little escapade, we stayed in the lake for some more time, bathing together. When it started to become noon, I regained my focus, if I still wanted to reach the monastery today, I had to set out quite soon.

I stepped out of the lake, dried myself up and put my clothes back on, June followed me shortly after.

When she wanted to reach for my katana, which she had put down together with her clothes, I looked at her with a smirk on my face, the sword already in my hands.

"No, no, no! This won't happen again!"

She smirked back and got dressed. We walked over to the tree where she had tied her shirshu, then we said goodbye to each other.

She mounted her animal and said: "It was a pleasure once again. You know, you're quite possibly the toughest guy I've ever faced."

"Well, that's just how I am, different than most guys."

"Indeed. Good luck on your mission!"

With these words, she clapped spurs to her shirshu which caused the animal to run off with high
speed. I looked after her and thought. Sure, she was one heck of a woman, she brought me pleasure like nobody or nothing else, but she also wasn't the woman for a lifetime.

When I thought about these words, it came to my mind clearer than ever before: Of course I wanted to have a family on my own one day, I only wasn't sure if I would ever find the right girl with the style of life I currently lived. I continued to think about this during my walk back to the monastery.

When I arrived there in the early afternoon, I only had just enough time to sort and store my newly collected supplies before I heard the familiar sound of mighty wings outside. I ran out to the courtyard where Pagan landed at the same moment.

"What is it, my friend?"

"It's the Avatar! He and the others went back to Omashu."

"And?"

"The city has been conquered by the Fire Nation!"

I was immediately on the alert! Fortunately I was already carrying my most important equipment, that's why I immediately mounted Pagan's neck and said: "Go, go! We have to get there as fast as possible!"

Pagan shot up into the sky and started heading east, right towards Omashu, while I was preparing myself for an intense battle!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Team Avatar vs Team Azula
As Pagan was rushing over the Earth Kingdom territories towards Omashu with high speed, I got ready for battle.

I sharpened my blades with a volcanic stone, clamped new strings in my bow and crossbow, adjusted the throwing knives' center of gravity and occasionally fired little flame blasts into the air.

I was most definitely prepared for what was coming!

After a few hours we eventually flew over the last pair of hills before we finally saw the huge city in front of us. But it wasn't the same splendid and noble place it had been during our last visit anymore.

The entire city's color scheme had shifted from the nice and clean sandy brown of the surrounding mountains into a weak and dull grey, the walls were covered in countless Fire Nation flags and smoke trails were rising from nearly everywhere in the city. The city had fallen!

I was speechless, it really was a terrible sight. Something had to be done as fast as possible, I said to myself, the Fire Nation had to be driven out of the city!

I told Pagan to camouflage and to start circling over the city for the time being, I wanted to observe everything precisely and then plan my next steps.

Nothing special happened for quite some time, just usual city life, although of course under the Fire Nation's control.

But eventually something actually did happen: All of a sudden, masses of Earth Kingdom inhabitants appeared on the streets, they walked very slow, almost limped, towards the city's main gate, without any Fire Nation soldiers trying to stop them.

"What the hell..?", I said out loud while getting my telescope out from my bag to get a better look at the people.

At first, except the limping walk, I noticed nothing special, but then I saw that most of them had strange red spots on their faces.

"Oh no! I hope this doesn't mean that a plague has broked out in the city!"

Before I was able to continue my observation, Pagan suddenly changed direction mid-flight, it happened so hastily that I almost fell off the dragon's neck!

"Hey! What was that? Are you trying to kill me?"

"I'm sorry, but I just discovered something that you have to see!"

"Well, at least tell me when you're about to change directions, or otherwise I will fall off one day!"
Pagan flew a little away from the city and then pointed down with his claw. That's when I saw it too: A big camp filled with many Earth Kingdom inhabitants.

I took my telescope and started observing again. I saw two guys wiping their faces with towels while laughing, that's when it dawned on me: The plague had been faked to guarantee safe leaving out of the city. I lightly clicked with my tongue, very smart, I had to admit.

But what or better said who I spotted next was even more interesting: I discovered Aang, Katara and Sokka walking around the camp.

"Good, so they're safe, but what are they doing down there?"

I was about to instruct Pagan to land so I could talk with the three, but in the same moment, a hawk with a scroll attached to his leg flew past me and landed in the camp.

"A messenger hawk? What did they do that it requires official attention?"

Instead to telling Pagan to land, I raised the telescope back to my eye again and looked down into the camp. Aang had untied the message scroll from the hawk's leg and began to read it.

I readjusted the telescope's level of zoom so that I was able to read it as well. Apparently, the son of the Governor of Omashu had followed the crowd of people leaving the city, they believed him to have been abducted. The Governor was willing to exchange his son for the captured King Bumi. The negotiation parties should meet tomorrow morning at the scaffolding in front of the statue of Fire Lord Ozai in the middle of the city to perform the exchange.

My plan was clear now: Me and Pagan would circle the venue of the trade, always ready to interfere should things get out of hand, something I was pretty sure was going to happen.

I told Pagan to leave the camp and look for a place where we could stay for the night.

I woke up just in time the next morning. I got ready for battle once more, it was almost guaranteed now that I would have to fight today.

I checked all my weapons multiple times to make sure that they functioned without any problems.

With a serious and determined look on my face, I pulled the hood over my head, walked over to Pagan and said: "It's time!"

The dragon understood immediately, I mounted him and we started heading back to the city, straight towards the meeting point at the statue.

When we arrived, neither negotiation party was present yet, but that was no surprise since we really were quite early, as I had not wanted to miss any decisive moments.

So we started circling, camouflaged of course, over the large Fire Lord statue. I took a sinister look at it and thought: "Soon..."

After a couple of minutes, which seemed fairly long to me, something finally seemed to happen down in the city. I looked down and discovered my three friends as they were walking to the middle of the place where the trade should happen.

Some further minutes later, the second party arrived, but my breath stopped for a second when I
saw who was leading them: It was Princess Azula of the Fire Nation! How much I already had heard about the sadistic machinations of this young woman wouldn't fit on the longest scroll in the world.

I focused my thoughts stronger than already, this fight would be even more intense than I had expected so far. I had the chance to kill Azula right here and now, and although that would most definitely be a very hard undertaking, it also would bring me one big step closer to my main goal.

I didn't know the other two girls that were accompanying the princess, but I immediately noticed how pretty one of them was: Her long brown hair, the wide red robe, it all went perfectly with the lively but serious look on her face.

But I digressed, this time my emotions would not hold me back during the fight! If the Spirits demanded it, all three girls would die!

The negotiations were starting, I couldn't exactly hear what they were saying, but I understood the context. Azula commented on the unfairness of the trade, an infant for a old powerful earth bender.

This statement alone seemed to be enough to convince the other girl who had conducted the negotiations. She said, loud enough for me to hear it clearly, that the trade would not be happening.

The next thing I saw was that everybody got ready for battle. That was my signal!

I said to Pagan: "My friend, the time is now! We have no more reason to be quiet, so let's show them that we're here! Show them all your strength!"

Pagan had understood and uttered a deafening roar, at the same moment I jumped off his neck and dove down towards the ground head first!

Despite the big height Pagan had been in, I landed elegantly and safely right next to Aang, Katara and Sokka.

I smirked when I saw Azula and the other girls standing there, mouths agape, and said: "The cavalry's here!"

Aang, Katara and Sokka cheered a little when they saw me.

Azula, now making an unimpressed face again, stepped forward and said: "And who exactly are you, you bigmouthed rescue team?"

I took a step forward as well and replied just as unimpressed: "I'm your doom, princess!"

She laughed out loud and said: "You think you can scare me? Very funny!"

With these words, she summoned two blue flames in her hands and launched them towards me. But instead of dodging, I calmly remained where I was standing and caught the flames out of the air, this caused Azula's face to fill with shock.

I still smirked, now even more mischievously, clenched my hands to fists and quenched the blue flames like they were candles.

I said: "Wow! Not bad, but not as good as this!"

I created a white flame in my right hand, Azula's face immediately filled with even more shock.
I looked right into the fire in my hand, then back at Azula and asked: "Scared, princess?"

"You wish!", she screamed, "Mai! Ty Lee! Attack!"

Thereupon, the other two girls rushed forward while my three friends also joined me for the battle!

I stormed straight at Azula, but before I could reach her, the pretty girl tackled me to the side.

I saw her from near for the first time now, she was even prettier than I had thought from the
distance. Even though she now looked courageous and determined, I still saw the liveliness in her
face and I liked it. But when she attacked me, I had to concentrate again.

I saw that Aang had chosen the battle with Azula while Katara and Sokka were trying to fight Mai,
the third girl of the group, therefore it looked like I was set to fight Ty Lee, that was her name,
which I found very beautiful by the way.

To my surprise she didn't wield any weapon, but instead was simply fighting with her bare hands.
Fight same with the same, I thought, therefore I didn't use any of my weapons and instead relied on
my fire bending.

I made the first attack, enveloped my fist in a flame and tried to punch her. But she simply dodged.
I tried again multiple times and also added some fiery kicks to the mix, but not a single try found
its target, she really was very fast!

As I eventually became a little exhausted because of the many missed attacks, she was able to
attack me. Despite the exhaustion, I still tried to keep up my defense as best I could.

She rushed around me in circles, striking many different spots on my body with her fingers: My
forehead, my shoulder, my chest, my wrist, my thigh and many more.

That's when I recognized the pattern: "Ah, chi blockade! Well, tough luck, girl, this won't help you
against me!"

The chi blockade was intended to stop and block the chi, every bender's internal flow of energy,
eliminating any chance of bending for a short period of time. But the Old Masters had once
discovered a special plant which had the effect to quicken the flow of the chi without harming the
body's health.

During their period of training, every Assassin had to brew themselves a special tea using this plant
as an ingredient and then drink it to unfold the effects inside the body. This faster chi flow was
unstoppable, giving the Assassins the ability to bend in every given situation, even if they were
facing someone that used chi blockade as their fighting style, like I did right now.

After she had finished her attack, she took a few steps away from me and called: "Come on! More
fire, try it if you dare!"

I said: "If you insist..."

She smirked, but I smirked back even wider. Her face turned confused and then shocked when she
saw one of my white flames flying straight at her, she was only able to save herself with a jump to
the side. She was lying on the ground and looked at me aghast.

I continued to smirk and said: "You'll have to do better than that, my beauty!"
I walked over to her, placed my foot on her chest, summoned another flame in my hand and raised it, ready for the final strike!

The girl closed her eyes in mortal agony, but then, suddenly, I heard my father's voice in my head again:

"No! Don't kill her! She is not a bad person, the princess forces her to do this! She can make good things happen in the world, and you will play a pivotal role in her life!"

I was even more shocked than the first time I had heard my father's voice. Alright, maybe she really wasn't a bad person, I could believe that, but how exactly was I supposed to play a pivotal role in this girl's life? I mean, sure, I found her pretty and stuff, but ... No! Was my father talking about...? No, I couldn't and at that moment didn't want to believe that!

I was in such a shock that I had removed my foot from the girl's chest without realizing it, she jumped back to her feet and ran away, together with her friend who had just been disarmed by Sokka.

Still in light shock, I wanted to walk over to Katara and Sokka, who instead ran past me shortly after, calling: "Come on, we have to catch up with Aang!"

That's when I realized that the young Avatar wasn't here on the scaffolding anymore. Hit with this realization, I started running behind Katara and Sokka through the streets of the city.

We eventually found Aang safe and sound on a little market place, alongside King Bumi, who was trapped in some kind of metal casket.

The king told Aang that he needed to wait for the right moment before acting, this had also been the reason why he had surrendered to the Fire Nation voluntarily, he knew that the right moment for him to conquer back the city will eventually come. He also said that Aang's earth bending teacher could only be somebody who had mastered this philosophy completely. After that, he bid us goodbye and started bending his casket up one of the many chutes of the Omashu Mail System.

Aang told us that there was nothing to do for us in Omashu for the time being, we would go searching for an earth bending teacher for him somewhere else. Shortly thereafter, we sat on our animals again and left the city behind.

-POV change-

On a street in the Earth Kingdom, not far from Omashu, a palanquin was moving along the path, inside were Princess Azula and her best friends Mai and Ty Lee. They talked about their fight with the Avatar and his team a few hours ago.

"So what exactly did the guy in the hood do?", Azula asked Ty Lee.

"I don't know. I blocked his chi like I always do, but it just didn't work!"

Azula furrowed her brow and said: "However he did it, it means that he is way more powerful than we might think, I mean, have you ever seen white fire before? How did he do that?"

Her friends shook their heads, Azula's face assumed a look of focus again:

"It doesn't matter who he really is or how powerful he might be, he now is one of our targets,
alongside my brother, my uncle and the Avatar! We will find him, rip the hood right off his head and then blemish his pretty head!"

Azula started laughing maliciously, Mai and Ty Lee looked at each other fairly concerned. Into what kind of crazy plan had they gotten themselves this time?

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: The Swamp
Without any kind of set destination, we continued to fly over the Earth Kingdom.

Normally I would have asked what exactly we were searching for, but as I already knew the reason per se, all I did was sitting on Pagan silently, rearranging my thoughts.

I had to think about Ty Lee, the girl I had fought in Omashu, the entire time, I couldn't get the image of her face out of my head.

I didn't know what was happening with me, I mean, sure, I always have had a good connection to the opposite sex, but this was something new entirely, I wasn't able to think about anything else and the entire time my father's words kept echoing in my mind as well:

"You will play a pivotal role in her life."

What had he meant by that? I had found an answer fairly fast, but that simply couldn't be, but on the other hand, why should my father be wrong? He had been a very wise man during his lifetime already, now in death his knowledge must had grown even more.

I also had set myself the goal to not let my mission be influenced by my feelings and emotions anymore, but that would most likely be a harder undertaking than I thought if I wouldn't be able to calm my mind soon.

While I continued to think about how my future could look like, we flew over a giant swamp region. There was nothing but little trees and murky water for miles beneath us. That's when I suddenly noticed that we were flying much lower than a couple of minutes ago.

I asked Pagan: "What's going on? Why are we flying so low all of a sudden?"

"It was Appa who started flying this low, all I did was following him."

I looked over to the bison and asked Aang: "Is there a certain reason why you're letting Appa fly this low?"

Aang answered: "It's the swamp. I have the feeling that it is calling me."

How should a swamp be able to call somebody? On the other hand, the Avatar differed from ordinary humans, he heard and saw things nobody else could, that's why I didn't question Aang's words any further.

Sokka however said: "Even if the swamp is actually calling you, how do you want to answer? Look down, there's not a single spot for us to land safely!"

I agreed with Sokka, well, at least Appa would have no chance to reach the swamp without problems. Pagan would certainly be able to wriggle himself through the tree crowns, but he'd also never be able to transport all of us, he was only trained to carry two persons at the very most at the same time, more passengers would result in his flight to become uncontrolled and unstable.

When Aang had already made the decision that we would simply continue to fly on, something
unpredictable happened: Suddenly, a giant tornado emerged from the sky into the swamp! And we were flying directly towards it!

I shouted to Pagan: "Quick! Turn around!"

The dragon immediately followed my word, turned around and rushed into the other direction with full speed! We just made it out of the whirlwind's suction radius, but the others weren't so lucky. Appa got caught in the tornado's airflows, got sucked in and ultimately thrown into the swamp.

I watched the horror scenario from a distance, when the bison had disappeared in the swamp and the tornado had dissolved shortly after, I ordered Pagan:

"Go! Down there, quick! We have to find and help them!"

The dragon immediately shot towards the ground, heading straight for the tree crowns.

Shortly afterwards, we broke through the many rotten and damp branches of some trees and stopped just before we hit the wet ground.

Pagan landed gently on the swampy ground, I dismounted him and at the same moment was glad that my boots were both high-cut and made from fine fire-boiled leather, because the mud splashed into the air several feet when my feet touched the ground.

I looked around. At first glance, everything looked like an ordinary swampland: Many small trees with big thick roots that were standing very close together, the ground was mostly muddy, there were deep puddles in many places and even some little lakes had formed.

However, the most striking and also most unendurable thing was the weather: It was very hot, typical for a swamp, but that wouldn't have been a problem for me, the fire bender, if it wasn't for this unbelievable high humidity! Only minutes after our landing, I was already sweating so strongly that I had to take off my hood while dark sweat stains began to appear on my robe under my armpits.

I only was able and also only wanted to stay in this conditions just as long as it was necessary, that's why I told Pagan:

"Well then, let's start our search. Try to move very slowly and watch where you're treading and what you're touching."

Pagan retracted his wings as close as possible and started following me through the swamp's maze.

We wandered through the swampland for some while, occasionally came across passages that looked impassable at first, but in the end, we were always able to overcome them with a little weapon usage or fire.

I kept my eyes open the entire time, one could never know what kind of dangers could lurk behind the next tree, especially in territories as unclear as this one. The only sounds that were always echoing through the humid air were the splashing of mine and Pagan's footsteps when we were crossing a more watery area again.

Even though I felt no real fear, the whole swamp area still didn't feel quite safe to me. I constantly had the feeling that we were being observed by something and according to my feeling, it was quite possible that this thing didn't necessarily had to be human, the whole swamp had a very
mysterious, almost supernatural vibe to it.

When the night fell a couple of hours later, we still didn't have any lead on our friends. I already had told Pagan that we wouldn't set up camp or anything by no means, it definitely wasn't safe enough in this environment.

To be able to see better in the progressing darkness, I got a phial filled with a purple liquid out from my bag and drank the content. It was a night vision potion, it adjusted the human eyes to those of an owl so that one was able to see like during the day, even in the most intense darkness. Pagan had adjusted his eyes for the night as well, the bright luminous green looked quite natural in the swampy environment.

But we weren't able to find any of our friends during the night either.

The next morning, we were still walking, admittedly more tired but still focused.

Nevertheless, I had to take a break some time later. I leaned against a tree trunk that looked safe enough, fetched two pieces of meat from my bag, gave Pagan one of them and ate the other one myself.

Freshly strengthened, we continued our search a few minutes later, but after a few hundred meters I stopped again, my foot had hit against something.

I looked to the ground and saw five strange ball-shaped things scattered in front of my feet. I wasn't able to recognize what exactly they were, they looked like rocks or big swamp fruits. I wanted to know exactly and picked up the thing my foot had hit to give it a closer look.

But what I saw gave me the shock of my life! It was so bad that I dropped the thing and tumbled backwards several steps, it was only thanks to Pagan that I didn't fell into the morass.

After he had helped me getting back to my feet, he asked: "What is it, my friend?"

I was at a loss for words, walked over to the thing I had picked up, picked it up again and looked at it one more time, to make sure that it actually was what I had seen the first time.

To my horror, it still was the same: I was actually holding my father's severed head in my hands! His glassy eyes had no pupils, instead they were completely white, his mouth was wide open, like he was screaming. I was staring at this scene in my hands completely aghast, I couldn't and didn't want to believe it!

My shocked eyes wandered over to the other four things that were scattered close by. Even though I already could guess what they were, I still walked over and picked all of them up individually. My sad guess proved to be correct: They were the heads of my mother and my siblings, they all made the same face as my father's head, it was a face that was practically screaming: "Help us! We're dying!"

When all the heads were lying on the ground again, I sank to my knees, my hands dug into the muddy ground, tears started welling up in my eyes, I wasn't fighting them, they ran over my face in big streams.

The memory, it returned to my inner eye, started chewing on my nerves once again, but I didn't let it overpower my mind and soul once again! I was strong! I wouldn't break from this kind of thought manipulation! Whatever was going on in this swamp, I would vanquish it!
Armed with new courage, I rose again, looked over to the heads again and was shocked once more: They suddenly weren't heads anymore, but big green fruits instead, just as I had thought at first.

This swamp slowly really started getting to me, I asked myself if the others had to experience similar things. Nonetheless, Pagan and I continued our way, we were hoping that we would find our friends soon.

About half an hour later, we came across a wall of lianas. I didn't have to think for long, drew one of my katanas and cut through the creepers' rows with a single blow. But what was behind this wall was way more gratifying than expected: Aang, Katara and Sokka were all standing on a large clearing. I was very happy that I had found my friends again and walked over to them.

They also were happy to see me and almost immediately began to tell me of the strange things they had seen. I of course told them about the heads of my family that I had seen and we eventually recognized a pattern: Me, Katara and Sokka all had seen dead loved ones, while Aang asserted that he had never seen the girl that had appeared to him before. In the end, none of us was able to make sense of this.

While we were still talking, I suddenly felt a strange big presence in our close vicinity.

Just as I was about to tell my friends about it, a large creature suddenly broke out of the swamp's thicket! It looked like it was completely made out of vines and lianas, the massive body was completed by two long arms. It uttered a high-frequency scream and charged at us!

I immediately yanked my hands up reflexively and hurled a fire beam at the monster, which burned away a large part of its body. But instead of going down in pain or the like, new vines just started growing at the burned spot like nothing had happened. I continued with my flame assault, while Aang and Katara now also started to use air and water against the monster. But whatever we tried, the monster was always repairing itself, we weren't able to sustainably injure it.

That's when I realized that I had to bring out the big weapons. I uttered two short whistles, the signal for a direct attack by Pagan! He shot to the front and spewed a fire beam at the monster's right arm, which got completely burned in the process.

I now grabbed both my katanas, charged at the monster, jumped on its arm and sliced through the burned vines. I had cut off the monster's arm in no time, and to make sure that it wouldn't grow back, I ignited a fire at the place on the body where the arm had been growing, the spot burned out completely. Now the monster wasn't able to grow another new arm.

I jumped back down and ran back over to my friends. Aang and Katara continued to shoot water blades at the monster which now noticeably started to get weaker, the final blow was not far away anymore.

Without much thinking, I grabbed my bow and a special arrow with a head that was filled with explosive black powder. I nocked the arrow, aimed while Aang and Katara continued to distract the monster, and then shot the arrow right into the monster's "face" which bursted into a little cloud of fire when the arrow hit.

Thereupon the whole monster collapsed and revealed something: An old man, clad in nothing but a loincloth. He introduced himself as Huu and said that the swamp had chosen us, he only had attacked us because Sokka and I had hurt the swamp with our weapons.
He lead us to a giant tree in the middle of the swamp and told us that he had reached enlightenment beneath this tree. He had realized that everything is connected with each other and that everything is transitory. The swamp showed that to people by for example creating visions of beloved dead people.

I thought back to my own experiences and visions, of course, some years had already passed since the death of my family, but it still hurt incredibly bad when I thought about it. I tried to understand Huu's words. And he was right: One day, I too would pass from this world, only to be reunited with my family. But no matter when or where, in life or in death, they would always be by my side, as I already had experienced when I had heard my father's voice.

Shortly afterwards, two other swamp benders arrived, friends of Huu, they had Appa and Momo with them.

Happy that we were reunited again, we decided to catch up the lost time as fast as possible and continue our journey immediately.

For farewell, Aang asked Huu about the girl he had seen in his vision, as he didn't know her. Huu answered that Aang would meet her some time in the future.

Just like Aang, I was glad, because we finally had some kind of actual goal again: Finding that girl, maybe she could help us on our main mission.

Some minutes later, we were flying again and I was back where I had been before: Thinking about Ty Lee.

What was all this about? I almost couldn't think about anything but her lively pretty face. And ... in my heart, I felt the wish to see her again, under more pleasant circumstances.

"Come on! She's your enemy, stop it!", I thought, but deep in my heart, I felt that I eventually would follow my feelings and wishes, sooner or later.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: A macabre method
After the events in the swamp, our journey went back to being relatively unspectacular in the time following.

We continued to travel through the Earth Kingdom, still with no real progress however. I once again started to doubt if we actually would have a real success ever, I was longing for any kind of progress.

But then I always remembered an important aspect I had learned in my training: Power can also come with patience, that's why I continued to just letting things happen the way they did.

One morning in our camp, we were woken up by Sokka who screamed loudly because Momo had woken him up by jumping onto his face.

I grinned and thought to myself: "He really should try to work on his temper a little bit, all of this fuss he's always making can't be healthy."

After Aang and Katara also had woken up because of the noises Sokka and Momo were still making, I suddenly felt that something was approaching us.

I said loudly: "Guys! Better ready yourselves, something's about to happen!"

Only seconds after I had finished speaking, it already happened: Five soldiers riding on komodo rhinos emerged from the forest and surrounded us! We had to flee as quick as possible, something the others realized as well.

I took it upon myself to distract the attackers, for what I already had a plan as well: I first launched a fire ball at each of the five to disorient them. While Aang, Katara and Sokka packed and stored their belongings on Appa's saddle in nex to no time, I jumped into the air, started rotating around my own axis and hurled a little globe filled with black powder at each of the attackers. When the globes hit the ground, right in front of the rhinos, they broke and thick black smoke emerged from them, completely enshrouding the attackers, leaving them no chance to attack us.

I safely landed on the ground again, yelled at the others to hurry, grabbed my mat from the ground and jumped onto Pagan, who immediately shot up into the air, Appa close behind.

After we had escaped our attackers without any major problems or losses, we eventually landed near some villages some time later, Aang and Katara wanted to buy new supplies.

While we were walking past the many different stands and stores, stopping in front of some of them from time to time, one merchant eventually told us of the "Avatar Day" which was currently celebrated in a village relatively close by. All of us found this to sound quite interesting, therefore we decided that we would go and take a look at this festival.

We made our way to the village, which really was not far away, and seemed to arrive just in time for the festivities, many people were already out on the streets.
While we followed the masses, we discovered the evident main attraction of the festival: Several big statues, depicting the Avatars Kyoshi, Roku and even Aang himself, were rolled through the streets. I was impressed and positively surprised, I liked it that there still seemed to be some people in the world who were properly paying tribute to the Avatar.

We followed the statue parade towards a bigger piazza where they eventually stopped. We asked ourselves what would happen next, but what actually happened shocked us all: An older man stepped on the piazza, right in front of the statues, he was holding a torch in his hand. And he threw said torch right at the statue of Avatar Kyoshi which immediately burst into flames! I could not believe it, what the hell was all this?

The crowd was cheering loudly and exclaimed: "Down with the Avatar!"

The first torch was soon followed by a second one which ignited the statue of Avatar Roku. When a third torch flew through the air and landed right in the eye of Aang's statue, we decided that we finally had seen enough! Katara wormed her way through the crowd, jumped onto the piazza, grabbed two plumes of water from a nearby fountain mid-jump and extinguished the burning statues. Aang took it upon himself to save his own statue from the flames.

The people began to protest that we were destroying their festival. Aang, who was standing on the shoulder of his statue, said loudly: "We have a good right to it!", and took off the conical hat he had been wearing the entire time so far to hide his tattoos. The people were shocked and started cowering on the ground, they really seemed to be afraid of Aang.

Thereupon, a man stepped out from the crowd, he was unsympathetic to me from the first sight I took of him, his whole appearance was that of a rigid bureaucrat, he was a guy with whom one could not negotiate fair and peacefully, I could tell that from my own experience with people from this kind. He told Aang that he wasn't welcome in this village and should leave immediately.

That's when I stepped forward and said to the man: "And what exactly gives you the authority to give orders to the Avatar? You have to respect what the Avatar does for the world and its people!"

The man replied snootily: "And who are you to tell me what I have to do? Better go back to your abbey and pray for a better life, boy!"

Had this codger just called me a monk? It was a huge insult for an Assassin to be equated with a spiritual, of course, our opinions were similar, but we had differed in the execution of our goals from time immemorial.

I was about to ram my blade right into the man's face, but once again Katara held me back, as Aang picked up the word again: "And why exactly am I not welcome here?"

The codger, who by the way had revealed himself to be the village's mayor, even though it was obscure to me how a guy like him had managed to become the spokesperson of such a big community of people, explained that Aang, in his former life as Kyoshi, had killed the founder and leader of this village, a man called Chin.

Aang wanted to clear his name and therefore agreed on a court procedure, a statement he probably should have thought about twice before saying it, as he subsequently was arrested and taken to prison, and we didn't have enough money to buy him free.

Now we were in quite the mess! I had already told Katara and Sokka that negotiations with the
mayor would not be worth it, because it was pretty much safe that we wouldn't get anything out of that.

Before he had been taken away, Aang had still been able to tell us that we should try to find evidence for the villagers' accusation, which was why we now were at the edge of the village where a little temple was standing right at the steep coast, in front of the building was a statue of Chin, the founder of the village, who allegedly had been murdered by Avatar Kyoshi. The mayor claimed that Kyoshi had run out of the temple and struck Chin down. The statue had been erected after his death to honor the man.

Sokka and I both took a closer look at the statue and the temple, we were looking for anything anomalous. After a couple of minutes, we both came to the same conclusion at the same time: The statue was made from the same stone as were parts of the temple, it actually wasn't possible that the temple had already been standing when Kyoshi allegedly killed Chin. But how exactly was this finding supposed to help us?

While I was thinking about other possibilities for us to help Aang, Katara and Sokka decided to fly to Kyoshi Island to search and ask for some first-hand evidence. I decided to stay in the village, on the one hand so that Aang would not have to stay here alone, on the other hand to also search for more evidence or something similar on-site.

I wandered through the village, the villagers' hostile eyes gazing at me the entire time, but I didn't care.

I eventually left the village to discuss the situation with Pagan. As we were sitting there, a little outside of the village on a meadow, we both thought about the matter.

"What could I do to help Aang? I can't think of anything, and then, there are those villagers. Dear Spirits, are those some tough nuts to crack, you really can't negotiate with them, not even under circumstances this extreme!"

"And you really haven't noticed any weakness they possibly have yet? Isn't that usually quite the good tactic?"

My face lit up abruptly. My dragon friend was right! An important Assassin rule was: "If you are facing a superior might, always look for weak points, even the tightest web has a hole somewhere, once you have found that hole, victory is basically yours already!"

I rubbed Pagan's snout and said happily: "Thank you, my friend, sometimes I don't know what I would do without you."

"Well, you definitely wouldn't be able to travel around the world as much as now."

We both laughed heartily at that, then I headed back to the village and started my search for holes in the web.

So I wandered through the village again, my eyes on the inhabitants more closely this time. Even though most of them didn't seem to have any kind of specialties or problems, one thing was common among them all: A very close sense of community. Almost nothing happened without everybody agreeing on the decision, the people were really close to each other. Was this what I was looking for? I decided to keep it in mind for the time being and search for other possibilities first.

When I walked through a narrow alley, where currently no other people were, I suddenly heard...
voices speaking. I quickly hid in the shadows of a house entrance and waited. Shortly afterwards, two persons walked past me: One of them was that codger of a mayor, the other person was his wife, as I heard from the conversation they were having when they passed me. He seemed to really love his wife, as he was constantly placing little kisses on her cheek.

I suddenly started grinning broadly, a plan had come to my mind, for the case that things would get out of control. The plan admittedly was quite macabre and brutal, but sometimes things like that were necessary to achieve certain goals.

Some time later, Katara and Sokka returned, they had brought back some very useful information from Kyoshi Island. When they told me about it, I became confident that we would have good chances to win this trial.

This confidence however was shattered like a mirror only shortly afterwards, because the mayor explained to us that justice in this village didn't make use of evidence or something like that, instead there would just be two versions of the story to tell, one by each party, whereupon the jury, just the mayor himself, would decide which party was right and sentence the opposite party.

When I heard that, I felt the urge to strangle the codger with his own intestines! How in the world was something like this allowed to be called justice? It became clear to me: Even with the evidence Katara and Sokka had brought, we probably wouldn't be able to win even a plant pot, therefore I decided that I would translate my plan into action, I only had to wait until just before the trial.

The trial was held the next day. While the people were swarming through the streets towards the temple yard where the trial would be held, I was sitting well-hidden in a backstreet and watched the whole spectacle. I was waiting for the mayor and his wife.

They were among the last to walk towards the temple a couple of minutes later, once they had passed me, I started my action. I snuck after them silently, and luck was on my side, because the mayor started walking faster shortly afterwards, moving away from his wife, since he really had to arrive at the trial in time.

"That's right, old codger! Run to your little trial, you will get the shock of your life in a few minutes!", I thought and laughed maliciously internally.

I looked around one last time, to check if there still was nobody else in the alley, then I snuck over to the mayor's wife and grabbed her from behind with tight grip. She wanted to scream, but I, smart as I was, had pressed my right hand onto her mouth, so all I heard was a quiet, stifled grumble.

"Be quiet and no stupidities or you're dead!", I hissed into her ear, she obeyed with a face full of fear.

I dragged her into a dark corner, laboriously pulled out a cloth ribbon from my pocket and tied it over her mouth. Since both my hands were free again now, I started tying her hands onto her back using one of my metal-enhanced ropes. I left her legs free since she had to walk for what I had planned.

I got a phial filled with a green-yellow-colored liquid out from my bag, drew one of my daggers and poured the liquid onto its blade. The liquid was a special kind of poison which wasn't lethal, but made sure that even the smallest wound would cause almost unbearable pain.

When the whole blade was imbued with the poison, I put the dagger to the woman's throat and
commanded her to walk in the direction of the temple.

We stopped in another alley close to the temple, we remained hidden but were still able to hear and follow the entire trial.

The mayor and Aang both told their version of the story, but when I heard Aang's version, I really wanted to smack my forehead with my palm, with THAT story, he wouldn't even have been able to convince even the stupidest tribunal in the world, and unfortunately, the one we were in front of here right now wasn't that!

Of course the mayor declared Aang guilty, even though I was sure he would have done that either way, even if Aang would have told his version of the story without any flaws or mistakes.

But Katara and Sokka didn't want to give up, they still had an ace up their sleeves: From Kyoshi Island, they had brought a costume of Avatar Kyoshi which Aang donned now, although I didn't quite understand how that should help us.

But I got my answer only moments later: Suddenly, strong winds arose around Aang, the winds eventually turned into clouds, and when those had cleared again, no less than Avatar Kyoshi herself was standing where Aang had stood! I couldn't believe it at first, but Avatar Kyoshi actually started talking, she spoke about how she had killed Chin the Conqueror to stop him from conquering her village, that had also been the reason for the creation of Kyoshi Island.

I was speechless! Technically speaking, Aang had just confessed the crime! That however spelled trouble, since we had nothing up our sleeves anymore, or had we?

Shortly afterwards, the villagers brought a big wheel that depicted several hard punishments to the yard. Aang should spin the wheel to decide his punishment himself.

Just when the mayor wanted to say something about the wheel, I took the chance and stepped out of my hiding place, the mayor's tied-up wife still in tow.

"Not so fast! I have another objection!", I said loudly and presented the mayor's wife to everybody present.

All of them, even Aang, Katara and Sokka, were completely struck with shock!

The mayor, the most shocked of them all, stammered: "What did you do to my wife? Set her free immediately!"

"Only if you release the Avatar!"

"Never! This criminal has to take responsibility for his crime!"

"Then you leave me no other choice!"

Even in the heat of battle, this codger still had the nerves to parade his disinterested bureaucrat personality: "Oh please, what are you going to do? You're just a monk and we all know that monks don't use violence!"

Now my patience finally snapped: "Shut the hell up and stop calling me a monk! If you knew what I really am, you would shiver in fear and beg for mercy!"
"And? What exactly are you going to do?", the mayor asked and laughed spitefully.

With every passing second, my eyes turned darker, but also more sadistic.

I pulled up the woman's sleeve, grabbed my dagger and shouted: "This!"

Using the dagger, I cut a long wound into the woman's arm, she screamed in pain, but because of the ribbon that was still tied on her mouth, it sounded heavily muffled.

However, what was way more horrible for the spectators anyway was the fact that the wound started changing its color shortly after I had made the cut, and green streaks started appearing on the woman's entire arm.

I started cutting her with the dagger in even more places, soon the woman's entire body was covered with green wounds. She was cowering on the ground, the pain had to be unbearable.

I grinned at the mayor, whose eyes had turned more and more shocked over the time, sadistically and asked: "So, have you changed your mind?"

He almost wasn't able to utter a proper sentence anymore and just stammered: "The Avatar has to take responsibility..."

That was already enough for me. I immediately said: "Obviously not! Guess I have to kick things up another notch!"

I put the woman's hand on the ground and held it in place while slowly moving my dagger towards her fingers. The mayor's eyes turned to blank horror at once.

I asked again: "And now?"

The mayor couldn't take it anymore, I could tell just by looking at him, yet he still shook his head very lightly.

Thereupon I said: "Then I have to do it!"

I lifted the dagger back into the air a little more and then rammed it down into the ground, cutting off the little finger on the woman's hand!

Now the mayor finally had enough, he dropped to his knees and cried: "Alright! Take the Avatar and leave! But please, stop hurting my wife, I can't take it anymore!"

"See, that wasn't so hard, was it?", I said nonchalantly, removed the woman's bonds from her mouth and hands and let her go.

But internally, I was still grinning sadistically, because I wasn't finished just yet! When the mayor and his wife had shared a short embrace and then turned their backs on me, I extended both my arm blades and rammed them right into the couple's backs! The crowd screamed out in shock when the mayor and his wife both collapsed to the ground, fatally wounded.

I turned around to face the villagers and said: "Let this be a lesson for all of you! Live your life in a decent way, then you will find peace! Live your own life and the Spirits will have mercy! Honor and thank the Avatar for his actions instead of despising him for a crime that happened centuries ago! Change your lives! Become better human beings!"
With these words I turned back around towards my friends, who were also looking quite shocked, and said: "Come on, let's go, there's nothing left to do for us here anymore."

Like in trance, Aang, Katara and Sokka followed me out of the village to the meadow where our animals were waiting.

When he had reached them, Katara was the first to find her voice again, she asked: "What was that? Why did you do that?"

My answer was calm: "Special times call for special measures sometimes. Didn't you see what kind of punishments were on that wheel? Those people were willing to kill Aang and plunge the world into chaos forever, just because of a crime that happened centuries ago. I saved Aang, just like my destiny demands of me, and also gave the inhabitants of this village an important life lesson. I don't know what problem you see with this."

Aang answered instead of Katara: "I have to admit that he is right, Katara, he saved me, and those people really lived their lives quite wrong. But I know what you mean: This method, the torture and the killing of the mayor and his wife, you really didn't have to do this, Yulizan."

"Like I said, Aang: Special times call for special measures. You really think that the guy would have released you if it wasn't for me? Also, he taught the people a wrong view of the world, he deserved to die! You three may not endorse or even share my opinion, but if this team shall continue like it did so far, you have to learn to at least accept my views."

I saw it in my friends' eyes that it was hard for them to digest my words, but after some time, they seemed to have managed it.

Shortly afterwards, we rose back to the air and continued our journey.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: A new team member
We continued our journey, still looking for an earth bending teacher for Aang.

Our next stop was the larger town of Gaoling. Here I had hope for the first time in a long time that we could achieve some kind of progress, as it was way more likely to find an earth bender in a town than somewhere in the middle of nowhere out in the country.

We reached the city without problems and acted natural at first.

Katara and Aang bought new supplies once again, I scouted around and Sokka ... yeah, Sokka seemed to have something really special in mind.

In one of the many shops in town, he found a carrier bag which he absolutely wanted to buy, however the price the merchant demanded was pretty steep, that's why Sokka tried to negotiate with the aim to push the price down. However, the negotiations dragged on enormously, which was why Katara, Aang and I soon became bored and left the shop.

While we stood outside the shop and waited for Sokka, I asked Aang: "Do you think that we will finally be lucky and find a suitable teacher for you around here?"

"I don't know, but the chances are definitely higher than somewhere else."

I looked up to the sky, time continued to trickle away, more and more against us. With every passing day without any kind of success, the Fire Nation's power grew, the comet's appearance came closer and closer. Should Aang not be able to learn how to bend every element within the next months, the world would be lost!

Shortly afterwards, my thoughts were interrupted when a man clad in grey clothes approached us and handed Aang a piece of paper.

Katara and I looked over Aang's shoulder to read for ourselves what was written on the paper. It was an advertising pamphlet, for an earth bending school!

My mood brightened immediately, I said: "That's perfect! Where else but in an earth bending school could you learn the art of earth bending better?"

But Aang was skeptical: "Well, I'm not sure..."

But Katara agreed with me: "Yulizan is right, you should at least try it, who knows how long it would take us to find a good private teacher for you."

That's when Aang realized as well that a simple look in the school couldn't hurt.

A few moments later, Sokka finally came out of the shop again, the bag over his shoulder.

I looked at him skeptical and asked: "So, how much was the guy willing to take off the original price?"
"More than enough! Almost had to pay only half!", Sokka declared proudly before he began to pose with and show off the bag.

I simply nodded in appreciation, I was noticeably impressed, I honestly hadn't expected such negotiation skills from Sokka.

We told him about the advertising pamphlet and the earth bending school, he also agreed that Aang should at least try it out.

So we now headed towards this earth bending school.

Some time later, we had found the school.

We went to see the owner and teacher, a certain Master Yu, Aang handed him the pamphlet which included a free training hour.

Yu accepted the pamphlet with a look in his eyes that I knew just too well: This man was craving for nothing but money!

I hated people like this, who just wanted the one thing, especially when they basically had the same profession as oneself. I often had crossed paths with assassins-for-hire and other mercenaries in the past already, and I had hated them all! People like those were thoroughly dishonoring us Assassins, who were fighting for honor and peace!

With a slimy grin on his face, Yu assigned Aang a personal training space and school uniform. Katara and Sokka decided to watch Aang during his training, I however had to get out of this "school" as fast as possible, I couldn't and didn't want to endure this atmosphere any longer. I darted a hostile look at Yu as I walked out the school grounds.

Outside, I leaned against the wall, slid down and tried to relax a bit while sitting. I took a sip of water from my bottle, I had to fight the feeling of nausea that the slimy Yu had caused in my body. The cool water felt nice, fresh and pleasant in my throat and my stomach, I was immediately able to relax even better.

I didn't have to wait for long, because only a few minutes later, Aang, Katara and Sokka came out of the school again. Aang said that this definitely was not the right place for him to learn earth bending; also, Yu had tried to squeeze the money for a year-long membership out of Aang.

That was the final straw for me, I wanted to run into the school with full steam and cram so much money into that slimy vulture's throat that he would suffocate agonizingly, but Aang held me back and said:

"Let it go! He's not worth it!"

I slowly calmed myself down again, followed Aang's word and started walking after my friends as we made our way through the city once again.

While we were walking and thought about what could be our next possible destination, two young earth benders who excitedly talked about something walked past us.

We picked up something that sounded like "earth bending tournament" when passing by, so we stopped and asked the two what exactly they had talked about, but they just said in a rude tone that it was none of our business.
But I of course knew a method to make people like these two talk nonetheless. I walked up to the pair, raised my hands so that they were almost directly in their faces and then created two flames right in front of their noses.

When I saw their terror-stricken faces, I asked: "And? Do you want to tell us now?"

Thereupon, the two immediately started talking a mile a minute and told us everything, down to the last detail, about a big underground tournament. The entrance was located just outside of town, underneath a large rock.

We thanked our two chatty informants and headed off, to try and find that entrance and the tournament.

After we had left the town, we also found the ominous rock relatively fast.

Inside the rock was the entrance to a big long tunnel. We entered it, I had to make some light with my fire, otherwise we probably wouldn't have been able to see anything.

At the end of the tunnel, the site of the tournament came into view and it really impressed us all: It was a large arena with multiple spectator stands; luminous crystals, which made the whole place appear almost as bright as daylight, grew out from the ceiling.

We looked for some seats in one of the stands and then eagerly waited for the games to begin. The first fight was contested between two fighters called The Boulder and The Hippo, with The Boulder picking up the victory fairly fast and easily.

Aang said: "This guy is only listening to his muscles, he's not a real bender in my eyes."

Sokka on the other hand was highly thrilled and entertained by the fighter's abilities, whereat Katara and I only shook our heads uncomprehendingly.

The Boulder won all of his next fights as well and eventually reached the finale in which he would fight against the yet unbeaten champion of the tournament: The Blind Bandit.

When said fighter entered the arena a few minutes later, all of us were more than surprised: Instead of a big muscular man or something like that, a little girl, not much older than Aang, was standing down there in the arena, but on top of that, her eyes were milky white, she really was blind!

"And how exactly is she able to bend like this?", I asked myself.

But Aang was not interested in this aspect, all he did was staring at the girl for a few minutes, then he finally said: "It's her!"

"Who?", Katara, Sokka and I asked with one voice.

"The girl! She's the one from the vision I had in the swamp. Remember what Huu said? He said that I would meet that girl some time in the future, and here we are!"

I was still skeptical, especially when I thought about the state the girl was in, but my doubts were brought to an abrupt end when she defeated The Boulder in mere seconds.

I was speechless! Although I had no idea how she had done it, now it was obvious: Her powers as an earth bender were incredibly impressive!

Aang seemed to have noticed my astonishment and explained: "She represents what Bumi
explained to me. She waits for the right moment and listens to nothing but the earth itself."

Of course! Now I realized it too. How else should the girl have known where The Boulder had been standing when she wasn't able to see him? She had sensed him through the earth. Simple, but ingenious!

I answered Aang: "If I didn't know it better, I'd say you might have found your teacher."

Aang agreed and decided that he would talk to the girl after the tournament.

But when we searched for her later, she was nowhere to be found.

Disappointed, we returned into the town.

The next day, we began asking around in the town if somebody knew the mysterious girl known as The Blind Bandit. But we had little to no success.

Only one man was able to help us at least a little bit, because when Aang described his vision, in which, alongside the girl, a flying boar had also appeared, the man said that the powerful Beifong family had a boar as their heraldic animal.

Therefore, we decided to pay the mansion of the family a little visit, to take a closer look at it.

In the evening, "the best time for a scouting mission" according to Sokka, we eventually closed in on the mansion, but the sight that greeted us was a little frightening: There were quite a lot of guards posted everywhere on the grounds.

We rounded the outer wall and eventually found ourselves at the backside of the mansion, where fortunately no guards seemed to be posted.

Aang decided that we should climb over the wall, better said he, Katara and Sokka would do that, while I would act as our guard and remain outside, to look out for other guards who potentially came along here.

Shortly after my friends had climbed over the wall, I heard voices, followed by a call and Aang, Katara and Sokka who hastily climbed back over the wall.

They called out to me to run away fast, which I did immediately.

When we had brought a good distance between us and the mansion again, I asked my breathless friends: "What the hell was that? You were inside there for less than five minutes!"

Aang panted: "The girl ... was in the garden ... saw us... called guards ... had to flee..."

Alright, that was a good reason. But I dug deeper: "Have you at least achieved a little something?"

Aang answered, already a little calmer: "Yes, we told her that I'm the Avatar and that she's most likely the earth bending teacher we've been searching for so long. Oh, and her name is Toph, she seemingly is a member of the Beifong family."

"Well, it's something.", I thought to myself.

"And what are we going to do now?", I asked.
But when Aang told me his new plan ... no, that simply couldn't work!

My doubts maintained when Aang marched towards the main gate just like that and introduced himself as the Avatar who would like to meet the Beifong family.

But, to my biggest surprise, nothing happened and we actually were welcomed very friendly.

We were introduced to the family, I of course concealed my Assassin affiliation again, luckily I had taken off my hood already when we still had been outside the house.

The Beifongs welcomed us and even invited us to eat dinner with them and spend the night at the mansion.

Had I been skeptical about Aang's plan at first, now I was completely on his side, because now I finally had the chance to put myself into the shoes of my old life again! At least for one evening and one night, I would be able to live like I did before my family's death, this prospect put me in a happy and excited mood!

However, my mood turned a little sour again when we all came together for dinner and I noticed that the slimy Master Yu was present as well. I of course maintained my good manners, for the sake of our hosts, on my inside however I was boiling. It actually went so far that I was tempted to slip some poison into Yu's food during an unobserved moment, but for the well-being of us all, I was able to hold myself back.

During the meal, we talked with the Beifongs a lot; after some time, Mister Beifong asked me: "I have noticed your excellent manners, young master Yulizan, do you hail from a reputable family?"

"In a way, yes, my family always did well for itself, if you mean that, and I have experienced a pleasant education."

"And it was worth while, as I can see."

We talked about many different topics, I of course avoided everything that would have been too sensitive and therefore for example concealed the circumstances of my family's death and who I really was.

But eventually, an altercation happened: Aang and Toph suddenly charged at each other, after Aang wanted to tell what he knew about Toph.

After the two had been separated again, the dinner was called off and the Beifongs ordered their servants to show us our rooms.

I stretched myself out on the soft sleeping mat in the room I had been assigned, it really was a nice feeling that heavily reminded me of my childhood.

The Beifongs seemed to be nice people, however, I asked myself if they knew what great of an earth bender their daughter was. They at least knew that she had the gift, there wasn't any other logical explanation for Yu's presence, but they definitely didn't know that Toph was fighting other powerful benders in an underground fighting arena.

As I thought about many different things, like I always did when I had nothing important to do, I suddenly heard strange calls from the lower floors. I jumped to my feet, met with Katara and Sokka in the hallway and made my way downstairs together with them.
We were shocked when we heard what had happened: Aang and Toph, who had been in the garden together, had been abducted! The abductors demanded 500 gold pieces, the hand-over should happen in the arena.

The three of us immediately promised the Beifongs our assistance, and therefore, shortly afterwards, we all left the mansion and made our way towards the underground arena.

We reached the arena without problems and the hand-over also seemed to work, once we handed over the money, Toph was released immediately, Aang however was nowhere to be seen.

I stepped forward and asked the abductors, who by the way consisted of all the fighters from the arena: "Where is Aang?"

The leader, a certain Xin Fu, said that they would hand the Avatar over to the Fire Nation, as they would pay better.

I became furious, created two big flames in my hands and said with an almost thundering voice: "Let the Avatar go or I will tear you all apart piece by piece!"

The earth benders laughed at me, but before I was able to unleash my flames, all the abductors suddenly were catapulted into the air by earth chunks.

I looked around in surprise and saw Toph who was standing next to me.

She grinned and said: "7-0, I win."

I was once again impressed by the young girl's abilities and also had to laugh internally, I really liked her personality.

Shortly afterwards, Katara and Sokka returned with Aang, and so we left the arena again.

When we were back at the Beifong mansion, Toph confessed everything to her parents. How she had led a secret double life as an arena fighter to flee her everyday routine; she hoped that her parents would understand, but they didn't.

Her parents thought that the freedom they had given her had only endangered her even more, they decided that from now on she would be monitored even more strictly. They also accused us that we had endangered Toph and ordered the guards to escort us out of the house.

Aang was visibly disappointed, just like Katara and myself; we had all three hoped that Toph could be Aang's teacher.

We left the mansion and returned to our animals. Pagan immediately noticed how disappointed I was and tried to cheer me up by softly nudging me with his snout. I smiled for a short moment, but it didn't help.

It looked like our search had once again not been crowned with success, when we saw Toph running towards us from a distance.

When she had reached us, Aang asked: "What are you doing here? I thought your parents had you monitored the whole time."

"I was able to persuade them in the end after all.", Toph replied.
Unlike my three friends, I was immediately able to tell that she was lying, but I kept this to myself and again laughed internally, this girl really was sly like a fox, she and I would surely get along very well.

Happy and content that we finally had been successful again at last, we mounted our animals and rose into the night sky, ready to continue our way through the Earth Kingdom.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Pursued!
During the following time, our journey went on way better than before, Toph really was a great addition to our team.

She and I got along magnificently, just like I had imagined, we talked very often and made jokes together. Also, I was repeatedly impressed by her large enjoyment of life despite her physical limitations, it really was nice to see. And of course she also was a powerful bender and fighter, she would teach Aang well, I was sure about that.

In addition to all our jokes, a friendly competition between Toph and me developed as well, we always tried to outdo the other in something when we had the chance to. A very interesting chance offered itself when one day we took a break in the afternoon, about one week after we had left Gaoling. Toph and I immediately noticed that many apple trees were growing in the area surrounding our resting place.

She grinned at me and asked: "Whoever can collect more?"

"You're on!", I replied, already filled with thirst for action.

We dashed off and started collecting apples as if there was no tomorrow!

After about an hour, during which I had walked a little further away from our resting place on my search for more apple trees, I returned, both my arms filled with apples.

Toph was already casually sitting next to a pretty big pile of apples; I had watched her in the beginning, she used a very interesting technique for collecting: She simply bent the trees into the earth far enough for her to easily reach the tree crowns and pluck the apples. Meanwhile, I had used my weapons most of the time, to reach even the most remote fruits.

I dropped my loot next to Toph's pile, pulled the arrow out from one of the last apples and said: "Final count: 42!"

Toph answered: "42? Wow! That's not bad, my sly little hood-wearer. I myself am holding proudly in my hand right now number 43!"

Toph threw the apple into the air triumphantly, I pulled a rope arrow out of my quiver with lightning-like reflexes and shot it with such skill that the arrow hit the apple mid-air and hauled it straight into my hand.

"43!", I said teasingly and took a generous bite out of the apple.

Toph countered slightly annoyed: "That was mine!"

"But it was in the air, and the air is neutral ground."

With a blank expression on her face, Toph bent a little earth pillar out from underneath of one of my apples, the fruit flew through the air and landed right in her lap.

"Now we're even.", she laughed and took a bite out of her apple as well.
I laughed as well and sat down next to her, we started another of our lengthy conversations. It really was just nice!

Our journey went on without any problems during the following time, until we set up our camp for the night one evening. In the corner of my eye, I saw Aang looking at Appa with a worried face, I went over and asked:

"What is it? Something with Appa?"

"He's losing fur, that means he's either nervous or very tired. Or both."

"Well, I don't know why he should be nervous, nothing has happened to us in a long time."

While I said this, I tapped my wooden bow three times with my knuckles.

"And if something unusual would be close, I would have noticed it by now."

Aang rubbed his chin pensively and eventually said: "I think you're right, he probably really is just tired, we should just let him sleep."

After that, Aang went to build up the tent while I also returned to mine and Pagan's spot. While I was walking, I suddenly heard and saw Katara and Toph who were arguing loudly. I walked up to the girls, but before I reached them, Katara walked away with a seething look in her eyes, she even bumped me in the shoulder as she walked past me.

I asked Toph: "What's wrong with her?"

The earth bender answered relaxed: "Oh, don't worry, she will calm down. She tried to explain to me how you guys always share the work, but she forgot the most important part: I'm blind, I most likely would be of little to no help with most things."

She was right with that, however, I didn't know why Katara had been this upset. Could it be that she was overtired? Over the course of the last days, we had always been on the ground to sleep at night, but of course I could not assess if and how long she had slept.

Fortunately, I didn't have to spend many thoughts about the whole matter, because some time later, Katara returned and even apologized to Toph. I was reassured, the atmosphere was calm again. I took a last look at Toph, she bent herself a tent out of earth to sleep inside, then I laid down to sleep myself.

In the middle of the night, I suddenly woke up after I've had a vision in one of my dreams: Something big and mechanical was approaching us! I jumped to my feet and saw that Toph was awake as well.

She told me: "I have felt vibrations in the earth! Something big is coming this way!"

"I know, I've seen it in a vision."

"I think we should leave this place as fast as possible!"

I agreed with her on that. We woke up the others, hastily packed up our things and rose up into the night sky.

We flew for several hours without finding another suitable place for landing, more precisely for
continuing our sleep. All of us were pretty tired already, no doubts about it, when I looked at the
others, I saw half closed eyes everywhere.

I myself could keep myself awake good enough to maintain a good look over the whole situation
thanks to my training, and that eventually paid off, because shortly after I discovered a larger
clearing, we decided to land there.

I wanted to continue my sleep as soon as possible, I put my mat down as soon as we touched the
ground and laid down. But unfortunately, I wasn't able to sleep, because Katara and Toph once
again started arguing. I didn't want to go through this whole thing another time, but luckily Aang
helped me by trying to mediate between the two girls, he was eventually able to calm both of them
down again. As soon as it was quiet in our camp again, my eyes closed and I fell asleep.

But once again I wasn't able to get a refreshing sleep, because only some time later I was woken up
again by screaming, this time by Sokka.

Apparently, Katara had been flung through the air by Toph and had landed on her sleeping
brother.

I slowly started to lose my nerves, but once again wasn't able to intervene when Toph said:
"That thing that's chasing us is close by again!"

Once again we packed our things and continued to fly away.

I was so tired now that I decided to use a little trick to stay awake. I took some dried herbs, a little
bowl and my water bottle, poured some water into the bowl, threw the herbs into it and heated up
the whole thing in my palms. Only seconds later I had a nice bowl of hot tea. I slowly drank the hot
liquid and immediately felt refreshed and recovered, I now was the only one from the team who
was in this state.

The others talked, half asleep more or less, about that machine, what it could be and why it was
chasing us. Katara brought forward the argument that it could be Zuko, but I already had a more
concrete idea, which however I would keep to myself for the time being, I didn't want to provoke
the others even more.

Shortly after, we landed once again, but this time we weren't able to do anything, because only
moments after our landing, the machine broke through some trees. It looked similar to the tanks
that Teo's father had built in the Northern Air Temple, however, it was equipped with different
weapons.

After breaking through the trees, it stopped only a few meters in front of us. Because of my wake
up-tea, I was immediately ready for combat, while the others needed a little longer.

Shortly after, a gate opened on the front side of the machine, out came three mongoose lizards. But
the animals were not the point of interest, their riders were. They were Azula, Mai and Ty Lee, the
three girls we had already encountered in Omashu. My eyes wandered over to Ty Lee almost
instinctively, but I was able to collect my thoughts again relatively fast, now was not the time for
such things!

In the meantime, Azula had noticed me, her mouth was agape, she yelled: "You!"

I grinned and replied carelessly: "Pleased to see me again, princess? In case you forgot: You and I
have a date! With death!"

I created two white fires in my hands, Azula's lizard took two steps backwards.

Aang said: "I think a retreat is the best option!"

I answered: "Just go! I take care of this problem and then catch up with you guys!"

Thereupon my four friends returned to Appa, whilst Pagan appeared by my side, the two of us now stood face to face with the three girls and their lizards. The lizards and Pagan stared at each other with poisonous eyes, all three lizards hissed, but Pagan was completely unimpressed.

He said: "What an insult to my species!" and uttered a loud roar, the lizards started cowering on the ground in fear.

I grinned at Azula again and said: "Three down, three to go!"

Azula became incredibly angry, I saw it in every fiber of her face. I turned around for a moment and saw that Appa was already in the air again.

I jumped onto Pagan and said: "Date postponed, princess.", before we took off and followed our friends.

During our flight, Pagan and I noticed that Appa became more and more tired, his flight had become very wobbly and limp, the bison would not last much longer. When I looked at the horizon, I saw the sun beginning to rise over the sea. We had been on the run the entire night!

"Thank the tea!", I thought.

Some time later, Appa was done and slowly started sinking towards the ground until he hit it, already asleep.

Aang noticed the obvious: "Appa is tired."

But I believed that the bison, just like us during the night, would not be able to sleep very soundly, as another vociferous argument broke out between everybody.

Now I truly wasn't able to take that any longer. I marched towards my friends, both determined and annoyed, and screamed from the top of my lungs: "That's enough!"

My scream was filled with so much power that a cloud of fire emerged from my mouth. All four immediately stopped arguing and stared at me in shock. I breathed heavily, the fire breathing had cost me loads of energy, I had to sit down.

Toph was the first to find her voice again: "He's right. That's enough, I'm leaving!"

I could not believe what I just had heard! But Toph actually turned around and left the clearing we had landed on. I tried to call after her, but nothing but hot air came out of my mouth.

I took a sip of water to moisten my throat again, then I said annoyed: "Well done, Katara! We finally find an earth bending teacher for Aang and you have nothing better to do but to chase her away again!"

Katara looked to the ground ashamed and answered abashed: "I'm sorry, I really don't know what happened with me there."
She looked like she really meant it, I decided to believe her this time. We all agreed that we now had one single goal: finding Toph.

Before we headed off however, Aang and Katara washed Appa, which was also to wake him up at least a little.

As they washed him, an idea came to Aang's mind: He wanted to use the fur that Appa had lost while washing to place a false trail for Azula. I didn't quite dislike the idea per se, but I wasn't sure if Azula would actually fall for something like this.

Aang decided that he would fly to the left, Appa to the right. I wanted to accompany Aang, just like my task demanded, but he assured me multiple times that he was ready to take care of himself for at least some time now.

Even though I didn't like the thought of leaving Aang alone, Pagan and I started following Katara and Sokka on the search for Toph.

We continued to fly over the country for some time, looking for Toph, but we had no success. But we still weren't able to catch any breath, because only shortly after, I felt a hostile presence close to us. I looked down and saw the mongoose lizards of Mai and Ty Lee directly beneath us.

I informed Katara and Sokka, the two immediately tried to get Appa to fly faster. But the bison had not been able to recover all of his strength yet and had to make an emergency landing on the bank of a river. When Pagan and I landed as well, we saw Mai and Ty Lee on the other bank.

Sokka groaned exhausted: "Very good, one problem less to worry about."

But I of course knew that the girls would not give up that easily, and I was right, because only seconds later, the mongoose lizards showed their power: They ran over the water surface with crazy speed.

I got ready for combat, as Mai was hurling multiple throwing knives at us in a big radius while her lizard was still running with full speed. I concentrated briefly and created a wall of fire sand in front of us, it stopped the knives and burned them to ash.

Mai and Ty Lee had reached our bank, jumped off their lizards and attacked us! Ty Lee immediately stormed right towards me, her fingers ready for the chi blockade. But this time I was another step ahead of her and simply grabbed her hand mid-attack.

She didn't know what hit her, I held her wrist with an iron grip and said: "No, no, no! Not like this, girl!"

While I was holding her, I looked directly into her eyes, I saw the sparkle they emitted, it was beautiful! Just like everything on her, she was perhaps the most beautiful girl I had ever met.

What was the most interesting thing however: She seemed to stare at me as well, possibly with intentions.

Nevertheless, she was my enemy once again, therefore I came to my senses shortly after and hurled her back with full power, but not too hard, so that she landed in the river. Mai followed shortly after, that was thanks to Appa, he had swirled her through the air using his tail.

Our attackers had been defeated, now we had to continue our search for Toph and now also Aang.
Mai and Ty Lee waded out of the river sopping wet, Mai cursed:

"Damn it! That's the second time we have lost against those Water Tribe jerks! We can't let this happen again!"

Ty Lee replied: "Yes, you're right. But honestly: That guy in the hood is very cute..."

Mai looked at Ty Lee in disbelief: "What?"

'I've seen his eyes, they were practically glowing with strength, with passion, I have never seen anything like this in my life!'

Mai grabbed Ty Lee's sleeve and said: "Let's just go, we need to leave this place!"

We headed off to help Aang by following the route he had taken before to place the trail. For quite some time, we saw nothing but forest beneath us, but then we finally discovered an old abandoned town. And in said town, there was a fight happening, it was visible even from a distance.

Blue and yellow flames whipped through the air, I was immediately alarmed: "Azula is down there!"

We came in to land and immediately saw Aang being cornered by Azula and also Zuko!

Katara jumped off Appa's back and hurled a water fountain at Azula. Thereupon, Sokka and I also entered the fight; shortly after, Toph and, to the surprise of all of us, General Iroh of the Fire Nation appeared on the scene as well.

We all stood in front of Azula and created a wall of all four elements in front of her, using our united bending abilities, she had no other choice but to surrender shortly after.

General Iroh stopped his fire beam as a result, however, Azula ambushed and cut him down shortly after. Zuko left to look after him, we continued to hold our powers up.

Eventually, Sokka intervened as well and threw his boomerang, which however resulted in nothing but an explosion, Azula used the confusion to escape.

We decided to leave the place, Katara glanced over to the injured general, I put my hand on her shoulder and said: "Let them, they will be alright."

Thereupon Katara followed the rest of us when we returned to our animals. We once again flew for quite some time until we finally found a suitable spot in the mountains where we finally could sleep and this time, to my greatest relief, I wasn't woken up by anything.

Of course, I dreamt of Ty Lee, it could not actually be coincidence that I had met her again, maybe there was more to my father's words then I had thought. I decided to wait and see what destiny would have in store for me and her.

My main attention definitely had to continue to be on my mission, which was going well so far. The next step would now be: Toph had to teach Aang earth bending. And as far as I knew the
young Avatar and the blind girl, this was not going to be easy for both of them.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Training and knowledge
The plan should be translated into action only a few days later.

We had travelled into a valley that appeared like a natural quarry, there was gravel, rubble and large boulders everywhere.

Toph had explained to me that a place like this was perfect to introduce somebody into the art of earth bending, as every kind of necessary material could be found here.

I of course was happy that Aang finally would be able to start learning the art of earth bending, I really hoped that he would learn it relatively fast so that he could move on to the fire and eventually be ready to face the Fire Lord, the sooner the better!

The morning after the first night in the quarry, Aang woke up very early and started fidgeting through our camp, eventually he woke all of us up. But I wasn't angry at him, I was happy that he was this willing to learn from Toph.

But his anticipation was brought to an abrupt end when Toph told him that his first lesson would be the simple task of moving a rock. She began to instruct him the physical and psychological basics of earth bending, one had to become a rock themselves to be able to move a rock.

This concept strongly reminded me of the fire bender's creed: One had to feel the energy and the heat of the sun flowing through one's body before one was able to unleash the flames. In the beginning, the biggest difficulty was to find the right moment to release the fire; too early and no flame whatsoever emerged, too late and the flame became either too weak or uncontrollable. During my training, I eventually had stopped counting how many white flames had blown up in my face during all the lessons.

And Aang now had to learn as well that basically nothing worked on the first try, because when he tried to move the rock, he was catapulted backwards instead and smashed right against Appa. I had to grin, oh yeah, there was still a lot of work in store for the young Avatar.

After Aang had recovered from his little involuntary flight, Toph explained the problem to him: He was still thinking like an air bender, smart and complicated, earth bending however was founded on simple thoughts.

I saw parallels to fire bending once again: The fire bender had to fill his mind with either pure willpower, determination or anger to unleash the full power of his flames. I most definitely had never lacked this, I had always imagined that the Fire Lord was standing right in front of me and I could have my revenge with every training doll that had went up in flames by my hand during my training. My thoughts had always been filled with anger and determination, my flames had reached their full potential.

To give Aang a better feeling of the earth, Toph assigned him a series of tasks, like carrying a little boulder around the camp or balancing on top of two pillars made out of clay. In the beginning, the young Avatar had his problems, but the more times he repeated the tasks, the better he became. I was pleased, we definitely made good progress.
After Aang had mastered all of Toph's tasks after several hours, the girl decided to give him another challenge: Instead of moving a stationary rock, he now should try to stop a moving rock.

Aang asked: "And from where exactly do we get a moving rock?"

Toph pointed towards one of the surrounding hills, a ball-shaped rock was sitting in state on the summit.

She said: "I will make the rock roll down from the hill and you will stop it."

Aang took his position: "Alright, let's do this!"

"Just a moment."

Toph came over to me and asked: "Can I borrow one of your cloth ribbons?"

"Sure, but why?"

"You'll see soon."

I fetched one of the ribbons, like the one I had used to tie down the wife of the mayor, from my bag and followed Toph.

When we had reached Aang, Toph said: "Blindfold him."

Aang and I looked at each other confused, but I did as told and tied the ribbon around the young Avatar's eyes.

After that, I took a few steps back while Toph made her way to the top of the hill to set the rock in motion. Aang was still standing in the same spot as before, but ever since I had blindfolded him I felt his tension increasing continuously.

On the summit of the hill, Toph now set the ball-shaped rock in motion. It rolled down the hill faster and faster, straight towards Aang. But the young air bender panicked and instead of stopping the rock using earth bending, he jumped over it.

As Aang was landing again, I saw a furious Toph marching down from the hill.

She ripped the ribbon off Aang's eyes and shouted: "What was that? You were supposed to stop it! You will never achieve anything if you keep this passive attitude! Weakling!"

Ouch! That hit home! Toph stomped away angrily, Aang just hung his head and walked away as well.

I followed Toph and tried to calm her down.

We walked side by side, I said: "Don't be too hard on the boy. Don't forget, he has a pretty heavy weight to carry, it's no ordinary task being the savior of the world."

Toph chuckled and said: "I guess you're right, but still, he's incredibly difficult to train, it looks like he doesn't take the whole thing as serious as he should."

"You're right with that, I mean, I witnessed his water bending training, he has always been like this, a little slow on the uptake, fixated on his air bending abilities too much."
Toph looked at me, as far as one could say that about her, she turned her head towards me and asked: "Tell me, how was your fire bending training? Did you shatter your master's nerves as well?"

I playfully punched her in the arm and answered calmly: "To be honest: No. While my master had always been very strict, he also was incredibly patient. He made me repeat every exercise over and over again, until I was able to pull it off as good as he wanted, and if it took me days. I was always pretty worn-out after that and had to recover for the next day, but it was all worth it, now I'm one of the most powerful fire benders in the world."

Toph nodded and became pensive: "Maybe I also should approach Aang and his training a little different from now on, we won't achieve anything with my current plan."

"That's a good and smart decision, an old Assassin saying also says: "Be variable, then your opponent will not stand a chance." Maybe this can also be applied onto learning and teaching."

"I will at least try it."

In the evening, we all gathered in the camp, that means, almost all of us, because Sokka, who had gone out for hunting a few hours ago, had still not returned and Katara slowly became noticeably worried.

She and Aang decided to search for Sokka, I wanted to come along as well, but the two reassured me that they would manage to make it on their own. Therefore Toph and I stayed at the camp fire alone.

We talked and ate nuts that Toph cracked using Aang's glider, I roasted some of the nuts in the fire, we enjoyed the time and continued to talk about Aang's training. But after some time, we heard strange noises in the forest, whereupon we stood up and made our way into the forest to check what was happening.

When we reached the source of the noises, my breath stopped for a second: Sokka was stuck in a quicksand pit up to his neck, Aang was standing in front of him, his eyes were fixated onto a large saber-tooth moose lion which stood only a few meters away.

I of course wanted to charge right at the beast and strike it down, but Toph held me back: "Wait! I want to know what Aang is going to do."

I grudgingly obeyed the young earth bender's order and continued to stare at the animal, which shortly after started to charge right at Aang and Sokka, only to be launched back into the forest by a strong wind blast of Aang.

Toph's mood suddenly brightened, she walked onto the clearing while slowly clapping her hands and said: "Very good, you did it! You think like an earth bender. Even though you used air, you did keep your position and that's what matters. Now try to move the rock again."

Without any objections, Aang marched back into our camp, heading straight for the rock. He took up his position with firm stand and actually managed to move the rock this time. We were thrilled, it had worked, Aang now was able to bend the earth, now he only had to learn the more advanced techniques, but I was confident that this would proceed without any major problems.

As we had managed the hardest part for now, the following time was pretty relaxed. We continued travelling and enjoyed the peaceful time we had.
But Sokka once again found a reason to nag. He said that we should concentrate on our mission more and try to find information that could help us against the Fire Nation.

I was torn on this matter: On the one hand, I of course wanted to defeat the Fire Nation and therefore found Sokka's claim to be justified. On the other hand, I wanted to enjoy the peaceful free time, because it was definitely possible that we wouldn't be able to have such an opportunity for relaxation again in the future.

One of our next destinations was the Misty Palms Oasis on the edge of the massive Si Wong Desert. Katara had heard that this supposedly was a nice place to relax.

But the atmosphere was all but relaxing when we arrived there. The whole area looked pretty dilapidated, as did the bar we entered.

In there, a guest bumped into Aang and spilled his drink on Aang's robe. When Aang dried the liquid using his air bending, the guest was fascinated. He introduced himself as Professor Zei from the University of Ba Sing Se, the Earth Kingdom capital. Sokka asked him if he had a map of the oasis' surrounding area, the professor immediately unrolled such a map and opened it out in front of us all. He told us that he was in this area to search for an ancient mysterious library that apparently was located somewhere in the desert.

When he mentioned the library, I started listening more attentively. Even though the library of the Assassin monastery was very old and filled with loads of useful knowledge, it definitely wasn't omniscient. However, more knowledge was always helpful, that's why I thought that this mysterious library could be worth a visit. So we decided that, together with Professor Zei, we would search for this library.

When we left the bar again, a little shock awaited us: Men, completely clad in loose white garments, tried to take Appa, who had been waiting a little away from the bar, with them! I summoned a flame in my right hand and hurled it right at the group of bandits, they immediately fled in fear.

The professor turned to me and said: "Fascinating! You definitely have to tell me more about this unconventional style of fire bending when we find the time, my young friend."

We flew over the endless sand of the desert for some time, always looking for something that looked like a library. But for miles around there really was nothing but sand! Even Pagan, who could see for far greater distances than all of us with his dragon eyes, saw nothing but sand in the distance.

But then, after several hours, he finally discovered something: "Over there! There is something! Looks like a tower.", he told me. I told the others and after a few minutes we were all able to see it.

We landed right in front of the tower in the warm sand, dismounted our animals and looked around.

I immediately said: "And this is the legendary library? A little small, don't you think?"

Sokka agreed with me: "He's right, this thing can't possibly be the library, it should be way larger."

Suddenly, Aang, who was standing directly at the tower, called: "Look at this!"

We all walked over and saw what Aang had discovered: From the window in the tower's wall a small staircase led steep down.
Sokka said: "Looks like this actually is the library. It must be located underground."

Professor Zei dropped to his knees and called: "Then what are we waiting for? Start digging!"

I looked at the rather ridiculous scene in front of me and thought what everybody else probably thought as well: It would take us years to find anything this way. Toph had walked up to the tower in the meantime and put her hands on the wall.

About one minute later, she said: "The library is still completely intact underground, and from the looks of it, the staircase in this tower leads straight into the library itself."

Thereupon, Sokka and Professor Zei immediately climbed through the window with excited looks on their faces and started making their way downwards. Aang and Katara followed shortly after, the only ones who would stay outside were Pagan, Appa and Toph, the two animals because they simply were too big and Toph because she obviously couldn't read because of her blindness.

Before I climbed through the window myself, I turned towards Pagan and Toph and said: "Be careful out here."

Then I followed the others down into the underground library.

Following the long steep path, we eventually reached the enormous library.

Its size was really impressive, I only had known the monastery's library so far, but this here was even more huge and spacious, I would say that this library was as big as the entire monastery complex.

As we walked through the first few of the countless corridors, we suddenly heard something. Shortly afterwards, something came around one of the many corners the bookshelves created, I have to admit that I was actually frightened more than I had been used to so far in my life: It was a giant black owl with a white face.

After the initial shock, I quickly realized who we were facing here: Wan Shi Tong, the Spirit of Old Knowledge, there was a statue of it in the monastery's library.

The owl towered over all of us and began to speak, it said that humans were no longer welcome in this library, as they would only abuse the knowledge they found to put themselves over the other creatures of the world. Aang assured the spirit that we weren't here to abuse the knowledge, we others confirmed this statement. The owl thought for a few moments and eventually allowed us to look around in the library, but only if we would hand over some of our own knowledge in return. I decided to offer the spirit a scroll on which the history of the Assassin Order was written down which I carried with me coincidently.

The owl accepted the scroll and spoke to me: "I already know you. You are very eager to learn and have already read many pieces of knowledge in another library that lies under the wing of my blessing."

I bowed, I of course knew that one always had to face a spirit with respect, that was also the reason why I genuinely didn't want to abuse any kind of knowledge from this library, if I would actually find something that would be of any interest for me.

We thereupon started to look around in the entire library, I didn't find anything of interest, most of the knowledge for subjects that interested me I already knew from the monastery's library.
Sokka on the other hand found something quite interesting: First a scroll with strange dates and second a special room in which a strange machine was located. It showed the positions of sun, moon and stars during different times of the year. Sokka entered the most recent date on the scroll, which was in a couple of months, into the machine which started moving thereupon.

When it had stopped again, we all stared at the ceiling where the celestial bodies where located. The moon was right in front of the sun, it caused an eerie darkness in the room.

I immediately realized what this omen meant: An eclipse! Every fire bender's worst nightmare! Without the sun, fire bending was not possible, our whole physical strength would be weakened without the sun.

But Sokka thought that this discovery was of greatest value: Because when every fire bender was powerless, Aang's chances to defeat the Fire Lord would increase immensely. That was also clear to me, but I still felt quite uneasy when I thought about the aspect of losing my bending abilities.

But shortly afterwards, I had to focus my thoughts again, because the spirit of the owl appeared from out of nowhere, it was visibly infuriated about what we had done with the knowledge from the library. It uttered a very high-pitched screech and only one second later the floor began to tremble. The library started to sink into the ground even more! We had to get out of here as fast as possible!

We ran back to our entry point with high speed, the spirit right behind us. I tried to hurl flame blasts at it while running, but then I realized that because I had given the owl the scroll with the history of the order it knew everything about our style of bending, I was powerless.

We ran faster and faster and finally reached the window through which we had entered the library. The spirit was still on our heels, but eventually Aang saved the day by knocking over some bookshelves, which in return knocked the spirit to the ground.

Aang, Katara, Sokka and I jumped through the window, Professor Zei had made the fatal decision to stay in the library, something we hadn't been able to talk him out of because of the massive time pressure.

We landed in the hot sand outside, I saw Toph, who had tried to stop the library from sinking, collapsing to the ground, the tower disappeared in the sand dunes almost instantly.

I took some deep breaths, but in the process swallowed some sand that was whirling through the air and had to cough.

Shortly afterwards, Pagan landed next to me. He looked like he had been in a fight and said with sadness in his voice: "I'm sorry, my friend. I tried everything but I wasn't able to prevent it."

"What weren't you able to prevent?"

It was only at this moment that I noticed: Appa was gone!

"Where's Appa?", I asked, still panting a little.

"Sand benders! They came and attacked. I tried to defend us out from the air, but they created a heavy sandstorm and I wasn't able to fly properly any longer. When the sand had died down again, Appa was already gone."

That was quite the fine mess! Aang's bison had been abducted by sand benders! And how should
my friends continue our journey now? I had Pagan, but he wouldn't be able to transport us all.

Sokka asked: "And what are we going to do now?"

Without saying a word, Aang opened his glider and rose to the air. I of course knew that he now would do anything in his power to find his loyal companion.

Katara asked me: "Yulizan, what about Pagan? Can he transport us?"

I shook my head: "I'm sorry, Katara, but Pagan is only trained to carry two people at best, with more passengers his flight will become too unstable, ergo this wouldn't work."

Katara looked at the ground for a moment and eventually said with a determination-filled voice: "Then we have to continue on foot from now on, as far as we can get!"

Nobody said anything against this idea, there really wasn't any better choice to be honest. A few minutes later, we started our march through the desert.

So we began to wander through the endless desert, but at least we had a goal in mind on which we had decided while still in the library: We would go to Ba Sing Se to inform the king of the Earth Kingdom about the eclipse and then start forging out plans for a possible invasion.

We walked and walked, but there still was nothing but sand everywhere. Even worse: After some time, the almost unbearable heat caught up with us, I was sweating like a pig in my robe, it was so bad that I capitulated a couple of minutes later and took the robe off.

I whistled for Pagan, packed my robe, my shirt and my bigger weapons into the bags he was wearing around his neck so that I didn't had to carry them myself, and then continued to walk with my torso naked.

I asked Katara to apply a special oil that I had fetched out from my potions pouch onto my back so that the sand would not tear open my scars and wounds again.

I tried to remember the survival tactics I had learned during my training to minimize my body functions so that I wouldn't consume too much water and energy.

In the meantime, Sokka had discovered a cactus, cut it up and was just about to drink the liquid inside when I slapped the fruit out of his hand: "Are you crazy? Cactus juice is poisonous, do you want to kill yourself?"

Sokka groaned, but obeyed and continued to walk. We kept on walking, but didn't seem to make any progress.

When the evening slowly began to fall, Aang finally returned, but he hadn't been able to find Appa. He seemed even more sad than on his departure couple of hours ago and already wanted to give up hope, but Katara and I were able to persuade him to never give up, we told him that we would find the bison eventually.

When the night broke in, we decided to rest for the time being. Pagan landed next to me after he had accompanied us through the air the entire time, I took my things back and put my robe back on, since I knew that nights in a desert could be as cold as a day in the polar circle.

Katara explained to Aang and Toph that we could find the way to Ba Sing Se by orientating
ourselves by the stars. I looked up to the sky and tried to memorize the positions of some striking star constellations that I had seen on the map in the library.

In the early morning, we set out again, the mood was even worse than yesterday. Aang was almost completely unresponsive, all of his thoughts were fixated on finding Appa now.

After a few minutes, Toph hit something with her foot that sounded like wood. Aang removed the sand and revealed a strange vehicle. It looked like a small ship with little planks on the bottom.

I suddenly remembered: The bandits who had tried to abduct Appa back at the oasis had been driving such a vehicle. It really was some kind of ship, it was able to glide over the sand when it was powered by wind.

Katara decided that we could use this thing to get through the desert faster. I however didn't really trust that strange and possibly dangerous thing, that's why I decided to play it safe and continue the journey on Pagan.

Shortly afterwards, I was sitting on my dragon friend, directly above my friends who were all sitting in the vehicle, rushing over the sand.

After some time, we discovered something in the distance that looked like a giant rock, and it turned out to be just that when we got closer.

When we reached the rock, we noticed the many caves that were located in its massif.

The others decided to explore these caves, Pagan and I stayed outside to look for possible threats.

And something like that seemed to happen sooner than we thought, because only a few minutes after my friends had entered one of the caves, I asked Pagan: "Do you hear that sound too?"

"This loud buzzing?"

I nodded, and only a second later Pagan and I looked at each other with shocked faces: What was building this kind of caves and made buzzing noises? Buzzard wasps!

I was about to call my friends to warn them about the danger when all four already stormed out of the cave again, followed by some of the large insects.

Pagan and I immediately started to attack the beasts. Pagan spewed a powerful fire blast at one of the wasps which killed it almost instantly, the carcass fell out of the sky and down to the sandy ground.

My friends fled from the wasps and were standing in front of the rock now. Pagan and I decided to land so that we would be able to defend all of us on the ground.

Just when another wasp was about to attack, it was hit by a concentrated beam of sand and torn into pieces. The other wasps fled back into the rock thereupon.

When the sand had died down again, the reason for its high concentration was revealed to us: The sand benders!

Aang immediately took a step forward and confronted them with the abduction of his bison. When they didn't answer him, he destroyed one of their sand gliders. I was shocked, I had never
witnessed the young Avatar like this before! His bison really had to mean a lot to him that he was even willing to give in to his anger almost entirely. I knew that an intervention or trying to hold Aang back was impossible at this moment, that's why I kept myself in the background.

While the sand benders were still protesting their innocence, Toph said that she had heard how one of them had tied up the bison to transport him better. What this statement set off within Aang was frightening: He entered the Avatar State! His eyes and tattoos started glowing brightly, with the same monster-like voice he already had used at the Northern Water Tribe while in the Avatar State he asked what the sand benders had done with Appa. But all they could say was that he had been sold to Ba Sing Se. This only made Aang even angrier, he rose up into the air, a whirlwind made of air and sand developed around him.

While Sokka and Toph searched for cover and the sand benders fled, I kept standing where I was, the raging air lashed against my hood and my scarf, but I withstood it completely unfazed, when Katara walked up to Aang, grabbed his hand and slowly slid him into her arms. This seemed to calm Aang down, his tattoos stopped glowing, the whirlwind also vanished. He laid there crying in Katara's arms, broken by almost infinite grief.

I lowered my head, Pagan appeared next to me. I rubbed his snout, together we looked down on the little despairing boy who was lying there in the arms of a Water Tribe girl. We both didn't know how exactly things should continue now.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: A venomous path
After a longer period of silence, I rose to speak:

"Guys, listen! We won't achieve anything this way. We have to pull ourselves together, find a way out of this endless pile of sand and get to Ba Sing Se, we must not forget our main mission!"

Everybody knew that I was right, which is why we eventually set out again a couple of minutes later.

Aang continued to hang his head, but I put my arm over his shoulders and said: "Buck up, Aang, we're going to find Appa eventually, believe me."

The young Avatar smiled at me for a short moment, but I knew that he was still grieving over the loss of his bison, how else could it be.

I decided that it was the best to leave him alone for the time being, I knew that his mood would eventually get better, at the latest when we would have left the desert.

Pagan lightly nudged me from the side and looked up to the sky. I smiled and said: "Just fly, I will call you should we need you."

Pagan spread out his wings and started flying above us in wide circles.

We continued to march and finally, after another day, faith caught up to us again, the sand dunes became smaller and smaller, the heat lessened and eventually we reached rocky terrain again.

We all cheered a little, we had done it, we had overcome the desert!

Only shortly afterwards, it looked like our prayers had been answered, because we actually found a waterfall with a little lake!

Aang, Katara and I immediately took off our sweaty clothes and jumped into the lake with delight! I dove into the water head-first, the cold and the wetness were beautiful balsam on my sand-marked skin, the water washed away all the struggles from the past few days just like that!

I stayed in the water for about fifteen minutes, then I sat on a rock at the edge of the lake and let the sun, which now shone pleasantly mild again, shine on my body. I finally felt fresh and recovered again, my energy reserves were filled up again.

After I had dried myself up and put on my clothes again, which I also had washed in the lake to get rid of the sweat stains, I walked over to Sokka, who was looking at the maps from the library.

I looked over his shoulder and studied the map myself; just like Sokka, I also tried to find a both safe and relatively-easy-to-travel-on path to Ba Sing Se.

Over time, Aang, Katara and Toph also joined us, we all looked at the map and discussed the different possibilities.

Aang, Sokka and I had all three discovered the same possibility: The infamous Serpent's Pass, a
very narrow path made out of rocks that was leading across a strait. From our current position, it was the shortest, but not necessarily the safest route, but we eventually decided that we would take this risk, as we had no time to lose.

We got ready to set out when suddenly three people approached us, a man and two women, one of them was heavily pregnant.

They introduced themselves, the man was called Than, the pregnant woman was his wife Ying, the second woman was his sister. They were on their way to Ba Sing Se, just like us, after their home village was destroyed by the Fire Nation.

We explained to them that we planned to use the Serpent's Pass to reach the capital, the three refugees however thought of this as a very dangerous idea. Their plan was to travel to Full Moon Bay where they could go aboard a ferry that would bring them all the way to Ba Sing Se.

They offered us to accompany them, we accepted after a short discussion, as a ship seemed to be a safer option than wandering over an immensely long rock path.

We reached the hidden underground bay without problems, but the sight was both imposing and disturbing at the same time, the large amount of refugees really got to me when I thought about the fact that all these people had suffered under the iron fist of the Fire Nation. My blood started boiling, but I was able to repress it, an outburst of my anger would only bring us disadvantages in this situation.

We queued up in front of one of the many ticket counters and waited for it to be our turn. When that happened, Aang stepped forward and ordered five tickets, but nothing was handed over to us, as we weren't in the possession of passports and animals like Momo were not allowed on board of the ships.

Even when Aang told the woman behind the counter that he was the Avatar, it didn't get us any further, because all the gruff woman did was pointing at a group of men who had actually dressed up as Aang! I wasn't so much upset by the fact that so many people were trying to steal Aang's identity, but more by the fact that most people by now seemed to know how Aang looked like, I was sure that this could cause us some problems sooner or later.

Aang had stepped back from the counter in the meantime, Toph however had walked towards it. I asked myself what she was planning when she put a document unknown to me on the counter. But no matter what it was, it changed the mind of the woman behind the counter immediately, she handed Toph five tickets, just like we had wanted it.

When Toph returned, I asked her: "What did you do over there?"

"Just used my family's power.", the blind girl replied with a cheeky grin on her face before she showed me the document on which the Beifong seal was depicted.

I clicked my tongue, I had been right, the young earth bender really was sly like a fox.

"And what about Momo?"

"Don't worry, I told her that he's my seeing-eye-lemur, he can come with us, no problem."

"You clever little thing, you!", I said and patted Toph on the back in a friendly way.
When I turned around to where the others were standing again, I saw that they were talking to a girl I didn't know.

Toph and I walked over to them, I asked: "Who is this?"

Aang replied: "Oh right, you two don't know each other yet! Yulizan, this is Suki, the leader of the Kyoshi Warriors. Suki, this is Yulizan, he's my protector and an Assassin."

Since Aang talked about my profession this casually, I was sure that he trusted the girl, we shook hands for a short moment.

"So she is the leader of the Kyoshi Warriors.", I thought to myself, "Good to know..."

We continued talking in our little group when suddenly the three refugees we had accompanied on the way here came walking towards us. They told us that their tickets and passports had been stolen, they weren't able to use a ferry to get to Ba Sing Se anymore.

We thought about what we could do now, Aang eventually made the decision that he would lead us all over the Serpent's Pass to Ba Sing Se. I still thought of this route as very risky, but still manageable, that's why I didn't said anything against it.

Therefore, we started heading towards the beginning point of this fabled path. Suki would accompany us as well, she now also was wearing her Kyoshi Armor again, now she looked like she did when I had first seen her on Kyoshi Island, back then, when I had still tailed Team Avatar.

We reached the beginning of the pass, it was marked with a sign and a map.

The sign had an inscription: "Whoever will walk along this path shall leave all hope behind."

"Not exactly a good motivation.", I said chuckling to Toph.

In spite of everything, we stepped onto the pass and started walking.

The first day went by without any incidents, we set up camp on a large grassy field on the side of the stone path.

I sat down at the cliff coast, let my legs hang over the edge and looked out over the sea meditatively.

After some time, Katara came and sat down next to me, she asked: "Are you thinking of them?"

I sighed and replied: "Yes, of course. Actually, not a single minute passes in which I don't miss them, sometimes it really gnaws on my mind. But currently, something else is occupying my thoughts."

"What is it?"

I turned to the side and looked into Katara's eyes: "Do you think that I'm doing the right thing?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, my whole way of life, do you believe that I'm living my life the way it should be? By dedicating my life to the thought that killing people will result in peace for the world and myself? I honestly begin to doubt this thought. And then there is this voice..."
"Voice?", Katara asked puzzled.

"Often, in the night after I killed again, I hear a voice in my head, an sinister voice, it really scares me sometimes. It always says the same, but every time it appears, it becomes louder. Always the same lines, over and over again:

"You're only a man, driven by nothing but revenge!

You will never escape what is hidden inside you!

A monster, a monster!

You have turned into a monster!

A monster, a monster!

And it keeps getting stronger!!"

Do you think that this is true? Do I keep alienating from my humanity by ending so many lives?"

Katara grabbed my hands and said with a calm voice:

"Yulizan, you may have done things some people will regard as terrible, and by the things you told us, you will always do such things. But you have always remained yourself. Since we met, you've always been the cheerful yet sometimes stoic and calm guy you simply are. You're definitely not turning into a monster, your actions are clinging to your conscience, that's completely normal. Just continue to be yourself, then you're on the right path."

I hugged Katara and thanked her. Afterwards, she asked:

"I hope you don't mind if I ask, but do you have plans for the time after the war is over? I mean, once Aang has succeeded with his task, he doesn't need protection anymore, right?"

"Well, of course I have spent some thoughts on that in the past, I of course want to live a peaceful live, meet a nice girl, have children, you know, the usual. But there's still more than enough time for details."

"You're probably right with that. Come on, let's go to sleep, we have many things ahead of us tomorrow."

"You're right."

We returned to the camp and laid down to sleep.

The next morning, we set out relatively early, we didn't want to lose too much time.

Most of the time, things ran in our favor, but then we stumbled upon a complicated obstacle: A longer section of the pass was flooded!

First, we were unsure what exactly to do now, but then Katara stepped forward and raised her hands. The water suddenly split in two and revealed the path, but it was still underwater a good bit.

But thankfully, Aang was able to help with this: He created a large air bubble that enclosed us all so that we were able to walk on safe and dry.
While we were walking inside the bubble, I suddenly spotted something in the corner of my eye that was swimming in the water.

I immediately sensed the danger and said loudly to Toph: "Bring us up, quick!"

The younger earth bender forced the path to rise up at our current position until we were above the water again.

Only seconds later, not only the large thing that had circled in the water was revealed to us, but also the true reason why the path we were wandering on was called "Serpent's Pass" of all things: A giant sea snake rose from the water!

Everybody screamed in fear, only I was able to keep my nerves, I turned to Aang and Katara: "Get everybody to safety, I take care of this thing!"

Aang and Katara commanded everybody further down the path, I put two fingers in my mouth and whistled as loud as I could.

Only seconds later, I saw the shadow above me and shortly afterwards the snake was hit by a strong fire beam.

Pagan flew down to a lower altitude, I jumped onto him and the two of us stormed right at the snake together! It was definitely too big for my weapons to do any kind of damage, but my fire bending and Pagan's raw force would do it!

I said to Pagan: "Now is your big moment, my friend! Today you can finally unleash your full power! Come on, let's get that snake!"

I didn't have to tell Pagan twice, he immediately roared loudly und rushed into battle!

I shot multiple flames at the snake while sitting on Pagan's neck, the dragon also spew his fire at the beast. We hit the snake again and again, it slowly started to stagger.

That's when Pagan initiated the crucial attack! He flew straight towards the snake's neck with full speed, clawed into the reptile's slick and scaly skin and bit into it with all the strength of his jaws! The snake let out a sharp hiss of pain when Pagan tore on its skin and muscles.

Eventually, the dragon had loosened the skin enough so that he was able to rip out large pieces of flesh, multiple blood fountains splashed into the sea.

Shortly afterwards, Pagan had almost completely torn through the snake's intestines, he spew a final large fire directly into the snake's neck, killing it! The dead reptile fell back into the sea sideways, Pagan uttered a roar of victory!

We returned to our friends who applauded us as we landed.

I patted Pagan's snout in appreciation and said: "Good job, my friend! I always knew that you're a real fighting dragon!"

To the others I said: "I think the Serpent's Pass is in need of a new name now."

We all laughed before eventually continuing our way.

After walking for quite a while again, the end of the pass finally appeared in the distance.
Sokka said cheerfully: "We did it! Nothing can stop us now!"

But he cheered to soon, because the second he finished talking, the pregnant Ying suddenly dropped to the ground in pain.

I immediately knew what that meant, I thought to myself: "Great! Just now!"

But there was nothing we could do, it looked like we had to deliver the baby now.

Fortunately, Katara had experience in midwifery from her time at the Water Tribe. Toph bent a tent out of earth, the birth would take place in there. Aang should go and get blankets or something like that, Sokka hot water, Suki would help Katara, who then turned to me:

"...and Yulizan ... umm..."

But she didn't have to assign me any task, because I already had an idea myself.

I told Katara to go inside the tent, then I got my brewing tools out from my bag. I looked for the right herbs, threw them in the bowl, poured some water over them and heated it up in my palms, just like I had done with the tea.

After three minutes, the potion was ready, I absorbed the heat in form of the steam over my nose, the potion had to be drinkable immediately, plus heat was never helpful at a birth.

I walked over to the tent and entered it. I handed Suki the bowl and said: "Let her drink this, it will help."

"What is this?"

"An old potion created by the Assassins, it eases pain by relaxing the muscles."

Suki bent down and put the bowl to the lips of the panting Ying. She drank the potion slowly and shortly after became calmer and more relaxed.

I smiled and then left the tent, a birth was still a women-only matter and I of course respected that.

Some time later, Katara called us all into the tent, the baby was born, it was a girl!

We entered the tent and saw the newborn in her mother's arms.

As I looked at the baby, my emotions suddenly overpowered me, tears started welling up in my eyes.

I said: "Excuse me please!", and walked out of the tent.

I sat down underneath a tree, my face buried in my palms, and started to sob.

Shortly afterwards, Katara exited the tent as well, knelt down next to me and asked: "What is it?"

Still sobbing, I answered with tears in my eyes: "You know, I've already seen so many lives ending right in front of me, whether through my enemies or my own hand, but now, for the first time, I have experienced how new life is born, this is a whole new experience for me, it was just beautiful, I couldn't help it, I'm sorry."

Katara put her hand on my shoulder and said with a smile on her face: "You don't have to be sorry,
I understand you. You have already seen so much pain and death in your life, the birth of new life may be new to you, but I think this experience also gives you new power, am I right?"

She was right, I had seen how new life was born, it had been a beautiful sight, the circle of life had begun once again. We are born, we live, we die, a very old but well known philosophy that was also used by the Assassin Order in certain situations. With new power in both body and mind, I stood up and returned to the others.

Some time later, we finally reached the end of the pass.

Aang said that he would now continue his search for Appa, we wished him good luck, I knew that I had to leave the young Avatar alone with this task.

Suki also said goodbye, she had to return to her group of warriors. She and Sokka shared a kiss before she left, I saw it with mixed feelings in my chest.

Pagan landed by my side and asked: "Are you alright, my friend?"

"I don't know. Everybody seems so happy, but I can't identify myself with this feeling quite yet. But I hope that this will change in the future."

At this time, I of course couldn't guess that said feeling would reach me sooner than I thought, and a certain girl from the Fire Nation, as foretold by my father, would play a major role in that.

But for now: Ba Sing Se, here we come!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: A mechanical threat
We left the Serpent's Pass behind and were already able to spot the colossal walls of Ba Sing Se in the distance, walls that had never fallen to this day. I had read many things about the extensive history of the Earth Kingdom capital in the monastery's library, therefore I was visibly impressed to finally see the city, or more precisely just its walls at this moment, in all its glory with my own eyes. I was sure that the interior of the city would provide some more surprises for us.

After we had already travelled a good distance, Aang returned with his glider, he looked noticeably worried.

Katara asked: "What is it Aang, what have you seen?"

"It looks worse than imagined. The Fire Nation will try to conquer Ba Sing Se. A giant machine is moving towards the outer wall!"

What Aang reported sounded alarming. I jumped on Pagan to take a look at the machine that Aang had discovered myself.

Pagan only had to fly a little towards the city, then we were already able to see it. And Aang had not exaggerated! What was moving towards the city there in the distance had every reason to worry us. It was an immensely long and narrow apparatus, it looked like a giant metal worm. When I took a closer look at the front part using my telescope, I noticed the vast amount of devices and instruments attached to the machine. It slowly started dawning to me what exactly this thing was.

I was about to return to the others when I saw that Toph and Aang were moving all travelers over the sandy surfaces straight towards the wall using two rock plates, Pagan had to hurry quite a bit to keep up with the rest of the group.

We reached the outer wall relatively simultaneously and started looking at the approaching machine in the distance together.

Sokka rubbed his chin and asked: "I would really like to know what exactly that thing is."

I immediately replied: "I can tell you! It's a giant drill!"

Everybody looked at me questioningly, I continued: "Yes, you heard correctly, a drill! The Fire Nation will try to drill holes into the walls of Ba Sing Se with the help of this machine to conquer the city this way! The city is definitely in danger!"

We continued to stare at the machine mesmerized, when suddenly some Earth Kingdom soldiers approached and asked us what we were doing at the Outer Wall. Aang introduced himself as the Avatar and demanded that they should guide us to their leader immediately. To my great surprise, the soldiers followed Aang's demand, I didn't expect this kind of openness from the Earth Kingdom soldiers who were usually considered the toughest fighters in the world.

Therefore, a little later, we were introduced to commanding General Sung, who however, even after we explained the new findings to him, claimed that he wouldn't need us, or more precisely
Aang, to defend the wall, as the walls of Ba Sing Se were unconquerable.

I thought back to the most famous historical fact that proved that the man was both right and wrong at the same time. A couple of years ago, General Iroh of the Fire Nation had tried to conquer Ba Sing Se. The Fire Nation troops had made it through the Outer Wall thanks to a ruse back then, but they eventually had been defeated at the Inner Wall, even after besieging the city for a whole of 600 days, almost two years. This siege was deemed the most important military event in recent times by many, it had decisively influenced the course of the war.

But the general seemed to forget something: Back then, the Fire Nation had not led such a devastating piece of war equipment, that drill was definitely a new invention which had been created specifically for this plan.

But even after I enumerated the many possible threats that could arose from this drill to the general again, all he did was assuring that there was nothing to worry about again, as there was also a team of elite earth benders that was instructed to defend the wall.

Nevertheless, I remained skeptical, I had a feeling that we had to fight another battle soon.

From the top of the wall, we watched the Terra Team, so the name of the elite earth benders, how they tried to stop the incoming Fire Nation machines. They had no problems with the tanks, they simply catapulted them through the air. However, once only the drill was left, they were soon stretched to their limits, their attempts failed miserably, the drill was simply too powerful.

I rolled my eyes under my hood and thought to myself: "So that's an elite team? Then I don't want to know how weak the normal earth bending soldiers of this bastion are!"

But suddenly I devoted all my attention to the scene that happened at the lower end of the wall again, because all of a sudden a sheer storm of throwing knives came flying towards the elite team, they were just barely able to save themselves from the flying blades using some earth chunks.

Even though I already had an idea who was behind this attack, I didn't have to think any longer, because from the side of the drill, Mai and Ty Lee came running! Of course, I stared at Ty Lee again, she ran towards the earth benders and was easily able to block their chi.

I couldn't watch this fiasco any longer, I whistled, Pagan came rushing up, Aang tried to stop me, but I jumped on the dragon who brought me down from the wall to the ground.

Just as Ty Lee had finished blocking the chi of the last member of the Terra Team and the man was sinking to the ground paralyzed, I jumped off Pagan and landed right in the two girls' field of view. Under my hood, I saw Ty Lee's eyes suddenly becoming large when she noticed me.

I stood up and called: "You won't have it so easy with me, but you already knew that!" During my last sentence, a spiteful, almost diabolical grin appeared on my veiled face.

Mai suddenly became furious and hurled multiple throwing knives at me. I used the same technique I had used during the chase, I created a wall of fire sand in front of me, when the knives hit it, they were burned to ash and drizzled to the ground. Mai looked at me completely aghast, the grin returned to my face.

I called with a hateful tone in my voice: "Not bad, but not good enough!"

I now took two throwing knives myself and hurled them at Mai with such speed and skill that she wasn't able to dodge them, the knives cut her robe on shoulder and sleeve. She again stared at me
aghast, I now had a mischievous grimace on my face to provoke her even more. But this time, it was Ty Lee who attacked.

She stormed towards me, I decided in the fraction of a second to allow myself to have fun with her again, therefore I allowed her to perform her chi blockade on me. I immediately felt that she was pressing the points on my body a lot harder than she had done back in Omashu, she seemed to believe that it would help her technique, I laughed internally when I imagined her facial expression.

When she had finished her moves, she took a few steps away from me and purred: "I won't fall for this again! I got you this time!"

I laughed quietly but heartily and said afterwards: "Oh, you little, naive, sweet girl! You have no idea what kind of power you're taking on." After that, I created a flame in my hand, Ty Lee's jaw dropped to her chest.

I continued: "Nice try once again, but when will you finally learn something?"

Instead of fleeing in shock like she did last time, Ty Lee became angry and shouted: "How are you doing this? That's impossible! One cannot simply break a chi blockade!"

I replied calmly: "If only you knew what I'm capable of, girl. Maybe we should meet under more civilized circumstances, then I could show you a thing or two."

Ty Lee was completely speechless, until Mai told her that they had to retreat. I couldn't hold myself back and winked at her. If my eyes weren't deceiving me, her face suddenly became very bright when she and her friend fled back into the inside of the drill.

I nodded to myself satisfied and waited for the others to arrive, as I had seen that they were making their way to the lower part of the wall as well.

When we all met again, Aang immediately confronted me: "Would you please explain to me what this action was all about?"

But I wasn't able to explain myself, as Sokka was calling: "Just leave it be, Aang, you can still give him hell later, we have to take care of the drill first!"

Sokka had planned that Aang and Toph should bend a tunnel into the ground which would lead them directly below the drill. They should be able to penetrate into the interior of the drill from there. I thought that the plan was workable, but I still decided not to enter the tunnel together with the others, but instead to circle over the area on Pagan, being the eye in the sky so to say. The others agreed on that.

Therefore, Aang and Toph bent a tunnel into the ground, hidden inside a cloud of dust, while I whistled and mounted Pagan before we rose into the air together where we had a good view over the drill and the wall.

Pagan and I started circling over the area, just as planned, always observing the drill. I felt a little queasy, as I of course wasn't able to see my friends in the underground tunnel, I wasn't even able to tell if they were still in the tunnel or already inside the drill. If they were already inside the drill, they hadn't made any major progress so far, as the drill was still moving towards the wall unhindered. It continued doing that, until it eventually hit the wall!

I said to Pagan: "Uh-oh, this is about to get serious!"
We flew a little closer to the drill, even though I was fairly sure that on the one hand we wouldn't able to do anything to stop it and on the other hand we probably wouldn't notice anything about our friends, but I was mistaken. Because when we flew past the drill's outer shell, I believed to hear fighting noises from inside of the giant machine. Of course those noises could have all sorts of reasons, but I was pretty sure that my friends were in some kind of fight in there. And I could do nothing to help them, as I would never be able to crack this shell. Therefore we returned to our original altitude and continued to observe the drill.

After some time, something moved on top of the drill. We once again approached the machine and discovered Aang who was now standing on top of the drill. I instructed Pagan to fly as close to the drill as possible so that I could jump onto it. The dragon did as told, shortly after I landed on the giant drill's metal shell.

Aang immediately noticed me and called: "Yulizan! Come and help me!"

I ran over to the young Avatar who was fiddling with a small bottle.

I asked: "What is it Aang?"

"We were able to do some damage inside the drill, I'm here to deliver the final blow, but I have to cut through these plates to do it. Could you try and heat them up with your fire, that would make things a lot easier."

"I can at least try it.", I replied.

I conjured up two flames and enveloped my hands with them. After that, I put my hands on the spot Aang had shown me and let the heat go. At first, nothing happened, but then I felt how the metal was slowly starting to cave in and become noticeably weaker.

"It's working!", I called and Aang came running.

"Alright, then leave the rest to me!"

The young Avatar bent the water from the bottle, formed it into a blade and started cutting the drill's shell. I guarded Aang while he was cutting, it was the right decision, because only some moments later I saw Azula, who was standing on top of the drill now as well.

I called: "Aang! Continue your cutting, I'll take care of this!", and started marching towards the princess determinedly.

"My first Agni Kai in a long time, I hope I'm not out of shape.", I thought to myself while still approaching Azula.

It was her who made the first move, she hurled two of her blue flames at me, but I could block them without any problems. I countered with an intense white flame wave, but Azula simply jumped over it. I continued my attack with some more flame blasts, but those were blocked by Azula as well.

In the following time, we threw many different techniques at each other, however, I never showed too much of my Assassin knowledge, because I was sure that I would meet Azula again and for this case I wanted to keep some aces up my sleeve, this also included my purple lightning.

After the fight had gone on for quite some time already, Aang suddenly called: "Almost got it!"

I flung one last fire ball at Azula, then ran back to Aang, Azula on my heels.
But there was one more trick that I was going to use in this fight: When I was in immediate vicinity of Aang and saw Azula running towards us, I first created a large flame wall which I then extended and converted into a dome of fire. Now Aang and I were surrounded by fire on every side, Azula had no chance to reach us.

Aang marked a spot on the drill's shell with a cross before picking up a small rock that was lying close to him, he bent it into the shape of a peg and then rammed it into the spot with the cross with full force.

"Get away and take cover!", he screamed, I dissolved the fire dome as fast as possible, ran to the drill's edge and jumped off. Pagan collected me mid-air and quickly flew away to get a safe distance between us and the drill.

When we turned around, it was just in time for the spectacle, because only seconds later the whole drill broke apart and collapsed! I rejoiced, we had done it, Ba Sing Se was safe, at least for now, I was sure that the Fire Nation would not give up this easily.

We returned to the others who were standing on top of the wall again. When we arrived, Aang confronted me again:

"Even though we have won this battle, you still owe me an answer! What was that action of yours about? Why did you just rush into battle?"

I scratched my head, I was unsure if I should tell Aang the truth, which was that I did this whole thing to meet Ty Lee again. I eventually decided not to tell anything, this whole matter would stay my secret for the time being.

So I lied and said: "I just wanted to protect you, those two girls were about to climb the wall before I intervened, you should thank me that I took this risk!"

Aang settled for this answer for now, however, one could clearly see that he was doubting me and my credibility.

"I'm sorry Aang, but it's better this way, for all of us.", I thought to myself while I followed the others on their way towards the interior of the city of Ba Sing Se.

-POV change-

Outside of the Outer Wall of Ba Sing Se, Azula, Mai and Ty Lee were sitting in the sand after their defeat and the destruction of the great drill.

Azula growled visibly angry: "That guy in the hood really is very powerful, that definitely was the hardest Agni Kai I ever fought, he had an answer for every single one of my attacks! He simply can't have learned stuff like this just like that!"

Mai asked: "But where has he learned it then?"

"I don't know, but I will find out, then I'll know how to defeat him!"

Mai's eyes moved from Azula to Ty Lee, who was sitting there dreamy, looking towards the city. Mai asked: "Hey, Ty Lee! What's the matter with you? You've been acting this strange ever since our fight against the hooded guy! Did he do something to you?"
Ty Lee didn't answer Mai's words, instead she said with a dreamy voice: "His eyes, so blue, so full of power, passion, determination, the eyes of a warrior, he has everything..."

Mai approached her friend and clicked her fingers in front of Ty Lee's face: "Hey! Are you even listening to me?"

Ty Lee shook her head for a second and suddenly looked focused again: "Yes, I'm listening! What is our next step?"

Instead of Mai, Azula answered: "First, we go to Ba Sing Se, then we'll see."

Ty Lee immediately jumped to her feet: "Then what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

She started walking towards the city enthusiastically. Azula and Mai shook their heads, what was happening with this girl, they both asked themselves.

Ty Lee on the other hand had quite different thoughts. She looked at the Outer Wall in front of her, imagined his face, his eyes and said in her mind: "I hope I'll meet him again, I want to see him again!"

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Life in Ba Sing Se
The destruction of the drill and the associated protection of the city paid off generously for us, for we were lead straight into the Inner City.

When we entered the city, the astonishment almost took my breath away. I had never seen such a giant city ever before in my life! Everywhere the houses stood side by side tightly packed, one couldn't even locate the other end of the city at the horizon.

We were led into the so called Upper Ring, the noble district of the city. There we eventually reached a smaller house that was provided to us during our stay in the city.

My friends were really excited, but I already had other plans. When the others wanted to enter the house, I kept standing at the bottom of the small stairway.

Katara asked me: "What is it, Yulizan? Don't you want to go inside with us?"

I replied calmly: "No, I won't be living in this house."

All four were visibly surprised, Aang asked: "And where are you going to sleep and stuff like that?"

"Don't worry, I already have something in mind."

"And what if we should need you?"

"Firstly, I won't be that far away and secondly if there actually should be such a big problem that you will need my help, I will eventually notice it. So, why don't you go inside and make yourselves at home for now? See you!"

I waved the others goodbye and then continued walking down the street.

While I walked, I kept an eye out for my destination, as I had planned the following: Ba Sing Se was one of the most important cities in the known world, therefore it was basically impossible for us Assassins to not establish ourselves here. Like in every major city in every nation, there were multiple so called "hideouts" in Ba Sing Se as well, houses that looked like they were unoccupied, but in reality were secretly owned by the Assassin Order to provide accommodations for travelling Assassins.

I was searching for such a hideout right now, and only minutes later it seemed like I had found it. Only a few hundred meters away from my friends' house, there was a house of the same architectural style, with the slight difference that the windows were nailed up with wooden boards.

"This has to be it!", I thought and started to climb up the few stairs to the door.

I examined every inch of the door frame until I found what I had been looking for in the top left corner: The Assassin Order's sigil that was carved into the tanned wood and painted with white color. I was happy, I had found the hideout.

In my bag, I searched for the master key of which a copy was handed to every Master Assassin at
their appointment ceremony. The lock of every hideout was built exactly the same, therefore one
only needed one single key to enter all of them.

After a few seconds I had found the key, inserted it into the lock and silently opened the door.

The first rule when entering a hideout: Search all rooms for possible threats or intruders. One of my
katanas in the right and a small flame that also gave light in the left hand, I silently snuck through
the few corridors, entered all rooms, checked every corner.

After a few minutes, I sheathed my katana in relief and ignited the many light sources located in
the rooms using the flame in my hand; as I had expected, nobody was in the house.

Since every room had light now, I was able to look around in the building a little more. Of course
the first impression one most likely would have when looking at the outer part of the house was
wrong, inside everything was neatly furnished, just like if somebody was living in this house
permanently. I of course knew that hidden aides of the Order took care of the hideouts when no
Assassin was using them.

I went into the bedroom, removed my weapons, robe and boots and lied down on one of the
sleeping mats. I crossed my arms behind my head and looked up to the ceiling while thinking about
what we would possibly experience in this city. Of course, we technically had a mission to carry
out, but some relaxation never hurt.

I decided to sleep a little for the time being, after that I would start wandering around the city to
familiarize myself with it. With this thought in mind, I fell asleep shortly afterwards.

I woke up again only a short time later already, but feeling well rested nonetheless. I blinked
through the gaps between the boards in front of the window, the sun was barely able to squeeze
through, but I was able to tell that it was still broad daylight outside nevertheless.

I stood up, buckled my equipment back on and left the house again, I wanted to look around the
city now. So I started wandering through the Upper Ring where many people were out on the
streets. Most of them looked like they were upper class, as expected, and did not deign to look at
me at all most of the time.

But when I slowly approached the Middle Ring, the scenery changed: The people and their
activities remained bustling, but the atmosphere became a lot more dark and constricting.
Alongside the inhabitants, there were strange men standing around every corner, they wore conical
hats and green robes that bore a sigil that seemed very familiar to me, but I wasn't able to assign it
at the first moment.

When I heard yells behind me, two of these men ran past me and called: "Stop! In the name of the
Dai Li!"

I winced! Did he just say Dai Li? A wave of great anger shot through my body, I knew just too
well what the Dai Li was.

According to official descriptions, it was the secret security service of Ba Sing Se, a team of
experienced earth benders who had the duty to provide peace and quiet in the city.

But as with many other public stories, I knew the truth: The Dai Li was a faction hostile to the
Assassins, even though they were once founded by Avatar Kyoshi to protect Ba Sing Se, but a few
years ago, a man who was a sworn enemy of the Order had taken over the Dai Li: Long Feng, also
known as "The Gaijin".

In his youth, Long Feng had been a member of the Assassin Order. Armed with powerful earth bending abilities and the brain of an ingenious manipulator, he had all the requirements to become a very good Assassin. But what the Grand Masters didn't foresee: Long Feng was more slimy and cunning than every snake, he craved for power like a megalomaniacal usurper.

About 15 years ago, he had revealed the location of the Assassin monastery to the Fire Nation to earn himself an important political position in the Earth Kingdom. The Fire Nation army attacked the monastery, but they hadn't the ghost of a chance against the extensive defensive measures of the monastery and the Assassins' fighting power. All witnesses were eliminated, the Order preserved its anonymity.

From this day on, Long Feng was outlawed in the whole world by the Order, he was to be eliminated immediately upon discovery. Also, the Grand Masters marked him with the name suffix "Gaijin", "Traitor", forever.

After his betrayal, Long Feng had absconded to the Earth Kingdom and disappeared. It was only when he took the leadership of the Dai Li that the Order became aware of him again. But every assassination attempt failed, he was always able to escape and disappear again before the attack could take place.

But here I was now, in Ba Sing Se, and I would find and kill the Gaijin, as the honor of the Order demanded of me!

I continued to wander through the streets, now always keeping an observant eye on the Dai Li agents, always ready to react to a possible attack. Even though some of the men made strange faces when I passed them, they didn't seem to actually become suspicious.

The conditions around me changed continuously as well: While the beginning of the Middle Ring, the citizen district, had still looked quite tolerable, I now seemed to proceed into the more poor regions of the city. The streets became dirty, the people wore torn clothes, the alleys were darker and damper. Sometimes I was really shocked when I saw just how bad the circumstances under which some people had to live here were, but what made it even worse was the fact that it seemed like the government just didn't care about any of this.

Something had to change here as fast as possible, I thought to myself, I mean sure, we were in times of war, but a city should still always try to give its inhabitants the best chances to live a peaceful and enjoyable life. Since I was thinking about the war already: The entire time I had walked through the streets I had noticed that most of the people had acted very unconcerned, one could almost think that there wasn't a war happening in the world. Sure, optimism was never wrong, but this collectively? That seemed a little strange to me.

After some time, I turned around and walked back towards the citizen district, I really could not stand it long in the ghetto. When I walked through the Middle Ring again, I suddenly heard a familiar sound above me. I turned around and looked up. I had heard correctly, it was Momo, who was flying directly towards me before he landed on my shoulder.

I petted the bat lemur's ear a little, then he handed me a small scroll that he was carrying. I opened and read it, it was from Aang. He wrote that there was a party at the Earth King's palace tonight and he and the others planned on going there to try and speak with the Earth King. Since I had nothing better to do, I decided to accompany my friends.
With Momo on my shoulder I returned to the street where our houses where located.

In the evening, we all got ready to go to the party.

Toph and Katara dressed up very neatly, they both wore festive dresses.

I too had don some clothes that seemed fitting for an event of this kind. Alongside food and other things for the daily life, there was also a large wardrobe in my hideout, in which there were many different robes and costumes. To hide my Fire Nation background, I had decided on a loose green robe with numerous silver ornaments, it almost made me look like a nobleman.

Similarly, I had set aside most of my weapons for this evening and only kept my arm blades on the sleeves of my undershirt. And for the worst case scenario, I still had my fire bending.

Some time later we reached the palace.

While Katara, Toph and I chose the main entrance, Aang and Sokka decided to take a more hidden route, they entered the large building through one of the many side entrances.

At the entrance, a guard blocked the way, but I showed him a passport that identified us as high-ranking personalities, another aid from the hideout, and also handed him a little pouch filled with gold coins, the man let us in without questions.

But we weren't able to see much of the party, because only minutes after our arrival we saw Aang and Sokka being led away by Dai Li agents. We of course followed them to avert any possible altercation, but it was too late: The agents exposed Aang as the Avatar!

We quickly ran over and positioned ourselves in front of Aang protectively. But instead of attacking or anything like that, the agents stepped aside and an older man approached us. He was wearing the typical clothes of a member of the royal court, had a long pigtail and a shrewd pointed beard. He ordered us to follow him and we eventually did.

The old man led us into a large conference room. He told us to wait on one side of the room while he himself walked to the other side. My instinct told me that this guy was not an easy man to deal with.

With his back turned towards us, he asked: "Avatar! What gives us the honor of you visiting our great city?"

Aang answered: "First of all, I would like to know who you are."

The old man immediately answered: "Of course, where are my manners? I am Long Feng, Grand Secretary of Ba Sing Se and leader of the Dai Li brigade."

My jaw almost dropped to the floor in shock! This old man, who was only standing a few meters away from me, was the Gaijin!

Even after a couple of minutes, I still couldn't believe it. The traitor who almost destroyed the Assassin Order was standing right in front of me, completely in the open, without any protection. All I had to do was walk up to him and ram my blade into his gut, then I would have destroyed one the Order's greatest enemies!
But my feeling of common sense convinced me of not doing it: If I cut him down here and now, we would never be able to get out of this palace alive. I only carried my most important weapons and wouldn't be able to take on the master earth benders of the Dai Li with fire bending alone. That's why I decided to lull the Gaijin into a false sense of security and wait for the right moment.

The Gaijin now explained that it was forbidden to say even a word about the war in Ba Sing Se, as the undisturbed worldview of the citizens should not be destroyed. As the true commander over the events in the city, the Gaijin made sure that things remained as they were. The Earth King only held representative functions, the citizens could look up to him, follow him.

Here it showed itself again, the sliminess of the Gaijin, how he had orchestrated this whole affair, he now virtually had complete control over the largest city of an entire country. He also threatened us with forcible expulsion from the city if we broke the rules and talked about the war in public.

After that, he dismissed us, but we should leave the palace immediately. When we left the room, I darted a hateful look at the Gaijin.

In my mind I said: "Just you wait, you little lousy snake! I will get my hands on you eventually and you don't want to imagine what will happen then!"

Afterwards I followed the others out of the palace. We decided that we wouldn't be able to speak to the Earth King for the time being, therefore could allow ourselves some days of vacation.

I was very pleased with this decision, since I now would have enough time to pursue a private goal of mine that I had strived for since we entered the city. I would begin my search for someone, someone very special...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: First love?
On the next day, we all started our "vacation".

Katara and Toph decided to have some sort of "girls day", Aang wanted to continue his search for Appa and Sokka didn't quite know what he wanted to do and therefore stayed in the house for the time being.

I too wanted to translate my plan into action and try to find her, my feeling told me that she was somewhere in the city.

When I left the house after a small breakfast, I first of all had to think about where to start my search.

"She always looked like she comes from a good home.", I thought to myself, "which means that she will most likely be somewhere in the Upper Ring, if she is in the city at all."

I decided to simply wander through the streets and alleys of the Upper Ring for a start while looking for her inconspicuously. I climbed down the stairs and started walking.

Just like yesterday evening, I also wore more casual-looking clothes today, even though they weren't as festive as the robe I had worn at the party. It was a simple green and brown garment of light but not too loose fabric, with fitting shoes and of course a hood, which I wasn't wearing at the moment though. If I didn't accidentally get into a conflict with for example the Dai Li, I didn't have to veil my identity.

I continued to wander through the streets, I was amazed that despite the early hour there was already quite a bustle. Many people were on the streets already, in every store I passed the merchants were already presenting their goods. To strengthen my breakfast a little more, I bought myself a fresh pear at a fruit stand which I then ate while walking.

Just like yesterday, I also was still amazed how carefree the citizens of Ba Sing Se were living, since they had no idea that there was a bloody war happening behind the massive walls of their city. I was inclined to tell at least a couple of people about the true happenings in the world, but Long Feng, the Gaijin, had threatened us with forcible expulsion from the city if one of us would say only a single word about the war in public and of course I didn't want to jeopardize our mission just because of a short twinge of self-righteousness.

While I was wandering, I looked at every girl around her age that I passed, but unfortunately, she was never among them. The longer I walked and searched, the more my hope to find her dwindled.

I just thought about how long I should continue to walk when I turned the corner of a house and crashed into somebody with full speed. The impact was so strong that both I and my counterpart...
fell to the ground. I rubbed my forehead which had hit my counterpart's skull and raised my head to see who I had knocked down. But what or more precisely who I spotted took me by complete surprise: Right in front of me on the fortunately deserted cobblestone street sat Ty Lee! I really couldn't believe it at the first moment, I had found her!

She now raised her head as well and looked directly into my eyes, her own eyes suddenly became huge.

With one voice, we both said at the exact time: "You!"

I quickly stood up and offered her my hand: "I'm sorry, that was my fault, I should have taken better care to where I was going."

She grabbed my hand and I pulled her back to her feet. She smiled and tapped the dust off her loose red clothes: "It's alright, half as bad. I didn't expect to see you here. Don't worry, I'm not here to fight today."

"I thought so. If you would have wanted, you probably would have done something already."

She laughed and answered: "Yeah, but answer me a question: What are you doing here?"

I hummed and hawed a little, but eventually plucked up the courage and said: "If I am to be honest: I have been looking for you."

Her eyes became huge again, then she heavily blushed and said quietly: "You too?"

I slightly tilted my head and asked perplexed: "What do you mean, "you too"?"

Ty Lee's cheeks reddened even more, then she replied: "I mean that I was looking for you as well."

Now I was flabbergasted! We both actually have had the exact same idea, this simply couldn't be a coincidence!

Even though I was pretty sure that I knew the answer already, I still asked: "Why were you looking for me?"

Ty Lee's face now finally took the color of a tomato, she hummed and hawed herself and eventually answered haltingly: "Because...I...think...you're...cute..."

My jaw almost dropped to the ground in surprise. The girl that had fought and tried to kill me on two occasions already thought that I was cute? I remembered my father's words. Was this what he had meant? I had to admit that since I had first seen Ty Lee back in Omashu I found her really beautiful and I also still liked her bubbly personality. But could such feelings really evolve into something more serious?

I said to her: "Thank you for the compliment. I also have to say that I find you really pretty and I also like your whole behavior, so cute and bubbly, it always makes me very happy."

I could swear that steam shot out from Ty Lee's ears when I said these words. Was she really this excited? Did she really feel something like that?

I gathered all my courage and asked her: "Do you want to walk through the streets a little and talk with me? Then we could get to know each other better."

Ty Lee's face lit up in happiness, she smiled and said: "I would love to!"
And then, just like that, she took my hand. This made me blush a little myself, luckily she didn't see it. So we started to wander through the streets, hand in hand. I had a strange feeling in my stomach, was it what I thought it was? Well, I guess I would find out eventually...

-POV change-

Katara and Toph enjoyed their girls day to the fullest and wandered through the Upper Ring joyfully, talking about all sorts of girl things.

But when they wanted to enter one of the numerous side streets, Katara suddenly stopped, held Toph back and whispered: "Shush! Don't go there!"

Toph asked baffled: "Why, what is it?"

"Yulizan is standing a little down the street."

"Great, then we can meet with him and..."

Katara snubbed the young earth bender.

"Ty Lee is with him!"

Now Toph's face darkened as well, she stood next to her friend when the two peeked around the corner and fixated both Yulizan and Ty Lee with firm eyes.

After some minutes, Katara commented: "They seem to get along very well."

When Yulizan continued to walk down the street, hand in hand with Ty Lee, a few minutes later, the two girls stepped out from behind the corner and discussed what they had seen.

"I don't believe it! Yulizan is actually making eyes at our enemy!"

"What do we do now?", Toph asked.

"We wait till he comes back, then, when we get the chance to be alone with him, we confront him!"

"Sounds like a plan. Now what about our relaxation day?"

"It continues just like before, don't worry."

Already laughing again, the two friends continued to walk through the streets.

-POV change back-

Ty Lee and I walked through the streets joyfully and talked extensively. I learned about her noble origin, how she had attended the Royal Fire Academy for Girls and met Azula and Mai there, her growing up with six sisters, her escape from home and how she started working in the circus afterwards. I was really fascinated by the bubbly girl who radiated an unbelievably strong zest for life.

When she told me about her six sisters, I commented: "And I thought two younger sisters and a younger brother were already an ordeal."
We both laughed heartily at this comment, after that I started telling her the complete story of my own life. She was very shocked when I told her about my family's death, but she was even more thrilled when I talked about my ascension through the ranks in the Assassin Order.

When I was finished with the story, she said: "So I was right! You really are a warrior, this power, this passion, this determination in your eyes, everything was true!"

"How could you read all of this out of my eyes?"

"When you had grabbed me by the hand in the forest, I had been able to see your eyes clearly even with your hood on, their shine immediately casted a spell over me."

"Wow! Never thought I would be able to do such things."

Meanwhile, we were relatively close to my hideout already, I told Ty Lee: "Look, I live in that house over there."

I pointed at my hideout with my finger. With a questioning look in her beautiful eyes, Ty Lee asked: "But why does it look like it's abandoned?"

"That's only the impression from the outside, just wait and see."

I only realized after a few seconds that I had just indirectly invited her to my home. We climbed up the stairs to the door, I fetched the key from my bag, unlocked the door and we entered the house. Ty Lee seemed to be really amazed by the fact that the house was completely furnished and habitable.

I spread my arms and said: "Welcome to my humble home."

"What exactly is this place?"

"Well, you need to know: We Assassins are represented worldwide and since we do not always find a secure accommodation, the Grand Masters developed the Network of the Hideouts some time ago. The Order buys abandoned houses in every larger city, silent aides keep them in good condition and those newly furnished houses then start to serve traveling Assassins as temporary quarters. And that's exactly how it is here as well, this is my hideout in Ba Sing Se."

Ty Lee was once again amazed, just like about basically everything I had told her about the Assassins. I led her through the whole house and showed her every room.

When we arrived back in the hall, we stood there facing each other, I asked her: "So, what do you want to do now?"

"This!"

Without warning, Ty Lee moved her head forward and her lips touched mine. Shocked at first, I gave into the kiss relatively fast, I had to confess that I had wanted it too this whole time.

We stood there kissing in the middle of the room for what felt like several hours, then Ty Lee removed her mouth from mine and looked me in the eyes, I looked back. I noticed a single little tear in the corner of her eye, but I knew that it was a tear of happiness.

With a quiet but unbelievably beautiful voice, Ty Lee said: "I love you!"

I looked into her beautiful glittering eyes, saw her face that was overpowered by joy and the bubbly
enamored smile, then I answered: "I love you too!"

Ty Lee's eyes became huge with happiness again, she flung her arms around my neck and kissed me again. During the kiss, I once again had my father's words in the back of my head. He actually had been right! I would definitely play a pivotal role in Ty Lee's life because I loved the girl and I would never let her go again!

After further sheer endless minutes of kissing, I lifted Ty Lee up from the ground, she wrapped her legs around my lower back. Closely entwined and still kissing, I carried her to the bedroom where I gently put her down onto one of the sleeping mats.

I lied down on top of her, broke the kiss for a second and asked: "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure, I love you and I want to feel you!"

That was the permission I had needed. I removed my mouth from Ty Lee's lips and started to place little kisses on the rest of her face and her neck, while my hand simultaneously started to wander towards her breasts. I moved her top aside and began to massage her well-shaped and quite big breasts. She visibly enjoyed it and already moaned a little.

After a couple of minutes, my hands wandered further down while my mouth had now found its place on her right nipple. While I used my tongue I tried to remove her loose pants with one hand and eventually succeeded after a few tries. While my mouth and my tongue continued to do their job obediently, my fingers now started to caress her smooth skin gently. It was perhaps the most beautiful thing my hand had ever touched, so silky, so smooth, just wonderful!

With time, my hand slowly moved down further and further until I had reached her holy spot. When I began to massage said spot with my fingertips, Ty Lee moaned again, now much louder than before. Shortly afterwards, my mouth followed my hand and my lips came in contact with the warm liquid of her womanhood.

My tongue now worked on her holy spot while I slowly inserted two of my fingers into her from under my chin. This combination educed the loudest moan so far from her and I wasn't willing to let it end. My tongue and my fingers became faster and faster, her moans became louder and louder until she eventually reached her climax after ten minutes and a real ocean of warm sticky liquid spurted into my face.

I looked up to her pretty face, her eyes were rolled back in pleasure, I smiled.

Suddenly she jumped up, turned me around so that I was now lying on the ground and said: "You made me happy, now I'm going to make you happy!"

Without objections, I let Ty Lee remove my cloth pants which made my best man virtually jump straight into her face. In the first moment, she looked surprised, but soon determination returned to her face and she started to rub him slowly but surely. I had already felt this feeling a couple of times now, especially in the last couple of months, but now, together with the feeling of love, it was even more intense than ever before.

Ty Lee lowered her head and gave me a questioning look, I immediately nodded, whereupon she started to use her mouth. This feeling was more intense than before as well, everything was simply indescribable by now! I knew that I could best show her my love by lasting as long as possible, which I eventually did, only after full fifteen minutes I unloaded my seed into Ty Lee's throat. Even
though she choked a little and therefore coughed afterwards, she still looked highly satisfied, just like me.

She smiled again and said quietly: "Time for the main course!"

She swung her legs over me, positioned herself correctly and slid onto my re-excited manhood with one swift motion. I came across a small resistance but was able to overcome it fairly fast, even though this caused Ty Lee to utter a small cry of pain. But once said pain had worn off, she thoroughly gave in to the passion and started to move in an unbelievable rhythm. This feeling was definitely the best feeling I had ever felt in the eighteen years of my life and I was sure that it would be really hard to find a feeling that could top this one.

Immensely spurred by the feeling of love, we both lasted amazingly long until we both reached our second climax together about twenty minutes later.

Some time later, we lied next to each other on the sleeping mat, exhausted but happy, Ty Lee had her head on my chest.

I moved my fingers through her long brown hair, she said: "That was the best feeling of my life, thank you so much, for everything!"

Instead of answering, I gently grabbed her head with one hand, turned it so that she looked at me and kissed her tenderly.

I said: "I love you, so much, I want you to be happy, I want us both to be happy, together!"

"Yes, I wish that too."

She put her head back down onto my chest and fell asleep shortly after. I stared at the ceiling and thought. So this was it, the feeling of true love. I had read so much about it, but the pleasure to feel it myself couldn't be put into words! I had found the woman of my life in Ty Lee, I wanted to stay be her side forever!

At this moment, I made a big decision: Once the war was over and peace was restored, I would marry Ty Lee and start a family with her. This was my new life goal and I would give it my all to achieve it! I actually never thought that I would be able to be this happy again after the loss of my family, but Ty Lee had made it and opened my eyes. Now I was ready for everything, because my life now had a deeper meaning again.

Get ready, forces of evil! The Assassin is now stronger and more powerful than ever before!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Death to the Gaijin!
The next morning, Ty Lee and I woke up together. She raised her head and smiled at me: "Good morning."

"Good morning, slept well?"

"Of course, I've been dreaming of you all night."

"Oh you!"

I gave her a little kiss, then I turned my head and looked towards the window. The sun was already shining through the cracks in the boards, it was probably already bright outside. We rose slowly and began to get dressed again.

While we did this, I asked Ty Lee: "So, what's on the agenda today?"

"Well, first off, I think that I should return to my own quarters, the others are probably already wondering where I've been this entire time."

Of course I knew that with she meant Azula and Mai when she said "the others", but I didn't say anything about it.

Instead, I asked: "Tell me: Do you actually like what you're doing?"

She looked at me questioningly: "How do you mean?"

"Well, do you like travelling with Azula and Mai? I mean sure, you have been friends for a very long time, but during our previous encounters you always seemed as if you didn't do what you did voluntarily."

She shook her head a little and finally said: "Well, you are not wrong with that."

"Then why do you continue anyway? Just leave those two behind and come with me! Just the two of us, taking on the world!"

She took my hand and answered: "As nice as I think this would be, I just can't, because otherwise Azula..."

"What otherwise?"

I saw that her eyes were becoming very frightened, tears welled up in them. With a trembling voice she said: "Otherwise...she...will..."

She couldn't continue as she burst into tears and started sobbing loudly. I embraced her and gently stroked over her smooth hair.

"Calm down, don't worry, I'm here, you don't have to be afraid."

I let her weep herself out, then I said: "Let me tell you something: If Azula ever only lays a finger
on you, then she will wish that she had never been born, because then I will take care of her and I won't hold back!"

I saw a little touch of shock in Ty Lee's face, but it was quickly replaced with relief.

I smiled and kissed her again, afterwards I said: "Don't worry. With me by your side, you don't have to be afraid of nothing and no one!"

She hugged me dearly, then we left the house together.

We went to one of the big crossroads of the Upper Ring, that's where our paths should separate. When we had reached the place, we looked into each other's eyes again and kissed one more time.

After that, Ty Lee said with a sad voice: "It's really hard for me to leave you, but I hope that we can see each other again soon."

"I hope that too."

We hugged one last time, then Ty Lee turned around and started walking away.

She waved at me, I waved back and thought: "Take care of yourself, girl. Don't worry, soon we can spend all the time in the world together."

When Ty Lee had disappeared from my field of view, I turned around as well and started walking back to my hideout, more precisely to my friends' house, as I was sure that they had planned something for today.

When I entered the street where our houses were located, I already saw from afar that my friends had just left their house and started walking down the street.

First, I quickened my steps to catch up with them, but then I slowed down again and hid behind the corner of another house when I discovered the two Dai Li agents that were coming out of a side street and started following my friends with safety distance.

I immediately realized that those two were up to something, I decided to follow them inconspicuously and observe them, while simultaneously following my friends.

As it turned out, my friends had set out into the city to distribute posters that were holding a picture of Appa, probably to get a better chance of finding him.

The two Dai Li agents had disappeared again only a few streets after I had discovered them, therefore I had been able to catch up with my friends relatively fast. Nevertheless, I of course stayed vigilant, I was pretty sure that those two agents were still hiding in the shadows somewhere.

I helped my friends to distribute the posters, while doing so, I noticed that Katara, who was walking with me, repeatedly darted strangely grim glances at me. What was wrong with her? Had I done something wrong? Nothing came to my mind.

While we were engrossed in our work, suddenly, out of nowhere, a young man approached Katara and me. He wore blue and red clothes, carried two swords with hooks on his back and had a blade of grass between his teeth. Katara became furious all of a sudden and charged at the guy.

I asked: "What's going on? Who is that?"
"Jet! A so called freedom fighter who doesn't care about anything or anybody!"

That's when I remembered the stories Pagan had told me some time ago. He had told that Team Avatar once had encountered so called freedom fighters who I had rather called terrorists. And this guy was one of them? Then I would probably do the world a favor if I would remove him from the face of the earth!

I walked up to him, drew one of my daggers while walking, grabbed him by the collar, pushed him against the nearest wall and put my dagger on his throat!

He looked at me, scared to death, and said: "Hey man, what are you doing?"

With a grim look in my eyes and a dark voice I said: "Give me one good reason why shouldn't slice your throat open right here and now!"

"Because I'm here to help you.", Jet gasped.

Katara asked grimly: "And why should we believe you?"

"He says the truth.", it came from Toph who had appeared on the scene now as well. "His heartbeat stays completely normal, it would be noticeably higher if he was lying."

That seemed logical to me, I loosened my grip and removed my dagger. Jet took a few deep breaths and then ordered us to follow him to a big warehouse.

When we arrived there, he said: "This is the place where your bison was imprisoned."

Toph added: "He's right, here!"

The young earth bender had picked up a tuft of fur that was of the same color and type of hair as Appa's.

"Are you searching for the giant bison?", an old man holding a broom suddenly asked. "I'm sorry, but you're too late, the fine animal has already been shipped to Whaletail Island in the southern polar circle."

"Well great! It would take us months to get there without any proper form of transportation!", I said annoyed.

But Aang seemed to be completely determined to risk this forlorn hope and Jet wanted to join him. We decided to come along as well, as Katara and I still didn't trust the slyly grinning terrorist.

Some time after our departure, we were stopped by two strangers. They turned out to be companions of Jet, a young girl named Smellerbee and a mute young man named Longshot. With their appearance, Katara became furious again, as Jet had claimed only shortly before that he had left his group behind. Jet asserted that he had told the truth as he was now living a peaceful life in Ba Sing Se, but Smellerbee said that he apparently had been arrested by the Dai Li some time ago.

I asked Toph: "Who is right now?"

"Both."

What? That could not be! But surprisingly, Sokka had an explanation: "They both think that they're telling the truth. Jet has somehow been influenced by the Dai Li to get rid of us!"
That was the last straw! That treacherous Gaijin! He was actually using techniques of this kind now to gain an advantage for himself! Oh, I would bring him such infernal pain that he would beg on his knees for me to end it quickly!

The others decided to question Jet about where he had been held when the Dai Li had manipulated his mind, as Aang suspected that Appa was there as well. Therefore, I tied Jet's arms and legs with my metal-enforced ropes and Katara used her healing abilities to loosen his mind so that he could remember. He slightly remembered something that he described as an underground base hidden beneath a lake. Smellerbee realized that it had to be Lake Laogai, a lake not far from Ba Sing Se. We decided to set out and pay this lake a visit.

When we had reached the lake the next morning, we noticed nothing unusual first. But after a short search, Toph discovered a hidden tunnel that led under the lake. Through this tunnel, we reached a wide-ranging underground location, just like Jet had described it.

Jet was walking in front and led the way, through many rooms filled with green pillars to a cell in which Appa apparently had been held in, as it was the only cell of the complex that was big enough to hold a sky bison. When we got closer to the cell, I suddenly felt an enemy presence close to us.

I said: "Watch out! Somebody is here with us!"

As soon as we had turned around, we already were face to face with Long Feng and other Dai Li agents. Long Feng, the Gaijin, took a step forward and talked with a diabolical grin on his face:

"Did you really believe that you could outsmart me? You won't find anything here. Now, please follow me, you will be led out of Ba Sing Se at once."

Now I couldn't hide my identity behind my anger any longer. I stepped in front of the others and said with a dark voice: "We won't follow you nowhere ... Gaijin!"

Long Feng's eyes grew huge with shock, he stammered: "You ... are ... no ... that is impossible!"

I put on my grimmest expression and continued talking: "The Order never forgets, Long Feng! You have betrayed us! You were marked forever! And now you will be judged so that the Spirits can give you your fair punishment!"

Long Feng stared at me with a face that was filled of fear, then he told the other Dai Li agents: "Get them!", before he himself ran in the other direction and out of the room.

I of course immediately rushed after him, Aang and Jet followed me.

We chased Long Feng through large parts of the complex, until we finally caught up and confronted him inside a large hall.

I fixed my eyes on him and said: "There's nowhere left to run for you, Gaijin! Face your destiny, then the Spirits might have mercy with you!"

"Never!", Long Feng shouted, before he started reciting some kind of formula, he did it so quietly that I wasn't able to understand one word, but it resulted in Jet's eyes suddenly turning completely white and him attacking myself and Aang.

He grabbed both his hooked swords and wanted to charge at Aang, but I was able to intervene at the last moment, our swords collided with a loud clinking sound. I saw his white eyes and the true
power of the Gaijin's manipulation in them, I had to kill him as fast as possible, before he could
turn even more people into spineless slaves using this dreadful technique.

We fought for several minutes, I tried everything to break Jet's trance. Finally, a possibility arose: I
made a circular motion with my katanas, driving his swords apart so that I was able to hit his chin
with a well-aimed knee strike. He staggered backwards, stunned, but still on his feet. He looked
around slightly confused, then I saw that his pupils had reappeared in his eyes, I had broken the
trance!

Long Feng stared at the whole scene completely aghast before he shouted: "What are you waiting
for? Attack them!"

But Jet was no longer under his control! The young freedom fighter stormed at the Gaijin and tried
to attack him with his swords. But I already had a feeling that this would not end well for him, as
Long Feng had the training of an Assassin and therefore was an experienced fighter.

And I was right! He dodged the attacks and countered with a devastating strike with the edge of his
hand against Jet's chest. I knew this strike, it was one of the many unarmed lethal attacks used by
the Assassins. If the Gaijin had performed the strike correctly, and I was quite sure that he did,
there unfortunately was no more help for Jet, as the strike caused a fissure in the opponent's heart,
causing them to slowly bleed out internally. The Gaijin once again grinned diabolically as Jet
crumpled to the ground, lethally wounded.

He said quietly: "Well, boy, you wanted too much!", before he fled again, out of the hall, towards
the surface.

I took a look at Jet, who was lying on the ground, and called out to Aang: "You stay here, I'll
follow Long Feng!"

Aang nodded and ran over to the wounded freedom fighter. I followed the Gaijin, out of the
complex and back outside.

When I had reached the surface, I saw the Gaijin standing directly at lakeside, he seemed to
recover from the escape.

I called: "Gaijin! There's no escape! You will pay for all your crimes!"

Long Feng turned around, when he noticed me, his face became frightened again.

But only seconds later, this face changed into a determined one, when he said: "If you want it this
way, boy, then so be it!"

So there we were standing now: Assassin against Assassin, fire bender against earth bender, and
only one of us would leave this lake alive!

Long Feng made the first move and bent himself some earth chunks which he then hurled at me, of
course I was able to dodge them easily. I countered with two big fire bursts, Long Feng dodged
them just barely.

So the fight continued, always even, it was clearly visible that the two of us, even though we were
of different elements, had practically experienced the same training, but I still had the advantage
that my training had been way longer than his, therefore I technically had more experience, even
though the Gaijin was older than me.
With time, the Gaijin was noticeably able to wear me out, he was clearly targeting my endurance, the constant dodging and blocking of his earth bending really took it out of me. So much that I became unobservant for a second, Long Feng used this to tie my arms and legs using boulders he created from the ground.

Now I was hanging there, defenseless, Long Feng walked up to me with the diabolical grin on his face, he said slimily: "Well, looks like I'm superior to you. And you call yourself Master? Ridiculous!"

He bent himself a sharp stone peg which he held a few meters away from my face, ready for the final blow!

He grinned into my face once again and said: "Send the Spirits my regards!", but I coldly replied: "I'm not the one who will meet the Spirits today!"

At the same moment, the rocks that had tied my limbs exploded into a million pieces, I had been able to create Impulsive Lightning thanks to my fingers being free inside the boulders, their charge had blasted the rocks.

By the force of the explosion, Long Feng was thrown backwards, but I was far from finished yet! I concentrated, began a quick form of the lightning concentration practice, stared at Long Feng's terror-stricken face and fired a purple lightning bolt at him with full power! The electricity crackled loudly as it shot through the air and hit the Gaijin with all its force! He was thrown backwards again by the force and landed on the ground a few meters further, his whole body was smoking.

I walked up to him, took my little crossbow, loaded it with a steel bolt and then bent over the defeated Gaijin, who was staring at me, his face still filled with fear as he was lying there in front of me, paralyzed.

I rose again, pointed the crossbow at his head, said: "Last Assassin standing!" and fired the crossbow bolt right into his forehead!

All that was heard was the clicking sound of the trigger, then everything was silent. I had done it! I had killed the Gaijin and thereby accomplished one of the most important missions of the Order! I was really proud of myself!

Shortly after, my friends returned to the surface as well, and to the joy of us all, they had Appa with them, they had found him in another cell in the complex.

When I noticed that Smellerbee and Longshot were not with them, I asked: "Where are the others?"

Aang and Katara hung their heads, I immediately understood.

I clenched my hand into a fist and tapped myself on the chest while I looked up to the sky and said: "Anxi, Jet! May the Spirits give your soul eternal peace!"

Afterwards, we began to make our way back, Pagan was also glad to see Appa again, he really had missed his aerial companion.

While we were flying, I asked myself what would happen now. Long Feng was dead, technically our way to the Earth King was now free. But what would happen to the Dai Li, now that they had no leader? Maybe I could do something about that, we would definitely talk about everything
important with the Earth King.

Of course, I also thought of Ty Lee, how things would continue for the two of us. Despite our love, we were still on opposing sides, a condition that would hopefully not last much longer.

As so often, one had to practice patience and let the next events just come upon oneself. And especially the events of the coming days should have quite a lot of things ready for us.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Caught in the middle
Infiltrated!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After we had left the airspace above Lake Laogai, we discussed the further course of our mission.

Katara and Toph both spoke out in favor of leaving Ba Sing Se, as we had no other reason to stay here after finding Appa.

Sokka interjected that we actually had another reason to stay: We had to convey our information to the Earth King so that we could count on the Earth Kingdom's support in case of a possible attack on the Fire Nation. Aang agreed with him on that, I said that I would go anywhere, no matter what we would do.

Resignedly, Katara and Toph eventually agreed on returning to Ba Sing Se to talk to the Earth King.

When we had reached the city again, we immediately headed for the Upper Ring where the palace was located. We ignored the palace guards and walked straight towards the throne room. When we entered it, we saw the Earth King sitting on his throne at the other end of the room.

He looked up confused when we entered and asked: "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Aang stepped forward and said: "We are here to bring you some very important information, your majesty."

And so we told the Earth King everything about the war, our information and everything else.

When we had finished, he gave us a questioning look and said: "And why should I believe this preposterous story?"

Sokka pointed at Aang's tattoo and said visibly annoyed: "He's the Avatar, is that enough?"

The Earth King rubbed his chin and said: "Normally, I discuss such events with Long Feng, my first secretary, but I don't know where he is, I haven't seen him this whole day."

I stepped forward and said coldly: "Long Feng is dead! He was a disgrace for this world, a germ, all he cared about was increasing his own power. He died like he lived: As a slimy perfidious snake!"

The Earth King was visibly shocked by my words, but then he said: "Well, you might be right about that, I always had the feeling that Long Feng was hiding more than he showed me. But that still doesn't prove most of your claims."

Aang stepped forward again: "We actually have one big piece of evidence. There are remains of a giant drill at the Outer Wall of the city. It had almost pierced the wall had we not destroyed it. We can show it to you if you want, then you should believe us."

The Earth King visibly wrestled with his thoughts, then he said: "Alright."

Aang was happy, he had reached his goal. Together with the Earth King and his pet bear Bosco, we headed back to the Outer Wall.
We reached the wall without problems, the Earth King was very happy when he was flying through the air on Appa's back. But his eyes became serious when he saw the remains of the drill in front of the wall.

After a few minutes, he said: "I have seen enough. You have convinced me. We should return to the palace and discuss our next steps."

Next to me, I saw Sokka with a big grin on his face, he seemed to be pleased that our, or like he would probably say his plan had worked.

We returned to the palace forthwith. When we had reached it, the Earth King spoke to us: "I hereby ensure you the support of the Earth Kingdom in the event of a possibly invasion on the ... what did you call it again?"

"The Day of the Black Sun. An eclipse that will render every single fire bender powerless.", Sokka added.

I once again felt uncomfortable when I was reminded of the eclipse, I still wasn't able to get used to the thought of losing my bending abilities or maybe even being so weak that I wouldn't be able to properly fight with my weapons.

We continued discussing further plans with the Earth King when a few minutes later five men came storming into the throne room.

Aang asked: "Who are they?"

The Earth King answered: "The Council of Five. The supreme authority over the Earth Kingdom military."

The generals all carried multiple documents each when they walked through the room towards us.

One of them said: "Your majesty! We recovered these scrolls from Long Feng's office! Apparently he owned documents holding information about every single person living in Ba Sing Se!"

I turned to the Earth King and said: "See? I told you! A snake!"

The Earth King gave me an approving nod before turning back to the generals. One of them was carrying only a small amount of scrolls which also looked different from Long Feng's documents.

"And what about those scrolls?"

"Intercepted messages. A message for the Avatar, a letter for Toph Beifong, a letter from the Northern Water Tribe and a report by a certain Hakoda from the Southern Water Tribe."

Katara's and Sokka's faces immediately brightened when they heard that their father was still alive and had even sent them a message.

The message for Aang was from a guru named Pathik who was living in the Eastern Air Temple. He wrote that he could help Aang to master the Avatar State.

The letter for Toph was from her mother who currently was in Ba Sing Se and would like to meet up with her.

The letter from the Northern Water Tribe was for me. I opened and read it. It was from Runa. She wrote that she was happily married and doing very well now. Her husband had treated her like a
queen since I had given it to him straight. She also wished me good luck for all my missions.

I smiled when I packed the letter away, I was happy once again that I had been able to help the girl from the Northern Water Tribe this well.

In our group, we now discussed our personal next steps. Katara made the proposition that we should split up so that everyone could individually follow the new knowledge we had received. We others admittedly didn't think of this as the best but still the most useful proposition.

We shortly discussed the best possible ways and then made a decision: Katara and I would stay here in the palace to help the Earth King, Aang would drop off Sokka at the Water Tribe base before flying to the Eastern Air Temple and Toph would go and meet with her mother.

The next morning, Aang and Sokka got ready to set off. While they did that, the Earth King received a message: A group of three Kyoshi Warriors had arrived in Ba Sing Se and asked for an audience. Sokka and Katara immediately assured the Earth King that he could trust the warriors and they would definitely prove themselves to be powerful allies.

The five of us all hugged one last time, then Aang, Sokka and Toph left the palace.

Katara and I followed the Earth King back into the palace, when we had arrived back in the throne room I asked the king:

"Your majesty, please excuse the question, but what exactly will be my function while we are here? Katara is going to help you with the preparations for the defense of Ba Sing Se, but what about me?"

The Earth King sat down on his throne and said: "Well, Master Yulizan, you have defeated and killed Long Feng, the leader of the Dai Li, in an as you have described it honorable head-to-head fight. By the right of the winner of a duel, I hereby appoint you the temporary leader of the Dai Li. May you ensure the safety of this city better than Long Feng."

I was the new leader of the Dai Li? I was pretty surprised at the first moment, I had completely forgotten about the rights of a duel in the Earth Kingdom.

It was true: When two people dueled on Earth Kingdom grounds under Earth Kingdom law, the winner received every belonging, title and everything else of the loser. I had defeated and killed Long Feng and thus had also taken his position.

I saw both good and bad things in this. Good because I certainly would be able to lead the Dai Li back to its former glory, bad because I could imagine that the agents would most likely not accept me as their new leader.

But well, I would try my best, that's why I answered the king: "I will restore the Dai Li's former honor, your majesty."

"Commendable, Master Yulizan."

Shortly afterwards, a servant entered the throne room and said: "Your majesty! The Warriors of Kyoshi have arrived in the palace."

"Very good, I will greet them right away."
We followed the king out of the palace. The three warriors were already waiting in front of the gate, they knelt next to each other.

The Earth King stepped forward and spoke: "Warriors of Kyoshi! Welcome to Ba Sing Se. I hope you will enjoy your stay in our glorious city."

The warrior in the middle said quietly: "We most certainly will."

When I heard her voice, I winced internally! I hadn't misheard! These weren't Kyoshi Warriors here in front of us! These were Azula, Mai and Ty Lee!

I stared aghast at the scene in front of me. Luckily I was wearing my green disguise robe, otherwise Azula definitely would have recognized me.

I peeked over to Ty Lee. She saw me as well and winked at me. I wasn't sure what kind of game was played here, but I would certainly find out soon.

I decided not to tell neither Katara nor the Earth King about my detection for the time being, to not unnecessarily unsettle the latter and to not have to reveal my relationship with Ty Lee to the former.

In the period of time that followed, the Earth King treated the fake warriors like true guests of honor, he even told them the city's military strategies like it was nothing. I would have liked to slap myself when I heard the king talking about the many different aspects of the Earth Kingdom army.

I also had visible problems to follow both my tasks. On the one hand, I of course needed to officially lead the Dai Li, on the other hand I of course wanted to keep an eye on Azula, Mai and Ty Lee.

The control over the Dai Li eventually proved to be a fairly easy task, I simply transferred the authority over to the highest-ranking agent who was second in the hierarchy. Thus I only had to attend possible official meetings or announcements. The Dai Li agents apparently had accepted me as their new leader when I first showed up at the headquarters, I had made sure that I looked as authoritarian as possible, but the whole thing was still suspicious to me.

I rather used my time to tail the three girls anyway, however they didn't do anything conspicuous for quite a long time.

But then one day, an interesting opportunity arose: I followed Mai and Ty Lee out of the palace, the girls sat down on the stairs and began to talk with each other. I pressed myself against one of the many pillars and eavesdropped on the two. And the topic they talked about was more than interesting: Apparently, Azula planned an infiltration of Ba Sing Se to conquer the city from the inside and to dethrone the Earth King. To achieve that, she wanted to gain control over the Dai Li.

Ice-cold shivers went down my spine. The Dai Li agents were still officially under my control, but I was sure that if I didn't keep on paying attention Azula would sic them on me faster than I could say 'eclipse'.

I returned into the palace and planned my next steps. I thought about how I could win the complete loyalty of the Dai Li agents.

I continued to wander through the corridors when I suddenly heard a loud call behind me. I quickly melted into the shadows of a niche in the wall and began to wait for what would happen.
The call came from Katara who came storming into the palace after she had gone for a walk in the city some time before. He ran straight towards the fake Kyoshi Warriors. I foreboded that she intended to do something very foolish, but even if I had wanted to intervene, it was already too late.

Katara approached Azula and told her what she had seen in the city. Shortly afterwards Azula turned around, I saw the shock in Katara's eyes before Ty Lee appeared from out of nowhere and paralyzed Katara with her chi blockade. The three friends stood over Katara who was lying on the ground, I didn't know what I should have done in this moment, that's why I continued to wait.

The three friends turned around shortly afterwards and wanted to leave the palace, the paralyzed Katara in tow. I silently stepped out from my hiding place, snuck over to one of the pillars and continued to observe them from there.

I looked in the direction of the three girls for a short moment and noticed that Ty Lee had turned around and looked directly at me. She looked over to Azula and Mai who were deep in a conversation while dragging Katara behind. Thereupon, Ty Lee ran back, straight towards me.

We hugged each other briefly, then I asked: "What's with the masquerade?"

"Azula has come up with a plan that she wants to use to conquer Ba Sing Se."

"Yes, yes, I already know about the plan."

Ty Lee asked surprised: "How?"

"I eavesdropped on you and Mai when the two of you had sat on the stairs. I recognized you three immediately after your arrival, but I didn't say anything to protect us all."

"And what are you doing here in the palace?"

"Well, the Earth King has appointed me the new leader of the Dai Li, I now have control over Ba Sing Se's security police."

Ty Lee uttered a sound of shock: "Oh no!"

"What is it?"

"Azula! She wants to gain control over the Dai Li to translate her plan into action."

"I'm afraid that we probably won't be able to prevent that unfortunately, but those agents don't trust me even in the slightest, it probably will be easy for Azula to gain their trust."

"And what are you going to do then?"

"Oh, don't worry about me, I will be ready to take those guys on. You should take care of yourself, don't do anything rash, lull Azula into a sense of security, don't worry, I will vouch for you if necessary. Now go, quick, before they notice that you're gone."

We kissed for goodbye, then Ty Lee ran back to her friends who were about to leave the palace.

I kept standing where I was, scratched my head and thought: Katara was gone and there was nothing I could have done to prevent it, but I would definitely go and try to free her sooner or later. The Dai Li was as good as lost for me, if I even have had the control over them at all at some point. Now I was completely alone here in the palace. So what should I do?

I thought about it and eventually decided to uphold the illusion as good as possible until my friends
would return, then we could start searching for Katara together and deal with Azula and the Dai Li.

But in all this confusion, I most of all hoped that Ty Lee would get out of this whole thing unscathed. Should something happen to her, I would never be able to forgive myself for not protecting her!

I knew that the following days would be very important, but of course I didn't know yet that they would open up another night black chapter in my soul, they would leave their mark on me, re-shape me...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: It's all over...
In the following time, my plan to uphold the illusion proved to be more difficult than imagined.

Just like I had anticipated, Azula had been able to get the Dai Li under her control without any major problems.

One morning when I was called into the secret police's head office for a meeting, I immediately felt that something was wrong. Every agent that was present stared at me with a strange look in their eyes.

I asked: "What is the problem now, guys?"

One of the higher-ranking agents answered: "You are the problem, sir!"

Without any further words, all Dai Li agents started to attack me!

Fortunately I had expected this.

Before even a single chuck of earth was able to hit me I threw a phial filled with the substance that generated black smoke onto the ground and vanished from the agents' sight. I appeared behind the agent who had talked to me for a short second, grabbed his head and twisted it to the side, breaking his neck, killing him. That's how I made sure that I left a message.

Following that, I fled out of the building and only seconds later believed to hear Azula's vicious laugh.

"Now we really have a problem!", I thought to myself while fleeing back to the palace.

Some hours after I had reached the palace again, the next problem already arose.

I had told the Earth King that all the Dai Li agents had turned against me but that I most likely had unsettled them enough so that they would not be of any danger for the time being.

Now the Earth King wanted to welcome the two owners of a small but relatively well-known tea shop in the palace, as he had already heard a lot of good about the tea of this shop and now wanted to try it himself.

I wandered through the palace, the king had assigned me a new role as the captain of palace security after the Dai Li's mutiny, a role I could live with for the time being, as I was now able to roam around in my usual role as a lone wolf again and didn't have to command a small army anymore.

Thus I also noticed the two tea shop owners when they entered the palace. But when I saw who they were, I quickly took cover behind a pillar. They really were Prince Zuko and General Iroh of the Fire Nation!

"What are they doing here in Ba Sing Se?", I asked myself while I observed them how they were told to wait a moment before the king would welcome them.
I looked around for a second to see if I could possibly find a better vantage point, and indeed:
Above me, between the individual pillars, were wooden beams, strong enough to stand on them.
Protected by the shadows, I climbed the wall with the help of some reliefs and eventually pulled
myself up onto one of the wooden beams. Now, with the help of the shadows, I had an almost
perfect disguise and also a good overview over the entire hall.

I didn't have to wait long before something happened: Multiple Dai Li agents entered the hall and
circled Zuko and Iroh. Shortly afterwards, Azula herself entered as well, that nasty witch had
actually managed to get the Dai Li under her control.

She confronted her brother and her uncle, but the latter stayed completely calm and continued to
drink small sips of the tea he had brought with him.

"I would like to have his calmness.", I thought to myself while watching the whole scene from my
vantage point.

But shortly afterwards, it showed that the tea had a reason, because General Iroh suddenly spewed
a giant blast of fire from his mouth, knocking down several Dai Li agents in the process.

I was surprised, the fewest fire benders had mastered the art of fire breathing, the Assassins also
taught it, I had learned it as well but almost never used it since one could burn themselves way to
fast in the process, even if one was a Master Fire Bender.

Iroh and Zuko now broke through the line of Dai Li agents and blasted a hole into the palace wall.
Iroh immediately jumped through the hole, but Zuko stayed behind. He told Azula that he wouldn't
continue to run away from her but fight her instead!

"Be careful what you wish for, boy!", I thought to myself, I had experienced Azula's formidable fire
bending skills firsthand and I was much more advanced than Zuko, he probably wouldn't have the
ghost of a chance should he really choose to fight her.

But a fight didn't occur at all since the Dai Li agents subdued and arrested Zuko. Azula looked
very pleased when she left the palace with the Dai Li agents and her captive brother.

I leaped down from my vantage point and thought about my next step. But I didn't have to strain
my thoughts for too long, because only shortly afterwards, Aang, Sokka and Toph came storming
into the palace.

Aang immediately approached me and asked: "Yulizan! What happened? Where is Katara?"

I rattled through a short version of the events that had occurred since my friends' departure.

When I had finished my report, Aang said: "Let's go to our house, maybe we'll find something
there!"

Even though I was pretty sure that we wouldn't make a find there, I of course still followed the
others.

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We had reached the house a couple of minutes later, but it was empty, just like I had thought, and
there weren't any clues of Katara's whereabouts.

"I told you! Katara must be in some secret place."

"But where?"
We weren't able to think about possibilities for long, as there suddenly was a knock on the door. I reached for my katana, combat-ready!

The door opened and revealed General Iroh! To everybody's astonishment, Toph greeted him like they knew each other which turned out to be true shortly afterwards, Toph told us how she and Iroh had once met in the forest during our escape from the tank.

Iroh asked for our help to rescue Zuko from Azula's clutches. Sokka was very skeptical at first, but Aang and I were able to persuade him in the end. As a sign of trust, I raised my left hand and showed Iroh my ring finger, he nodded in agreement. Therefore we decided to start searching for Zuko and Katara together.

When we wanted to leave the house, we stopped in surprise: A bound Dai Li agent stood in front of the house. By his own admission, Iroh had detained him during his escape from the palace. He now wanted to question him where exactly Zuko was held prisoner.

Fortunately, I was quite the good interrogator. I first put one of my daggers to the agent's throat before starting to move the other one over his skin menacingly, whenever he didn't want to answer our questions, I carved a new wound into his skin.

But luck was on our side, the agent was a pretty weak fellow, after only a few minutes we learned that the Dai Li operated a large underground prison inside a natural cave called "Crystal Catacombs" in which both Katara and Zuko were most likely incarcerated now.

When we had found out all the information we needed, I said "Thank you!" and rammed my dagger into the agent's neck. I ignored the others' shocked faces while we started searching for those catacombs.

When we had reached the spot the agent had described to us, we decided to split up: Aang and Iroh would go down into the catacombs to free Katara and Zuko, while Sokka, Toph and I would go and inform the Earth King.

The three of us headed for the palace immediately, we were able to reach the throne room without any resistance, but in there a dangerous scene unfolded in front of us: Azula, Mai and Ty Lee were present and had taken the king hostage!

I yanked the hood off my head, this moment should contain nothing but truth!

As soon as my face was visible, Azula's eyes widened and she screamed: "YOU!"

I replied with a dark voice: "Sorry, today I'm not polite, princess!"

"Mai! Ty Lee! Give them hell!"

The two girls charged at us, but I simply leaped over them and ran towards Azula.

She let go of the Earth King and hurled a flame at me. I however simply caught it mid-air and threw it back, Azula was just barely able to dodge it.

Although the fight seemed even at first, the tide turned against us relatively fast when several Dai Li agents came storming into the throne room and made the fight even more difficult for us. Azula used the resulting confusion to escape.

I knew that I had to follow her, that's why I mobilized my powers and, with extreme violence,
began to eliminate all the Dai Li agents that were attacking me.

Afterwards I ran out of the room, trying to follow Azula. While running, I glanced at Ty Lee who was fighting against Toph. Our eyes met for a short moment, she nodded.

I knew what she wanted to say with that: "Don't worry, I'll be careful not to hurt any of them."

I appreciated my love's gesture in thought and continued to pursue Azula.

We eventually reached the subsoil of the city through several tunnels, after a final curve I saw Azula blasting a hole into a wall. I rushed through it and almost immediately stopped in amazement: We seemed to be inside the Crystal Catacombs and there most definitely was no other name that would have fitted this place better. Everywhere, whether from the walls or the ceiling, crystals in many different sizes, shapes and colors were growing.

While I looked around, I spotted Aang, Katara and Zuko. I ran and positioned myself at my friends' side.

So there we were standing: Three against two. Aang, Katara and myself against Azula and Zuko.

Azula looked at her brother and said: "Think about it, Zuko! The two of us, we defeat the Avatar together, then father will welcome both of us with open arms. Your honor would be restored, you would be a free man again!"

I clearly sensed the deceitfulness in Azula's propositions, but I remained silent and waited for one of the two to make the first move.

In the end, Zuko gave himself to Azula and hurled the first flame at Katara.

Thus began the battle, Zuko against Katara, Aang and me against Azula.

Right at the beginning, I dug up a new trick from my wide repertoire of abilities and created two long fire whips in my hands before immediately unleashing their unbridled power on Azula! But she dodged the attack skillfully, only to be catapulted backwards by Aang's air bending shortly afterwards.

The fight was very hard and very long, everybody involved was most definitely equal regarding their fighting skills.

I always tried not to completely exhaust myself, I knew that if I wanted to survive this battle I had to be able to use all my energy.

After some more time, Azula and Zuko gained even more of an advantage when several Dai Li agents came storming into the catacombs. Their appearance resulted in a great exchange of earth bending powers when Aang and the agents each created a large wave of rubble which they then hurled at the opposing side.

At this moment, I committed what I would later describe as maybe the biggest mistake of my life: To avoid the flying debris, I jumped to the side but dropped my cover for a brief moment in the process, Azula took advantage this and hurled a flame at me that I wasn't able to block in time. The fire hit the left half of my torso with full force!

I clenched my teeth to not cry out in hellish pain when the flame scorched my robe and burned the
skin on my chest and shoulder. I sank to the ground, my right hand pressed onto the bloody and burned wound, then my world turned black.

But I only stayed unconscious for a few moments, when I woke up again the pain was still unbearable but what I had to watch one second later completely tore me to shreds: Aang was entering the Avatar State, his eyes and tattoos glowed brighter than ever before, he began to ascend into the air.

I thought that this could be the moment that would give us the victory, but it became the possibly worst defeat of my life!

Because all of a sudden a lightning bolt flashed through the catacombs and directly hit Aang with full force! His glaring eyes shot wide open while I suffered the shock of my life because I knew exactly what had just happened: Aang had been fatally wounded while in the Avatar State! And if an Avatar was killed while in the Avatar State, then this was the end of the Avatar Cycle, there would never ever be a new Avatar!

As Aang fell towards the ground, I screamed at the top of my voice: "NOOOOOOOOO!"

Katara caught Aang using a wave before he hit the ground and placed him in her arms.

I stood up arduously, my right hand still pressed onto my wound to stop the bleeding.

Suddenly, General Iroh appeared in the catacombs, he called out to Katara and me: "Get out of here, quick!"

With almost unbearable pain in my upper body I followed Katara who carried Aang's dead body in her arms.

We eventually managed to leave the catacombs, the pain in my shoulder became worse with every passing minute.

Back on the surface, we met with Sokka and Toph, we all knew that we had to flee as fast as possible.

I had no strength to call Pagan, thus I also climbed on Appa and we rose into the night sky.

Katara put Aang's corpse down in the middle of the saddle. I looked at the young Avatar's dead body and wasn't able to hold back my tears, they were tears of both grief and of pain.

I couldn't believe it! I had failed! I hadn't been able to fulfill the task of protecting the Avatar with my life, a task the Spirits themselves had given me! I had disappointed everybody! My family, the order, the whole world! I no longer had the right to walk the face of the earth!

With tears and pain filling both my mind and body, I said to the others: "This is all my fault! I wasn't able to protect Aang! I have failed in my task! I have no more reason to live!"

Katara, despite also being marked by immense grief, replied: "Don't say something like that!"

"No, Katara, don't say another word! It's my fault and my fault alone that we have lost the Avatar forever and I alone will bear the consequences for this!"

I looked at everybody: "I wish you all that you can continue to lead a largely good life, but for me, there's nothing left to live for! Farewell, my friends."
I managed to utter a short whistle and waited for Pagan. Katara said: "Wait Yulizan, there's one thing left you have to tell me."

I looked at Katara when she continued: "What was that between you and Ty Lee? Did you have something going on with her?"

I looked at the water bender aghast: "How do you know about that?"

"Toph and I saw the two of you in Ba Sing Se, hand in hand. So, did you have something going on with her, yes or no?"

I pressed my hand onto my wound again when the pain became stronger again for a second, then I answered:

"If you really want to know: Yes! I had something going on with Ty Lee! I fell in love with her! So what? I regret nothing! I have feelings and followed them! But that doesn't matter because that has no future anymore as well!"

At this moment, Pagan appeared next to Appa, I really struggled to mount him in my current state. When I finally sat more or less safely on the dragon's neck, I looked at my friends one last time:

"Farewell!"

Then Pagan flew away, towards the Assassin monastery.

We reached the monastery and landed in the courtyard where many Assassin recruits stood in two rows, effectively creating a lane.

I dismounted Pagan, looked at the dragon who hung his head in sadness and started to walk through the lane the recruits had created, still suffering hellish pain from the wound. At the end of the lane, the Grand Masters were waiting.

I sank to my knee and said with a tear-filled voice:

"Masters! I'm so sorry! I have failed! The Avatar is dead! I wasn't able to protect him! I have disappointed the Order! I have disappointed the Spirits! I have disappointed the world!"

The Grand Masters remained silent until Lao Zhu finally began to speak:

"You know there's only one trial for this kind of failure, Master Yulizan."

"The Purification!"

"Correct! Perform the Purification and wait for the judgment of the Spirits. We will pray that they may have mercy. Good luck, Young Master!"

I rose again and walked over to the monastery's arsenal, the pain in my chest became worse with every step I took.

Inside the arsenal I approached a small metal chest that was standing on a decorated pedestal. Inside that chest was the tool for what was maybe the most cruel and most dangerous ritual known to the Assassins: The Purification! It was only performed when an Assassin had suffered such a great shame over which only the Spirits were to judge.

I opened the chest and saw the weapon I had only read about in stories until now, I never would
I have thought that I would need to use it myself one day. It was a cat o' nine tails made of metal, plus every tail also had a metal ball covered with thick spikes at its end.

The Assassin who performed the Purification had to go to his personal quarters, completely disrobe himself, kneel down on his meditation mat and then flagellate himself to unconsciousness with the whip! During the phase of unconsciousness the Spirits would judge over him and either send him back into the realm of life or pull him into hell to make him suffer for all time!

I grabbed the whip determinedly and made my way to my quarters.

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When I had reached my room, I locked the door, removed all my weapons and clothes and put them into a large chest since I wasn't sure if I would ever need them again.

Afterwards, I knelt down on my mat in the middle of the room, completely naked.

I took the whip in my hand with firm grip, lunged out and hit my back with full force! The pain was the worst feeling I had ever felt, the spikes on the balls pierced through my skin and tore at my flesh!

After some more blows, my entire back was already covered with deep and bloody wounds.

With every blow, I uttered a blood-curdling scream, I wanted to show that I had realized my sins and was doing penance now!

With every blow, the pain become more intense, I slowly began to lose the feeling in my arms, but still continued to hit my back.

My mind became foggy, my consciousness was only hanging by a thread.

I lunged out one last time, as strong as never before, the last blow was the hardest, several pieces of skin were torn out of my back, my vision became dark, the whip slipped from my hand, I fell forward and lost consciousness.

Here I was now: On the threshold between life and death, my destiny was now in the hands of the Spirits!

How would they decide? Would they ban me into the eternal torments of hell? I would have deserved it for the shame that I had brought over the world.

Or would they decide on giving me one last chance?

I was in limbo and stared towards an uncertain future.

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Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: The awakening
I, or more precisely my mind, found myself, or itself, inside an endless black mass.

I saw nothing but blackness and didn't know what to do, as I was able to move which however lead to nothing because of the missing orientation.

Then, all of a sudden, I once again heard my father's voice in my head: "Concentrate!"

I did as I was told, even though I didn't know what exactly I should concentrate on. Therefore I only performed the standard practice, which was to create a single fixed spot in one's mind and then think of nothing else but that spot.

When I was able to clearly see the spot in my mind I suddenly realized that it had started to come closer and closer towards me. I still remained fixated on it, no matter how close it might come.

Then ultimately the spot collided with me in my thoughts which caused my eyes to open wide. I was surprised: The black mass had disappeared! But the place where I was now was even more surprising: It was the entrance hall of my old family home.

"What does this mean now?", I asked myself and received an answer shortly thereafter:

"Yulizan!", said someone behind me.

I turned around and saw my father standing a few meters away from me. He was fully clad in a bright white robe, a clear sign that even in death he remained loyal to the Assassins. I noticed the whitish-blue glow of his silhouette as he started to walk towards me.

"Father!", I called before I hung my head and my voice became filled with sadness: "I am so sorry!"

My father put his hand on my shoulder and asked: "What are you sorry for?"

"I have failed! I did not manage to fulfill my task! I wasn't able to protect the Avatar! He was killed while in the Avatar State! It's over! The world is doomed! I have disappointed you, I have disappointed all of you! I have disappointed the Order! I have disappointed the world!"

I wasn't able to hold back while still speaking and broke out into tears.

My father rubbed my shoulder and, after my crying fit had died away, said to me: "Follow me, I will show you something."

He guided me through the dark room towards a little table on which a large bowl filled with water stood. My father touched the edge of the bowl with his finger which caused the water to light up brightly.

My father made an inviting gesture with his hand and said: "Look into it!"

I positioned myself in front of the table, bent over the bowl and glanced into the glowing water.

At the first moment, the scene appeared blurry but then I recognized Appa and Katara, Sokka and
Toph on his back. Aang lied in the middle of the saddle. It was seemingly shortly after I had left my friends.

Katara rolled Aang's corpse over, I was now able to see his face. His closed eyes and pain-filled facial expression tugged at my nerves.

Katara now got a small phial out of her pouch. I recognized the design, Master Pakku had given her this phial back at the Northern Water Tribe after the battle against the Fire Nation, it contained some water from the Spirit Oasis.

Katara opened the lid, trickled some drops of the water into Aang's mouth before rolling him over again. I once again saw the big circular wound that Azula's lightning had burned into Aang's back. Katara poured the rest of the water onto the wound and then spread it with her healing powers. I stared tensely at the scene and even closer at Aang.

For several moments that appeared like an eternity to me, nothing happened. I was about to give up my hope again, but then suddenly Aang's tattoo lit up for a very brief moment and he opened his eyes very slightly, it was almost not visible. I couldn't believe what I had just seen!

With the image of Aang's slightly opened eyes still in my mind I moved my face back out of the water again.

With shock visibly written in my face I looked at my father again and asked quietly: "So ... that means ... Aang isn't..."

My father nodded: "You have not failed, my son. The Avatar is still alive, your mission has not failed yet. You can still save the world."

All of a sudden every sad and bad emotion seemed to vanish from my mind, they gave way to the well-known feelings of focus and determination.

I asked my father: "But how do I get back? I have performed the Purification, the Spirits have to decide if I'm worthy to return into the world of the living."

"The Mantra. Recite the Mantra. But you must not feel any emotion other than certainty during the recitation, then the Spirits will show mercy and send you back."

I immediately knew what my father meant. The Mantra was an ancient sacred formula of words that the Old Masters had used to lengthen the lives of old, sick or wounded members of the Order by convincing the Spirits that their souls were not yet ready to be taken to the Spirit World.

And now I should try to manage what had been thought to be impossible until now: To use the Mantra to return into the world of the living from the realm of death! It sure was a very risky undertaking but I had to try it!

I bid goodbye to my father with a hug: "Farewell, father. Don't worry, I won't disappoint you! I will fulfill my mission! I will avenge you so that you can finally rest in peace!"

"Take care, my son. Walk in the shadows. Make me proud. And don't forget one thing: This is not your only mission, there is another one already waiting for you, it is right here."

My father placed the palm of his hand on my chest, right where my heart was located. I immediately understood what he meant, there was another reason for me to return into the world of the living because I now had someone who loved me.
I answered: "I will always be there for her, I will never let her go, I promise!"

After these words, my father's silhouette started to slowly fade away until it had disappeared completely.

Shortly afterwards, I sat down on the ground in the Lotus Position, concentrated all my thoughts on my only goal, which was to leave this realm, and finally began the Mantra.

I called: "Oh, come to me, Spirits, and listen to what I have to say! Judge me, so that I may or may not return into the world of the living!"

As soon as the last word had left my mouth, wind got up and strange blue lights appeared from out of nowhere and started to shoot through the air. They circled around my body, the wind ruffled my hair. They were the judge forms of the Spirits, they had come to listen to me.

I began to recite the Mantra with a loud and determined voice:

*Hell has to wait!*

*It is not yet time for me to go!*

*Despite all my doings*

*Hell has to wait!*

*It is not yet time for me to go!*

*Because after everything that happened*

*I am still here!*

*There is still so much to do for me!*

*No matter what will happen*

*I'll put up with everything!*

*Whatever might happen*

*I never give up!*

As soon as the final verse was finished, I saw and felt some of the blue lights coming closer and eventually entering my body!

Shortly afterwards, I heard eerie voices in my head:

"Master Assassin Yulizan! You have performed the Purification! By doing so, you have brought your soul here, into our realm! Now you have recited the Mantra of the Assassins to return to the world of the living! We have conferred and made a judgment! You may return to the world of the living! Your body and soul are hereby purified of all sins! Now go and fulfill the task we have given you! Protect the Avatar! Bring peace back to your world!"

Suddenly I felt an unknown power flowing through my entire body. I looked at my hands, they were glowing bright blue!

"What's happening?", was everything I could think about before my mind was pulled from its
present state.

What followed was such a confusing and blurred journey that I wasn't able to remember any exact details afterwards. The next feeling I could remember was my face that was lying on cold stone.

I opened my eyes and saw nothing but burnt stone.

I realized that I was lying on my stomach. I raised my head and turned it to the left and right.

At first everything looked blurred but then I recognized my room in the tower of the Assassin monastery.

Suddenly I remembered everything, the events of the last few hours: The battle in Ba Sing Se, Aang's supposed death, my return to the monastery, the Purification!

I felt my back with my right hand. While I felt the fresh scars that the flagellation had caused, I didn't feel any blood; the Spirits had been right, both my body and my soul had been literally purified.

I pushed myself up from the ground with both hands into a kneeling position. That's when I realized that I was still completely nude.

I quickly stood up, which made me feel dizzy at first, tottered over to my wardrobe, took out a new cloth shirt and new cloth pants und donned both. After that, I sat down on my mat in the Lotus Position and slowly started to realize what exactly had happened.

After almost an entire hour I had extensively analyzed all the facts and circumstances: Aang was still alive, which meant that my mission was also still extant.

I was pretty sure that the plans we had worked out together in the team were still up, despite the tragic events that had happened in Ba Sing Se, which meant that the invasion on the Day of the Black Sun would most likely still happen.

My next goals became clear to me: I would find my friends and join them again. But first I would stay in the monastery to prepare myself for the coming events. I would further enhance my abilities and improve my equipment, until I was eventually ready to fight the battle of my life!

I took a look at the chest in which I had stowed my previous equipment. It would stay in there, I said in my mind, because for my new self I would need new equipment as well. Therefore, my first stop would the monastery's workshops.

First I entered the tailoring shop in which the robes were made. I had a look at every available robe and eventually decided on a night black robe with blood red and black ornamentations. I entered the small dressing room and put on the robe. I immediately felt much stronger and more powerful.

Next stop: The blacksmith. I needed new weapons!

Since I was quite skilled at forging, I crafted my new weapons myself.

New throwing knives with a heavier blade that caused larger wounds without negatively affecting the flight behavior.

New daggers, this time with curved blades.
I completely renounced a new crossbow since I hadn't used my old one that often anyway.

My new bow was no longer consisted of wood but instead of a light metal that was hollow inside. Thus the bow itself was merely a framework which made it very light and yet very powerful.

And finally my personal masterpiece: My two new katanas! They consisted of a core of hot-dip galvanized steel, the blade consisted of silver-plated diamond! Thus the swords were not only virtually indestructible, they also were perhaps the sharpest weapons ever created! On the golden handle, along with the sigils of my family and the Order, there also was a little golden phoenix, the symbol of my rebirth!

Lastly, I also crafted a new bag made out of dragon leather that I had extracted from one of Pagan's scales.

The only piece of my old weapons that I kept were my arm blades because they had once belonged to my father and I didn't want to leave them behind.

Now I was fully armed again, ready for the upcoming battles. Now I had to toughen my body!

I put on a very intense training program to improve every part of my body even further.

While I was training, Pagan set out to find our friends again.

He could already report a success when he returned on the first day: Our friends were at the Fire Nation coast and probably planned to continue their travels through the country. I was glad to hear that, they actually weren't that far away.

During the next few days I continued to train both my body and also my combat strength. I wrapped my fists and ankles in thick leather bandages and then started to hit a small rock until it broke to toughen my punches and kicks.

Pagan continued to bring me news of our friends, this way I learned of their disguise as Fire Nation residents, Aang's school attendance, the story of the Painted Lady and how Sokka apprenticed to Master Piandao. Piandao was also a member of the Assassins, which meant that my friends were in good hands.

A couple of days later, Pagan brought some very interesting news home that had nothing to do with our friends though. He landed in the courtyard while I was in the middle of practicing my fire bending skills on some training dummies.

He said: "I have news that will surely interest you."

"Well, then tell me!"

"You know Ember Island?"

"The popular vacation spot? Of course! What about it?"

"Well, I overflew it today and saw Azula, Zuko, Mai and Ty Lee, they seem to spend some time there, on the island."

At the mention of Ty Lee's name, I started to listen attentively.

Pagan smirked: "I knew you would be interested."
"Do you think we could..."

"...travel to Ember Island? But of course! Jump on!"

The dragon didn't have to tell me twice, I sat on his neck only seconds later. But before we set out, I told him to fly over to the monastery's wall.

There I climbed down again and positioned myself on top of the wall.

My eyes filled with determination, I shouted at the top of my lungs: "Get ready, Fire Lord! I'm back and I'm stronger than ever before!"

With these words, I created a giant phoenix of flames which rose to the air, wings spread wide out. Pagan was once again amazed by my abilities.

I climbed back onto the dragon and we set off for Ember Island.

We reached the island relatively fast since it wasn't that far away from the monastery.

We flew over the different landscapes of the island camouflaged and searched for the group until we eventually spotted them on one of the many beaches.

I gave Pagan the signal to let me get off on a small hill near the beach so that I could observe the four friends. The dragon did as told and began to fly over the island close enough that I was able to jump off and land safely in the soft grass. I hid in some bushes near the edge of the hill, from there I had a good overview over the entire beach and even was able to hear what was spoken.

The four friends seemed to have fun, but after some time some guys approached Ty Lee and started to pester her. My blood immediately began to boil with anger, but I simply couldn't intervene, not with Azula and Zuko in immediate vicinity. But fortunately my girl was able to defend herself, she simply used her chi blockade to paralyze the guys that had pestered her. I had to smile, even in battle she kept her unmatched beauty.

But unfortunately this feeling of happiness didn't last long, because shortly afterwards Azula said to Ty Lee: "Your own fault, I mean, just look at you! Walking around dressed like this, of course every guy is drooling over you! But just so you know: They just want the one thing, but I guess you want that, don't you?"

My head turned red as a tomato, I simply couldn't believe how Azula had just insulted Ty Lee. My girl buried her face in her hands and ran away, up the hill where I was hiding and past me. I made sure that none of the three others followed her, then I ran after her.

I found her sitting under a tree, crying, a few hundred meters further.

I took off my hood, walked a little closer towards her and then said: "Don't worry, she can't hurt you anymore."

She looked up. When she saw me, her eyes became huge with surprise, her mouth turned into a big smile, she jumped to her feet and flung her arms around my neck.

I struggled not to be overwhelmed by her embrace, I said: "Careful, or you'll crush me!"
Thereupon she let go of me and kissed me instead. Afterwards, she asked: "What are you doing here? How did you know that I'm here?"

"I have my sources, and by that I mean Pagan. He saw you guys when he flew over the island. I of course had to come here immediately, I wanted to see you."

She kissed me again, then took my hand and said: "Come with me! I know a place where we won't be disturbed."

I let Ty Lee pull me a little further through the landscape and down a small slope until we eventually stood on a small empty beach.

I was impressed: "How did you find this?"

"Seek and you shall find, am I right?"

"Yeah, true. So, what now? Do you want to swim?"

"Sure!"

I took off my clothes, then we both stormed into the sea.

We stayed in the water for several hours until the evening broke in.

Ty Lee didn't really want to return to the others but she was also sure that they probably wouldn't miss her anyway Therefore we decided to spend the night together here at the beach.

Thanks to the vacated space of my now missing crossbow I now carried a tent with me instead that I built up shortly afterwards so that we wouldn't have it too cold at night.

When the sun had set and the stars slowly started to appear in the sky, we were already lying in the tent together.

Ty Lee sighed: "This is so nice! I wish it could be like this forever!"

"Perhaps it can once the war is over."

"I really would love that, just you and me, forever."

I turned and looked her in the eyes: "Well, for now we should use the time that we have, don't you think?"

Instead of an answer, Ty Lee kissed me, I answered the kiss immediately. So began a passionate night on the beach which we both enjoyed thoroughly.

However, this night should have consequences, as we would realize later...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: By all means!
The next morning I was woken up by Ty Lee who, already awake and her head supported on her hand, was smilingly playing with my hair which had become somewhat longer during my stay in the monastery. I smiled back, raised my head and kissed her gently.

I said: "You know what? I had the feeling that last night was something very special, even better than the previous ones we've spent together."

"Yes, I had a similar feeling"

"Well then, let's get up."

We both got up, left the tent, took a morning bath in the sea together and then lied down on the beach in front of the tent again, hand in hand, our eyes directed to the sky.

After a couple of minutes I stood up again and said: "As beautiful as it is here, I need to set off soon."

"Where to?"

Although I loved Ty Lee above all else and had shared all my secrets with her until now, this time I had to lie to her, I simply could not tell her that Aang was still alive, Azula would find it out eventually and then our entire mission would be done for!

That's why I said: "I have a mission to do on the mainland. The Masters want me to retrieve an old relic from some cave and then bring it to the monastery so they can study its secrets. Since this is not very important, I decided to make a quick side-trip and meet with my love."

Ty Lee stood up smilingly, wrapped her arms around my neck and kissed me.

Then she said: "Then go, but watch out for yourself."

"Sure, I always do. But wait, there's a little something I wanted to give you."

I got two small flat stones, about as big as a person's palm, out of my bag, both had a heart-shaped piece of red volcanic stone embedded into them.

I handed Ty Lee one of the stones. She looked at it with a questioning look in her eyes, I explained: "These stones symbolize the connection between us. When one of them is heated, the heart on the other one lights up, look."

I heated my stone in my hand, the heart on Ty Lee's stone began to pulsate red.

She looked at me with wide eyes, then hugged me and said: "Thank you. But what is this good for, except that it always reminds us of each other?"

"Well, I thought that we could use this to contact each other. Whenever you want to see me again, all you have to do is heat your stone, then I will notice it on mine and come to you as fast as I can."

"Oh! That sounds very convenient. I think this will help us a lot."
"I think so too. But you definitely have to keep it in a safe place. Otherwise everybody could use it and lure me into a trap, for example."

"Don't worry, I'll take care."

"I know. I trust you. But now I really have to go."

I whistled and Pagan came out from behind the near cliff coast shortly afterwards. He landed on the beach, Ty Lee walked over to him as well and petted his head.

I climbed onto the dragon's neck, looked down to Ty Lee and said: "Bye for now, I hope we can see each other again soon."

Then Pagan rose to the air and we set off.

In the air Pagan told me that he had been able to locate Aang and the others during the last night. They were near a large city on one of the many big Fire Nation islands, we wouldn't need long to reach them.

A good two hours later I was already able to spot the city in the distance, our friends' camp was situated a little away from it, as usual.

I told Pagan not to land directly in the camp but a little further away. The dragon obeyed and silently landed a few hundred meters away from the camp.

On foot I, silently as well, began to approach the camp. While I was still a good distance away, I already noticed that Katara and Toph were once again having a heated argument. This basically implied that nothing had changed and I was pleased by that, since I honestly had missed all the squabbling quite a bit.

When I was only a few meters away from my friends, the argument was still in full swing, I said aloud: "You two are never going to change, are you?"

Immediately the heads of all four turned towards me, their eyes became huge, their mouths stood wide open.

I spread my arms out and said: "Surprise?"

After this, the state of shock finally ended, Toph ran towards me and threw her arms around me.

Aang, Katara and Sokka approached me as well, Katara said: "Yulizan! You're still alive? But we all thought that after the incident in Ba Sing Se, you..."

"To be honest: I was. But I returned and now I'm better than ever before!"

Sokka smelled a rat: "Wait a moment! Did you just say you had been dead, but came back to life? That's impossible!"

Aang cleared his throat loudly, but Sokka just said: "You're the Avatar, that's something different! He is an ordinary human, and they just can't ... you know!"

I interjected: "Never underestimate the powers of the Spirits, Sokka. I'm the living proof that it is possible if you only have the right faith."

Sokka looked around confused until his gaze eventually fell on my new katanas. With big eyes full
of interest, he grabbed one and pulled it out of its scabbard.

"Hello! Who is this beauty?"

"Pretty impressive, right? I forged them myself"

Sokka unsheathed his own sword, the blade was as black as the night.

I uttered an impressed whistle: "Not bad, sir! May I ask what it is made of?"

"You will hardly believe me, but it's the metal of a meteorite!"

"Oh my! An actual gift from heaven, really impressive. But is it also effective?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Does it cut as well as it looks?"

"To be honest: I haven't really tried it out yet."

"Then how about a little comparison? Let's see whose sword is sharper. Do you have anything lying around here that can be cut safely?"

Aang ran to the camp and returned with two melons in his hands.

"What about these?"

"Perfect! Could you please place them so that they lie at the right height for our arms?"

Aang bent two earth pillars out from the ground and placed the melons on them. Now everything was ready, Sokka wanted to begin.

He positioned himself in front of the left melon, unsheathed his sword, took a swing and sliced through the melon with a powerful blow like it was butter. I was impressed, apparently he had not exaggerated, the meteorite sword really was a powerful weapon.

Now I stepped in front of the right melon. I unsheathed one of my katanas, looked at my work once again, traced the golden phoenix on the hilt with my fingers, then grabbed said hilt firmly with both hands, took a swing and let the katana whirr through the melon.

The cut was virtually perfect, so good that the two halves of the melon remained on one another instead of slipping to the side like they had done on Sokka's melon.

I wiped the melon juice off my katana's blade and said: "The sharpness is equal, I would say, but I still have the better technique."

Sokka agreed with a slightly sour expression on his face.

After this little performance we all sat down in the camp together and started talking about many different things.

I told of my experiences in the Spirit World, my training in the monastery, but once again nothing about the time I had spent together with Ty Lee. Although the others knew about my relationship with the girl by now, they still only thought of it as some sort of little fling that had happened in Ba Sing Se. I would tell them only later, if ever, that it really was true love.
In return, I once again heard of the events that Pagan had already told me of during my time in the monastery, only this time in greater detail, basically straight from the horse's mouth.

After all the stories were finished, I rose to speak and said with a solemn voice: "At this point, I would like to say that I'm really glad that we're still together and doing well, even after this flood of bad events. Let's hope that we can finally achieve some lasting successes from now on!"

The others agreed with me but the festive mood didn't last long, because only shortly afterwards Katara and Toph resumed their argument from before, this time it escalated and eventually caused Toph to walk away in anger once again.

I decided to completely stay out of things that didn't concern me from now on, so instead of trying to mediate between the two girls, I talked with Aang about various things, for example the Spirit World, we compared our experiences and realized that we perceived the Spirit World very differently. I could justify this with the fact that my soul had to be quite darkened because of all my doings, therefore I didn't always see the ghostly blue glimmer around every creature and object, only on special occasions, like when I had met the souls of my family.

We were still talking when Sokka suddenly came back to the camp as if stung by an adder, a messenger hawk on his shoulder, he had gone into the city to buy one of those, and a rolled up piece of paper in his hand.

"You have to look at this!", he said wheezily and unrolled the paper.

My face turned serious immediately: It was a wanted poster with a picture of Toph! Written underneath the picture was in big letters: "The Runaway - High Reward" plus some additional information. I was slightly unsettled about how much the Beifong family was doing to bring Toph back.

When Toph returned to the camp a little later, Sokka and I explained the new circumstances to her. Toph however remained completely calm and said that the only thing we had to take into account was that Katara wouldn't find the poster. I was skeptical about what the girl was up to.

But of course everything played out different than planned, but in such different ways that even I was surprised: Katara eventually found the poster and was upset about it, but after she had calmed down again, she talked with Toph for quite some time.

After their conversation was over, they both seemed like entirely different people, they said that they had talked about their problems and had put an end to their dispute. I was both glad but also confused about this sudden change of mind.

But of course the two had not only talked about their problems but also worked out a shrewd plan: Toph should be handed over to the city guards in pretence so that we could collect the bounty, only to free her again afterwards of course.

I was surprised by Katara's sudden cunning, it was a really well thought-out plan, I would definitely help my friends with this.

After all: There was nothing like a nice old-fashioned fraud.

We executed our plan the next day. At first everything seemed to go as planned, but the whole thing eventually turned out to be a trap!
First Katara and Toph were locked in a large wooden box, then a mysterious man appeared.

I had never seen someone like him the flesh before, but I had read about people like him: The giant had an eye-shaped tattoo on his forehead, a combustion bender!

Sokka called: "Oh man! Not him again!"

I called back: "What do you mean, 'again'?"

"This guy already attacked us a couple of nights ago. Watch out, he shoots energy beams from..."

Sokka wasn't able to finish his sentence, because suddenly a beam of concentrated fire was fired at us, the source was the tattoo on the giant's forehead, as I had guessed. Luckily I knew exactly what to do to neutralize this type of bender.

I said to Aang and Sokka: "Distract him! I have to get close to him!"

My two friends immediately initiated an attack and the giant actually took the bait, he seemed to focus entirely on Aang.

I was easily able to sneak up on him from behind and jump onto his shoulders. Only then did he seem to realize what was going on but it was already too late! I extended my right arm blade and cut a little wound into his tattoo. He probably didn't feel any pain but that wasn't my intention.

I jumped off his shoulders again and ran back to my friends who were about to initiate another attack.

Katara and Toph had been able to free themselves in the meantime and wanted to attack as well but I held all four of them back and said: "Wait and take a look at this!"

My friends seemed visibly nervous but still did what I said. The giant grinned at us diabolically as he prepared another energy beam of concentrated fire. My friends tried to take cover behind me but they didn't need any.

Because when the giant was ready to fire his beam, his now slightly bleeding tattoo flashed red for a second before he himself was catapulted backwards with enormous force, directly into a large brick wall which then collapsed on top of him. The power of the impact rendered him unconscious before he was buried by a large amount of bricks from the collapsed wall.

My friends looked at me with wide eyes and asked with one voice: "What was that?"

"Don't worry, I will tell you, but first we have to get out of here before he wakes up again!"

No sooner said than done! Only a few minutes later we had reached the camp again, packed our things in no time at all and rose to the air on our animals.

In the air I began to explain: "I damaged his tattoo by cutting a little wound into it, thus he was no longer able to use his powers."

"And how did you know that you had to do that?"

"Oh, there have always been benders of his type and the Assassins of course keep records of them and their powers, it's just another page in our great book of knowledge."

My friends once again showed me their respect for my outstanding abilities, I of course felt really
glad that I was always able to help them like this.

Later in the evening, Toph, with Katara's help, wrote a letter to her parents which she then sent away using Sokka's new messenger hawk. I was glad that the girl was at least trying to keep her parents up to date on her whereabouts.

Thus, as we had done many times before, we simply flew across the country without a real goal. Although ... without a real goal wasn't really true: In a few weeks was the Day of the Black Sun and we of course didn't intend to forget the Invasion we had planned for that day.

But until then, we just flew, and flew, and flew...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Morally correct?
After we had flown for what felt like an eternity, we finally landed in a forest in the evening of one of the next days to set up camp for the night.

I once again felt this feeling of boredom that I had already experienced many times in the past when we had travelled around without a real goal, but I decided to ignore it completely from now on. After all, it led to nothing.

After everything in the camp was set up and after I, like always, had ignited the campfire, we all sat down around the fire together.

Toph proposed that we should tell each other some horror stories, this probably came to her mind because it had already become completely dark in the meantime. Even though I wasn't exactly fond of this proposition, I, like the others, still agreed.

While the others now took turns in telling all kinds of stories, I once again noticed that my vocation as an Assassin had really toughened me up against almost any kind of fear. While the other four in our circle winced every now and then when they heard some of the scarier stories, I simply sat where I was all the time and listened.

Then it was finally my turn.

I only knew one really scary story, but I was sure it would be good enough to scare my friends quite good.

I knew the story from my grandfather, he had told it to me in my childhood, and he had been so credible in his way of narration that in the nights after that, I had always crouched into a corner of my room anxiously to try and hide myself. As I grew older, I eventually lost my fear, also because I eventually realized that the story was simply to crazy to be true. Yet I still used it to scare my siblings from time to time, especially after they had been getting on my nerves again.

So I began to tell:

"A long time ago, a young man lived in the northern Fire Nation. At first sight, he appeared completely normal. He was friendly, courteous and well liked by his fellows. But this was only the case in the daytime. Because what nobody knew: When the night broke in, the young man changed. Every night, just before midnight, he awoke and found himself physically changed. His skin had become black, with white and red marks. His eyes were blood red, his teeth long and sharp like a saber cat's, his fingernails were claws. He climbed out of his bed and slowly crawled towards the door on all four."

I saw the suspense and the fear in the eyes of my friends, when I continued:

"He opened the door and stared out into the night. Then he stood up and uttered a bloodcurdling screech."

I uttered a light grumbling and groaning noise, as quiet as possible, I of course didn't want to attract any attention from nothing and no one.
"He then began to wander through the city, looking to suck the blood out of the bodies of the innocent, to tear out their hearts and eat them, and sometimes he abducted them into a cave outside of town, where he slashed their bodies open using his long sharp claws before hanging them up on their intestines so they would bleed to death agonizingly. Soon after the first murders and abductions, the people had already found a name for the nocturnal monster: They called it "Xuemo", the "Blood Demon"! It is said that he is still roaming the Fire Nation today, on the hunt for fresh victims he can feast on."

With this, my story was finished, and I looked around myself: Aang and Katara were closely entwined out of fear, Sokka laid huddled behind a log, only Toph had seemingly stayed completely calm almost the entire time.

She asked me: "How did you say the monster's screech sounded again?"

I repeated the screech and then asked: "Why did you want to hear it again?"

"Because I've been hearing a similar noise all the time for a couple of minutes now, it seems to be coming from underneath that hill over there."

I strained my ears as good as I could, but I didn't hear anything. Toph really had some very good ears, but she of course needed those to even out her non-existent seeing ability.

Then, all of a sudden, I felt an unknown presence close by, I said quietly: "Look out, guys! There's something or someone close to us!"

We all got into position and formed a circle, back to back! Then, a few seconds later, something rustled in the nearby bushes, we were ready to attack, but when the presumed attacker emerged from the bushes, it turned out to be just an old woman.

She said: "Don't panic, I mean you no harm!"

Kind of relieved, we gave up our position again and listened to what the old woman had to say. Her name was Hama, she had found our camp by coincidence. She owned a small inn in a village not far from our campsite and offered us to spend the night there. We of course accepted appreciatively, a building was always a better option than simply lying outdoors in the open.

We followed the old woman into the village and then to her inn, where we immediately felt comfortable, as everything was furnished nicely and really felt safe compared to the clearing where our campsite had been located. She told us that in this region it was especially dangerous to spend the nights outdoors, as many people had vanished under mysterious circumstances in recent times.

I was pretty sure that there had to be a logical explanation for these vanishings, but I still kept my grandfather's story in the back of my mind, as the saying goes: There's a grain of truth in every story.

The next morning, we all went into the village to buy things for the further journey. Katara and the old Hama seemingly got along swimmingly, as they always walked a little ahead of us and talked with each other permanently.

In the meantime, Aang and Sokka questioned the other villagers about the vanished people. Toph and I stayed out of this whole thing, Toph because she wasn't really interested, I because I, like I said earlier, wanted to stay out of matters that didn't concern me personally from now on.
Nevertheless, I still tried to figure out what could have caused the vanishings of the villagers in my head. There was this one thought that always fought its way to the front: Had my grandfather been more right than it had always seemed? Did the Blood Demon really exist after all? I was still unsure about this whole matter.

We returned to the inn a little later, Sokka decided to look around a little closer in the house, as he still had some strange doubts regarding the old Hama. After only a couple of minutes, he returned, holding two objects, a wooden doll and something I couldn't quite identify.

Sokka put both items down on the table, I asked him: "Where did you find these things?"

"The doll was in a cabinet in the hallway, and this thing was in a little chest in the attic."

I picked up the unknown utensil and asked: "And do you happen to know what exactly this is?"

"I actually do, and that's what makes it quite suspicious. It's a whale tooth comb, a renowned tool only known at the Southern Water Tribe. I really wonder how she got her hands on this."

"I can tell you, my boy."

All our heads turned towards the door where Hama had appeared. She walked over to the table, picked up the comb and said with a sigh:

"Now I can't deny it any longer, so I should put my cards open on the table: I originally hail from the Southern Water Tribe, and I also know that the two of you do as well."

She looked towards Katara and Sokka during her last sentence.

"Well, that changes quite a lot of things.", I thought to myself.

And, as almost always, I should be right with my thoughts.

In the next few hours, Hama told us the story of her life. How she had been captured by the Fire Nation, along with the rest of the old generation of water benders from the Southern Water Tribe, and how she eventually ended up being the only surviving fugitive. Katara was deeply touched by the story. When Hama, after she had finished her story, offered to exchange some water bending knowledge with her, Katara was immediately on fire, if I'm allowed to use this expression, being a fire bender and all.

The next morning, the two of them set out to train, while Aang, Sokka and Toph had plans themselves: They wanted to explore the area surrounding the village, continuing their search for the missing people, they now had the suspicion that evil spirits could possibly be the cause for all the vanishings.

I was pretty sure that this wasn't the case, that's why I passed and instead decided to wander through the forest for some time, to grant my soul and thoughts some freedom. In addition, I also wanted to polish my fighting techniques a little more, the many trees would make for some good targets.

Therefore, I left the inn together with the others and followed them when they entered the forest, but shortly after that our ways parted. I chopped my way through the undergrowth, until I finally found a tiny clearing, just big enough for me to wield my weapons without problems.

I grabbed both my katanas and began to practice a new sequence of movements of which I had read
during my stay in the monastery. It specialized the style of back-and-forth-swings, during which the sword in the strong hand, the right one in my case, was held with the blade in front, the sword in the weaker hand, the left one, was held ninja-style, with the blade going up backwards along the arm. The goal was that after every slash with the sword in front, the rear one should follow immediately, fast enough so that the opponent wouldn't even have a chance to react.

I tried it immediately, positioned myself and selected a big old tree as the target. I took a deep breath, concentrated myself, shot forward, hit the tree with the right sword and let the left one follow immediately. When the dust, which I had whirled up because of my fast movements, had died down again, I took a look at the tree trunk. The two cuts were both exactly straight, but still a few inches apart.

"This means I still can do better.", I said to myself and repeated the practice.

The rest of the day, I was working on the goal of putting the two cuts in exactly the same spot, then I would have mastered the technique.

Hours later, it was already evening, I was already visibly weakened, but still had not reached the goal I had set myself. My arms were slowly starting to get limp, but I pulled myself together!

"One last try!", I encouraged myself internally.

I positioned myself, caught my breath, shot forward, the right sword cut the bark, the left one followed immediately, and this time I succeeded! There was only one single cut visible on the tree trunk, I had placed both swings perfectly identical! As a result of my success, I sank to the ground satisfied and rested for a moment, the practice had demanded almost all of my physical power.

But I wasn't able to calm down completely, because only a few minutes later, I heard loud shouting coming from a distance, I immediately recognized the voices of my friends.

"Oh no! What happened?", I thought to myself, while I jumped to my feet and started rushing in the direction where the voices had come from.

Only a few minutes later, I saw the scene in front of me. I hid behind a tree so that they wouldn't see me. On a big clearing, Aang, Sokka, Toph and Katara were standing face-to-face with Hama, but she wasn't that friendly old woman she had been two days ago anymore. Who, or better said what, was standing there on the clearing was a power-mad, insane and unscrupulous hag, who didn't know the virtues of mercy and prudence anymore.

She cackled spitefully when my friends readied themselves up for a fight. A few seconds later, Aang and Sokka charged forward and attacked, but mid-run, they suddenly stopped as if struck by lightning, turned around and charged right at Katara!

"What is going on here?", I asked myself, before my eyes turned back to Hama, who had her hands up in the air and performed strange movements with them.

"She's bending, but what?"

I really couldn't get my head around what exactly was happening here, but one thing was for sure: I had to help my friends immediately, this uncontrollable witch had to be stopped!

I stepped out from my hiding place, a feeling of determination filling my body, and called: "Hama!"

The old woman turned around immediately and spotted me. I summoned two flames in my hands,
this caused a glimpse of fear to appear on her face for a second.

I said: "This party is over!", but she cackled again, before talking with a voice filled with madness: "I don't think so!", then she raised her hands once again.

What happened to me next was completely unexplainable: My limbs didn't obey my commands anymore, I wasn't able to control my arms and legs any longer! The flames in my hands died out and, without me being able to do something against it, I started walking towards Katara as well.

While I was walking as if by an invisible hand, I suddenly noticed it: My blood was coursing through my body way faster than usual, something was influencing it! The only possibility of who or what could be doing this that came to my mind was Hama, but how was she doing it? Suddenly, Katara raised her hands as well, and all of a sudden the pressure that had been on my body dropped again, I was able to move by myself again.

While Hama was still distracted by Katara's actions, I took cover behind another tree again. Whatever she had done, it had manipulated my blood. And how did one stop influence on one's blood? Self-poisoning. Because toxicity changed the blood's condition. Originally intended to stop internal bleeding, I hoped it would help me in this situation as well.

As fast as I could, I fished out a small phial filled with a bilious green liquid from my bag and took a tiny sip. One was not allowed to drink too much of it, otherwise you really would get poisoned on a health-damaging level! I immediately felt a light stinging in my body, the poison was working.

I once again stepped out from behind the tree, ready for battle!

As soon as I appeared from my hiding place, Hama had already spotted me again. She uttered another cackling laugh, then she raised her hands.

But this time, I remained in control of my body, no matter what she did, I was still able to move freely. However, I decided that I would continue to play along, therefore I pretended that I was under her control again.

But this time, once I was very close her, only about one meter away, I dropped to the ground and started to squirm with pain, to lull her into a false sense of security. She fell for the trick and turned her back towards me, now facing my friends again.

This mistake proved to be fatal for her, because as soon as she wasn't able to see me anymore, I broke out from my feigned state of paralysis, grabbed one of my daggers and stabbed her in her right calf with full power! She uttered a loud scream of pain, before dropping to her knee thunderstruck, not able to move her right leg anymore.

I stood up and walked around her, so that I stood right in front of her eventually. She looked up into my face, her eyes filled with shock and fear, but I showed no mercy! I grabbed the old witch's head and twisted it to the side with such force that her face was facing completely backwards! With a loud and disgusting cracking sound, the renegade water bender crumpled to the forest ground!

I turned to my friends and immediately saw their faces that were filled with shock and all asked one and the same question: Why?

Eventually, this question was also asked with words, when Katara said with a trembling voice: "Did you really have to do that?"
I answered slightly vigorous: "Yes, I had to! She attacked us, we all were in danger! And in a scenario like this, one does not take prisoners!"

When the shock in my friends' faces still didn't wear off, I added:

"Guys, I have told you once already: You don't have to endorse what I'm doing, it's my free decision to do these things, you don't have to like it by no means, but you still have to accept it if you want us to stay together as a team."

Finally, the shock started to slowly fade away and all four of them nodded, even though they still seemed a little out of it, but I understood that. They simply weren't used to see that much brutality being used in so many situations, but, like I said, they still had to accept my decision of committing these actions, I had chosen this path myself and would continue to follow it!

When we made our way towards Appa and Pagan to continue our journey, I asked Katara: "What exactly happened back there? Why weren't we able to move anymore?"

"Hama invented a water bending technique that lets one bend the little amounts of water inside a person's blood, this lets you control said person like a puppet."

"Oh man! That sounds sinister! And you can do that too now?"

"Don't talk about it, ever!", Katara shouted at me angrily. "I'm ashamed of myself for having learned such an inhuman form of water bending. If only I could forget it again!"

She seemed fairly upset, so I left her alone.

Internally, I reflected on the events that had happened only a few minutes ago: I had committed the first assassination in my new life, after my rebirth, and it felt way better than it had always felt in the past. There was no heavy pressure on my chest anymore after I had made the final blow, I felt way more free and safe in general. And that was a good thing! Because for the events that would happen over the course of the next time, focus and determination combined with absolute physical fitness was the key to success!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Mental experiments
The days and weeks went by, the Day of the Black Sun was approaching with big steps.

I honestly found it quite suspicious that we were able to travel for weeks without any major problems. After all, it was true: We hadn't been in any kind of fight since the incident with Hama. Not that I was complaining, but it still was a little odd, considering all the things that had happened to us so far on our journey.

Four days before the big day of the eclipse, we finally arrived at the Black Cliffs. Here we would meet up with the rest of the invasion fleet, to fight what perhaps would be the most important battle in history!

I was very confident, yet still a little concerned regarding the eclipse itself. I knew that during the short phase in which the sun would become veiled by the moon I would be limited in my physical abilities as well as in my fire bending, which wouldn't work during said time, just like with every other fire bender. Therefore, I had to rely on my pure fighting abilities. But I was still unsure whether these would be weakened as well, due to my lessened physical strength. I just hoped for the best, either way I would certainly be of great support during the battle.

While I definitely was confident, others were not. Aang had been very nervous the entire time since our landing, which I didn't blame him for, after all: He had to face the Fire Lord during the battle. I had to admit: I kind of envied him for this. I still wanted to face the Fire Lord myself, look into his face, confront him with the murders of my family and then cut his throat, just like I had prophesized all those years ago! But my hope for this had slowly started to fade by now, however, I of course still accepted the circumstances, after all: The Avatar's destiny was more important than every kind of vengeance could ever be.

Aang's nervousness went sky high in the course of time. He trained for most of the time and therefore almost never got around to sleep, and this became more than noticeable! He frequently dozed off, only to jump awake from a nightmare some minutes later. With the slowly dwindling last remains of his mind he repeatedly uttered that the Fire Lord apparently was making fun of him in his dreams.

The gravity of the situation reached its provisional peak when Aang suddenly started to prowl around in our camp like one possessed. Katara, Sokka, Toph and I exchanged glances, we all thought the same: We had to get this boy a nice snatch of sleep, otherwise we could forget the entire invasion! So we decided that everyone of us would try different methods to help Aang relax and then let him sleep peacefully.

Katara was first, she tried yoga in a hot spring she had bent herself, but this lead to nothing, as Aang perceived the heat the same way as fire bending.

Sokka tried to get Aang to talk to him about his problems, but this didn't help either, as Sokka was acting way to extreme and therefore unsettled Aang even more than he already was.

Toph's method was more than unconventional, she gave Aang a special earth bending massage,
which however only resulted in him becoming even more awake than he already was.

Now it was my turn, I already had made all the necessary arrangements. I had brewed a tea from various herbs, it was able to relax specific regions of the brain and therefore able to loosen the whole body, both mentally and physically. However, there was quite the big downside: The tea had a rather bitter smell and taste, which I unfortunately couldn't change as further additions would destroy the effect.

I tried to hand Aang the bowl over and over again, while saying: "Come on! Do you want to feel better or not? Pull yourself together and drink this!"

But Aang refused unwaveringly to take even one little sip of the tea. After a few more minutes, Toph had enough! She bent multiple earth walls from the ground and fixated Aang where he stood, leaving only his face free and open. She took the bowl from my hand and walked towards Aang.

I called: "No, Toph, that won't...", but it was already too late.

The girl placed the bowl on the defenseless Avatar's lips and poured the tea into his throat. Aang choked and coughed loud and long, when he seemed to have calmed down again, Toph freed him and asked:

"And? Do you feel relaxed?"

Aang didn't answer, but instead ran straight into the next bush, we heard that he was throwing up!

I looked at Toph and said to her:

"It didn't work, for a very specific reason: Whoever drinks the tea to be treated with it, has to want it, he or she has to prepare mentally for the muscles and the mind to relax properly. If you just pour the tea down someone's throat like that, the body rejects the active ingredient and the tea becomes a simple bitter-tasting decoction."

"Oh!", was everything Toph said before she turned around and walked away ashamed. But I couldn't be angry with her, as she had not known about this.

Aang returned shortly after and explained: "I simply won't sleep until the invasion begins. No sleep, no nightmares, it's as simple as that!"

Was that really such a good idea ... I was skeptical, but remained silent, I didn't want to say anything against Aang's own decision.

However, my skepticism turned out to be justified the following day, as Aang now had daydreams and hallucinations as opposed to the nightmares, it made him even more crazy. It definitely couldn't continue this way, with all due respect!

I talked to the others what else we could possibly do. After another ten minutes of discussing, we had come up with nothing better than simply talking insistently to Aang again to try and get him to calm down.

While we walked towards the young Avatar, a thought or better said a method came to my mind, a method how I would be able to at least get Aang to sleep, should he still insist on staying awake.

We talked to Aang again, with both encouragement and friendship in our voices.
I said to him: "It's your destiny, you were born for this task, the Spirits have chosen you, and with their help you can achieve anything! All you have to do is believe in both yourself and your task, then you won't have any problems!"

Alright, maybe "without problems" was a little exaggerated, but it still achieved the desired effect, Aang immediately became much more relaxed.

Katara put her hand on his shoulder and said with a reassuring voice: "Now lay down and sleep, regain your strength, you're going to need it."

But Aang replied: "I'm calm, but unfortunately not tired at all, how am I supposed to sleep now?"

"No problem!", I said.

I had wrapped some of my cloth ribbons around my arm and elbow and had snuck up behind Aang in the meantime. Now, after he had said that he wasn't tired, I reached back with my elbow and hit a specific spot on Aang's neck, he immediately dropped to the ground, already fast asleep.

"Sweet dreams.", I said while looking down at Aang, who was now sleeping peacefully at last. When I raised my head again, I saw the astonishment in my friends' faces.

I immediately explained: "Assassin Elbow Strike, directly hitting the spot of the consciousness-chakra's flow in the neck. Causes everybody to fall asleep immediately, completely without any pain."

Katara and Sokka said nothing, Toph only uttered a single word: "Wow!"

Oh yes, we Assassins had more than a couple of tricks up our sleeves. Now that Aang was getting some rest, I was calm and confident that the invasion would go well.

But there was still one other thing that would happen to me, and it would affect the whole situation quite strong.

When we had all lied down to sleep that night, I suddenly felt a strange vibration in my bag. I stood up silently, to not wake the others, and reached into my bag. I immediately felt the light warmth and therefore already had quite the hunch what was causing the vibration. I fished it out from the bag and saw what I had expected: The red heart on the flat stone pulsated in a steady rhythm. I clenched my fist around the stone and looked into the distance.

"She wants to see me. Why not? Some motivation prior to such a big battle never hurts!", I thought to myself.

But what would my friends say when I would disappear just like that in the middle of the night? I decided to quickly write them a short message. I got a small scroll and a small piece of charcoal out from my bag. I hastily wrote that the message of an important Assassin mission had reached me in the night and that I had to leave for some time, but would be back exactly on time for the invasion.

I placed the scroll, well visible for everybody, in the middle of our camp, then snuck away a few hundred meters, before uttering a light whistle to call Pagan, who silently landed next to me a few moments later. He rolled his eyes, but I made gestures that I would explain it to him later. I mounted the dragon and we rose to the sky.

When we were up high enough in the air, Pagan asked: "What is going on? Where are we going in the middle of the night?"
"To Ba Sing Se! Ty Lee has contacted me, she wants to see me."

"Do the others know?"

"I left them a message, yes, but now fly, there are only two days left until the invasion and it's a long way to Ba Sing Se, so try to be as fast as possible!"

Pagan settled for my short explanation and eventually started rushing towards the Earth Kingdom with maximum speed.

We fortunately already reached Ba Sing Se at dawn, the sun was just rising, therefore we were able to notice the changes that had happened in the city after the Fire Nation's conquest. The whole city looked dark, to say it simple, as if covered by a corrupt shadow, it really wasn't a nice sight, especially not if one had seen the city in its full glory, like I had.

But this wasn't the reason why I was here, I knew that Ty Lee was somewhere down there. I told Pagan to fly over the city as close to the ground as possible, camouflaged of course. Near my hideout in the former Upper Ring I readied up, told Pagan that he should stay close to the city, and jumped off!

I landed unseen in a small alley which I left immediately to head towards my hideout, which I hoped had been spared from the takeover. Luck was on my side that day, because the empty looking house was still standing at its place and looked completely unaffected.

"This means that we have kept our influence in the city, very good.", I thought while I took the stone out of my bag. I placed it in my palm and heated it up for a short moment so that it would pulsate again. I then followed the streets in the direction in which the pulsation grew stronger. Should it become weaker, I would know that I was walking in the wrong direction.

Then, after a couple of streets, the pulsation suddenly developed a very high frequency, I looked down the street and saw her! She was standing only a few hundred meters away from me, holding her own stone in her hand. She spotted me as well and ran towards me, before embracing me with a strong hug. I put her down on the ground again and kissed her.

Then I asked: "I felt the pulsation of my stone. You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, I did. Can we go to your house and talk there?"

"Of course."

Hand in hand, we walked back through the streets I had come from until we stood in front of the hideout again. I unlocked the door and we entered the house. I ignited the light sources, then Ty Lee and I entered the big main room.

"So, about what exactly did you want to talk with me?"

"About very big and exciting news! Something wonderful has happened!"

My tension reached its maximum levels when I saw Ty Lee smiling. Then, she said with a quiet but delighted voice:

"Yulizan, I'm pregnant!"
I was taken by complete surprise! Did I just hear that correctly? Ty Lee was pregnant? She was expecting a child? And I was the father? My emotions all went completely crazy at the same time, but in the end, joy, nothing but pure joy, outweighed them all! I smiled, tears welled up in my eyes, I flung my arms around Ty Lee's neck!

"This is ... wonderful!", was everything I was able to say at the first moment.

"This is the most beautiful news you ever could have given me, I'm so happy!"

I loosened my embrace and kissed Ty Lee passionately.

Afterwards I asked: "It probably was that night at the beach, am I right?"

"Most likely, yes."

"Then it seems like I really was right when I said that this night felt very special."

"Seems like you were."

"So, since when do you know?"

"Well, about one week after the night at the beach I started feeling sick in the morning and even had to throw up a couple of times, that's when I started to realize. When I didn't get my bleeding last week, I had complete certainty."

"If you know it for this long already, why did you wait so long to tell me?"

Ty Lee turned her head to the side and looked to the ground:

"I was afraid that you might react completely different, that you don't want..."

I didn't want to hear another word, I kissed Ty Lee to silence her. Then I said:

"Ty Lee, don't you ever waste any thoughts on something like this! I will tell right here and now: I love you more than anything, I actually had planned to start a family with you eventually. Even if it's already happening now, it doesn't matter! Do you understand? Since the death of my family, I have missed this feeling, of being loved, the security, everything! And now I'm finally getting all this back: I have you, my girlfriend, who I love so much, and soon this little bundle of joy as well."

I knelt down, Ty Lee understood and lifted her shirt, revealing her belly. Even though I knew that it was way too early, I first placed the side of my head on her belly and then kissed it gently. Ty Lee smiled while tears of joy started welling up in her eyes, she said quietly:

"You will be a wonderful father!"

"And you will be the best mother in the world!"

We both laughed and then went on to spent the rest of the day in peaceful togetherness.

On the next day, I already had to say goodbye again, with a heavy heart, to my now two most beloved people, tomorrow was the day of the invasion and I wanted to be back at the cliffs in time.

While I was getting ready to leave, I said to Ty Lee: "I will be back as soon as I can. Take good care of yourself, of both of you."
"Don't worry, I'm sure everything will be alright."

We kissed once again, but then it was time. I whistled for Pagan and sat on the dragon's neck a few moments later. I waved Ty Lee goodbye until she disappeared from my field of view.

In the air, I thought about everything that had happened yesterday: Ty Lee was pregnant, I was going to be a father! I felt so much joy and pride, it gave me so much strength!

From this moment on, I knew that the battle on the Day of the Black Sun would be my battle! If I had to, I would take on the entire Fire Nation army on my own! We would win and finally restore peace in the world! My mission would finally find its successful ending tomorrow!

But as so often, destiny would also foil us this time...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Day of the Black Sun (Part 1)
While we traversed the airspace above the Earth Kingdom, my thoughts had a fight with themselves about what I should think about more now: Ty Lee and our child or the battle of the eclipse.

On the one hand, it of course was a wonderful thought when I imagined how nice it would be, holding my child in my arms, on the other hand I still had to think about my mission, I simply couldn't let my emotions hinder me once again, otherwise I would fail again and this time for real!

Therefore, soon afterwards, my thoughts started to completely focus on the battle, I had to concentrate if I wanted to succeed in a battle without my fire bending against such a great army.

On our departure from Ba Sing Se, something had come to my mind that I still wanted to do before we returned to our friends. I had told Pagan to fly to the monastery first before returning to the Black Cliffs, I was planning to pick up something quite special.

When we had reached the monastery a few hours later, I instructed Pagan to wait in the courtyard, since it wouldn't take me long. I determinedly walked towards the tower, in which my room was located and eventually entered said room. I walked up to the wardrobe, in which I had always kept my weapons and other equipment, and opened it. It looked unchanged, but I wasn't interested in the actual contents anyway. I moved my fingers along the outer edge of the frame until I found what I was looking for: A small hidden button. I pressed it and as if by an invisible hand, the wardrobe's back panel slid to the side. I nodded pleased when I saw what I had been looking for in front of me. I fetched a burlap bag and packed up everything I needed. Afterwards, I tied the bag on my back and left the tower again.

Pagan of course immediately noticed the bag and asked: "What is in there?"

"You will see soon.", I said mysteriously.

Even though Pagan still had quite the curious look in his eyes, he eventually decided not to inquire any further. I climbed back onto the dragon's neck and we continued our way back to the Black Cliffs.

We reached the place where the fleet would meet in the afternoon. Therefore, I had been able to stick to my schedule of being back before the beginning of the invasion, thus I still had the rest of today plus some hours tomorrow morning to prepare myself for the battle.

When Pagan landed and I jumped off, our friends came walking towards us immediately.

Katara said: "Yulizan, you're back!"

"Yes, I am. Did you read my message?"

Katara and Aang nodded, Aang asked: "What kind of mission was it that it was this urgent?"

"Sorry, but I can't tell you, order secret, very complicated, very dangerous, you know."
I tried to make a very calm impression the whole time, I of course wanted to avoid that the others found out that I was lying. I eventually succeeded, also because the others were convinced quite quickly.

Aang said: "No matter what it was, you're back in time, that's all that matters."

"Exactly, and I have to say: You look well-rested for tomorrow, Aang."

"Thank you, I have been able to sleep very well thanks to your words."

"It wasn't just the words...", I thought to myself and had to chuckle inwardly.

Afterwards I said: "Well, all we have to do now is to wait for the rest of the troops to arrive, and then we head into battle tomorrow!"

"You seem pretty confident."

"Of course! This is our chance to end this pointless war and restore peace! I could finally complete my mission and then..."

I stopped myself immediately, I had almost prattled away!

"Then what?", Sokka asked with an interrogative look in his eyes.

"Oh, nothing, everything's fine. Let me tell you something: We should relax for the rest of the day, so that we can make use of all of our strength and power tomorrow."

"Yulizan is right, we all need give our absolute best tomorrow if we want this invasion to be a success.", Aang confirmed what I had just said.

I was glad that the young Avatar finally seemed ready, willing and able to approach his task with the necessary seriousness.

To help the relaxation, I now got the first souvenir from the monastery out from the burlap bag. It was my little mandolin, I had learned to play the instrument a few years ago during the little free time I have had during my training, and now I finally had an opportunity to play it again. I sat down on the cliff coast, the instrument in my hand, looked out into the distance, at the sea, which slowly started to turn orange because of the setting sun, and started to play and sing a well-known Assassin song:

*Oh brother, let us go,*

*it is that time again!*

*I will accompany you,*

*through light and darkness!*

*Brother, let us fight,*

*for a new time!*

*For freedom, honor and peace!*

*Let us stand, side by side!*
Wherever the path leads,
whatever might happen!

Even if our blood freezes,
in our hearts we are strong!

We are wandering through the world,
the embers are blazing!

We remain true to ourselves,

Until the last breath!

I completely ingulded in the music, closed my eyes and therefore didn't even notice when Katara sat down next to me. When I had finished the song and opened my eyes again, I was surprised to see her. She smiled, but at the same time seemed quite touched and surprised herself.

She said quietly: "I didn't know that you are musical. Your singing is really good. What was that song?"

"A song every Assassin should have in his mind before every great and important battle. It strengthens the community spirit of the combatants and also shall remind one to never give up, then every battle, no matter how hard it might be, can be won."

"Then let's hope that it will help us tomorrow."

"Are you nervous?"

She looked out at the sea with a dreamy look in her eyes, then she said:

"Of course, but to be honest, I'm more afraid for Aang. What if he's not ready to face the Fire Lord yet?"

I took Katara's hand and said:

"Katara, you have given me a good advice or encouraged me to never give up many times during our journey, now let me encourage you: Aang will succeed, it's his destiny. And if this doesn't reassure you enough: I promise that I will continue to protect him with my own life tomorrow. I don't want to witness another defeat like in Ba Sing Se, just like everybody else. Tomorrow will be the day this war ends! We'll finally have peace again in this world!"

Katara hugged me for a short moment and said:

"Thank you Yulizan, I hope you will be right. Come on, we should go to sleep as early as possible, so that we're completely ready tomorrow."

"Of course."

And so, I laid down to sleep shortly after, determined to end this war tomorrow and then look forward to my new life as a father.

The next morning, we all woke up well-rested, one could immediately notice it: The tenseness of
course, but also the almost infinite determination.

A few hours later, the first Water Tribe ships arrived at the cliffs, led by Katara's and Sokka's father, Hakoda. Katara introduced me to the experienced warrior, I was confident that we would have good chances with him as one of the leaders, he definitely knew what he was doing.

From one of the other ships, the young earth bender, who had been part of the group that I had helped freeing from that prison, came walking towards us. Katara also introduced him to me. His name was Haru, he offered me a handshake and said:

"Katara told me that it was you, the guy in the hood, who killed the overseer back in the prison. I wanted to thank you for that."

I immediately accepted the handshake and replied:

"No problem, I only acted in the sense of my task. Katara has told you of my "profession", hasn't she?"

"Indeed, and that's why I have great respect for you. I'm glad that you're on our side. I think you will be a great aid in this battle."

With one of the last ships, the inhabitants of the Northern Air Temple also arrived at the cliffs. They were led by Teo and his father, who immediately approached me as soon as they touched land again:

"Young Master, it is a pleasure to meet you again. You remember the construction plan I had shown you back in the temple?"

"The plan for that little cannon thing? Of course. Why, what about it?"

Teo's father got something out of his bag.

"Well, I have managed to build this weapon! Look!"

He presented me a small device, consisting of a thin, short tube and a slightly wider end. It was small enough to easily fit to the vambraces of my arm blades.

Teo's father explained: "You see the little lever-shaped mechanism? All you have to do is aim and then pull the lever, this results in a tiny black powder explosion inside the weapon, which then hurls out the previously-loaded bullet with high speed and strong force. The effect is powerful enough for the bullet to even penetrate armor! I have taken the time and also made a whole bag of fitting bullets for you."

Teo's father handed me a little bag, which I immediately fastened to my belt. Afterwards, I attached the "bullet-thrower" itself to my left gauntlet and positioned it so that it didn't reduce my arm blade's availability, but still was completely usable without any problems. Oh yes! This little thing would definitely be a good help for the future. I thanked Teo's father and then walked over to Aang, who had just received a new glider from Teo. As I had learned a few weeks ago, he had burned his old one in a volcano. After that, we all walked towards the rest of the fleet, to listen to the plans one more time.

Hakoda stepped in front of the entire invasion fleet and explained the battle plans and tactics: The fleet's ships would transport the warriors to the Fire Nation capital, where they would storm the beaches, so that we would reach the palace before the eclipse would begin. Then the troops would
take care of the defenseless fire benders, while Aang was fighting the Fire Lord. We would conquer the capital and finally end the war!

When Hakoda had finished his speech, I asked him if I could say a few words to the fleet myself, he allowed it. I stepped in front of the assembled warriors and said with a loud and determined voice:

"Today is the day the Fire Nation perishes! Today is the day this pointless war finally comes to an end! It will be a hard battle, but let me tell you: It's our time to change it all! Rise! Unite and fight! To make the world a better place! One for all, all for one! Today, we rise! We will be victorious!"

The assembled fleet cheered and uttered a loud battle cry. I stepped back, Sokka clapped me on the shoulder:

"Nice speech, I honestly didn't think you were capable of something like this."

"Well, special circumstances call for special abilities, don't they?"

Sokka nodded, before wandering off to consult with some other soldiers. I went over to Aang, Katara and Toph, who were also readying up by buckling on battle armor, Aang was also shaving his hair to regain his bald head, which also resulted in his air bender tattoos becoming fully visible again.

When I saw my friends prepare themselves for battle, I said in my mind: "It's time!"

I went and got my burlap bag, opened it and spread the contents on the ground. Aang, Katara and Toph almost lost their breath when they saw what was lying in front of me: Night-black, metallic shining armor plates! I had crafted them ages ago, but I had sworn to save them for the most important battle of my life!

I waved some earth bender soldiers over, I needed their help to buckle on the plates. First the chest plate, then the individual plates for arms and legs, bit by bit and part by part the armor plates slowly found their place on my body and my robe. A few minutes later, I stood there, fully armored! And I had to say: While my new robe itself already had an intimidating effect due to its night-black coloring, now, with the armor, I looked even more dangerous!

"But the culmination is yet to come!", I told my friends, when I took the final piece out from the burlap bag. When I presented it to them, they were almost frightened to death! It was a mask, night-black like the armor and modeled after the head of a demon. It was a replica of the face of the infamous Shadow Demon Grim Bazor, the Demon King, who once had been defeated in an epic battle by Master Assassin Burzu Lee, better known as the Dragon Emperor. I put the mask on, now my whole body was almost completely covered in black, I looked like a walking shadow, but that was my goal: To further unsettle the Fire Nation soldiers with just my appearance, to make the fights even more easy than they would already be.

While I was equipping my weapons, Teo came rolling towards me and said: "Yulizan, do you have a moment? My father has something else he wants to show you."

I followed the crippled boy, curious about which other invention his father wanted to present to me. I already saw it from the distance shortly after: Teo's father was standing next to several huge, red-black plates of metal.

I asked: "What is this supposed to be?"

"Am I right in the assumption that your dragon will also take part in the battle?"
"Yes, that is correct."

"Then my work wasn't for nothing, because what you are seeing here is a specially-designed, custom-made dragon armor!"

Oh! Not bad! Actually, why not? Pagan probably wouldn't need any additional protection, but this armor would definitely help with his intimidation factor, just like it was with me and my armor.

I called my dragon, who shortly after landed right next to me, I said to him: "Look, Teo's father has built an armor for you. You could wear it during the battle, it would definitely make you look even more dangerous."

Pagan thought about the whole thing for a moment and eventually agreed. Teo's father immediately called over some soldiers to help him buckle the armor plates onto Pagan's long body.

While they were working, Aang, Katara, Sokka and Toph came to us, Aang said: "That is nice. Appa has also received a set of armor, that means we will have double support from the air."

"But you don't know the best thing yet: Pagan will be able to help us with his fire the entire time."

The others stared at me confused, Sokka said: "Uh, hello? Remember? Eclipse! No sun - no fire bending!"

"That only applies to humans, Sokka. Dragons are often seen as the first fire benders, but that's only half of the truth. It's true: Dragons have mastered the fire long before the humans, but in a different way. Dragons produce their fire organically in their bodies, therefore, unlike humans, they don't need the energy of the sun. They have special glands that can produce fire. Thus, they are able to use their flames without any limits, even during an eclipse, like the one we will have today."

The others were visibly impressed, but also glad, since they now knew that we would have some very useful help during the battle in the form of Pagan.

Now it was finally here, the moment of departure! We had developed a very special tactic with which we wanted to catch the Fire Nation off guard: We would send empty battle ships towards the Great Bay of Azulon, while our entire army would use special underwater-boats to reach the beach unseen. In addition, of course, there were Pagan and I, the support from the air.

I walked over to my dragon friend, who was now completely clad in his armor, and told him: "Alright, this is it, my friend, let's hope we will make it!"

"Don't worry, we can do it, you definitely have to make it, after all: You have quite a lot to lose..."

Pagan's last words caused a little feeling of uncertainty in my body. What if really something happened to me? Then my child would have to grow up without a father! And I simply could not allow that to happen! I had already fought in innumerable battles and I had survived every single one of them, so I would survive this one as well!

Filled with determination, I climbed onto Pagan's neck, called to my friends: "We'll meet at the beach!", then we rose to the air.

Pagan's flight was a bit uneasy at first, since this was his first time flying around while wearing something like an armor, but he managed to get used to it quite quickly. So we now headed straight towards the Fire Nation capital, we were flying straight into battle! In a few hours, the time would finally come, the war would finally be over!
But while my thoughts were already completely fixed on the fight, I suddenly heard a strange and very quiet music, so quiet that I almost wasn't able to understand it, in the back of my head, accompanied by words, uttered by an unknown voice, the same words, over and over again:

"When the empire falls..."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Day of the Black Sun (Part 2)
"When the empire falls...", what did that mean, I asked myself as we came closer and closer to the capital.

The only logical thing that came to my mind regarding this strange sentence was that it was most likely foreseeing our victory, as "empire" could only refer to the Fire Nation, which would fall today if the invasion would be a success.

But the sentence seemed like it was not complete. Were there even more words that followed the ones I had already heard, words that would possibly reveal the sentence's true meaning? I decided not to waste any further thoughts on this matter but to completely focus on the upcoming battle instead.

I asked Pagan: "So, are you ready?"

"I'm always ready, I'm already looking forward to unleash all of my power!"

"That's the spirit!"

Filled with confidence, we continued to fly over the sea, the ships and underwater-boats were also setting sail now.

A little later the capital came into sight. The decoy ships slowly headed towards the coastline.

"So now it begins...", I thought, took my mother's medallion into my hand, pressed it firmly, looked up to the sky and said:

"Today, I will prevail, I will finally give you your long-awaited peace!"

When I turned my eyes back towards the coast, I saw that our plan proved to be successful: The empty decoy ships were attacked while the underwater-boats were able to reach the beach without any problems.

"Well then, Pagan, attack!", I called.

The dragon uttered the loudest roar I had ever heard of him until now, he tucked up his arms and legs and hurtled towards the Fire Nation defense forces like an arrow as they gradually came storming out from the city.

He flew across the front rows head-on while spewing a big burst of fire towards the ground, instantly killing a good bunch of soldiers already.

After that, Pagan positioned himself in the air and started to focus his flames at the other soldiers and also the first war machines that were now coming out from the city, while our underwater-boats now emerged from the sea and one by one started to land at the beach.

I spotted my friends as they were exiting one of the boats and said to Pagan: "Quick! Bring me down and then continue your offense!"
The dragon glided to the ground as fast as possible where the first infantry battles had already begun.

I jumped off in the midst of the turmoil while Pagan immediately rose back into the air and continued to launch bursts of fire into the rows of our enemies.

I ran towards Aang, Katara, Sokka and Toph, who all four were getting ready to fight.

When I had reached them, I immediately said: "Pagan is in control of the situation, his flames are causing a lot of damage to the Fire Nation troops!"

"Very good, everybody knows what he or she has to do?", Sokka asked.

We all nodded, then Aang said: "Good luck everybody, let's hope that we can celebrate our victory in a few hours."

I tapped my chest with my fist and said: "May the Spirits guide us!"

After this, our little group split up again, I ran over to a group of water benders with whom I had talked extensively before our departure from the Black Cliffs, because we had come up with a nice little plan to mentally weaken the Fire Nation soldiers already before the eclipse: We wanted to weaken them using fear!

The plan was fairly simple: The water benders would create a dense fog through which I would then stride while wearing my black armor and mask. We hoped that the soldiers would consider me as a real demon and become visibly demotivated and frightened because of that. I also had another ace up my sleeve that was meant to increase the illusion even more.

When a new large group of fire soldiers came storming out of the city and headed directly towards me and my group of water benders, we translated our plan into action: The water benders created the cloud of fog and completely enshrouded us in it.

Despite my mask I was able to perceive the growing uncertainty in the eyes of the fire soldiers. I drew both my katanas and got ready to stride through the wall of fog.

As I moved forward slowly and determined, I spoke with a dark and diabolic voice to recite an ancient prayer, written in the equally ancient language that had supposedly been used by the demons themselves:

_Tha thu a 'tighinn a-steach an rioghachd na deamhain! (You have entered the realm of the demons!)_

_Bàs agus sgrios a 'feitheamh thu! (Death and doom await you!)_

_Do aghaidhean Grim Bazor, righ dheamhan! (You stand in front of Grim Bazor, the King of Demons!)_

_Do thachair tha sheulaicheadh! (Your fate is sealed!)_

While I was still speaking, I emerged from the fog. Now I was standing there, truly looking like a demon through-and-through!

I immediately noticed the soldiers' terrified faces, some of them were even screaming in fear, especially after they had realized that I was holding swords in my hands.
Our plan proved to be a complete success: They were way too frightened to put up even the smallest amount of resistance.

I also got ready to use a new technique which I had developed in preparation for the battle: I had applied a special oil to the blades of my katanas ahead of our departure. Now all I had to do was to bend a small flame and only a second later both blades were blazing fiercely!

That ultimately proved to be too much for the soldiers to handle: A shadow demon with two fire swords!

Some of the soldiers from the back rows started to run back into the city, screaming in absolute terror. I called to the rest of my group: "Attack!"

Everybody stormed forward immediately, with myself in front!

With both katanas ready to strike, I used the technique that I had mastered back in the forest near Hama's village: I rammed the right katana through the chest of the first soldier with full force, the left katana shot forward at the same moment and decapitated another soldier who had been standing to the left of the first one.

When the swords made contact with the bodies of the soldiers, flames shot out of both the blades and the bodies of the killed men, these flames then jumped over to the rest of the group of soldiers, setting some of them on fire as well in the process.

It was a very single-sided affair. After less than ten minutes my brigade and I had completely destroyed the entire group of fire soldiers!

And the rest of the battle also was clearly in our favor as well. Our warriors, benders and machines did a very good job against the Fire Nation army. Even the Fire Nation tanks weren't able to cope with the attacks of the earth benders and also our own tanks.

But then the defenders suddenly started to bring out the heavy machinery! After I had just incapacitated a tank by shooting an explosive arrow directly at it, a large fire ball hit the ground next to the destroyed war machine! I looked up and discovered the source of the projectile: A defensive tower had been erected!

I knew that our infantry probably couldn't do much against that thing, therefore I whistled as loud as I could, Pagan came flying towards me in an instant.

I didn't even let him land but instead just shouted: "Take care of that tower!"

The dragon understood and immediately started an assault on the tower. He skillfully dodged the projectiles that were hurled towards him until he was on the same level as the top of tower in which the siege machines that were firing the projectiles were located.

He immediately spewed a beam of concentrated fire at the tower which first set the machines on fire and after another minute blew up the entire upper part of the tower! I clenched my fist and uttered a small cheer, Pagan also uttered a loud roar before flying to the other side of the battlefield to help Appa who was trying to take care of another tower.

A short time later, that tower fell as well, Pagan then set out to further decimate the Fire Nation army, Appa on the other hand landed a bit off the main battlefield, I spotted Katara and Sokka sitting in the saddle.
I rushed through the tumult of the battle, rammed my arm blades into some hostile guts or backs here and there on the way, until I had reached the sky bison. Hakoda was laying in the saddle, he had been seriously hurt during the attack on one of the towers, Katara had already began to treat his injuries.

When she spotted me, she immediately said: "Father is badly hurt, I don't think he can continue to fight."

I became worried, without a strong leader the whole army would soon be demotivated which would definitely diminish our chances to win this battle.

But Sokka said resolutely: "Then I'll take over command! I will lead us to victory!"

He sounded so mature and confident in his words that I didn't dare to contradict him.

Hakoda defied his pain for a short moment and said: "Then go and make me proud, my son!"

Sokka said goodbye to his father, jumped onto Appa's back and rushed off to give new orders to the warriors of our army.

I asked Katara: "Will you be able to do this by yourself?"

She immediately replied: "Of course, no problem, go back, they need you!"

I wished the girl and her father the best of luck, then I sprinted back to the battlefield where progress had become visible, we were about to conquer the walls of the city. I entered the battle again and continued to decimate the Fire Nation forces.

After a few minutes, the call we had waited for finally echoed over the battlefield: "We are through!"

We really had made it, the wall had been conquered!

I immediately rushed through the now open gate into the city, a large part of our army by my side.

Shortly afterwards, Katara and Toph joined me on the other side of the gate.

I asked Katara: "What about your father?"

"He's in a short-term sickbay by the beach, don't worry, he will pull through!"

"Alright, then let's go to the palace! We need to find Aang and help him!"

But before we were able to set out, everything changed and not for the better!

Because only seconds after I had finished speaking, Aang landed with his glider right next to us!

I was completely perplexed and asked the young Avatar: "What are you doing here? Have you already defeated the Fire Lord? Without the eclipse?"

"The Fire Lord wasn't even in the palace!", Aang said.

What? That couldn't be! How in the world was that possible?

Sokka, who had joined us as well in the meantime, said: "There's only one logical explanation: The
Fire Lord has somehow learned of the invasion and is now hiding somewhere!"

"But where?", Toph asked.

"He most likely has a bunker or shelter somewhere in the city."

"Then we must hurry and find this bunker before the eclipse begins!", I called.

The others agreed with me.

We briefly discussed our next moves with some of the higher-ranking warriors of our army, in the end the following arose as a result: Aang, Sokka, Toph and I would go and search for the bunker of the Fire Lord, while Katara and the rest of our forces would continue trying to conquer the palace.

I somehow had the feeling that this was only the tip of the iceberg and there were even more unpleasant surprises waiting for us...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Day of the Black Sun (Part 3)
We immediately set out to find the bunker in which the Fire Lord was supposedly hiding himself. I thanked the Spirits that we had Toph with us, because thanks to her special earth bending abilities, she was able to scan our entire surroundings, also underground.

After a few minutes of search, she suddenly pointed her finger into the distance and said: "There! The bunker is underneath that area!"

I followed her gesture, she pointed right at a small volcano located just outside of the city limits.

"Well, this comes in quite useful to me.", I thought to myself.

Because: Even though I would not be able to bend fire during the eclipse, a fiery and hot environment would still give me a positive feeling for that period of time.

Sokka said: "Then what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

He didn't have to say that twice! We ran off, heading for the volcano!

When we had reached the mountain, Toph quickly bent a tunnel into the massif, it would lead us under the earth, directly towards the bunker.

I took advantage of the little time left before the eclipse and used my flames to give us the light we needed while we were walking through the dark tunnel, however I had to put it out here and there, as we often walked through chamber-like caves in which hot and flammable gases flowed out from cracks in the ground and the walls.

We were making our way deeper and deeper into the heart of the volcano, which was also shown by the fact that small lakes of magma were now appearing from time to time. I enjoyed the heat of the molten rock, I literally sucked it in so that it would give me strength later during the eclipse.

After we had walked through the underground tunnel for about half an hour, we finally found what we had been looking for: A big and strong metal door, the entrance to the bunker! Toph stepped forward, placed both her hands on the door and ripped a big hole into the metal without any problems. Her abilities amazed me every single time, she truly was incredibly talented.

We entered the bunker, without knowing where exactly to go next. But as fate would have it, a servant suddenly crossed our path. I grabbed him by the arm, twisted it to the back and then hit the arm with my elbow as hard as I could, breaking the bones effortlessly. The servant uttered a small scream, but I pressed my other hand onto his mouth and looked at him devilishly through the eye slits of my mask.

I saw the mortal fear in the man's eyes when I asked him with a dark and muffled voice: "Where ... is ... the Fire Lord?"

The man was not able to make a sound, but instead gestured at a large door at the end of a long corridor with trembling fingers.
"Thank you!", I whispered and hit the servant on the neck with the side of my hand, destroying his carotid artery, killing him.

I followed my friends, who had already gone ahead, to the ominous door. In my mind, I briefly went through the schedule again, if I hadn't miscalculated, the eclipse would have to begin at this moment right now! I tried to create a flame, but nothing happened, my hand didn't even get hot!

"Guys, the eclipse has begun, now or never!", I said to my friends.

Thereupon, we all took up fighting positions, I drew both my katanas, ready to strike! Sokka counted to three, then we breached the door!

But what awaited us in the room behind the door caused us to stop dead in our tracks! Not the Fire Lord, but Azula waited at the end of the room, sitting calmly on a small throne!

At the first moment I didn't know what happened to us, then an ineffable rage overwhelmed me! This damn little witch had conned us! I slapped myself a thousand times on the inside for that I had actually fallen for such a cheap trick.

Azula grinned devilishly and said: "Welcome, Avatar! Surprised? You probably had expected to find my father here, am I right? Well, tough luck, but I had learned of your little miserable invasion plan months ago already. At first, I didn't really want to believe it, but my oh so fine brother was firmly convinced that you had survived and would try to attack us again. Well, boo-hoo! Now, should I finish what I started back in Ba Sing Se? Even though I'm currently not able to use my fire bending, you and your two friends still won't stand any chance against me!"

Azula laughed spitefully, she hadn't even spotted me yet. Therefore, I emerged from behind my friends, right into Azula's field of view. Slightly frightened by my sight at the first moment, she immediately found her spitefulness again and asked mockingly:

"Oh, even more backup, Avatar? And what is that supposed to be? A living shadow? Don't make me laugh!"

Now I finally had enough! This time she wouldn't escape me!

With my demon voice I said: "You should really learn to start thinking about what you are doing and wishing for, princess!"

Azula suddenly stopped laughing, stared at me with a shocked look in her eyes and shouted angrily:

"You dare talk to me like that? Who are you anyway?"

In response to that, I reached for my mask with both my hands and removed it from my face slowly and dramatically. When Azula saw my face and recognized me, she stumbled a few steps backwards in shock, before screaming with a voice that was filled with fear and fury:

"You! That's impossible! I clearly killed you in Ba Sing Se!"

In contrast to our previous encounters, I didn't grin this time, but instead showed what was perhaps my grimmest face.

With a dark voice I said: 'I am the phoenix! I have risen from the ashes of my defeat, with only one goal: Ending your worthless life! And today will finally be the day I achieve this goal! Prepare
yourself to step through the gates of hell, princess!"

Katanas drawn, I rushed forward, straight towards Azula!

But shortly before I reached her, two Dai Li agents shot out from the earthy ground! Thunderstruck, I stopped mid-run and stared at the two earth benders. But I regained my composure fairly fast and said with a dark voice:

"You miserable traitors! I still have a score to settle with you! You can't escape! Prepare to meet Long Feng again!

The two agents created some earth chunks from the rocky walls of the room and hurled them at me, but I was able to dodge them without problems. Without further frills, guided solely by my anger, I lunged at the two Dai Lis!

I rammed my right katana through the chin and the whole head of the first agent from below, so that the tip of the sword broke through the top of his skull!

While I was tugging at the hilt to pull out the katana again, the other agent tried to sneak up on me from behind. But I had foreseen the attack, kicked backwards with my right foot and hit the second agent directly in his abdomen, he went down.

I tore the first katana out of the first agent's head, turned around in the same motion and rammed both katanas into the second agent's head and back with all my force and power!

I panted with anger and exertion before turning my eyes back to Azula, who seemed unaffected by my actions on the outside, but I could feel that she really was afraid of me on the inside.

While we stared at each other, my friends now took the initiative and attacked Azula. But even without her fire bending, she proved to be a very tough opponent, as she was still very quick and agile, she dodged every single attack. After a couple of minutes filled with unsuccessful attacks, Sokka suddenly called:

"Forget it, guys, we are only wasting our time with her! We must find the Fire Lord!"

I called back: "Then go! I stay and take care of her!"

When I turned to face Azula again and Aang, Sokka and Toph were about to leave the room, Azula suddenly said maliciously:

"Oh, does that mean that the great warrior doesn't want to know what has happened to his fair maiden?"

Sokka turned around, thunderstruck, and asked with a voice that was filled with both worry and anger: "What have you done to Suki?"

Great! Azula actually had something on us that kept me from killing her right here right now on the spot. But if I knew one thing, then that one should never leave a comrade behind, this now also pertained to the apparently vanished leader of the Kyoshi Warriors.

Toph reacted and tied Azula up against the wall using a couple of earth rings. Sokka marched straight up to the princes and shouted: "Where is she? What have you done to her?"

While Sokka was shouting, I suddenly felt the heat returning to my body. Oh no, the eclipse was...
already over? And Aang hadn't managed to face and fight the Fire Lord? In my inside, my
determination shattered into a thousand small pieces like a mirror. We had failed again? No! Not
this time! This time I wouldn't withdraw from the battle without success or a fight!

Azula had noticed the return of her abilities as well, grinned and said: "Nice try, but it's the end for
you now!"

Using her blue flames, she effortlessly broke her chains and ran to the far end of the room.

When she got there, she turned around to face me and said with a wicked grin on her face: "Well,
tough luck, Hood!"

But I was by no means finished yet! I shouted: "This is not over yet, princess! This time I won't
fail!"

I conjured up two huge flames in both my hands and hurled them into every direction, every nook
and corner of the room! Shortly afterwards, the entire room was in white flames, except for the
part in front of the door where my friends where standing. Although I of course already knew that
we had lost, I still tried my best, or rather most desperate, to take down Azula.

Unfortunately, my attempt did not bear any fruit, when the fire had cleared again shortly
afterwards, Azula had disappeared.

I was about to scream out my frustration over my failure as loud as I could, but Aang said to me:
"Come on, we need to get out of here!"

With an incredible rage boiling in my stomach, I followed my friends back to the surface.

The second we had left the volcano, we immediately saw the extent of the returned sun: A fleet of
giant airships and balloons was heading straight towards the city! Now it was finally sealed: We
had lost! The invasion had failed!

I immediately said to the others: "No chance! We are completely outnumbered! Retreat and escape
are the only options we have!"

The others agreed with me on that, therefore, we rushed back to the beach. But there, our chances
were decimated even further, as the airships had destroyed almost all of the underwater boats. In
the first moment, we didn't really know what to do next, then Hakoda came to us and said:
"Come on, you have to flee! We stay behind and let ourselves be captured! This way, we will give
you enough time to get away far enough!"

Katara and Sokka did not agree with this plan at first, they didn't want to lose their father again, but
eventually they realized that we had no other choice.

After a brief but emotional farewell, we readied ourselves for departure. I whistled and Pagan
landed next to me almost immediately. The traces the battle had left on him were clearly visible,
most of his armor plates were either charred or bore deep furrows. But fortunately, he had not lost
any of his strength.

While I was climbing the dragon's neck, I saw that the rest of the group getting ready as well, some
of the younger fighters, including Teo and Haru, would accompany us.
I called out to Aang: "Where exactly are we flying?"

"The Western Air Temple! There we should be safe, at least for the time being!"

I looked at Pagan, he had understood. Shortly after, we rose to the air and shot past the airship blockade with lightning speed, heading westwards!

In the air, I finally realized to full extent that the entire invasion had been nothing but a bitter defeat. We hadn't achieved any of our goals: we had not conquered the city, Aang had not defeated the Fire Lord and I had not been able to kill Azula! All in all, it had been an outright disaster!

Well, I could still draw at least one positive conclusion: Nothing bad had happened to me on a physical level, I was still alive, I would be able to be there for my girlfriend and my child in the future.

Nevertheless, one thought still prevailed: Azula and eventually Ozai had to die, at all costs!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Conversion?
We had been able to leave the airspace above the capital quite quickly, now we were flying westward, heading towards the Western Air Temple, where we would hide for the time being.

The boiling anger in my body was only cooling down fairly slow again, the renewed defeat, even though it wasn't as bad as it had been in Ba Sing Se, was really gnawing on my mind, I couldn't and didn't want to believe that I, no, we, had failed once again. Azula had escaped me once more and the Fire Lord had also skillfully dodged danger.

It was not quite clear to me how many more defeats it would take before I would lose my mind and start wandering through the world on an uncontrollable killing spree. No! I couldn't let things get that far, I had to stay focused, for the sake of my honor and most importantly my future, Ty Lee and our child were more important than anything else, I would not let this happiness be taken away from me by anyone!

After a few hours, Appa slowly began to get tired, as he had to transport quite the good amount of people at the same time. Aang decided to give his bison a break, they would continue on foot for the time being. Pagan still had enough energy reserves, therefore the two of us were able to stay in the air, keeping an eye on our friends walking on the ground.

Our journey eventually led us to the edge of a large and misty chasm. Pagan landed, I asked: "And where exactly is the temple supposed to be now?"

"We're already there!", Toph said.

We all looked around, but there was nothing to see except for the extensive grassy landscape and the chasm.

An idea came to my mind. I said to the others: "Wait here, we'll be right back."

Pagan rose to the air again and headed for the chasm, into which we eventually descended a little bit. After a few meters, my assumption proved to be correct: Many old and dilapidated temple buildings were hanging upside down from under the cliff. We rose back out of the chasm and shared our discovery with the others.

Shortly after, everyone was sitting on Appa again. We flew into the chasm together, only to land in a larger courtyard between the upside down buildings a few seconds later.

I dismounted Pagan lividly, angrily kicked a little stone into the chasm with full force, then sat down on the ground.

With a voice that was seething with rage I said: "I can't believe it! We lost again! This just can't be true!"

Aang approached me and said: "Yulizan, stay calm, it's..."

"No, Aang! Nothing is! We have planned this invasion for so long and so extensively and what did
it do for us? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! We only were humiliated once more! I don't know what kind of philosophy you want to use this time, but I also don't care, because it won't do anything to help us! There is nothing positive about this battle! We are just as smart as we were before!"

Aang shrunk back a few steps with a start, he had never seen me so angry before.

It was this reaction by the young Avatar that made me realize how I had behaved, I dropped back down to the ground again, as I had jumped to my feet during my phase of rage.

"I'm sorry, Aang, I didn't mean to yell at you. It's just ... I've experienced so many defeats over the last while and they were all so severe for my body and soul, it really made me feel low. But I promise that it won't happen again."

The Avatar approached me again, a smile on his face, he put his hand on my shoulder and said: "Don't worry, everything is alright. I can understand you, but don't forget: If you hold on to past defeats for too long, they will also negatively affect the future."

The young air bender was right. I briefly thought about his words and eventually came to the conclusion that I really shouldn't spend too many negative thoughts on the failed invasion, otherwise I really would become mentally unstable eventually, which would certainly not help me with the continuation of my mission.

I reorganized my mind and then stood up again, my confident and determined look back on my face.

"So, what is our new plan?"

Sokka made a proposition: "I think there's only one fairly plausible plan now: Aang has to learn fire bending and face the Fire Lord before the comet appears."

Aang was visibly unsettled by this proposition, I felt that the events that had taken place back when we had visited Master Jeong Jeong were still weighing quite heavily on him.

He said: "But where should I find a fire bending teacher? The only one we knew is Jeong Jeong, and I'm pretty sure that he doesn't want to see me again."

I originally wanted to say something about this matter, but eventually decided not to, since I noticed that Aang really didn't want to be taught by Jeong Jeong again. Where should we find a suitable teacher for the fire bending then? I really couldn't think of any suitable options, the only other peaceful fire benders I knew were all Assassins, and as I had told my friends shortly after I had met them, Assassins were not suitable as bending teachers, because of the many special forms and abilities that our style of bending involved.

As the others continued to talk, I sat down on the ground again and thought about other things, mainly about Ty Lee and our child of course. I thought about how I would be able to reconcile my Assassin affiliation and my new family life. The most sensible option would probably be that I gave up my position as an active fighter and only act passively in the future. But to be honest, I didn't really want to give up this life, the freedom, the excitement, the adventure, I was just so familiar with all this already.

While we were all engrossed in our respective activities, we didn't notice that someone was approaching us. It was only when I perceived a nervous and accelerated breathing a few meters behind me that I suddenly jumped to my feet and turned around.
But what I saw was worse than anything I had imagined! The others, who also had become aware of the new situation because of my sudden jump-up, saw it as well! There, just a few meters away from us, stood Prince Zuko!

If my anger had only vanished a few minutes ago, it now had returned with almost the same intensity!

Zuko raised his hand and opened his mouth to say something, but he wasn't able to utter a single word! I charged forward, fast as an arrow, until I stood right in front of him. Before he could react, my right hand shot forward and closed tightly around his neck. I was almost one head taller than the prince and therefore now looked down on him, right into his terror-stricken scarred face.

With bright flames of anger in my eyes and a knife-sharp voice I said: "Give me one good reason not to squeeze!"

Zuko was already noticeably gasping for air, but my grip remained as firm as it was!

He croaked out: "I'm not here to fight!"

Although I of course didn't believe him, I still loosened my grip a little bit so that we were able to understand him better.

"What do you want? Why are you here?", I asked, still with the same sharp voice.

"I have changed my life, I have realized my mistakes. I'm here to teach the Avatar fire bending."

"And why should we believe you?"

"I didn't immediately attack you, isn't that proof enough?"

Instead of an answer, I lifted the prince, even though he was only two years younger than me, a little higher up in the air by the throat and then hurled him backwards several meters! He landed hard in the dust, grabbed his throat and gasped for air. But he wasn't able to do this for long, because only seconds later one of my steel arrows hit the ground, right next to his head!

He stared towards me horrified, with a furious face I called: "If you show your face again, I'll aim better the next time!"

Thereupon the prince jumped to his feet and ran away, I gazed after him, still with the same furious face.

I returned to my friends and said:

"He won't come back anytime soon!

The others were already discussing the events:

"What did he say? He has changed himself and wants to help Aang? Why should we trust him even in the slightest?", Sokka asked.

Aang, as usual, tried to remain objective, recalling how Zuko once had freed him from the prison, disguised as the Blue Spirit.

Katara interjected: "He only did that because he wanted to hand you over to the Fire Lord by himself, not for any noble reasons."
That became clear to Aang too after a few moments of thinking.

Toph, who had remained remarkably quiet and calm the entire time, eventually said: "He appeared to be very confident all the time and seemed to have said the truth. Your prejudices against him obscure your possible insight."

After this statement, another heated altercation arose. Katara accused Toph that she knew nothing about Zuko, as she hadn't been hunted by him the entire time. In the end, Toph was in the sulks once again and marched away frustrated.

I also had spent some thoughts on this matter the whole time. Sure, Zuko had always wanted our death or at least our defeat, but nevertheless, he was still a son of the Fire Nation, we had a undying sense of honor. Was it actually possible that the mists of corruption in his mind had lifted and that he had found his true honor again?

I also remembered the words of my father, the words he had whispered to me at the Northern Water Tribe, where I had already had the chance to kill Zuko: "He will turn his back on the path of chaos."

Was all what was happening now what my father had meant? I decided to sleep on it for one night and then make my final decision the following day.

The next morning, I was awakened by the sudden sound of a large wave of rubble rushing through the temple. I raised my head and saw Toph coming towards us, crawling on all fours and with a disturbed look in her eyes.

I immediately jumped to my feet and ran over to her: "Toph! What happened?"

"I was searching for Zuko during the night and also found him eventually, but then he did this."

She sat down and showed me her feet. They were completely covered with big and bloody blisters!

I immediately called: "Katara! Quick! We need healing!"

The water bender came rushing up at once and started to treat Toph's injuries.

While she was working she said: "Well, now it's definitely evident that Zuko is posing a great danger! We have to stop him before more like this happens!"

I momentarily forgot my thoughts from the previous evening and determinedly agreed with Katara!

But just as Katara had finished the healing of Toph's injuries, we heard a loud explosion above our heads, followed by an equally loud shout, I immediately recognized the voice as Zuko's:

"Watch out! Danger from above!"

At first I didn't know what to think of this, but then Pagan appeared from out of the chasm. I immediately jumped onto his neck, together we flew up to the top of the cliff. There I discovered the reason for the explosion: It was the colossal combustion bender with the eye-shaped tattoo on his forehead! He was just shooting another beam of highly concentrated fire directly at a loose piece of rock.

"Looks like the wound I gave him back in that city has healed again by now.", I thought. "Looks like I have to take care of him again, and this time once and for all!"
Pagan flew back down for a brief moment so that I could warn my friends.

I called: "It's the giant with the eye on his forehead! Get yourselves to safety, I take care of this!"

Thereupon Pagan flew back up again, stopping at the same height as both the cliff and the giant, we were now directly in front of him, only a few meters separated us! He immediately noticed Pagan and me, grinned broadly and prepared another attack.

But I was faster! I took a throwing knife and hurled it right into the giant's head, the blade hit him right in his tattoo! Even though this already did much more damage than the wound I had given him in our first fight, I was far from finished with him yet!

I gave Pagan the permission to attack, the dragon roared loudly, before he grabbed the giant's entire upper body with his strong jaws, shook him violently a few times and finally hurled him into the misty depths of the chasm!

"Well, now he definitely won't make us any more trouble!", I said proudly to Pagan as we returned to the others.

When Pagan landed in the courtyard and I turned around towards my friends, I was as if struck by lightning! Zuko was indeed back! The anger inside me immediately started boiling up again, I reached for one of my katanas and marched towards Zuko, a furious look on my face!

But before I reached him, Aang hastily took a step forward and said:

"Yulizan, no! Don't do anything to him! He really has cleared his character! He has openly admitted his faults! I have agreed that he will become my fire bending teacher, but only if everyone else agrees as well. You're the only one yet to agree. So?"

I skeptically put the katana back in its scabbard and started thinking. On the one hand, I was not entitled to question the Avatar's decision; on the other hand, I had to think about the well-being of us all, since I still was not sure if I really could trust Zuko completely. Eventually, I made a decision.

I directly approached Zuko: "You surely are familiar with the honor of a son of the Fire Nation?"

"Only too well.", Zuko replied.

"Then I hereby give you the chance to prove that you really have found your honor again: You and me, Agni Kai! Right here, right now! If you win, I will accept you completely, if I win, you leave, and should I ever meet you again after that, I will kill you without warning! So?"

I held out my right hand to Zuko. I clearly saw the fear and the tension in the face of the prince, I was curious to see if he would make the right decision.

After a good minute, Zuko finally said: "No! I don't want to fight you! I've been in enough pointless battles and I don't want to destroy my life any further with more of these."

I grinned and said: "Very good! You have made the right decision. You have proved that you were able to cut yourself off from your old and evil self. Aang, you have a fire bending teacher!"

The young Avatar was happy, and Zuko had to smile as well. He said: "I won't disappoint you!"

Even a few minutes later, I still was not able to be completely convinced by these words...
Later in the evening, when I was just about to lie down to sleep, Katara came towards me and said: "Yulizan, can I talk to you?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"I have noticed that you still don't trust Zuko completely, just like me, am I right?"

"To be honest: Yes, it's true. He was part of the Fire Nation leadership, which means that he also played a part in all the suffering that has happened in the world. I actually intended to kill him sooner or later. All the events of today might have given me new a perception of him, but that still doesn't mean that I completely trust him. I still see him as a risk, not just for Aang, but for all of us!"

"I feel the same way. Come, we should tell and show him once again what will happen to him if he's really just pretending."

I nodded and followed Katara to Zuko's quarters. He was currently in the process of setting everything up, but when he turned around and spotted the two of us standing in the door, his mood changed noticeably.

I walked up to him, grabbed him by the collar, pressed him against the wall and placed my arm blade on his throat! Katara appeared next to me, looked the prince straight in the face with grim eyes and said:

"Listen carefully: If you try anything suspicious or try to harm Aang in any way, then..."

That was my cue, I slowly moved the broad part of my arm blade over the skin on Zuko's chin. Scared to death, the prince nodded as slightly as one could nod, I removed my blade and let him be, whereupon Katara and I left the room.

My next task was now clear to me: I would now permanently keep an eye on Zuko while he was teaching fire bending to Aang.

I also considered to make another trip to Ba Sing Se to visit Ty Lee, I wanted to spend as much time with her as possible, without neglecting my mission of course.

Oh yes, there was a lot of hard work lying ahead of me in the near future...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Explanations, promises and confessions
The next morning, Zuko already wanted to begin with Aang’s training.

When he stepped out of his room and started to make his way to the great courtyard, he walked past me as I leaned against a wall of rock, a skeptical expression on my face.

Slightly confused, Zuko said: "Uh, good morning?"

I answered: "I will keep my eyes on you, man, so watch yourself!"

Zuko quickly turned away from me and continued walking.

"Good, respect me!", I thought as I followed the prince with some distance.

When I arrived outside I saw Aang already getting ready for the training.

I sat down and leaned against a larger stone, got some fruits out of my bag and began to eat them while I watched Aang and the prince as they prepared for the training.

Zuko eventually said to Aang: "Show me how much fire you can create already."

Aang performed the standard fire bending movement but only a tiny flame, which died down almost immediately again, emerged from his hands.

Slightly disappointed, Aang said: "Maybe you show me how you do it first so I can understand better."

Zuko agreed and now tried to create a flame himself, but to everybody's surprise his attempt wasn't any better than Aang's. I really had to hold myself back to not laugh out loud, it really was quite a fiasco that was happening over there. And it didn't get any better over the course of the day.

Around noon, I walked over and joined the others who had watched the entire occurrence from a different position. The first thing I noticed after I had reached them was that Katara, just like me, also seemed to have a giggle over Zuko's miserable bending attempts.

She commented with a grin on her face: "It would have saved us much trouble if he had been like this a few months ago."

I replied: "Yeah, especially that I wouldn't have had to freeze my fingers off in that snowstorm at the north pole."

We laughed and continued to watch what I wouldn't exactly describe as training anymore.

Some time later, Aang and Zuko sank to the ground exhaustedly, Zuko panted:

"I just don't understand! Why doesn't it work anymore all of a sudden? I never had any problems like this before."
I thought that now was the right time for me to get involved; after all, not only was I a very good practitioner of fire bending, but of course also more than familiar with the whole philosophy behind the creation of the flames.

I walked over to Aang and Zuko and said to the latter:

"Well, I might have an explanation for your ... ahem ... defective mastery of fire in recent times. You see, in the last months, and probably even years, you've always only been driven by your fury, your anger, your hatred. Negative emotions like this strengthen the fire bending. After being banished from the Fire Nation and making it your life goal to catch the Avatar, your entire mind was flooded with negative emotions. But now that you have refined yourself and have dispelled your negative emotions as far as possible you also destroyed your source of bending energy in the process."

Aang asked: "Does that mean he would have to get angry again to properly bend fire?"

Zuko immediately interjected: "That may be true but I don't want that anymore! I no longer want to rely on such emotions but rather find a new and more practicable source."

Toph joined us and said: "Then I would advise you to go and learn from the original benders. I for example was taught by badger moles how to bend earth."

"That may be a good idea but it unfortunately is impossible to fulfill. The first fire benders were dragons and they are as good as extinct."

I immediately said: "Not so fast, Zuko! I obviously have to explain quite a lot to you. Better sit down, it's a pretty interesting story."

The prince did as told, I sat down as well and began to speak:

"Alright, the first thing you should know is that dragons weren't the first fire benders."

Zuko asked astonishedly: "What? But they have always said so in school!"

"Because schools don't have access to the kind of information we Assassins have. The truth is this: While it's true that dragons have mastered the fire before humans, dragons bend fire in a different way. They produce it organically inside their body with the help of special glands. Thus dragons, unlike humans, are not dependent on the sun for the ability of fire bending."

"But then who was the first fire bender of the way we know and practice?"

"The sun! It is the source of all fire in the world. When man began to learn the art of bending he was inspired by both the dragons and the sun. The dragons showed the humans that it was possible to create and control fire. Unlike the dragons however, the humans did not have organs to produce fire by their own hand. They needed a different source and eventually found it in the sun. They absorbed the sun's energy, the heat, felt it wandering through their bodies, eventually concentrated it with the help of their chi and eventually managed to create their own new fire. That's how fire bending came into existence as we know it today."

Zuko looked to the ground and rubbed his face with his hands, most likely processing all the new information he just had learned.

"I had no idea ... but how exactly is this supposed to help us to strengthen our bending again?"

"Well, does the term "Sun Warriors" ring a bell with you?"
"Of course! An ancient civilization, the alleged first human fire benders! But they also died out thousands of years ago."

"Wrong again! What also only very few people know: The very first fire bender Assassins, who long ago co-founded the Order, were descendants of the Sun Warriors. The Assassins always maintained a connection to the civilization, as most of the Sun Warriors want to stay among themselves. For this reason we are the only people who know that members of the Sun Warrior civilization still live in an ancient city on a small island far in the north of the Fire Nation."

"And what does that mean for us now?"

"Well, if you really want to try to re-learn your skills and abilities, you should follow Toph's advice and learn from the oldest fire benders. Travel to the Sun Warriors and acquire new knowledge."

Zuko and Aang thought for a moment and then said: "Alright, what other choice do we have?"

Shortly thereafter the two were already preparing to leave. While Aang made Appa ready for the journey, I took Zuko aside and talked to him insistently:

"Listen: I clearly notice that you really mean the thing as seriously as you said. Regardless, a few words of caution: Keep your eye on Aang while the two of you are gone. When you meet the Sun Warriors you need to always behave in a manner that is both respectful and humble, then nothing bad should happen to you."

"What do you mean, 'should'?"

"Well, the Sun Warriors, like the Assassins, are very skeptical of strangers and can become hostile quite quickly. You have to make it clear from the beginning that you come without any evil intentions."

"Alright, we will remember that."

"Good luck, may the Spirits guide you."

After that, Zuko climbed onto Appa's saddle where Aang was already sitting and they flew away.

When I returned from the take-off spot, I saw Pagan lying on the floor, curled up and hanging his head.

I walked up to him, stroked his head and asked: "What's the matter, my friend?"

The dragon sighed and said: "Well, I'm disappointed because Aang and Zuko get the chance to see other dragons and I don't."

I immediately knew what Pagan was talking about: I hadn't told the others that reportedly some very old dragons lived in the city of the Sun Warriors who worshipped the giant lizards as gods. Pagan of course knew that and was sad now, as he surely would have liked to meet a fellow member of his species.

I tapped one of his horns and said encouragingly: "You know what? When the war is over, the two of us will also travel to the Sun Warriors at some point, then you can meet the other dragons."

Pagan's mood immediately lit up again, he blew out a small cloud of smoke from his snout and said: "Thank you! That would really mean a lot to me!"
"Hey, you're my best friend and friends give each other a treat from time to time."

Now that he was happy again, Pagan unrolled himself and set out to fly through the chasm for a little bit to re-vitalize his body.

I looked after him for a short moment before I eventually walked back to the rest of my friends.

For the rest of the day I didn't really have anything to do anymore, most of the time I just sat there leaning against my rock while I thought of Ty Lee and our child. I imagined what it would be like once it was born. Probably the most beautiful but at the same time most difficult time of my life would start.

In addition, I also already began to make plans. I intended to train my child, no matter if it was a boy or a girl, to become an Assassin like me once it was old enough, to uphold the tradition of my family, of course only if Ty Lee agreed as well.

While I was absorbed in my thoughts, Katara came to me and asked: "Yulizan, tell me, is something aggrieveing you? You've been sitting here without saying a word and make this pensive face the whole time."

I looked at the water bender and thought. Should I just tell her? Sooner or later the others would probably find out anyway, it would probably be better if I told them personally.

I said: "Yes, there actually is something. I think I have to make a confession. But promise me that you won't freak out."

"Promise."

"Alright. You remember that I had something going on with Ty Lee in Ba Sing Se..."

"Yes...", Katara's face immediately became more serious.

"Well, I want to be honest: I fell in love with Ty Lee. And she fell in love with me. We are together."

Katara's mouth opened wide to say something, but I was faster: "But that's not all. When I disappeared in the night before the invasion, I actually visited Ty Lee in Ba Sing Se. And on this visit she revealed to me that she's pregnant. I'm going to be a father, Katara."

The water bender clapped her hands over her mouth and said: "Oh dear!"

I continued with a serious face: "Don't you understand? I miss her, I want to see her again, be there for her. That's why I sat here so pensively the whole time. I hope you understand this. These are my honest feelings so please respect them."

Katara was pacing. I could feel that she was thinking. After a few minutes, she finally said: "While I'm not keen on the fact that you were willing to endanger our mission this much, if they really are your true feelings and you really love this girl, and I believe you, then I can accept it."

I jumped to my feet and hugged Katara tightly: "Thank you, I was sure that you would ostracize me once you would find it out."

"Come on, you should really know us better by now. Friends are there for each other, in every situation."
"And I know that as well now. So, if you don't mind, I would like to fly to Ba Sing Se with Pagan, to visit her."

Katara put her hand on my shoulder and said with a smile on her face: "Just go. I will tell Sokka and Toph about the whole matter."

"Thank you, but promise me one thing: Don't tell Zuko anything. He knows Ty Lee, if he finds out, it could get dangerous for us all. Aang on the other hand you can tell everything without any worries once they're back."

"Alright, I will do that."

Thereupon I walked to the edge of the chasm, whistled for Pagan and shortly afterwards sat on the dragon.

"To Ba Sing Se!", I called and Pagan rushed off.

Once we were high enough in the air I got the Heart Stone out of my bag, gently ran my fingers over the red gem and eventually heated the whole thing in my palm. The heart began to pulsate immediately, I hoped that Ty Lee was not busy at the moment and would notice the pulsation of her stone.

We reached Ba Sing Se in the early evening, the sun was just starting to set but it was still almost as bright as day.

We performed the exact same maneuver as on my last visit. Pagan flew over the city as close to the ground as possible while camouflaged, I jumped off him near my hideout. I landed in the same alley as last time, firmly took the stone in my hand and started my search for Ty Lee.

But I didn't have to search for long, because when I left the alley, which was right next to my hideout, I saw Ty Lee standing directly in front of the latter, her stone in her hand.

I packed my stone away, snuck up silently behind my love with a grin on my face and put my hands over her eyes.

She asked with a slightly startled voice: "Who is this?"

"I!"

"Who I?"

"I love you!"

I removed my hands and turned Ty Lee around. When she saw me her eyes lit up and she kissed me immediately.

I answered the kiss and then asked: "So, how are the two of you?"

As I said that, I put my hand on Ty Lee's belly.

She smiled and said: "Not right here, let's go inside."

Shortly afterwards we were once again standing in the main room of my hideout.

I repeated my question: "So?"
Ty Lee answered: "Everything's fine. I'm well, the bundle of joy has not made itself felt yet, still too small."

"Good to hear. Do you pay enough attention to your health and your nourishment? That's very important, especially during the early stages of pregnancy, so that the child can develop without any problems."

"Of course, I have already informed myself about all the important things, you don't have to worry about that."

I moved a strand of hair out of her face and kissed her again.

Then I asked: "By the way: Have you already told someone else?"

"No, you?"

"To be honest: Yes, I just couldn't keep it to myself any longer, and let's face it: Sooner or later they would have figured it out anyway."

"You're probably right. But tell me: Can you stay a little longer this time? I don't want you to leave as quick as last time."

"Don't worry, this time I have enough time. Which means that the two of us can enjoy some quiet days full of intimate togetherness."

Ty Lee was very happy about this realization, just like me. My friends would be fine and should they really get in danger I would sense it and could go to the rescue if really necessary.

But for now, on to some nice time together with the love of my life!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Prison Break
The next days were purest balm on my soul, not only did I finally have peace and quiet for a longer period of time but I also was able to spend this time with the two most important people in my life.

Ty Lee and I spent almost every single minute together. During the day we were often strolling through the whole city, thanks to the coloration of my new robe I now looked like an ordinary Fire Nation citizen and therefore didn't attract any attention. And almost every day when we got home in the evening, we began to indulge in our love for the entire night.

Ty Lee has been a bit worried at first that it could hurt the baby but I was able to hush her fears fairly quickly and assured her that the baby was in no kind of danger. So we made love again and again, it simply was an indescribable feeling, I almost never had been happier in my life and our child wasn't even born yet.

Then everything would be perfect, my life would finally be in balance again, at peace with itself. I was looking forward to this day more than yearningly!

As the days passed, we occasionally commuted between my hideout and Ty Lee's home in Ba Sing Se which also was pretty nice to look at.

Our activities included simple walks during which we talked a lot about our plans for our future but also visits to the many different shops and stores that were spread all over the city, the latter most of the time ended with Ty Lee buying a large amount of different stuff which then resulted in me playing the pack mule and carrying everything back to our home. But this didn't bother me in the slightest, as long as Ty Lee was happy I was happy too.

The many people on the streets also always gave us friendly looks when we walked past them as the young couple in love that we were. It was just wonderful, but unfortunately it shouldn't continue that way...

About one week after my arrival in Ba Sing Se, when we entered Ty Lee's house in the afternoon after we had eaten lunch in one of the city's many teahouses, there was a scroll on the table in the entrance hall that hadn't been there when we had left.

Ty Lee unrolled and read the scroll, I looked over her shoulder and read along.

What I had to read made my blood boil: The message was from Azula, she wrote that she, Mai and Ty Lee would soon go on another mission.

Ty Lee gasped in shock and said: "Oh no! What am I going to do now?"

"Don't go, under no circumstances, no matter what kind of mission it might be! You can't expose yourself or the child to any stress let alone put yourselves in danger, that would just be far too risky!"

"But you know Azula. She will force me to tag along, no matter what happens. And I can't say anything about my condition, that would be even more dangerous! Oh Yulizan, what am I going to
Ty Lee started to cry, I embraced her comfortably and whispered: "Relax, don't worry, nothing will happen to you, I'm here for you."

My words seemed to help, for her crying became noticeably quieter until it eventually turned back into sobbing as she rested her head against my chest while I had my arms around her, holding her tight as if I wanted to protect her from any kind of harm with the embrace.

I thought: How could we possibly solve this problem? Of course, the simplest method, which also was the one I would have liked the most, was that I would simply kill Azula once she arrived. But unfortunately quite a lot of things spoke against this, first and foremost of course the fact that I wouldn't be able to perform an unnoticed assassination on Azula and a public execution was even more out of the question in a big city like Ba Sing Se.

So what could we do? I thought about it for a while longer and eventually came to a decision that I admittedly didn't really like that much but it was probably the most comfortable and safe one for me, Ty Lee and our child.

I put my hands on Ty Lee's shoulders and explained to her: "Now listen carefully. I have a plan on how we can most likely accomplish this whole thing safely: You will go on this mission with Azula. You're still in the very early stages of your pregnancy so you shouldn't really be affected by it yet. You just have to be careful that your belly doesn't get hit by any kind of strike, blow or the like. And to make sure that Azula doesn't pose any kind of threat to you on this mission, Pagan and I will secretly follow and keep our eyes on you permanently. If anything unforeseen happens I will intervene and get you out of wherever that place Azula will take you to might be as fast as possible. What do you say?"

I saw that Ty Lee was brooding over the whole matter, after a couple of minutes she said: "I think this could work, I honestly can't think of anything better at the moment."

"Then let us hope for the best."

Ty Lee hugged and kissed me but we weren't able to enjoy the togetherness because only seconds later there was a loud hammering on the door followed by an elitist-sounding voice:

"Ty Lee! Are you ready? We have to go!"

We immediately recognized the voice: It was Azula!

I had to hide immediately! I looked around the room, the best option was a wardrobe. I yanked the door open, slipped between the many robes and coats and closed the door except for a small gap so that I could see and hear what was going on in the room.

Ty Lee opened the front door and Azula came strutting in. The sight of her made my blood boil again but I had to hold myself back, I couldn't risk to give myself away in this moment.

Ty Lee now asked: "So, what kind of mission is this that you need me for?"

"Oh, it's actually not really a mission. We will pay a little visit to the Boiling Rock prison on behalf of the Fire Lord."

I felt ice-cold shivers running up and down my spine! Did she just say "Boiling Rock? The world's most secure prison which was located on a small island inside an active volcano? In what kind of
nightmare had I just sent Ty Lee into, for the love of the Spirits? A trip to the Boiling Rock was basically a suicide mission! I swore to myself at this moment that I would go into this pursuit with highly-increased attention and preparation.

After a few minutes, Azula and Ty Lee left the house after Ty Lee was finished getting ready for the mission. I waited for another moment before I slipped out of my hiding place and then left the house as well. I looked around and was able to spot the girls at the end of the main street. I caught up a little but of course still remained in a sufficient safety distance.

They led me through the entire Upper Ring and eventually out of the city. Outside the city walls was a smaller Fire Nation airship, similar to those that had arrived at the end of the invasion. Hidden in the shadow of the wall I watched Azula and Ty Lee climbing into the ship where they joined Mai, who had already been visibly impatient because of the long wait, and lifted off.

Shortly afterwards I whistled and Pagan landed right next to me. I mounted the dragon and told him: "Our destination is the Boiling Rock but first follow that airship over there."

Pagan nodded, rose to the air, camouflaged himself and took up pursuit.

The flight took quite a long time, only the next morning our destination came in sight: A large volcano with a wide crater in which was no lava but boiling hot water instead! Only in the middle of this hot lake an island rose, upon which the probably most secure prison ever built by men sat enthroned.

Nobody escaped the Boiling Rock! Even if one succeeded in overcoming the walls of the prison building, after that it was already end of the line. The only way out from the interior of the volcano was either by air or by a couple of gondolas that had their station on the edge of the crater, every other way was blocked by the boiling water which would cook everyone who tried to swim through it alive!

We watched as the girls' airship landed near the gondola station, all three hopped out and then entered one of the gondolas, right on the way towards the prison.

Pagan and I began to make slow circles over the crater, Pagan visibly enjoyed the hot steams that were permanently rising from the boiling water below, he simply was in his natural environment.

This gave me an idea, I asked Pagan: "Say, do you think you could land and swim in that water down there without injuring yourself?"

"Of course! The heat is a dragon's habitat and a hot bath like this would certainly be something very pleasant!"

"Good to know...", I thought as I continued my observations.

For a couple of hours nothing really interesting happened, I was glad that Pagan had a lot of stamina and therefore didn't get tired of making circles. Normally I would have given up hope after some time that something would happen, but this time I couldn't just stop, the lives of Ty Lee and our child were at stake, I had to stay on guard!

And eventually my patience was rewarded! Because shortly thereafter it became noticeably louder in the prison below us. Pagan camouflaged again and flew as close to the building as he could.

The source of the noise turned out to be a riot of the prisoners, who, for some reason, were all
roaming outside in the prison courtyard. But it wasn't the riot itself that attracted my attention but rather four people fighting through the turmoil of prisoners. They were Sokka, Zuko, Hakoda and Suki!

"What in the name of the Spirits are they doing here?", I asked myself.

I watched as the four fought their way to the landing spot of the gondolas, then I understood: Hakoda had stayed behind with the other adults after the invasion to surrender and be taken captive, and now Sokka and Zuko most likely had infiltrated the prison to free him, only what exactly Suki had been doing here was beyond me.

When a gondola reached the landing spot, they all entered it, a bound man wearing a decorated uniform in tow, probably a high-ranking guard of the prison. Zuko kicked a lever and the gondola started to move again, back towards the edge of the crater.

I was inclined to help my friends to make sure that their escape would be successful, but in the same moment I heard a strange buzzing noise close to Pagan and me. I looked around and spotted Azula's airship! She was standing on a viewing platform, Ty Lee by her side, and they were moving directly towards the gondola.

"Oh no, now this gets serious!", I said to Pagan.

I could almost imagine what they were planning to do: To jump from the airship's platform onto the gondola! If this happened I wouldn't have any opportunity to intervene, otherwise I would put Ty Lee and myself in unnecessary danger.

I decided to keep watching from a safe distance and only intervene if everything else would fail.

And as if on cue, something bad actually was about to happen, because at the gondola station some of the prison guards now began to notch the cable that was carrying the gondola!

"Oh dear, that doesn't look good!", I thought and panic slowly began to fill my body.

Azula and Ty Lee apparently also had noticed what was happening and therefore jumped over onto a second gondola that was attached to another rope. I uttered a small sigh of relief, at least Ty Lee was safe for now.

The same could not be said about my friends however. I was on the brink of intervening and ready to take out the guards that were notching the rope, but no one less than Mai took this task from me! She hurled some of her knives at the guards so that they immediately stopped sawing. The gondola with my friends on top of it thus continued to move towards the edge of the crater and eventually reached it. All four jumped off the gondola and fled from the volcano.

"One problem settled, one still there.", I said as I looked towards Azula and Ty Lee who had just reached the prison again on their gondola.

I told Pagan to fly as close to the prison as possible so that I could jump off to get closer to the action.

The dragon did as told and flew towards a watchtower while camouflaged, I jumped off and landed on the tower's roof.

Pagan sank down just a bit so that I would be able to jump back on anytime. But for now I focused my thoughts on what was happening in the courtyard.
As soon as Azula and Ty Lee had arrived with their gondola some guards already brought Mai to them.

Azula slapped her across the face and yelled: "You better have a good explanation for what you have done!"

Mai rubbed her cheek and said with a determination-filled voice:

"Quite simply: My love for Zuko is stronger than my fear of you! I'm sorry, Azula, but I'm bailing out! Make your megalomaniacal plans with someone else in the future!"

Azula became wild with fury and wanted to charge at Mai, but at the last moment Ty Lee jumped in between, grabbed Azula by the wrist and threw her to the side.

The princess was back on her feet fairly fast, glared at Ty Lee with a hate-filled gaze in her eyes and said with a poisonous-sounding voice:

"You too?"

Ty Lee took a determined step forward so that she was standing right next to Mai: "I too am not afraid of you anymore!"

I had to smile, that was my girl!

Azula's eyes became glassy like those of a demented witch, she yelled: "Guards! Arrest these two traitors!"

Mai and Ty Lee didn't have enough time to react and were overpowered by the guards.

Azula said: "There is only one punishment for treason! Throw them into a cell until they rot! I never want to see these wretched faces again!"

After that, Ty Lee and Mai were led away and moved towards the cell block by the guards.

Ty Lee looked up to the sky in sadness as she was led away and therefore coincidentally spotted me on the roof of the watchtower.

Her big sad eyes said only one thing: "Please help me!"

I gave her a determined nod, of course I would free her, no matter what!

When the girls and the guards had disappeared into the prison, I jumped off the watchtower's roof back onto Pagan who then flew back to a higher altitude.

I said: "Pagan, my friend, we have to forge out a battle plan!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Ty Lee is in this prison now, I have to free her!"

"And how exactly do you want to do that?"

"Don't worry, I already have a pretty concrete plan. Listen: You said that you can swim in the water here in the volcano?"
"Yes?"

"Good, because that is what you have to do during my plan. You see, I plan to procure myself the uniform of a prison guard to disguise myself which will then allow me to safely infiltrate the prison and eventually get the girls out of there. That's when you come into play: Depending on where exactly the cell with the girls is, you'll have to wait in the water below that area. I will blast a hole into the cell's wall, then you have to fly up, pick me and the others up and ultimately fly all of us out of this crater. Do you think you'll be able to at least make this short distance with more than two persons on you?"

"Could be physically demanding but I will try my best."

"Very good, then let's go, we have to free my love!"

I had already spotted a suitable location where I could begin with my plan.

Pagan flew to a spot on the prison island where a single guard kept patrolling all the time, most likely to make sure that no prisoners reached that point if they tried to escape.

Under the cover of the rocks I jumped off the dragon's neck right onto the island's rocky terrain before Pagan himself landed in the water.

I explained all the steps of my plan to Pagan one more time to make sure he really knew the entire score:

"Alright, as soon as you see and hear an explosion you fly towards it and pick us all up, got that?"

"Got it, and Yulizan, good luck!"

"Thank you, my friend."

After that, Pagan dove completely under water while I started to sneak towards a small rock behind which I then hid myself as I kept my eyes focused on the single guard that patrolled the area. I continued to watch closely as the man made his rounds by walking along the whole waterfront of the island.

When he turned his back to me, I reacted lightning-quick, emerged from behind the rock, silently sprinted towards the guard and rammed my right arm blade right into his lung from behind. The man dropped dead immediately but I caught him before he hit the ground and quickly pulled him back behind the rock to make sure that no one was able to see him. I then completely undressed the corpse and threw it off the island right into the volcano's boiling water.

Now I took off my robe and all my weapons, except for one dagger and three throwing knives that I put in the right boot, and put on the guard's armor. It was a little too big for me but that fortunately didn't really affect or hinder my movements.

I whistled softly so that Pagan reemerged from the water, took my clothes and weapons and put them in the bags that Pagan had strapped around his neck. Fortunately these were made of burnt leather, therefore the boiling water wouldn't affect the contents.

After that, I gave Pagan the signal to dive again; then, now wearing my disguise, I headed for a small side door through which I eventually reached the innards of the prison.
Inside, everything was very dark and there were guards running around everywhere, trying to get the rebelling prisoners back into their cells after the riot.

It was fortunate that the guard whose clothes I had taken possession of had worn a helmet with a built-in mask along with his armor, this way I was able to wander through the individual cell blocks completely incognito.

I checked every single cell that I passed, being on the look-out for Ty Lee and Mai. At first I seemingly had been in the men's block, but after a while I saw a lot of group cells and then eventually the apparent women's block. This one was much smaller, better said far less filled which would make my search easier.

I had a look at every single solitary cell but wasn't able to find the girls anywhere. Therefore all that remained for me to search were the women's group cells.

And in there luck was finally on my side! Only one cell was occupied and in it I spotted my girlfriend, Mai and several other girls.

"Guess I'll have to free them as well.", I thought while I looked around.

The cell was located in some sort of special-block with no other cells in immediate vicinity. But there still were three guards standing around and in front of the cell, evidently Ty Lee and Mai had been classified as high-security prisoners. I probably would have to take out the guards if I wanted to free the girls.

One of the guards was standing a little more secluded from the cell so that he could see the other two but they couldn't see him. I would take advantage of that!

I walked towards the secludedly standing guard as normal as if I was making my round, but once I was behind him I grabbed him tightly around the neck and started to strangle him! At first the guard tried to fight out of the grip and fidgeted a lot, but the more pressure I applied to his neck, effectively cutting off both his brain's blood and air supply, the weaker and quieter he became until he eventually collapsed dead in my arms. I dragged the corpse into a dark corner and then prepared myself to take out the other two guards.

I walked past them, once again trying to make it look like I was making my round, then turned again and started to walk towards the two again. After I had gotten rid of the first corpse I had already taken a throwing knife into my hand and now I also reached for my dagger as I approached the guards.

One of the guards noticed it but didn't manage to scream for alarm because I had already rammed my dagger into his chest! The other guard noticed this now and ran towards me but I hurled the throwing knife at him, it hit him right in the neck! Both guards dropped dead to the ground at the same time.

I searched the corpses for the key to the girls' cell and had found it pretty quickly.

The girls in the cell had followed all the action with great tension, now as I approached the cell after I had done my work they all had slightly frightened looks on their faces.

I took off the helmet with the mask and said: "Don't worry, I'm a friend!"

Ty Lee's eyes became huge when she recognized me, she probably would have liked to rejoice loudly if it wasn't for her current situation.
I inserted the key into the lock and said: "I'm going to get you out of here now."

Mai asked: "And how exactly? We'll never make it all the way to the exit unharmed!"

"We won't use the main exit, I'll make us our own exit. You all better step back a little."

The girls did as told while I got a small glass ball that was filled with flammable explosive oil out from my armor's pocket, I had put it in there when I had disguised myself.

I turned around and asked: "Ready?", all girls nodded.

I created a tiny flame that set the oil on fire and then hurled the ball directly at the cell wall with the window. The glass broke with a loud bang as it hit the wall and blasted a huge hole into it.

Only a couple of seconds later we already heard the alarm gong, I kept looking for Pagan who only a few moments later came flying towards us with high-speed before he stopped right in front of the hole in the wall.

I called out to the girls: "Come on, come on, jump on! We have to get away from here!"

All the girls jumped through the hole and took their seats on Pagan who sank down a little bit under the large weight but remained in the air. I was the last one to leave the cell when all the girls were already sitting on the dragon.

I tapped Pagan's neck and said: "Now let's go, my friend, show us what you're capable of!"

Pagan started to move, much slower than usual, but eventually he made it and we rose far enough into the air to leave the volcano. Ty Lee, who was sitting directly behind me, had her arms wrapped around my body.

I impelled Pagan: 'Come on! Only a little bit more!'

The dragon mobilized all of his strength and eventually managed to fly over the edge of the crater! Everybody cheered as Pagan, even though already visibly exhausted but still at full speed, left the volcano island behind.

We flew directly towards the nearest spot of mainland, Pagan simply couldn't manage more with so many passengers on him.

As soon as he landed, he immediately slumped to the ground exhaustedly.

I dismounted the dragon, tapped his neck and said: "Rest easy, my friend, you have more than earned it!"

When I turned around, Ty Lee immediately flung her arms around my neck.

She kissed me and said: "Thank you! I knew that you would come and save me!"

"Oh please! Surely I won't let the two most important people in my life rot away in such a dangerous prison!"

We laughed, then Ty Lee introduced me to the other girls.

I already knew Mai, but seeing as she had now turned her back on Azula we had no reason to fight
each other anymore.

The other girls were all members of the Kyoshi Warriors who had been incarcerated in the Boiling Rock together with Suki. They were all visibly amazed by me and my fighting skills, I had to control myself to not blush with pride.

When we had all calmed down a bit again, I suddenly felt a slight pain my left hand. I raised it and saw that the tattoo on my ring finger was glowing, but this time it wasn't a red but rather a blue glow! What did that mean?

Whatever it was, it most likely meant that my friends at the Western Air Temple were in danger! I had to go and help them as quick as possible!

I asked the girls: "Do you think you can make it alone from here? I have to leave immediately, duty calls!"

The girls nodded, Ty Lee was a little sad that we had to split up again, but I promised her: "The next time we'll see each other, it will be forever!"

With this assurance in mind, Ty Lee wished me good luck, I told her to take care of herself and the baby, then I ran over to Pagan.

I took my equipment out from the bags, got rid of the prison guard's armor, put my robe and my weapons back on, burned the armor and then said to the still sleepy-looking Pagan:

"Come on, we have to get back to the Air Temple! The others are in danger!"

As soon as he heard these words, Pagan was wide awake again, I mounted him, we rose to the air and dashed off, on the fastest route back to the Western Air Temple!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Tensions in the team
Revenge or Forgiveness?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

While we made our way back to the Air Temple, many different thoughts ran through my mind. The glowing of my tattoo continued to last but fortunately didn't really hurt anymore.

It hadn't been an ordinary pain, like the one I always felt during a red glow, anyway, but instead a strangely cold and stinging pain, as if someone was stabbing a small pointed icicle right into my finger. This seemed to be some kind of protection mechanism that should cause me to go and help the Avatar like I did right now.

I also thought of Ty Lee, it had been really difficult for me to leave her so quickly once again. But I would keep my word: The next time would be forever!

Because if my thoughts weren't erring, the comet's arrival was less then two weeks away! That meant that there were only a few more days between me and the culmination of my mission. And once it was finally done, it would signify the end of my active Assassin career.

After that, it would only be me, Ty Lee and our child, this I swore to myself faithfully!

Shortly afterwards we spotted the familiar fog-filled chasm in which the temple was located.

But when we dove into the fog to find a place to land, we saw it: Several Fire Nation airships hovered just outside the Air Temple!

On one of the ships that hovered slightly in front of the others I spotted Princess Azula on the observation deck. She watched as the airships fired large burning rocks at the temple buildings.

My blood started to boil, in my mind I said: "Just you wait, you bitch! After what you did to Ty Lee, this whole affair is personal now! I will destroy you!"

To my dragon friend I now said loudly: "Pagan! Our friends are down there somewhere! We have to attack the ships and bar them from firing! So show them all of your power!"

Pagan nodded determinedly and started to fly an attack on the nearest airship. He spewed a concentrated jet of fire right at the ship's left side, I supported him with an almost equally as strong concentrated inferno of white flames.

Our attack eventually was successful, after a few minutes we had managed to burn a gaping hole into the airship's outer shell so that it first tipped to one side and ultimately fell into the depths of the foggy chasm.

I watched the destroyed war machine fall for a few seconds before I turned back towards the observation deck, my eyes fixated on Azula who was still standing there.

I said: "Come on, take me there! This time I'm finally going to get the witch and finish her!"

Pagan turned and flew towards the platform precisely where he then reared up with his whole size before I jumped off and landed on the platform, just a few meters from Azula.
My landing made the princess jump, she immediately turned towards me. When she saw and recognized me she made a step backwards in shock. I just continued to stand there and fixated her with my grim expression.

The already strong winds in the chasm, which now were even more intense because of the airships, blew the hood off my head, but I did not care about that in this moment! All my thoughts were focused on one goal alone: To finally end the life of this despicable girl! I had already suffered so many defeats against her in the past and wouldn't fail another time!

Without saying a single word I summoned flames in my hands and began to hurl them at Azula! She seemed to have regained her courage, dodged the flames at the very last moment and now began to counterattack with her own fire. But I also had no problems dodging this and hurled even more flames at her in return. This went on for several minutes, none of us was able to work out an advantage for themselves.

Then however the key moment happened: I had just hurled another, this time especially large flame at Azula, but she caught and deflected it to the side. Unfortunately she hadn't paid attention to where exactly she had deflected the flame, namely straight into the steam-powered flight mechanism of the airship! The fire caused the entire machine to explode, the explosion's power threw both Azula and me off the platform, we fell into the chasm on opposite sides of the airship. Luckily Pagan was already in position, I rushed through the air towards him headfirst until I safely sat on his neck again.

When I turned around I saw the airship falling into the depths of the chasm, as well as Azula who had used her crown-shaped metal hair clip to save herself and was now hanging on a rocky ledge on the chasm's wall.

Even though I was angry that I once again had not managed to kill the princess, I had no time to lose, because only a second later I spotted Appa who was just leaving the chasm. Pagan and I of course followed him immediately and had caught up with our friends shortly thereafter.

They were glad to see me again, a feeling that was mutual, but the thought of Azula escaping, although this time it had been more by luck than judgment, still continued to gnaw on my mind.

We continued to fly over the land for the rest of the day until we eventually found a deserted beach in the late afternoon where we decided to set up camp for the night. After we had finished doing that, we all sat together in a circle around the campfire.

Aang said: "It's really nice that we can finally sit together in peace like this again. Almost like old times."

Zuko remarked jokingly: "Well, if you really want to feel like old times, I could chase you around for some time and try to capture you, then it would really be like old times."

I almost choked on the water I was drinking when I had to laugh at this joke. The others, with the exception of Katara, laughed as well. The water bender stood up and walked away, her face filled with anger. Zuko jumped to his feet and followed her, he wanted to find out what exactly caused her strange behavior towards him.

"Make an educated guess, princeling.", I thought and rolled my eyes.

When the two still had not returned after some time, we others packed our belongings together and retired into our tents. I was really satisfied with my new tent that I was carrying with me since my
"rebirth", it served its purpose more than well.

I was about to take my volcanic stone to sharpen my katanas when I spotted Zuko who had just returned to the camp.

I left my tent again and asked him: "What was that between you and Katara back there?"

"Well, she still does not trust me, blames me for what happened in Ba Sing Se and strangely also for her mother's death, even though I don't even know what has happened there. Do you know it maybe? After all, you've been travelling with her way longer than me."

"I only know that her mother was killed by Fire Nation soldiers, but that's it."

"Well, I was just on my way to Sokka, I wanted to ask him if he could tell me more about it."

"Interesting ... you know what? I'm going with you, I want to know the whole story too."

While we walked the few steps towards Sokka's tent, Zuko asked: "Tell me: Do YOU trust me by now?"

I answered: "Yes, I do. If you really had something against us in mind, you probably would have already done it. Also, I saw you fighting all the soldiers back at the Air Temple with nothing but determination in your eyes. I now trust you that you really mean all your actions."

Zuko clapped me on the shoulder and said: "Thanks man, that means a lot to me."

"Oh, come on, we are sons of the fire, we have to stick together."

Zuko laughed, I laughed as well. Oh yes, I think this could be the beginning of a good friendship...

We entered Sokka's tent, but what awaited us in there took us both entirely by surprise: Rose petals were scattered everywhere on the tent's floor and many lit candles were standing in between, apparently Sokka had planned something for Suki.

"I never would have taken him for a romantic.", I said in my thoughts, showing Sokka some silent respect.

He however seemed unpleasantly surprised to see us but of course tried everything to hide his emotions.

He asked: "What are you guys doing here?"

Zuko said with a serious voice: "We want to know more about your mother's death, I need to know why Katara is still this mad at me."

After some initial skepticism, Sokka began to tell the story, but I for my part didn't learn anything new, everything he said I already had been told by Katara back on the evening of my revelation to Team Avatar.

Zuko on the other hand listened attentively and, when Sokka had finished the story, asked: "Can you remember any details of how the soldiers looked like?"

"Well, they had banners with a sea raven depicted on them."

"The Southern Raiders!"
"And that helps us to what extent?", I asked.

Zuko immediately replied: "Now I can help Katara so that she'll finally trust me!"

We left Sokka's tent again, I already had a hunch of what exactly Zuko was planning. He marched straight towards Katara's tent which the young water bender was about to enter.

When she spotted us, she snapped at Zuko: "What do you want?"

"I know who killed your mother and I can help you find him!"

Katara's eyes lit up suddenly, she looked at me as if she wanted to ask: "Is that really true?"

I nodded, her gaze shifted back to Zuko: "Alright!"

She grabbed his arm and started to drag him towards Aang.

Once they had arrived at the Avatar's tent, Katara asked: "Aang, could we borrow Appa?"

The young air bender crossed him arms and asked: "Oh, do you want to abduct our dear Zuko on a trip now?"

I had to suppress my giggling as Katara vigorously affirmed Aang's question.

She told the young Avatar her intentions, but Aang was anything but thrilled: "Don't go! Revenge is never a solution!"

For the first time ever, I dared to contradict the Avatar, simply because I had to. Revenge was most definitely a solution, at least for an Assassin.

I interpreted Aang's philosophy as part of his air bender existence which involved complete pacifism. I could completely accept it if he was following this certain path of life, but as it was with every kind of path, this didn't necessarily applied to other people as well.

Katara seemed to share my mindset, she said it was impossible to forgive the man who had killed her mother.

Eventually Aang gave in and allowed Katara and Zuko to take Appa.

However, before they were able to set off, Aang appealed to Katara one last time to think carefully about her next steps. She promised to do so, then we left, Katara and Zuko on Appa, I on Pagan, I had decided to join the two as this seemed to me as quite the fitting mission for an Assassin and I wanted to help them.

Our journey led us to Whaletail Island where the Southern Raiders were currently stationed.

During our flight, Katara recounted a more detailed version of the story of her mother's death, it once again reminded me of my own grief as well. Katara and I reached for necklace and medallion respectively at the same time and thought of those we had lost.

When Zuko noticed how visibly touched I was by Katara's story, he asked: "What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, right, you don't know yet. I too have experienced this much suffering in my life."
And so I told Zuko the story of my life. The death of my family, how I had found Pagan, my training as an Assassin and so on. Zuko was particularly shocked when I told of my family's execution by the hand of his father.

He shook his head and said: "I mean, I always knew that my father was malicious, but I never would have thought of him to be that fiendish. I'm really glad that you're not blaming me for anything, especially after all the things I've done myself in the past."

I answered: "Well, there is an old Assassin adage: "All it takes is one bad day to turn even the most peaceful man into a monster." You were turned but eventually managed to revert the change."

Zuko nodded and looked into the distance. I clearly saw it in his face that he was thinking about his past, just like me so often. The suffering, the tyranny that was destroying this world, it had to end! This pointless war had to be ended as soon as possible!

After a long flight, Pagan finally spotted a larger ship with the banner of the Southern Raiders blowing on top of its mast.

Katara created a giant wave that swept the ship's entire crew clean off the deck and into the ocean. Following this, the three of us boarded the ship and made our way to the captain's cabin.

When we had found it only shortly afterwards, Zuko kicked the door open, I stormed into the room, grabbed the captain's arm, twisted it to the back and placed one of my daggers on his throat with my other hand.

The mortally scared man looked at all three of us, but then Katara said: "That's not him!"

What? But then where was the man we were looking for? There was only one logical way to find out: I pulled and twisted the man's arm even tighter so that it already creaked a little, pressed the dagger's blade against his chin and spoke with a dark voice:

"Where is your predecessor?"

Still scared to death, the man answered immediately: "Yon Rha? He retired four years ago and now lives with his mother in a village not far from here."

The man described the way to us, I whispered a low "Thank you!" in his ear and cut his throat! Zuko stared at the corpse in horror for a short moment, then he followed us as we left the cabin and the ship again. We set out to find the real murderer of Katara's mother.

Only a little later we were already lying in wait near the village the captain had told us about.

After some time, an elderly man came walking out of the village, Katara immediately said: "That's him!"

I rose to my feet and said: "Good, I will subdue him, you two come out of hiding once you can see that I have him tied up safely."

They both nodded, I made my way down the small hill we had been hiding on. Under the cover of some trees and bushes I sneaked up to the murderer.

When I had reached a good position from which I was able to overlook the entire area I took some leaves and made them rustle loudly to distract him. He fell for the ruse, I was able to sneak up on
him without any effort.

When he turned around again he spotted me but I didn't give him any time to react. I kicked both his legs away from under his body so that he fell into the dust lengthways. I took one of my metal-reinforced ropes and tied his hands and feet together with it.

As soon as I was finished doing that, Katara and Zuko arrived on the scene.

Katara grabbed the old man's head so that he looked right into her eyes and asked: "Do you recognize me?"

At first, the old guy looked confused, but then nothing but pure fear appeared on his face. He recognized Katara and remembered the day he had killed her mother: An allegedly unknown source had revealed to him that there was only one last water bender at the Southern Water Tribe. Katara's mother had pretended to be this water bender and subsequently had been killed.

Katara shouted: "My mother wasn't the water bender, I am!"

She bent water from a nearby puddle and formed it into sharp icicles which she then threateningly let hover in the air in front of the old man. He begged for mercy, something I could only shake my head at since I knew exactly how scenarios like this always ended. His time was up!

But to my biggest surprise the icicles turned back into water some moments later. I looked at Katara in surprise, she had turned away. She said that the old man led such a miserable life already and she simply could not kill such a man out of sheer revenge. He was already punished enough by having to continue to live with all the shame that weighed on him and his soul. She then started to walk back to Appa, Zuko followed her.

I on the other hand felt a strange feeling of astonishment and incomprehension arise in my body. So we had made this long journey for nothing at all? No! I would not accept this!

I noisily drew one of my katanas, shock and fear returned into the old man's eyes when he heard the sound.

With a dark voice I said: "She might have spared you, but you have to die nevertheless! And I am the one who will do the deed!"

Under a loud cry of the old man I lunged out with the katana and cut his head clean off his shoulders! Blood spurted from the remains of the man's neck and bespattered my face and upper body.

"Anxi ba ni zhege hundan! Rest in peace, you bastard!", I said before I kicked the headless body into the dirt.

After that, I turned around, only to see the petrified shocked faces of Katara and Zuko.

I only said: "I did what had to be done. His death was the will of the Spirits!"

The gazes of the two followed me but they didn't budge.

I didn't really want to wait for them, therefore I mounted Pagan and called to them: "I'll see you at the meeting point.", before I rose to the air with my dragon and started to head towards our new meeting point: Ember Island.
A little later, we had reached our destination, a pier on an empty beach. We landed and realized that we were the first ones here. Therefore we waited until the others eventually arrived on Appa. I was already able to make out from afar that the general sentiment seemed to be pretty bad.

As soon as the bison had landed, Aang approached me and said: "Yulizan, Katara told me what happened. Why did you do that?"

"I had to do it, Aang. This man was nothing but a parasite to the world, his existence meant absolutely nothing, he was scum, his death was the will of the Spirits, he deserved it!"

Aang was visibly shocked by my words and said: "Yulizan, I'm not sure if this will work with you like this ..."

I was completely flabbergasted! Did Aang really just say that?

"Do you mean that you don't want me to be part of the team anymore?"

"No, it's just ... your behavior, it's just ..."

I grabbed the young Avatar by the shoulders and said: "Aang, I've told you and the others several times already in the past: You don't have to approve of what I'm doing, but if you want me to remain a part of your team you have to accept my actions and decisions, whether they meet your own moral standards or not!"

After I had let go of Aang's shoulders again, he scratched the back of his head for a second and then said: "Well, I really don't know if we can continue like this..."

That was already enough for me to understand. Without another word I turned around and walked away.

Aang called: "Yulizan, wait!", but I acted deaf.

I didn't have to listen to this! I wouldn't let myself be lectured by an air bender, no matter if he was the Avatar or not!

I called over my shoulder: "Only talk to me again once you've thought about this whole matter!"

I walked over to Pagan, mounted him and told him to make circles over the island, I had to clear my mind. And I did just that. I distracted myself with thoughts of Ty Lee and our child, once again imagined the pleasant future, it calmed me and gave me new strength.

Of course I hoped that my friends would eventually come to their senses again because disputes like this so close to maybe the most important time of this war could ultimately prove to be fatal for us all!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: A menace from the darkness
After Pagan had circled over the island for a longer while I told him to land on one of the small beaches nearby. I had decided that I needed a different kind of distraction, therefore I would now swim a bit to calm down and cool my mind again.

The dragon subsequently landed on a beach from which I would be able to keep an eye on the house in which we had taken up quarters. Despite all quarrels, I still had to follow my mission and protect Aang, I could not let any emotion affect this whole affair.

I dismounted Pagan and told him: "You can continue to fly around if you want to but try to stay close to the island." The dragon nodded and rose to the air again.

I brought out my meditation mat, put it down on the warm sand, took off both my clothes and weapons and placed them next to the mat tidily before I eventually waded into the sea. The water's coldness did me good, it was nice and refreshing. I dove completely under the water, let it cover my entire body, it was a really nice feeling.

As I was floating and swimming, I continued to think. I of course understood if the others did not share my philosophy, the Assassins' acts simply seemed mostly cruel to outsiders. Most people outside the Fire Nation abhorred violence and always tried to find a peaceful solution to all problems.

But what if peaceful methods weren't enough? Should one let the world fall into endless chaos just so that one did not have to perform any supposedly morally bad deeds? No! One should always try to do everything that lied within the power of the individual to prevent war and suffering in the world!

The Assassins taught this way since the Order's inception, without us the world would have fallen into the abyss of darkness much earlier already. By wiping out the people who harm this world we make this world a better place!

The man who had killed Katara's and Sokka's mother deserved to die! He had killed an innocent young woman in the name of a mindless ideology, he had taken the mother of two children and presumably had committed even more atrocities of this kind in the course of time.

I thought of his face, it had been the face of a broken man. He may have regretted his many misdeeds over the years but that didn't undo them! Furthermore, if the story of his life after leaving the Southern Raiders was true, then his life had already been pure hell on earth. Therefore I basically had done him a service and released him from this physical and mental suffering.

Now his soul was burning in hell forever for his terrible deeds and that was good! Nobody should suffer and be judged like this on earth, the Spirits alone were to decide over the fate of a human's soul!

Suddenly I heard that strange voice, which I had heard so many times before already, in my head again, but this time it sounded even clearer and also much darker than before:

It said: "When the empire falls ... you will completely turn into a monster!"
Ice-cold shivers began to run down my spine! So that was the complete sentence? What was that supposed to mean?

The falling empire could only mean the end of the war and Fire Lord Ozai's reign of terror. But the fact that I would turn into a real monster? I couldn't and didn't want to believe that!

Because until now, one thought had always remained in my mind: Despite the fact that I was doing so many things that were so difficult to bear morally, I had always kept my mind and my sense of justice and peace! I had never succumbed to the corrupt delusion that had stricken the rest of the Fire Nation.

And it would remain like this! I would kill both Azula and Ozai, sooner or later! After that, my soul would finally be able to find peace, I would finally have accomplished my mission! No! I will not turn into a monster!

I emerged from the water with a deep breath, rubbed my face with both my hands and then looked at my reflection on the water surface. My last haircut was already dating back quite the long time, my dark blond hair was almost lying on my shoulders already and I also could have used a shave as there was quite the thick beard on my lower face.

But now that I thought about it, it actually didn't look that bad on me, it gave my appearance something that spoke of experience, it underlined my status as a warrior. I decided to at least take care of my hair but I would leave the beard as it was for the time being.

My eyes wandered over to our house, it was the royal family's vacation cottage, therefore I had been quite skeptical when Zuko had suggested it as our new hideout, but he had insured me:

"This is the last place where my father would look for something.

From the house my gaze eventually moved back to the beach where I spotted Aang, Katara and Zuko who seemed to be waiting for me. Since I wanted to know what exactly they wanted from me I swam back to the shore, stepped out of the water, dried myself off and slipped back into my clothes. Zuko's eyes widened in shock when he saw all the scars on my body.

Once I was fully equipped again, I asked: "What do you want?"

Aang began to speak: "We have talked extensively about you and your behavior. And we have come to the conclusion that...

I saw the struggle in the Avatar's face as he tried to find the fitting words.

"...you're just too good of a friend and an important member of our team for that we could lose you just like that. That's why we decided to accept your mindset, even though we really don't like it. But we still ask you to hold yourself back a little, at least in our presence, and not act as brutal anymore. Would that be alright for you?"

I saw the anxious faces of my three friends, I smiled and said: "Of course."

As soon as the words had left my mouth I saw the tension and anxiety in the three faces easing off, they all seemed really glad that we had been able to reach an agreement. I packed up the rest of my things and started to follow my friends back to the house.

While we were walking, I slapped Aang and Zuko on the shoulders and asked: "Did you really think that we would break apart because of such a small bagatelle?"
Both shook their heads, I laughed: "There we go! And now I would really like to see how far the two of you are with your training." The two didn't need to be told twice! They started to rush towards the house, leaving Katara and me behind.

The young water bender looked me in the eyes and said: "You know, for all these years I have longed for revenge on this man. But when I saw him ... I just couldn't do it. Had it not been for you, if you hadn't killed him, my soul probably never would have been able to find true peace. But now he is dead and my mother has finally received the justice she deserves. Thank you."

She stopped and hugged me for a short moment. I was surprised since I really had not expected such a change of heart from her in this matter. She released the hug again and smiled. I smiled back as we continued our way towards to the house.

Shortly afterwards I sat on the steps of the house together with Katara and Toph while Aang and Zuko were practicing some advanced fire bending techniques in the courtyard in front of the house. I once again saw myself reminded of my own training, although it of course had been much more complex and difficult, yet the practice had been very similar.

As I was sitting there, it was one of the rare times in which I wasn't wearing my hood, and nibbled on a piece of bread, Katara said:

"Oh, by the way, Yulizan, what I wanted to tell you for quite some time now: I think the beard looks really good on you."

I rubbed my chin with my hand and said: "Thank you. I thought it underlined my warrior's will, that's what I let it grow out a bit longer. But my head hair I will cut again soon."

Suddenly Katara stood up, sat down behind me and started fidgeting with my hair.

"Um ... what are you doing with my hair?"

Katara didn't answer but instead continued to work on my hair. I felt her taking some strands of the longer mane and moving them together. Was it what I thought it was?

A couple of minutes later, Katara said: "Done!"

I immediately reached behind my head and felt a long ponytail hanging down my neck.

I turned around to face Katara and asked: "Really? You think this is funny or something?"

"Yes, kind of...", was all Katara was able to say before she couldn't hold back her laugh any longer.

I felt pretty awkward, I was glad that Toph wasn't able to see me like this because of her blindness.

I stood up and said: "Enough of this! Something has to change!"

I entered the house and looked for a room with a mirror. After I had found one fairly fast, I took my bowl and filled it with water. After that, I whipped out one of my daggers, positioned myself in front of the mirror, untied the ponytail so that my hair was falling onto my shoulders naturally again, dunked the dagger's blade in the water and started cutting my hair. I trimmed it to about the same length it had when I had first left the monastery all those months ago.

When I eventually looked at the result in the mirror I was more than satisfied. The short hair emphasized the beard even better now. I also noticed that I now looked pretty similar to my father.
in his youth, he had worn a similar beard when he had been around my age. I sheathed my dagger again and disposed of the old hair and the water before I stepped outside the house again.

Aang and Zuko were still occupied with their training, Katara immediately noticed my new haircut. When I saw the slight look of disappointment in her face, I only said: "Sorry.," while I quietly grinned and chuckled to myself. After that, I sat down on the steps again and continued to watch my two friends performing their moves.

In the afternoon, things changed quite a bit: Sokka and Suki returned to the house from a walk, Sokka held a rolled-up poster in his hands. He showed it to us, it was an announcement for a stage play that was reportedly recreating the story of our team. We all were very skeptical about this, especially when Zuko said that this group of actors, the so-called Ember Island Players, were more infamous than famous. I had my doubts about this matter as well, I wasn't really fond of acting to begin with, but a play in which I myself might possibly appeared as a character? I wasn't happy with this mental image at all!

But luckily I didn't have to make a decision on this myself, because shortly afterwards a big bird came flying towards us. It was a messenger hawk with ice-white feathers, these birds were bred and used by the Assassins to deliver messages between members of the Order all over the world. The hawk placed a scroll on the ground in front of me before flying away almost immediately again. I picked up the scroll and read it. It had been written by Lao Zhu himself:

*Master Yulizan,*

*please excuse this disturbance in your mission, but we have troubles that cannot wait. According to reports from some of our scouts, it is very likely that the dark-light demon Wilo Hazd has escaped the guard of our shamans and is now wandering through the Fire Nation. We have already sent out several brothers and sisters to find and kill the demon but none has succeeded. Now we ask you, as one of the Order's best fighters, to track down and eliminate the demon.*

*May you walk in the shadows*

*Lao Zhu*

As soon as I had finished reading, I got goose bumps. Wilo Hazd was free? That was bad! This demon had been part of Grim Bazor's entourage, the army that had tried to wipe out the human race centuries ago. Wilo Hazd had been one of few demons to survive the battles, yet the Old Assassins had still managed to capture him and lock him up in an inter-dimensional dungeon. This "rift between the worlds" was permanently protected and reinforced by shamans who dealt with the forces and powers of the Spirit World. But now something bad must have occurred so that the demon had been able to escape his prison.

I had seen drawings in ancient scriptures, this demon was a dangerous creature! Although his appearance was remotely similar to a human, Wilo Hazd was a creature of light and shadow, his body was black and white in color, his head slightly elongated with pointed horns. His nature was unpredictable, his character constantly changed between maniacal crazy and mysteriously silent. His weapon was also quite unusual, it was a parasol, similar to those carried by women at festivities, with an extendable blade at the top. But the demon's greatest strength was his control over light and darkness. He was always clever enough to confuse his opponents and then flee most fights, because even though he was a demon he was more of a coward who didn't like fighting and most of the time tried to avoid it.
I of course had to take advantage of this, I had to try to get the better of his confusion games in order to engage him in a direct fight in which I then would definitely have the advantage over him!

I told my friends what was written in the scroll and that I of course had to perform this mission immediately.

Everybody understood, except Sokka, he grumbled: "You don't want to watch this stage play?"

"Even if I could, no!", I replied. "But could you please help me with something for a second? You too, Zuko."

Both guys followed me into the house, I needed their help to buckle on my armor plates. Even though I most definitely wouldn't be able to intimidate or scare a demon of this kind, the sight of his former leader would probably still disarray him!

When I was completely clad in my black demon armor once again, I left the house and whistled for Pagan. The dragon came flying immediately and landed in the courtyard.

I mounted him and said to my friends: "Don't worry, if everything goes well, we'll probably be back by tomorrow. Take care and enjoy the play!"

After these words Pagan rose to the air and we began to make our way towards the village Lao Zhu had mentioned in the scroll where Wilo Hazd had reportedly been seen last.

When we reached our destination it was already starting to get dark.

"Not good!", I thought to myself, "he definitely has the advantage in the darkness, we have to be very careful!"

Pagan landed in the completely abandoned village. Although most of the houses were still intact they showed clear signs of fighting and hasty escapes. I put on my demon mask and told Pagan to fly away, this was a battle I had to fight alone!

As soon as my dragon friend had risen to the air again, I heard strange noises in one of the houses not far away from my position. I drew both my katanas and looked in all directions nervously. Through the eye slits in my mask I observed the entire area, I was ready for anything!

Suddenly I heard a loud fiendish and cackling laugh! I turned towards the direction it had come from and spotted the pair of bright white eyes that was now emerging from the shadows of one of the houses.

There he was: Wilo Hazd, the dark-light demon! In his hands he held his parasol. He began to slowly walk towards me and said with a sneering voice in the language of the demons:

"Dè tha sinn an seo? Fiù 's tuilleadh creach gun urrainn dhomh a' tarraing san dubhar?" (Well, what do we have here? Even more prey that I can pull into the shadows?)

Unimpressed by the demon's taunting, I answered, also in the language of the demons:

"Tha mi an seo gus iomlan sibh le Grim Bazor, Wilo!" (I'm here to reunite you with Grim Bazor, Wilo!)

The demon uttered his cackling laugh again and said:
"Do gòrach murtairean! Chan urrainn dhut casg a chur air mo teicheadh, mar sin bidh thu orm nach urrainn a mharbhadh!" (You foolish Assassins! You were not able to prevent my escape, therefore you will not to be able to kill me either!)

"If only you knew!", I thought to myself.

The demon laughed once again and called: "Bo truagh! Coinneachadh ri mo chumhachd gus fios!" (You pitiful boy! Prepare to witness my power!)

The demon conjured up an orb of pure darkness in his left hand and hurled it at me! I knew that I wasn't fast enough to dodge this attack of concentrated darkness and therefore used the only technique that was effective in this situation: I created a large white fire and hurled it towards the dark orb! The bright flames hit the darkness, enveloped and eventually suffocated it! With a big grin behind my mask my eyes wandered back to Wilo who was staring at the scene in front of him compeltely flabbergasted.

I called: "Chan eil teicheadh idir, Wilo! Aghaidh do dàn!" (There is no escape for you, Wilo! Face your destiny!), and rushed forward, directly towards the demon!

He reacted far too late, when he was about to yank up his parasol and extend the blade I had already impaled him through his black and white chest with both my katanas! Wilo realized that I had defeated him and cried out in pain as his body suddenly began to gleam in a strange dark glow.

I quickly pulled both katanas out of the demon's body and ran away a few meters since I knew exactly what was about to happen: The demon had been defeated, therefore his existence would now be pulled into hell! Wilo's loud screams echoed throughout the village as his body slowly began to disintegrate, his skin was burned, his bones were crushed, until eventually only a small heap of ashes remained on the ground.

I of course knew what I had to do now. I walked over to the pile of ashes, took one of my daggers, cut a tiny wound into the skin of my ring finger at the spot where my tattoo was and sprinkled some ash crumbs on it. With this I showed the Spirits the respect that came with killing a demon while also informing the Order of my success this way.

After I had finished the little ritual, I let the ashes be ashes, whistled for Pagan, mounted him and we started to head back to Ember Island. As I had thought it had been a fairly simple mission.

By dawn we had reached the island again, our friends were already awake, Aang and Zuko were already training in the courtyard again.

When Pagan and I landed the others immediately came running towards us and asked about my mission. I of course told them about Wilo and the pretty quick and one-sided fight. In return my friends told me about the disaster that had been the stage play they had visited in the evening. When I asked them about how I had been portrayed as a character they told me that I hadn't been part of the story at all.

"Good! I still have my anonymity, I'm still a single haulm in the cornfield.", I thought to myself, using the metaphor my master had always used during my training of how to disappear in a crowd of people.

Now everything was in perfect order again! I had been able to consolidate my role in our team, another demon had been destroyed and Aang was making good progress with his training. Now the only thing we'd have to do was wait for the arrival of the comet. Then it would finally be time! My
mission would come to an end! The war would be ended! Peace would return!

But there still were a few obstacles waiting for us on our path...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Where is Aang? (Sozin's Comet, Part 1)
The only one who didn't seem to share our good mood was Zuko. He constantly urged Aang to put even more power and energy into his fire bending to further improve it.

I shook my head and thought: "Leave the boy alone for one second, he has to fight what might be the most important battle in history in a few days and you put even more pressure on him, that will get you nowhere."

While I watched the two continue their training, Katara came out of the house with some watermelon juice for everyone. I immediately took a cup and sipped the sweet cool drink, it added immensely to the relaxation. Aang decided to take a break from training as well and came over to get a drink.

After a couple of minutes Sokka suggested that we should all go to the beach for a little fun. Everyone but Zuko agreed and set off. Before I followed the others I ran into my room in the house and fetched my mandolin to take it to the beach with me.

Once we were there, everyone immediately plunged themselves into individual activities. Katara bent herself a small ice floe and then used her bending to glide across the incoming waves. Suki bathed in the sun while Sokka, Aang and Toph started to build sand sculptures. I sat down on a rock that was close to the water, looked out onto the wide sea and eventually began to play my mandolin.

My maternal grandfather had been a sailor, my mother had spent the first years of her life on his ship. In my childhood my grandfather had often taken me to the harbor and once even on a trip with his ship. It had been a really nice and also important experience, I had learned a lot about...
seafaring and the life aboard a ship.

But what I remembered the most were the beautiful sailor songs, or "shanties" as the sailors themselves called them. I still knew some of them well enough so that I was able to sing and play them on my mandolin. Most shanties were about the beauty of the oceans and the infinite freedom that one was able to feel while sailing them.

I began to softly whistle the tune of a familiar song to find the rhythm before I eventually started to play and sing:

No king shall dictate us our ways,

We follow the oceans, only them alone!

No lord is our ruler, no land our prison!

The sea and no one else shall be our judge!

No prince shall oppress us, and if they banish us

The sea is our refuge, with all her might!

No one will wear the kings' colors here,

only our banner flies above on the mast!

We sing the songs, the songs of freedom!

The world shall hear us, we are not alone!

We sing the songs, the songs of freedom!

The world shall hear us, come, join in with us!

Stand up, because out there, you'll be a free man as well!

Only the vast sea as far as the eye can see...

Together we're in control of our own destiny!

Wherever the winds will blow...

I liked the words of this song very much, they spoke of the same kind of freedom we Assassins also lived by.

I continued to sit there on the rock, sang and played the mandolin, my thoughts slowly wandered off.

But then suddenly my reverie was abruptly broken when something atrocious happened: Zuko stormed onto the beach and mid-run started to hurl fireballs at Aang!

"That lousy little traitor! I knew it!", I thought angrily while I practically threw my mandolin to the ground and started to run after Zuko who had begun to chase Aang all over the beach.
But ultimately I proved to be faster, I caught up with him from behind, threw myself forward with both my arms reaching for Zuko's midsection, effectively dragging him to the ground.

I grabbed his right arm, twisted it backwards and rammed one of my daggers into the sand only inches away from his face!

"Would you please explain to me what you were trying to do there?", I yelled at him.

His face slightly contorted with pain, Zuko said: "Hey man, stop it, I just wanted to test him and his abilities in a situation of stress!"

I let go of his arm and said with a slight hint of cynicism in my voice: "Well, mission failed, I would say."

Zuko stood up, moved his arm a little to get the feeling back into it and said: "I'm sorry, but I think it's quite reckless of you all to stay this calm and carefree with the comet's arrival being only a few days away now."

Aang approached us again and said: "Well, there is something you don't know yet: I intend to not face the Fire Lord until after the comet is gone again."

Zuko and I both said in perfect unison: "What?"

Aang continued: "Yes, because, first of all, the Fire Nation has already practically won the war with the conquest of Ba Sing Se and secondly I think that I should master the fire completely before eventually fighting Ozai."

While these were more than plausible reasons, I still could not shake off the feeling that the comet's arrival was part of something bigger, therefore I wasn't sure if Aang's decision would really be the right thing to do.

Zuko confirmed my suspicions shortly afterwards when he told us what he had learned at one of the Fire Nation's military meetings some time ago: Ozai planned to use the comet's power to completely burn down the entire Earth Kingdom! Then, with no kind of resistance whatsoever remaining, he could rule the entire world without anybody able to stop him.

I felt ice-cold shivers running up and down my spine at the thought of this horrible image. Completely burning down the largest country in the world? That really would be the definite end of the world as we knew it and no one, not even we Assassins, would be able to do anything about that. No! We simply could not allow this to happen!

I agreed with Zuko when I said to Aang: "Unfortunately you have no other choice. You have to face the Fire Lord now, otherwise there will be no world left for you to save."

Aang looked at the ground, uncertainty all over his face, and said that he really wasn't sure if he had everything it would take to defeat the Fire Lord.

But we as a group were once again able to give him his motivation back when we said that we would help him and stand by his side all the time, no matter what would happen.

We all formed a circle, standing there arm-in-arm, Aang said: "One for all!", we answered: "And all for one!"

So we were all ready to hurl ourselves into what would most likely be the decisive and final battle!
I of course thought about the revenge for my family, in now only a few days I would finally get it!

Later that day, Zuko taught Aang the special technique of how to redirect lightning that had been invented by his uncle General Iroh. I thought of this as the right decision as Aang would never be able to learn how to bend his own lightning in the short amount of time he had left.

While I watched Aang train throughout the rest of the day, especially during another practice in which he was to fight a doll that was supposed to represent the Fire Lord, I clearly noticed that he was mentally fighting with himself, mainly because Zuko had told him that he had to kill an opponent as dangerous as Ozai to completely defeat him.

After he had finished his training for the day, I took the young Avatar aside and talked to him.

I said: "Aang, I clearly noticed throughout the entire day that you have spent a lot of time thinking about the fact that you'll most likely have to kill the Fire Lord to defeat him."

Aang nodded and replied: "Yes, it simply isn't part of an air bender's philosophy to decide over life and death like this. The monks always taught us that all life is sacred and should not be harmed."

"I of course can completely understand you, I accept your attitude to life as you have accepted mine. That's why I want to make the following proposition: I just know that you somehow will be able to defeat the Fire Lord, you're the Avatar. The Spirits have always told of moments like this: The Avatar is the Highest Peacekeeper, he or she alone can maintain balance in this world. You will find a way to defeat the Fire Lord, it is your destiny. But, to come back to my proposition, let me tell you: You don't have to kill the Fire Lord once you have defeated him, I am going to do that!"

Aang immediately wanted to respond but I cut him short: "Please spare me with any kind of lecture, Aang, and let me finish. You have to understand, I just have to do this! That man has killed my entire family right before my very eyes, I just have to kill him, I vowed to myself to do so back then and an Assassin never breaks a vow. Besides, this is the only way to give myself and my family in the afterlife the peace that we deserve. So please, I ask you to accept my decision."

Aang thought about what I had just said for a long time before he finally said: "So ... I really don't have to kill the Fire Lord?"

"No, you still have to fight and defeat him but you don't have to kill him, I will shoulder this burden."

"Very well then. The monks have also said time and again that inner peace is perhaps the most important feeling of every human being. If you really think that you are going to achieve your inner peace with this deed, then so be it."

I hugged the young Avatar for a short moment and said: "Thank you for your insight."

Aang smiled and then asked: "But how am I supposed to defeat the Fire Lord? I don't think that my current bending abilities will be enough."

"That is something that only you alone can figure out. Turn your gaze inward, explore your Avatar spirit, then you will find a solution."

"Thank you, Yulizan."

Aang smiled again before he left the courtyard with Momo on his shoulder, probably to walk
around the island for some time. I knew that he would now go on a journey into his soul to find a solution, something during which one should better not disturb him.

I looked after him until he had disappeared from my view, then I returned to the others inside the house.

The next morning we all packed our things together, it was time to leave the beach house and start with the battle preparations.

While I was in my room tying up my equipment, Katara suddenly entered and asked: "Yulizan, have you seen Aang? We can't find him anywhere!"

What? That couldn't be! He had just taken a walk around the island last night, or hadn't he?

I immediately packed everything together as quick as I could, then I helped the others with the search.

In the end it was Sokka who discovered something: On the beach there were footprints in the sand which eventually led into the sea.

Just how had Aang disappeared? Both his glider and Appa were still in the house and on the island, therefore it hadn't happened by air. He also couldn't be in the Spirit World because otherwise we probably would have found his body somewhere by now.

We decided to split up and search the entire island. I instructed Pagan to scout the island from the air and keep both eyes out for Aang, while on the ground, with the help of my good detection skills and techniques, I would do everything in my power to solve the mystery of the Avatar's disappearance.

But even after countless hours of endless searching we didn't have even the slightest trace of Aang; Pagan hadn't found anything from the air either.

After we had all gotten together in front of the house again, Zuko suddenly said: "You know, I know somebody who might be able to help us..."

"Who?", the rest of us asked with one voice.

"A bounty huntress named June from the Earth Kingdom."

I flinched involuntarily! June of all people should help us find Aang? Oh dear, may as well expect the worst.

With a pretty tense feeling in my mind I mounted Pagan shortly afterwards as we began to make our way towards the Earth Kingdom.

In my mind I prayed to the Spirits that everything would go smoothly and that June wouldn't put me in some kind of precarious situation ... once again!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: In the name in the Order! (Sozin's Comet, Part 2)
As we made our way towards the Earth Kingdom I feverishly thought about how I could avoid it that June put me in any kind of bad light in front of my friends. The risk that June would reveal just a nuance of our past escapades was very big, I absolutely needed to prevent that from happening, otherwise I would lose all credit with my friends and sooner or later Ty Lee would probably also learn of it and I was sure that she would never forgive me for those indiscretions.

So what could I do? One of the first options I could think of was disguising myself so that June would not even recognize me. But how should I explain this charade to my friends? Since I wasn't able to think of anything decent on the fly I decided to calm down for the time being and make the final decision after we had reached our destination.

Our destination eventually turned out to be a tavern in a relatively uninhabited area of the Earth Kingdom, about a day's journey from Ba Sing Se.

We landed and dismounted the animals, now I had to translate my pretty vague plan into action if I wanted to uphold my relationship with Ty Lee. While the rest of our team began to make their way to the tavern I did not take a single step away the landing spot of Appa and Pagan.

The others of course noticed this, Sokka called: "What now? Are you coming or not?"

I said: "Just go, I'll stay here. I don't like taverns like this, I've had some bad experiences in the past."

That wasn't even a lie, a few years ago I had gotten involuntarily involved in a tavern brawl during which I was whacked over the head with a wooden stool of which some splinters had given me two small scars on the right cheek and the edge of the lip in the process.

Not that this was a real valid reason but apparently it still was enough to convince my friends because they entered the tavern without any further words.

As soon as the building's door had closed I turned towards Pagan, got some items I had packed for emergencies of this kind out from the bag that was tied around his neck and then told the dragon:

"Quick, rise back to the air and camouflage yourself, June knows that you belong to me, she must not see you!"

"And what are you going to do?"

"I'll be fine, just stay close and in the air, this shouldn't take too long."

Pagan seemed a little unsure but still obeyed and rose to the air.

I disappeared into some nearby bushes and put on the emergency equipment I had gotten out from Pagan's bag: A wide black cloak, big enough to cover all my weapons, and a small tin filled with black cream-like paint. I took a few drops and daubed the upper half of my face with it. After that I took my new jet-black scarf, which was part of my new robe, and pulled it over the lower half of my face. I looked at my work in a nearby puddle, it had been successful, I was entirely swathed in
black. I turned around, walked over to the tavern and entered it while trying not to attract any attention.

I took a look around inside the building, which to my surprise was much more quiet and filled with less people than I had thought, and eventually spotted my friends at the other end of the room. June was standing right next to them. They all talked for some minutes, then started to walk towards the door again. I moved into a dark corner of the room so that they wouldn't notice me. After they had all left the tavern I waited for another minute before I eventually exited the building myself and followed them.

Only a few moments after I had stepped outside again and spotted my friends near our animals' landing place, I saw June's shirshu running towards her. Damn, I had completely forgotten about that beast! It had been my luck that it hadn't waited right in front of the tavern or anything like that, otherwise it would have most likely recognized the smell of Pagan and me.

Zuko now held Aang's glider staff in front of the animal's snout, it sniffed the tool for a brief moment but then laid down on the ground and covered its head and snout with its paws.

I heard Sokka saying: "What does this mean?"

June replied: "It means that your friend does not exist!"

What? What was that supposed to mean, Aang did not exist? Where the hell was the young Avatar? My hope to find him in time for the comet's arrival slowly began to fade, my friends seemed to feel the same way.

After a couple of minutes Zuko said that the only other person, apart from the Avatar, that could be on a par with Ozai was his uncle Iroh, the Fire Lord's brother. But there was one problem: He didn't know where his uncle was at the moment since he had not seen or talked with him since Iroh had been incarcerated for his "act of treason" in Ba Sing Se.

June said: "Do you have anything with you that belongs to your uncle? Maybe Nyla can at least find him."

Zuko nodded and got out a sandal from his bag. As soon as the shirshu had picked up the scent of the piece of footwear it immediately rushed away! The others ran over to Appa and rose to the air, I waited for a short moment until they were far enough away, then I whistled for Pagan and began to chase after my friends and June with the shirshu.

In the air I took an old piece of cloth and wiped the black paint off my face, the entire masquerade had ultimately proved to be unnecessary, but that didn't bother me at all at this moment. I took off the cloak and put it back into Pagan's neck bag, the scarf I of course kept in my collar.

We followed June all night and the entire next day, and over time I slowly began to realize where the trail of Zuko's uncle was leading us.

My guess eventually turned out to be correct once again when in the evening I spotted the walls of the once great city of Ba Sing Se in the distance.

The shirshu eventually stopped not far from the Outer Wall, the trace must have ended.

As soon as June and her animal had set off again, Pagan landed next to our friends.
When they noticed us Zuko immediately asked: "Where the hell have you been all this time?"

"I'm sorry, but the bounty huntress just couldn't know I was with you, our paths had crossed a few times in the past already and ... I'd rather not talk about that..."

In the corner of my eye I saw Sokka trying his best to stifle his laugh.

"What? Our great and mighty warrior, who can make mincemeat out of the entire Fire Nation army, has lost to a girl?", was all he was able to utter before he couldn't hold himself back anymore and began to literally roll around on the ground, laughing like there was no tomorrow.

I did not feel the need to respond, by this time he should know himself that we had no more time for ridiculousness like this.

Katara seemed to agree with me, she said: "Cut it out, Sokka! Make yourself useful and help us set up the camp!"

Sokka wiped his face and began to help while still giggling. After a short while our camp was set up.

My friends planned to enter the city the next day and find Zuko's uncle. I was content with this plan as well and fell asleep in my tent shortly thereafter.

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But only a few hours later I woke up again after I suddenly had felt a big increase in the heat concentration in our vicinity. I jumped to my feet and immediately saw the cause: Our camp was surrounded by a large circle-like wall of fire! The others were already up and combat-ready, prepared for the worst! I grabbed my katanas and took my position at my friends' side, ready for battle!

A few moments later the fire began to clear but none of us had expected what actually waited behind the flames: No soldiers or anything like that, just four old men.

I recognized all four of them immediately, they were Pakku, Jeong Jeong, Bumi and Piandao!

I immediately sheathed my katanas and dropped to one knee!

My friends stared at me in confusion and continued to do so as I stood up again and walked towards the four men.

I stopped right in front of them, tapped my chest with my fist and said with an obsequious tone in my voice:

"Greetings, brothers, Masters!"

All four did the same gesture and said: "Greetings, Master Yulizan!"

Meanwhile, Katara and Sokka had approached and greeted the men as well. Zuko and Toph however were still rooted to the spot they had stood in the entire time until Toph eventually found her voice again and asked:

"Could somebody please explain to me what exactly is going on here?"

Katara thereupon introduced the earth bender and Zuko to all four men and recapitulated the adventures we had experienced with them. At the end of her story however, her eyes wandered over to me, she said:
"The only thing I don't understand is what Yulizan has to do with all this. Why do you call them "brothers" and "masters"? I mean, you only interacted with them very barely, if at all."

Determined I took a step forward and said with an equally determined voice:

"Well, I think it is time for some clarifications. All four men standing right here in front of us are members of the Assassin Order, just like me. However, shortly after their appointments to become Grand Masters, they intended to split off the main order to have more freedom for their activities and missions. The Assassins' leadership eventually allowed them to do so, the Order of the White Lotus, of which all four of the masters here are members, came into being. As you can see, I've always used my connections on our travels to pull some strings and spare us potential problems this way. I was able to persuade Grand Master Pakku to teach you the arts of water bending, Katara. Through Grand Master Jeong Jeong, I was able to make it clear to Aang that he wasn't ready to learn fire bending back when we first encountered the Grand Master. And the Grand Masters Bumi and Piandao also always acted in the name of the Order and followed the Codex. But the perhaps most important thing you don't know yet: The leader of the White Lotus, the Grand Lotus, is none other than Grand Master Iroh, your uncle, Zuko."

My friends were visibly shocked by the sheer mass of new knowledge.

I asked the Grand Masters: "If you don't mind my asking, Masters: What brings you here to Ba Sing Se?"

"The Grand Lotus has summoned us here."

"Grand Master Iroh is here too?"

"Yes, he is currently staying in our camp."

"That is very convenient, we were searching for him for the last days. Would you please do us the honor and lead us to your camp?"

"Of course. Just follow us."

The Grand Masters turned around and began to walk towards the wall. Me and my friends, who still seemed to try and process all the new information, followed them.

While we walked Grand Master Bumi recounted how he had managed to free himself from his prison in Omashu during the eclipse and retake the city in the process. I nodded contentedly, that was the Assassins' mentality: Never give up, then any problem, any enemy, could be defeated.

Some time later we reached the camp of the White Lotus. While the others decided to go back to sleep, Zuko waited in front of his uncle's tent to apologize to him for his betrayal.

I had given him some words of advice earlier: "If you are really and truly sorry, then he will forgive you. One might not notice it right away but Assassins are very emotional and understanding people."

I lied down in my tent shortly afterwards and fell asleep contentedly, knowing that with all the other Assassins by our side we had far better chances to survive the now imminent final battle.

The next morning, all of us, including myself, my friends and the members of the White Lotus met in the largest tent in the camp and held a council of war.
Zuko told Iroh that he was the only one able to stop Ozai now that Aang had disappeared. But Iroh said that this was not the right decision as it would only be seen as fratricide for power in the history books. The Avatar alone was destined to defeat the Fire Lord, so the will of the Spirits said, so the Assassins taught it since their foundation.

Then Iroh said: "Nephew, I can now tell you that you have finally restored your honor completely and that the Spirits have declared it your destiny to ascend the throne of our land, to lead it into a new age, an age of peace and glory."

After that, Iroh turned to me: "Master Yulizan."

I stood up and began to speak: "Grand Master Iroh is right. As the Avatar, Aang is the only one able to defeat the Fire Lord, once and for all. However, we were faced with the problem that Aang, as an air bender, has an aversion to killing, as every form of life was sacred to the air benders and it was never in their nature to harm any of it. However, seeing as he's the Avatar, the Highest Peacekeeper, I know that he will be able to defeat the Fire Lord without killing him. How exactly I do not know, but I'm sure Aang will find a way. Here's where I come into play: Even though Aang won't kill the Fire Lord, I have to do it. Four years ago, on the day my family met their deaths at the hands of the Fire Lord, I have vowed that one day I would kill the Fire Lord for all the evil he has done! And if an Assassin makes a vow he must try everything in his power to achieve it, otherwise he sins against the Spirits. After Aang's fight with the Fire Lord I will travel there and kill the Fire Lord. The same goes for Azula. She also is to blame for all the suffering that has almost destroyed this world, she must die as well. I will kill her and make sure that you can take your rightful place as ruler of our great country, Zuko."

After I had finished my speech I sat down again and we all discussed what to do next. I would travel to the Fire Nation capital to prevent Azula's coronation as the new Fire Lord and finally kill her, my friends would try to fight the Fire Nation's airship fleet and help Aang if necessary, and the White Lotus would try to free Ba Sing Se from the iron grip of the Fire Nation.

For the rest of the day we were all occupied with battle preparations. I refined most of my equipment once again, even though I was sure that I wouldn't need any weapons other than my fire bending which would be strengthened massively by the comet. I also would go without my armor plates, they probably would hinder me more than help me.

When Zuko walked past me once, I asked him: "Do you hold it against me?"

"What?"

"Well, the fact that I have to kill your sister and your father."

"No, I don't hold it against you. They never were much of a family to me anyway. I've always had my mother and now my uncle. But I'd like to ask you for one favor: Make Azula suffer, as hard as you can!"

"I'll try my best."

Zuko clapped me on the shoulder and walked away.

Eventually the evening hours began, the time of departure approached. We met one last time in the middle of the camp, hugged each other and wished each other luck for everything to come.

I walked over to Pagan and said: "It is time!"
I mounted the dragon, casted one last glance at the others and shouted:

"Women zhan zai yiqi! Cike de shengli!" (We stand together! Victory to the Assassins!)

After these words Pagan rose to the air and began to make his way towards the Fire Nation.

After we had been flying for some time I suddenly felt the heat in my body going sky high. But it wasn't an unpleasant feeling, quite the contrary: I had never felt this strong or powerful ever before. When I looked up to the sky I saw the reason for all this: The sky was slowly but surely beginning to turn orange, the comet had reached its orbit!

I took my mother's medallion into my hand and held it firmly before I said to my dragon friend:

"Pagan ... the end is nigh..."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Yulizan vs. Azula
Pagan turned his head and asked: "You really think so?"

I nodded and said determinedly: "I have waited four long years for this fight, four years during which this once so ordinary young man who had lost his family has evolved into a masterful warrior. From the day my family died and I decided to become an Assassin to avenge their deaths everything I did was aimed at this moment. Now the time has finally come, the biggest fight of my life is about to happen. And I will not fail!"

Pagan asked: "But what will happen if you do fail? If you really ... what about me? And Ty Lee and your child?"

I gently rubbed the dragon's scaly neck and said: "If the worst-case-scenario really becomes reality, promise me that you will keep an eye on Ty Lee and our child for the rest of their lives. Protect them as you have always done for me."

Pagan nodded and then I saw something that I had never deemed possible: A tear in the eye of the dragon.

I asked: "Are you crying, Pagan? I never knew that dragons were even able to cry."

Pagan answered with a low voice: "It's just ... you're my master, my best friend, you raised me, I have accompanied you for all my life. And now all of this might end just like that..."

I once again rubbed the dragon's neck and said: "Don't worry, everything will work out somehow. I have trained four years for this moment, I will not fail! And now please be quiet and continue flying, I have to concentrate for a moment!"

Pagan obeyed, fell silent and continued his flight while I tried to put myself into a state of meditation, I wanted to get some final advice before fighting what would definitely be the most important fight of my life. I closed my eyes and began to concentrate my thoughts.

It worked faster than I had thought, after only a couple of moments I found myself in the Spirit World, more precisely in the great hall of my parents' house. And as I had wanted the spirits of my father and grandfather were there as well.

I walked up to them, bowed and said: "It is time, the biggest and most important fight of my life is imminent. I was hoping that you could give me one more piece of advice before I face the princess."

My father looked me in the eye, smiled and said: "You don't need another piece of advice, my son. You have all the skills and abilities you need to win this fight."

My grandfather added: "You have fought countless battles during the last years and you have emerged victorious from each and every one of them. You always honored the Order, never lost focus of your task, the Spirits are pleased with you."

I bowed one more time, before my father began to speak once again: "Just do not forget one thing:
You now have another big responsibility that you have to carry. But do not despair, you will master this one as well."

I of course understood that my father was talking about my love to Ty Lee and our unborn child.

I answered: "Of course, father, I will not disappoint you. But now is the time for me to go. Today I will finally be able to give you, mother and the others the peace that you have longed for so long. And through this deed I will also finally find my own inner peace so that I'll finally be able to live my life in order."

My father bowed while my grandfather said: "Good luck, Yulizan, and don't forget one thing: Your master has given you something special to help you on your way and now is the time to use it. May the Spirits watch over you, my boy."

Now my grandfather bowed as well before only one second later the two silhouettes began to slowly fade away while I returned to the mortal world.

I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was the now almost blood red sky around me, the comet was approaching its zenith.

I thought of my grandfather's last words, of course I knew what he had meant. I took my bag of concoctions and potions and rummaged around in it. At the bottom of the bag I eventually found what I had been looking for: A small phial filled with a dark red liquid. My master had given me this potion after my appointment as Master Assassin, he had said: "This is perhaps the most powerful potion we Assassins have ever created. Save this phial for the one fight that you will consider the most important of your entire life. Should you get the feeling that your strength and abilities won't be enough to win the fight, drink the potion. It will give you incredible power, nobody will be able to defeat you once you are under its influence." I put the phial under my belt since I wouldn't carry my bag with me during the fight.

As we continued to draw closer and closer to the Fire Nation capital I wanted to know how much of an impact the comet really had on the fire bending. I intended to create just a small flame, but instead a huge stream of fire immediately emerged from my hand! I flinched in shock for a short second but then nodded determinedly, my powers had increased tremendously. I would still have quite a hard time with Azula but I was confident that I would succeed.

Shortly afterwards the capital finally came into sight. I embraced my mother's medallion in my hand one last time, looked up to the sky and said:

"It is time!"

From a distance I had made out the large courtyard in front of the palace relatively quick, it was the only enlightened spot in the otherwise seemingly deserted city.

I said to Pagan: "We will land right in the middle of the palace courtyard. You drop me off and immediately fly away again. Stay away from any kind of danger as far as possible. If I win, I will signal you to pick me up again. Should I fail ... you know what you have to do."

Pagan nodded and said softly: "Good luck, Yulizan, may the Spirits watch over you."

After that, the dragon fell silent and began his landing approach on the palace courtyard.

While still in the air I was already able to see the large-scale ceremony that was currently taking
place to crown Azula the new Fire Lord. But I would not let them finish!

As he descended Pagan uttered a loud roar to attract the attention of all the people assembled in the courtyard. He eventually landed gently right in front of the palace, I slowly dismounted, Pagan rose back into the air and flew away.

With perhaps the most determined and most grim face of my life I slowly but surely began to approach Azula who was dressed in queen-like robes.

Some of the priests who stood beside and behind the princess began to mumble and whisper when they caught sight of me.

One of them eventually said quite loudly: "It's the dragon rider, just like the ancient legend prophesized!"

The priest who stood next to him asked: "Dragon rider? Ancient legend? What are you even talking about?"

The first priest answered: "Many hundreds of years ago the very first Fire Priests received a scroll of prophecy from the Spirits themselves. The prophecy said that one day a great conflict which will shape the history of the entire world will be started by a dragon rider and ended by another."

The second priest, who now began to look quite unsettled, said: "Stop talking in riddles! What is your point?"

"Don't you understand? Fire Lord Sozin! He was a dragon rider and he started the Hundred Year War! He was the first dragon rider mentioned by the prophecy! The Fire Lord knew of the prophecy, which was also the reason why he introduced the dragon hunt: To prevent the existence of potential new dragon riders and therefore be able to conduct his plan of conquering the entire world without anyone able to stop him. And this boy right there is the second dragon rider mentioned in the prophecy, the one who will end the conflict..."

"ENOUGH!"

The priest was cut off mid-sentence by Azula who had a furious look in her eyes. She stared at the priests, who I think just wanted to curl up and die instead of having to face the princess's fury, and said:

"Stop with your stupid old wives' tales and focus! This is the most important moment in the history of this country and I won't let some superstitious old idiots ruin it!"

She turned her head again and now looked directly in my direction as she shouted: "You there! How can you even dare to interrupt such an important ceremony? Reveal yourself! NOW!"

I moved both hands up to my hood and slowly removed it. As soon as my face was visible, Azula's eyes widened, she had recognized me!

"YOU? Not again! When will you finally give up? Kill him, now!", Azula yelled at some nearby guards.

But most of them were too intimidated by both my mere sight and seemingly also by the priest's story of the prophecy, which by the way didn't interest me at all; only a handful of soldiers charged at me in the end.

I remained calm the entire time, eventually drew my katanas and killed all of my attackers without
turning a hair when they came close.

Azula became even more shocked, her previously perfect hair slowly began to become disheveled.

I raised my head, looked the princess in the eye and said with a loud and dark voice: "This ceremony is over, princess! You are not worthy to ascend the throne of this once great country! This time you cannot escape from me, this time I won't fail! Your rule is at an end, and it wasn't short enough! I will kill you so that your brother can take his rightful place on this throne! But I offer you one last chance to keep your honor! I hereby challenge you to an Agni Kai Siwang! A fire bending duel, just the two of us, TO. THE. DEATH!"

Azula's expression suddenly changed from shock to an insane grin. She stood up and said darkly: "I accept! Then I'll finally be rid of you and nobody can stand in my way anymore!"

I reached for the clasp shaped like the seal of the Assassins that held my robe together by the collar, unfastened it and removed my robe. My cloth shirt followed shortly afterwards, my scarred torso became visible. I saw Azula swallowing hard, she actually seemed to be intimidated by my sight after all.

As I took my position at one end of the courtyard, Azula got rid of her ceremonial robes and then took her position at the other end of the courtyard. I focused all my thoughts on this moment and took up my fighting stance!

Here we were: A completely insane witch-princess and an Assassin driven by nothing but vengeance! And only one of us would leave this courtyard alive!

Azula eventually made the first move and launched a gigantic jet of blue fire towards me! I countered with a jet of equal intensity. With incredible power blue met white and filled almost the entire courtyard. It was perhaps the strongest state I had ever experienced my fire in, the comet really gave both of us incredible bending powers.

In this fight I also would finally play all my hidden trump cards, I hoped to surprise Azula with at least a couple of new attacks.

My first new attack was the "Flight of the Phoenix", as I called it: I created a small flame in the palm of my hand, then held it in front of my face and blew into it with all the strength of my lungs! A huge fire-bird emerged from the small white flame, it spread its wings and rushed towards Azula. She was able to dodge the fiery animal's onslaught at the last second, otherwise I would have already hit her pretty hard this early into the fight. Now she began an attack on her part again, hurling all sorts of variations of her blue fire at me but I was able to dodge or block everything relatively easy.

After a series of hard attacks, Azula dropped to one knee and gasped for air exhaustedly.

I called: "Is that all you got, princess? I had expected a big challenge but this is ridiculous! You are weak! Do you hear me? Weak!"

Apparently this provocation was enough to destroy Azula’s already endangered mental health for good. She let out a high-pitched scream, grabbed one strand of her hair and ripped it out completely!

"Just you wait! I will show you! Nobody is more powerful than me! Nobody!", she screamed with the howling voice of a broken but still highly dangerous witch.
I watched her next moves very closely, once I saw the electricity crackling at her fingertips I knew exactly what was coming. But for situations like this I still had one very special ace up my sleeve, a technique only known to me and my master, who had taught me how to use this very often life-threatening personal defensive measure.

I waited for Azula to fire her bolt of lightning which happened only seconds later. But instead of dodging or the like I stayed in my position and raised my arm. The lightning bolt came closer and closer and eventually hit the exact center of my open hand. I concentrated all my physical strength and almost all of my chi in my hand, it was pushed back quite a bit but in the end it worked! A ball of pure energy that absorbed the lightning began to form in my palm. Eventually, after collecting all of the lightning in the ball, I managed to clench my hand into a fist with great effort, effectively directing the ball's energy into my body. I had done it, in contrast to Zuko's technique I had not redirected the lightning but instead completely discharged it, completely negated its power!

I looked at Azula who was staring at me in complete disbelief, she couldn't believe what I had just done. For the first time during this duel I let myself get carried away for a short moment, cracked a mischievous smirk and said:

"You still have much to learn, princess. Get ready for the true power of lightning!"

I entered the state of concentration and began my own lightning bending. My movements became faster and faster until I eventually discharged the full force of the purple lightning and hurled it at Azula! She stopped dead in her tracks as the purple bolt flew towards her, only at the very last moment she ducked away. The lightning hit a pillar behind her and destroyed it completely!

Azula first stared at the remnants of the pillar, then back at me. Her eyes were now filled with nothing but complete and utter madness! Then, suddenly, she started to laugh, at first it was just a laugh, but then it eventually turned into an insane cackling. Without a word of warning she suddenly came rushing towards me, her fists engulfed in flames!

I was completely unprepared for this attack and reacted far too late. Even though I managed to block the first fire-boosted punch, the second hit me in the chest with full force! I groaned through my teeth to stifle the pain but the force of the punch sent me to the ground nevertheless. My back plunked hard onto the stone ground, I saw Azula as she slowly approached me, then everything went black.

But thankfully my state of unconsciousness didn't last long, because only a few seconds after blacking out I sensed being pulled up from the ground and pressed against something else that was equally as hard.

I opened my eyes slightly and saw Azula, one hand around my neck, the other still engulfed in flames, ready for the final blow! But I wouldn't be a Master Assassin if I wasn't able to get out of a situation like this.

In her madness Azula had completely forgotten about my free arms and legs. As she reached back to finish me, my right hand sprung forward and pushed Azula away from me a couple of meters. Before she realized what was going on, I followed my punch up with a strong kick to the princess's head that sent her to the ground. She got up again only seconds later however and looked at me, her face filled with hatred. I still felt the pain from her punch on my chest but nevertheless knew: The moment has come!

I reached for the phial with the special potion inconspicuously and said:
"All I've ever wanted was destiny to be fulfilled! It is in my hands! I must not fail! I will not fail! This passion inside me, it keeps burning and burning! Even through the darkest days, in the darkest night, I am the Flame, I always burn! I walk in the shadows to bring light to the world! I am an Assassin!"

I uncorked the phial and emptied it in one swig. The potion tasted a bit sour at first but had a quite spicy aftertaste. I stared at Azula with a determined face and waited for the potion to take effect.

Shortly afterwards I felt an unfamiliar warmth, it was almost heat, inside me. And unlike the heat the comet caused, this feeling was not very pleasant, quite the contrary, I felt like I was burning internally! What the hell had my master foisted on me with this potion?

I wanted to feel my face to check if my temperature really was climbing into such extreme heights, but when I raised my hands an incredible shock hit me! My hands and arms began to slowly turn orange to reddish and even went up in flames shortly afterwards! At first I wanted to scream, but then I realized that my whole body was changing. My vision suddenly turned orange, apparently my eyes had changed color. I heard a steady crackling in immediate vicinity, seconds later I realized that my hair had turned into flames! And after my arms the rest of my body had also changed color and caught fire! Now there was absolutely no doubt anymore: I had actually turned into a fire demon! And amazingly I didn't feel uncomfortable or anything like that but instead strong and powerful!

I looked at Azula again and saw the mortally scared look in her eyes. With a dark and demonic voice that I didn't even have to imitate I said:

"Let's finish this, princess!"

Azula broke away from her rigidity and fell back into her madness. She began to hurl a rain of fire at me but I didn't dodge. Some of the fire balls hit me but I felt nothing but a puff of air on my skin. Azula continued to attack unhindered, I had to counter somehow.

Since I didn't know what kind of special powers the fire demon transformation gave me, I used a technique that I also could have used as a human. Thankfully, despite the fact that the demon consisted of ordinary yellow-orange fire, I was still able to create my typical white fire. Supported by the power of the comet I created a column that was several meters high and completely made of white fire. Then I took some yellow fire from a nearby torch and by using rotary motions integrated it into the column which now began to spin around itself, effectively creating a fire tornado!

Azula, completely oblivious to do what I was doing, was still hurling flames at me, I managed to deflect some of them and move them into the tornado. The colors of the different flames eventually mixed together and created a light green-colored fire in the process! Once the storm had gathered enough power, I pushed and forced it to move towards Azula. She had no chance to dodge, was flung through the air by the storm and burned in many places in the process.

Shortly afterwards the storm died down again and Azula fell to the ground. Her hair was now dangling all over her face, her clothes were torn or burned in many places, some spots of burned skin were visible. After having some problems to stand up and regain her balance, she prepared to create lightning once again. Although I didn't know what kind of effect lightning would have on the demon I was willing to take the risk and find out first-hand.

Azula eventually created an even larger lightning bolt than the first time and was ready to fire it right at me. I just stood there, ready for impact, when the lightning struck my body with full force.
Even though I stumbled backwards a few steps I remained on my feet.

And then I felt another change in my body: The heat that had spread in my body with the fire
demon suddenly disappeared and gave way to a new sensation, a feeling of coldness but also
incredible power. When I looked down at my body, my guess was confirmed: Azula’s lightning
bolt had changed my shape again, my body was now glowing in a bright blue color, the fire demon
had become a lightning demon! I was pretty sure that this was the most powerful form I could
achieve, now I had to act!

I began to approach Azula who continued to throw flames at me, now out of complete desperation,
but nothing seemed to do any damage to me anymore.

I raised both my hands and from out of nowhere created four chains made of lightning that
encircled Azula’s wrists and ankles and shackled her mid-air! There she was hanging now, the
insane princess of the Fire Nation, completely helpless.

I positioned myself right in front of her and stared at her with my blue demon eyes, her fearful look
was balm on my soul. Now she would finally die, after so many failed attempts the moment of
truth had finally come!

I created a sword made of lightning and grabbed it with my demon hand. I looked Azula in the eye
one last time, then I said:

"This is for the world, my family and Ty Lee!"

I lunged out with the lightning sword and rammed it right through Azula’s black heart with full
force! The lightning chains shattered and shot up into the sky as Azula uttered her death cry! The
sword dissolved in her heart, she sank to the ground dead.

There I stood, triumphant over the dead princess! But suddenly I was overcome by a great pain, I
grabbed my chest and sank to my knees. The great power that the demon form had given me
vanished, the potion’s transformation began to lose its effect. My body gradually changed back to
normal, first my hair reappeared, then my vision turned back to normal and finally my skin also
regained its usual paleness.

I now saw Azula’s corpse with my normal eyes, I raised my fist to the sky, I had done it! Now only
Ozai was left, then my mission was finally completed!

Shortly afterwards I heard the well-known sound of the flying bison above me, only seconds later
Appa landed in the courtyard and Katara and Zuko dismounted the saddle.

Katara called: "Yulizan! Are you alright?"

I wanted to answer but suddenly the last remains of my strength left me, I toppled over and lost
consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Peace at last?
I don't know exactly what happened next, the first thing I remember was a feeling of cold and wet on my forehead.

I tried to open my eyes, which took me quite some effort, the first thing I saw and noticed was the slowly darkening sky which meant that the comet had now passed the world completely.

Next I saw Zuko and finally Katara who was kneeling next to me and dabbed my forehead with a damp cloth. I tried to sit up but suddenly felt a strong and sharp pain in my chest.

Katara tried to hold me back and said: "Relax, you're not strong enough just yet. After all, you took quite a few hits."

I looked down and saw that my chest and shoulder were firmly bandaged at the spot where Azula had hit me. I tried to speak, which proved to be quite difficult because of the injury.

I asked Katara: "What happened?"

"Well, Zuko and I both knew that your fight against Azula would most likely be pretty tough and brutal. We were worried that something bad might happen to you so we set out ourselves some time after you had left and followed you, to help you if necessary. When we saw the many lightning bolts shooting into the sky from afar we immediately knew that something serious had happened. We hurried and eventually found you standing next to Azula's corpse in the courtyard. I called out for you but you passed out after you had turned around. Zuko carried you onto Appa's saddle and I immediately started to take care of your wounds."

That's when something came to my mind: "My equipment! I had put it aside before the fight!"

Katara put her hand on my shoulder: "Don't worry. We saw it and took it with us."

She pointed to the other end of the saddle with her finger, I saw my robe and my weapons lying there neatly.

"Thank you.", I said.

Katara smiled and said: "Get some rest, we're flying to the others."

Did that mean that Aang had done it? The Fire Lord was defeated? How should I get some rest then? My mission was not yet finished!

But for the moment I deferred to Katara and lied down again. In my thoughts however there already was a real outburst of emotions, I was only more step away from the completion of my life task!

We flew for quite a while until we eventually reached the Earth Kingdom's western seaboard. There, in the remains of a stone forest, we landed on a large pillar of rock.

Katara asked me: "Do you think that you're fit enough to at least stand up with help?"
I nodded whereupon Zuko came to me, pulled me up and put my left arm over his neck. My legs felt like lead at the first moment, I stood quite wobbly despite Zuko's support, the potion's transformation really had robbed me of all my energy.

With Zuko's help I eventually managed to leave Appa's saddle and reach the pillar of rock where Katara, Sokka, Suki, Toph and Aang were already standing.

At the far end of the pillar, a broken-looking figure knelt, shackled to the ground with earth shackles. Although he had lowered his head I recognized Fire Lord Ozai. Despite the pain and my physical weakness, the anger began to boil up inside me once again.

Meanwhile, Aang told about how that he had used a very special power to forever take away the Fire Lord's ability to bend fire and had defeated him this way. I smiled, I had ended up being right, the young Avatar had found a way.

But unfortunately that was not enough! I had to complete my mission, I had to do it!

I turned my head and said to Zuko: "Let me go, it's alright."

"Are you sure?"

"Just trust me."

Zuko skeptically removed my arm from his shoulders and let me stand on my own again. My legs were still a little wobbly but now I was kept on them solely by my sheer determination.

Slowly and with caution as I set my wobbly steps I approached Aang and gave him a small nod. Aang nodded back and made a little gesture with his arm, as if he was opening an imaginary door for me, towards the Fire Lord.

Katara wanted to stop me but Aang held her back: "Let him, we have to give him this moment."

Katara obeyed with a slightly sad look in her eyes.

I walked slowly but determinedly towards to the fallen monarch. Eventually I had reached him, the moment of truth had finally arrived!

As I stood directly in front of Ozai, he didn't look up at first. I leaned down, grabbed his pointed chin beard and pulled his head up so that I could look him in the eye.

I asked him: "Do you recognize me?"

At first the former Fire Lord did not react, but then realization seemed to strike him, his eyes widened, he gasped:

"It's ... it's you! You're the boy of that traitor family! But that's impossible! The soldiers told me they killed you!"

"As you can plainly see, I am very much alive! Four years ago, you killed my entire family! Do you remember what I screamed into your face that day?

"You will pay for this! One day I will find you and slice your throat!"

And now, this day has finally come!"
I extended my right arm blade.

"This blade once belonged to my father. Do you remember what he screamed before you chopped off his head? He was right! You may have killed him and the rest of my family but you did not win! The Assassins are always victorious and with your death, peace will finally return to the world!"

I put the blade to Ozai's throat and enjoyed the broken frightened look in his eyes one last time, then I said:

"This is for my family! Anxi ba, ni zhege kewu de hundan! (Rest in peace, you miserable bastard!)"

Slowly and with relish I pushed my father's blade into Ozai's throat, cut through skin and muscles, felt the blood running over my hand, it was nothing but pure satisfaction!

Ozai rattled for a short moment, then the evil in his eyes died down for good and his whole body sank to the ground!

At the first moment I just couldn't believe it but I really had done it! I actually killed Fire Lord Ozai! The world was saved! My family was avenged! My destiny was fulfilled! I had prevailed!

I took my mother's medallion from my neck, held it firmly in my hand and raised my fist to the sky.

While doing this I said: "I did it! I have avenged you! At last you can rest in peace!"

I wasn't able to hold my emotions back any longer, tears of joy began running down my face, it simply was an incredibly beautiful feeling.

But suddenly the feeling of victory gave way to another feeling, a very unpleasant one. My raised fist suddenly began to tremble, my body felt like someone was piercing countless needles into my skin in all kinds of places! I dropped to my knees and pressed my hand to my chest, my breathing became heavy, my vision became blurry.

Eventually I wasn't able to keep myself on my knees anymore, I sprawled to the ground, my vision continued to fade, the last thing I perceived was the nervous shouting and running of my friends, then my world turned black completely.

When I opened my eyes again I didn't know where I was. I was standing in a forest of strange white trees that emitted an unnatural light.

"Am I in the Spirit World?", I wondered and as if by command a strange voice answered: "No, you're not!"

I immediately recognized the voice, it was the same voice that I had heard in my head so many times before and that had kept talking to me.

"Who are you? Show yourself!", I called.

"If you insist.", the voice answered.

I turned around several times, was attuned for any kind of danger, to see what exactly this voice was and where it came from.

Eventually, something moved behind one of the many trees. I drew my katanas, ready to fight.
But what emerged from behind the tree shocked me to the core: It was a figure that looked exactly like me except that it seemed to be made entirely of shadow. There was no real face visible under the hood, just a mouth and two empty crimson-colored eyes.

I couldn't figure out what this was all about by no stretch of the imagination so I asked once more:

"Who or what are you?"

The figure laughed softly and answered: "Actually, I was hoping that you would know that by now, but don't worry, I can give you a leg up: I am you! Your dark side!"

I took a step back in disbelief. This shadowy figure was supposed be my dark side? I couldn't and didn't want to believe that!

"What exactly is this place here?"

"This is the Spirit World's precipice, or to use a more simple term: Purgatory! You were sent here because you currently are on the threshold between life and death. As you probably have realized by now, my prophecy has come true! You actually provoked it yourself in the end!"

"What do you mean by prophecy?", I asked perplexed.

The figure tried to act surprised: "Oh, have you already forgotten my words? The words I have whispered to you over and over again. I can repeat them one more time if you want:

"When the empire falls, you will completely turn into a monster!"

Does that ring a bell?"

I stared down at the ground, speechless. Now I finally understood the true meaning of that phrase: When I took the potion and transformed into the fire demon, I literally had turned into a monster and brought down the Fire Nation empire, the empire of terror, it all made sense now!

The figure grinned: "I see you finally understand! Do you get it now? You cannot escape your dark side! I will always be with you, accompany you, so you better accept it! You're a killer and killers are monsters! You are a monster, embrace it!"

I raised my head determinedly and stared at the figure with a grim look in my eyes.

"You're wrong! I've never been a monster and will never be one! I've fulfilled my task, the killing is over! I already have a new life waiting for me and I won't let anybody take it away from me!"

I raised my katanas with a loud cry, rammed the first one right through the chest of the figure, who didn't even know what hit it, and cut off its head with the second one. As soon as the blade had passed through its neck, the whole figure dissolved and vanished in a cloud of black smoke.

Was that it? Did I defeat my dark side? Were my body and soul pure again?

I didn't have to think long about these things because only shortly afterwards five silhouettes appeared in front of me, the souls of my family!

My mother had a smile on her face as she approached me and gave me a tender hug which I of course returned.

She said: "I always knew you could do it. I'm so proud of you!"
My father arrived and said: "Son, you did it. You have avenged us and restored our family's honor, our souls are free now and can finally rest in peace. Thank you so much, for everything you have taken on to achieve this."

My father now hugged me as well, I said:

"I did what had to be done. And now I also defeated my dark side once and for all. The killing is over, I will retire from my position as an active Assassin. A new age is about to begin for me, the age of my own family."

My father put his hand on my shoulder and said: "You will manage it, my son. You definitely will be a good father. And if you ever have problems, never forget that we are always right at your side."

"Thank you, father. But I think now it's time for me to return, my friends are probably very worried about me already. Enjoy your peace. Rest well!", I said as the silhouettes began to fade and my soul slowly found its way back into my real body.

I opened my eyes and took a deep breath. I was just lying there, panting and unaware of where exactly I was.

But then I suddenly heard a familiar voice next to me:

"Yulizan! Thank the Spirits, you're awake!"

It was Katara, I turned my head and spotted the water bender.

I was obviously lying in a bed, wrapped in thick blankets. The room in which this bed was located in had reddish walls with sunlight coming through a large window, I most likely was in a Fire Nation building.

I tried to sit up, which proved to be relatively easy, I only got a little dizzy. The blankets fell off my shoulders, I now saw the bandages that were still covering my chest.

My eyes wandered over to Katara who was standing next to the bed, I asked:

"What happened? Where are we?"

"In the palace of the Fire Nation capital. You fell into a coma after you had killed the Fire Lord, we tried everything but weren't able to revive you on the spot. So we decided to take you to a safe place and to look after you, in the hope that you'll wake up again by yourself."

"And how long was I out?"

"One week."

I was practically dead for seven days? That was quite the achievement!

"And what about the others? What happened while I was gone?"

"To be honest, not much. We were mainly occupied with looking after you and hoping that you are fine. Zuko even said that he doesn't want to be crowned the new Fire Lord until you're awake and fit enough to attend the ceremony."

"A nice gesture from him. And I think this day has now come. I'm awake and feel well rested
"Are you sure?"

"Of course. An entire week of sleep seems to work wonders."

"Then would it be OK for you if I go and get the others? They surely want to talk to you too."

"Sure, no problem."

Katara left the room. I got up as well and slowly walked over to the window. I touched my bandages, they probably only were still there for protection because I felt almost no pain anymore. I looked out of the window into the distance to the sea, towards a world that now was finally peaceful again.

But a real phase of tranquility to enjoy the whole thing was not granted to me because shortly afterwards the door opened again and the rest of my friends entered the room.

Toph immediately ran towards me and wrapped her arms around me. A short twitch in my chest was the result but I ignored it and returned the hug. Aang and Zuko hugged me as well and expressed their joy that I was fine.

Sokka retained his usual stoic personality and said: "Well, looks like good ol' Zuko here can finally be crowned now!"

We all laughed and agreed. The coronation eventually was scheduled to take place the following day.

The next day, a large crowd had gathered in the courtyard in front of the palace.

I had joined the celebrations together with Katara, Sokka, Toph and Suki. I was wearing a ceremonial Assassin robe that was only allowed to be worn for special occasions. Pagan, who by the way had cried again when he had found out that I was fine, had gotten me the robe from the monastery. My dragon friend was delighted that I had survived my battles and that we would continue to travel the world together.

As we now walked across the courtyard and through the crowd, we met many old friends again. Katara and Sokka met their father again while Suki was reunited with the rest of her group of Kyoshi Warriors, the group that I had freed from the Boiling Rock.

And this group of the Warriors also had a very special surprise for me. When I turned away for a moment somebody behind me suddenly covered my eyes.

I said: "Who's this?"

I heard the well-known voice, it was music to my ears: "Love!"

I answered: "I love you too!", turned around and kissed my Ty Lee.

That's when I noticed: She was wearing the armor and face paint of the Kyoshi Warriors, just like back in Ba Sing Se.

She told me: "After you had freed us from the prison, Mai and I continued to travel with the Warriors. We became friends, I showed them some of my chi-blocking techniques and they eventually accepted me as a full member of their group!"
"Very nice!", I answered.

So my girl had found a new purpose in her life, I was more than proud of her.

I told her: "I was able to fulfill my mission. Now there is nothing left that could separate us. From now on we will stay together, forever."

Ty Lee was all smiles and kissed me again.

Then the coronation ceremony began. Zuko officially declared the war over and vowed to lead the world into a new age of peace.

We all applauded, I looked up to the sky and thought once again:

"I did it! This is the world I always wanted to live in. This is the world in which my new family will originate. It's a peaceful world and it will stay this way."

Some time later we all sat together comfortably in a large hall in the Fire Nation palace and enjoyed our well-deserved repose. Ty Lee sat on my lap, we were cuddling fondly.

After some time Suki came up to us and said: "Yulizan, can I talk to you alone for a moment?"

Wondering what the leader of the Kyoshi Warriors wanted from me I said: "Of course."

Ty Lee slipped off my lap, I stood up and left the room together with Suki.

We eventually went to a balcony from which one could look over the entire courtyard and the sea.

As we stood there I asked: "So, what exactly did you want to talk about with me?"

"Well, I wanted to ask you a big favor."

"And that would be?"

"I have seen that you are an incredibly skilled fighter and the other warriors, the ones you freed from the Boiling Rock, also talked about how impressed they were with what they saw you do in the prison. Therefore I would like to make a proposal to you: Would you be willing to train the Warriors of Kyoshi and teach us your fighting techniques and abilities? I'm sure that skills like yours could be very helpful for our missions."

I have to admit that I didn't expect anything like this offer at all.

I answered: "Suki, the training I went through has been very difficult, long and complicated. I don't know if you really want to take on this kind of exertions."

"We are Warriors of Kyoshi, we face any kind of challenge."

"I don't doubt that but the training for Assassin skills is a whole other caliber. But if you really are sure ... then I would be honored to become your master."

"Wonderful!", Suki rejoiced.

"However, there are a few things I need to tell you in advance. First, to be trained in the arts of the Assassins, you must respect the Assassin rules and rituals. Second, I will be your teacher and master, which means that all of you have to follow each of my commands. And thirdly, as an
Assassin, one can't know any moral limits, you must be willing to kill if you want to reach the full extent of the training. Is that clear to you?"

"Yes, it is. I will inform the other warriors, I'm sure they will agree as well."

"What will you inform us about?", I heard Ty Lee saying, she seemingly had followed us. Thereupon Suki and I told my girl what we had just discussed.

Ty Lee was immediately hooked by the whole idea and said: "That's perfect, Yulizan! This way we really can stay close together."

My love was right. By training the Warriors on Kyoshi Island I would be able to be close to Ty Lee all the time which was a really good prospect with regard to our child.

Suki added: "Well, then everything seems settled. As far as I know, there is a large currently unoccupied house on the island, I'm pretty sure you will be able to live there."

"Is it big enough for an entire family?", I asked.

"I think so."

"Well, then you're right: Everything is settled. Just let me know when you plan to leave for the island, then Pagan and I will accompany you."

Suki nodded and went back inside the palace.

Now Ty Lee and I were alone on the balcony which offered a beautiful view of the sea and the setting sun.

I stood behind Ty Lee and put my arms around her until they rested on top of her belly. She turned her head and looked at me with a smile. I smiled back and kissed her gently. After that, we continued to watch the slowly setting sun.

I was happy. I had fulfilled my life task, my family could finally rest in peace now.

The war was over, a time full of love and peace lied ahead of us.

I had found the woman of my life and would be a father soon.

My life was perfect! I had completed my previous mission, but a new and probably far tougher one was already waiting for me:

The adventure known as family!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: The beginning of a new life
In the time that followed, our lives in the palace were simply wonderful! We enjoyed our time in this now peaceful world.

I had stored away my weapons and the rest of my equipment in a chest on the day of Zuko's coronation, I wouldn't need them anymore for the time being.

Zuko proved to be a good and, above all, wise ruler, one of his first official acts was to dissolve the numerous Fire Nation colonies in the Earth Kingdom. I endorsed this goal even though I wasn't really interested in politics. The Assassins had always preferred to keep their independence and Zuko had immediately assured me that it would stay this way.

I now dedicated my entire attention and interest to Ty Lee and our unborn child, sometimes spending what felt like hours placing my head on Ty Lee's belly to feel if the baby was already moving. And although I never achieved a success, since it was still way too early in Ty Lee's pregnancy, it still was a very nice feeling, I really couldn't wait until the baby was here.

However, a few days later something that would throw our nice and peaceful life a little off course again happened.

We were all sitting together in the tearoom that Iroh had set up in the palace when we suddenly heard the quite loud sound of wings flapping. Shortly afterwards a large white hawk landed on the edge of the window. I of course immediately knew that this was another message from the Assassin Monastery.

I stood up, walked to the window and unbuckled the scroll the hawk had carried from its leg whereupon it turned around and flew away again.

I looked at the scroll, it of course was sealed with the Order's sigil. I sat back down in my chair, opened the scroll, unrolled it and began to read:

Master Yulizan,

the tidings of your victory are spreading in the world. You have accomplished your mission, protected the Avatar in his task and restored peace in the world by the elimination of Fire Lord Ozai. Not many men can boast themselves with the accomplishment of such great deeds. The Grand Masters have taken counsel and decided that your deeds were of such great importance for the entire world that you have earned yourself the honor of being appointed Grand Master yourself. This will make you the youngest Grand Master in the history of our Order. Return to the monastery as soon as possible for that we can perform the ceremony.

May you walk in the shadows

Lao Zhu

After I had finished to read the scroll I rolled it up again and rested my head on my hand.
I was to be appointed the rank of Grand Master? At my age? It had never happened before that someone as young as me had received the honor of being allowed to call themselves Grand Master as Lao Zhu had mentioned in his message.

Normally the old rules of the Assassins required a member of the Order to honor the Codex throughout their entire life and to perform at least one act or deed that would be written down in the history books.

In fact, as I thought it through, I actually had achieved this already: During the four years in which I had been a member of the Assassin Order I had always honored the Codex one-hundred percent and I had played an essential role in ending the Hundred Year War by eliminating Ozai, a story that would be in all books from now on.

Therefore I actually deserved the right to be appointed Grand Master.

And I also realized that this was very good in regards to my future role as teacher of the Kyoshi Warriors because as a Grand Master I would have all the powers and authority within the Order which certainly would help me with the training of the Warriors.

My friends, who had been looking over my shoulder while I had been reading and probably had read along, were probably even more astonished than myself.

Zuko said: "Wow!"

Aang said: "What an honor!"

Katara said: "Incredible!"

But Ty Lee had the biggest reaction. She flung her arms around my neck and rejoiced: "That's wonderful! You're going to be a Grand Master!"

I hugged her back and said: "Yes, seemingly I am."

Sokka looked at me with a questioning look on his face and asked: "What's wrong? You look like you're not very happy about it."

"No! Of course I'm happy, I just still can't believe it. You all read it yourselves: Such a thing has never happened before in the history of the Assassins and our Order is several thousand years old already. I think it's a pretty big thing that such an honor is to be granted to someone like me."

"And what exactly are you going to do now?", Katara asked.

"What do you think? I will travel to the monastery and perform this ceremony."

"But I thought you wanted to travel to Kyoshi Island with me and the other Warriors to begin our training as soon as possible.", Suki interposed.

"One thing won't rule out the other, Suki."

I looked out the window, it was afternoon, the sun had already left its zenith position and stood a little more in the west now.

In my mind I thought through the best possible route from the Fire Nation capital to the monastery, then I said:
"If I set out with Pagan within the next hour, we probably will reach the monastery late in the evening. Including all the frills, the ceremony usually takes several hours. Therefore I think that it should take the entire following day. If Pagan and I then set out late in the evening again I think we should be back in the early morning of the next day."

I turned around again: "That means: Suki, tell the other Warriors that we will set out for Kyoshi Island in the morning of the day after tomorrow."

The leader nodded and said: "Understood, I'll go and look for them."

She stood up and left the room.

I now wanted to get ready for departure but as I was bidding goodbye to my friends, Toph asked me:

"Are we not allowed to come along? I mean, isn't such a ceremony usually some sort of big party, shouldn't friends and such be there as well?"

"That's usually true, Toph, but don't forget: We Assassins prefer to retain our anonymity. For this reason, all outsiders who aren't members of the Order are prohibited from entering the monastery. Especially during ceremonies like this since they always contain many secrets of the Order. I'm very sorry."

The young earth bender took it easy and answered casually:

"Oh well, but I still wish you a lot of fun anyway."

I however doubted that I would have "fun" at the ceremony.

I left the tearoom and proceeded into the room that had been assigned to me and Ty Lee.

In there I opened the chest in which I had stowed my equipment.

I got the robe and the arm blades out and put them on since one should at least wear these two compulsory equipment pieces when entering the monastery.

I smoothed down my robe, then left the room and the palace.

On the way out, Ty Lee joined up with me, she wanted to say goodbye to me.

When we arrived in the palace courtyard I whistled loudly and Pagan arrived shortly afterwards. We approached him after he had landed, I tapped one of his horns while Ty Lee petted his neck.

After that I put my arm around my girlfriend and kissed her tenderly for goodbye.

She said: "Take care of yourself."

"Don't worry, I won't be gone for long. But be ready for departure to the island when I come back. I don't want to arrive here and see that all the other warriors have to wait for you."

We laughed together, then I mounted my dragon friend.

I waved Ty Lee goodbye, then Pagan rose to the air.

There I said to him: "To the monastery!", whereupon the dragon began to fly towards the
We reached the monastery as night fell, as I had predicted.

Pagan landed in the courtyard, I dismounted the dragon and treaded towards the Great Hall.

Eventually I opened the door and saw the Grand Masters sitting in their usual spots at the end of the room.

I walked through the big wide hall until I had reached the Grand Masters.

I knelt down, Lao Zhau said: "Rise, Master Yulizan.", I did as I was told.

The Old Master continued: "You have received my message?"

"I have, Master. It is a great honor that you have decided to bestow me the rank of Grand Master."

"You have more than earned it, young Master, not just for what you have done for the Order but for the entire world."

"Thank you, Master. If you are alright with it, I would like the official ceremony to be held tomorrow, I want to lose as little time as possible, I already have other tasks coming up that will soon require my attention."

The old man nodded and said: "Of course. Go and rest now, a big day is waiting for you tomorrow."

I bowed to the Grand Masters, then left the building and returned to my old room in the tower.

As soon as I had stepped through the door, my eyes moved over to the chest in which my old equipment still was stored.

I thought for a moment if I should take one final look at it before tomorrow but then I remembered one of my father's many sayings:

"Let dark pasts rest, otherwise they will haunt you for all your life."

And the equipment in that chest was just that: Nothing but a dark memory of a dark past, of my old life before the defeat in Ba Sing Se, a memory I definitely didn't want to refresh.

Therefore I just took off my robe, lied down on my bed and fell asleep shortly thereafter.

The next morning I woke up very early since I of course knew what the traditions demanded of a prospective Grand Master.

I followed the steps one by one. First I went to the tailor shop to pick up the garments every Grand Master had to wear over his usual robe when he was appointed.

My garments were red, as usual for an Assassin from the Fire Nation, and embroidered with golden ornaments.

I took the fabrics and put them over my shoulders. I had to say that they definitely looked good on me.
The next step was to go into the Great Hall while the rest of the Order gathered in the big courtyard to do homage to the prospective Grand Master.

I had to wait until the other Grand Masters had prepared everything and called me, better said until the doors of the hall opened.

So I stood in the hall and waited. I didn't feel nervous since I knew how the whole procedure would pass off, I knew everything I need to know, everything would be normal and go well.

Eventually I heard Lao Zhu's voice calling from outside: "And now welcome him, brothers and sisters, the newest Grand Master of our order, Master Assassin Yulizan Huyan!"

The big door of the hall opened slowly, I took one last deep breath and stepped outside.

I immediately saw the sheer mass of Assassin recruits, novices, adepts and all other ranks, every single one of them had raised their fist to the sky.

I walked forward to the top of the stairs that led to the hall. There was a pompous chair which I sat down on, now I had the entire courtyard with all the Assassins in view.

Now the ceremony began. First a little crown adorned with the sigil of the Order was placed on my head.

Next I had to stretch out my hands. The tattoo of the Order's sigil, which I already had tattooed on my left ring finger since my appointment as Master, was now also being applied to the ring finger of the right hand. This was the first symbol of Grand Master status.

For the next step the sleeve of my left arm was rolled up, Lao Zhu asked:

"Master Yulizan, which Grand Master name have you chosen? I hope you have considered your choice well."

I nodded and said: "From this day on, I shall be known as ... the Tyrantslayer!"

Lao Zhu said: "A good choice."

The tattooist then began to perpetuate the characters on my arm.

Once that was done, the ceremony was almost over already.

Lao Zhu rose to speak again and said: "Brothers and sisters, it is done! Now honor him! Grand Master Yulizan Huyan, the Tyrantslayer! May the Spirits be with him!"

The crowd repeated the last sentence loudly.

I stood up and said: "Brothers and sisters, it is a great honor to bear the title of Grand Master from now on. And each and every one of you has the opportunity to one day stand here where I am standing. Just never forget one thing: Your life belongs to the Order, always adhere to the Codex, then the Spirits will reward you. To be an Assassin is more than honor, it is almost glorious! Never give up until you are victorious! Defend the Order and everything it stands for with your life! Cike de shengli! (Victory to the Assassins!)"

The crowd once again repeated the last sentence loudly.

Now the ceremony was almost completed, only the final step was still missing: The music that welcomed the new Grand Master in his position.
I had decided on a relatively well-known piece that I had always liked. It was called "The Rising Sun" and was played on the erhu, an old string instrument. I listened to the sounds that some of the adepts coaxed from the instruments.

When the music stopped, it was sealed. From this moment on I was a Grand Master of the Assassin Order! I would never have dreamed of reaching this position at such a young age but here I was!

However, the first task in my new position was immediately waiting for me, because in front of the chair I had been sitting on, a long line of Assassin recruits and novices had formed, all of whom wanted some pieces of advice from me.

Resigned but still smiling, I sat down again and let the mass come at me.

For the rest of the day I was busy answering questions and things like that. When it started to get dark I realized that Pagan and I would have to leave soon if we wanted to reach the capital in time for dawn.

I turned to the remaining Assassins and announced that I had to take my leave now. They were disappointed but still obeyed immediately.

"So this is how giving commands feels like...", I thought as I began to say goodbye to the rest of the Grand Masters.

That's when I remembered another important thing that I still had to do.

I visited the blacksmith's shop and placed a large order for special weapons with the craftsmen, the weapons the Kyoshi Warriors would need if they really wanted me to train them in the Assassin ways of fighting.

The craftsmen assured me that the required items would be ready tomorrow, I was more than satisfied with that.

I would send Pagan to pick up the order sometime during the day tomorrow while I would already start with the Warriors' basic training on the island.

I left the blacksmith's shop and again stepped out to the now completely deserted courtyard.

I whistled and Pagan landed shortly afterwards.

I mounted him and said: "Alright, let's go back home, my friend, we have a long journey ahead of us tomorrow."

Pagan, who of course knew what I was talking about, nodded and rose to the air.

Shortly thereafter we left the monastery behind and flew straight back towards the capital of the Fire Nation.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: The training begins
We flew all night, I used the time to sleep at least a little bit, I wanted to be one hundred percent ready when I would begin the training of the Warriors tomorrow.

In order to fall asleep faster I thought through all the important aspects and lessons that I planned to teach the Warriors over the course of the following time. And it worked, eventually, also supported by the fine breeze of wind caused by Pagan's flight, I closed my eyes.

The last thing I thought about was that tomorrow truly a new era would start. I would no longer be just the simple warrior who acted on behalf of the Order but now would be the Master, the Teacher, the Sensei myself.

I wondered if I would be able to fulfill this role just as well as my previous one but that was a question that only time could answer.

The first thing I saw when I woke up again was the slowly rising sun in the distance.

I sat up and thereupon saw that the capital was already visible again in the distance. This meant that my plan had worked and we had been able to meet the allotted time.

As we continued to draw closer and closer towards the city I eventually instructed Pagan to camouflage himself.

"But why?", the dragon asked.

"I came up with a little joke I'd like to play on the girls but for it to work they must not see us beforehand."

"And what kind of joke is it supposed to be?"

"Don't worry, nothing bad. But you also play a role in it. Later on, when we're about to land, you have to fly as slowly and carefully as possible because I'm going to stand up and I don't want to risk falling down and breaking my neck."

Pagan laughed and agreed. So that was settled, I would be able to translate my plan into action. Thereupon Pagan camouflaged himself and we flew on.

Shortly afterwards we reached the airspace above the palace. From up here I saw the Kyoshi Warriors who currently were in the process of gathering in the palace courtyard.

"Very good!", I thought to myself, "this means I can start right away! Pagan, begin with your landing, but as I said, slowly and with caution."

The dragon positioned himself so that he would land directly in the Warriors' field of vision.

I now stood up, took up my position on Pagan's head and started to pose like a figurehead as he revealed us and slowly began to sink towards the ground. I raised my hands to both sides, I wanted to look like some kind of divine apparition.
As Pagan continued to descend the girls finally began to notice us. I immediately saw the completely speechless expressions on their faces, especially on Ty Lee's.

I had to laugh after Pagan had landed and I jumped off his head.

Suki was the first to find her voice again, she asked: "What was that?"

I answered calmly: "Well, I thought I'd make an entrance worthy of a Grand Master."

Suki's and Ty Lee's eyes widened, Ty Lee asked full of hope: "So it worked out? You truly are a Grand Master now?"

I raised my hand and showed the girls my new tattoo: "Of course. You're looking at the brand new Yulizan who is now known as the Tyrantslayer!"

I rolled up my sleeve and also showed the girls the character tattoo that displayed my new Grand Master name, they were visibly impressed.

After that, I said: "OK, I think that's enough staring for now, it's time to get serious."

I turned to Suki: "Are all the Warriors ready for departure to the island?"

Suki nodded and answered: "We are ready. There's a ship waiting at the harbor that will take us directly to the island. What about you?"

"Pagan and I will follow the ship and then go ashore together with you guys."

"Alright then. Warriors! We are leaving!"

Thereupon Suki and the rest of the Warriors began to make their way to the harbor, only Ty Lee stayed behind.

"Are you waiting for something, sweetheart?"

"Oh, right, I haven't told you yet. Suki has allowed me to travel with you and Pagan instead of having to use that boring ship."

I smiled and kissed Ty Lee.

"That's my girl.", I said softly and Ty Lee grinned.

"Well then, let's set out.", I said and started to walk back to Pagan.

Ty Lee followed me and shortly afterwards we both sat on Pagan's neck together, Ty Lee once again behind me and with her arms wrapped around my midsection, just like during our escape from the Boiling Rock.

I said to Pagan: "Try to fly a little more carefully than usual, we can't risk to expose Ty Lee and the baby to too much stress!"

The dragon nodded and rose to the air with a lot of caution.

Our first destination was the harbor, we saw the ship with the remaining Warriors on board as it just left the bay.

I told Pagan to follow the ship at about the same speed, he obeyed.
This way we slowly but surely moved towards our new home.

A few hours later, when the sun was already high in the afternoon sky, I eventually spotted the characteristic features of Kyoshi Island in the distance.

It was rather amazing that my last visit to this place already dated back more than half a year, all the things that had happened during this time, it was just incredible!

I said to Ty Lee: "Have a look at our new home. This is the place where our little family will come into life."

Ty Lee replied: "I think there could not have been a better place."

I agreed with my love on this. The island actually was the perfect place to start a new life. Due to its remoteness from the mainland, it was nice, quiet and peaceful, the climatic conditions were temperate and the residents were friendly, best conditions for a young prospective family like us.

However, we could not forget that we weren't just here to live a calm and relaxed life, we had tasks to fulfill. But I was certain that one would go hand in hand with the other.

I now could see that the ship with the Warriors on board had landed in Kyoshi Bay in the meantime.

The Warriors disembarked and were solemnly received by the inhabitants of the main village.

That's when I knew that it was time for us to arrive as well.

I asked Ty Lee: "Ready to land?", she nodded.

I turned to Pagan: "Alright, my friend, bring us down there but be careful."

The dragon thereupon began to descend slowly until he eventually landed on the beach, right next to the group of Kyoshi Warriors.

The villagers were quite startled when Pagan touched the ground, understandable since they, like most people in the world, had never seen a real dragon before.

Suki addressed them: "Fear not, people, he will not hurt you."

Although the villagers seemed a little more reassured after Suki's words, I still wouldn't have called their condition actually calm yet.

Ty Lee and I dismounted Pagan, Ty Lee joined the other Warriors, I walked up to Suki and positioned myself next to her.

She began to speak again: "Residents of Kyoshi Island! This is Yulizan Huyan, a great warrior. He will train the Warriors of Kyoshi from now on and therefore will live with us on the island from now on. We can trust him."

I bowed to the crowd and now began to speak myself: "It is a great honor for me to call this island my home from now on. I hereby vow to obey and respect the laws and traditions of Kyoshi Island. The Warriors of Kyoshi will be under my orders and protection from now on, I will continue their training so that they can continue to protect the island from danger."

I beckoned for Pagan who immediately took a few steps towards me, the crowd anxiously backed
off a few paces.

I said: "This is Pagan. He is my dragon, my transporter, my best friend. You don't have to be afraid, he's peaceful, I've raised him myself."

After my last words, the villagers' tension finally drained away, they seemed to accept me and Pagan.

An old man with a big thick beard now stepped out from the crowd.

He bowed to me and said: "Greetings, young master Yulizan. I am Oyaji, the chieftain of this village. I am pleased to meet you."

I bowed as well and said: "The pleasure is all mine, Oyaji."

The old man continued: "If you do not mind, I would like to talk with you in private for a little, I would like to know more about you."

"But of course."

I turned to Suki: "Go ahead and prepare everything, I'll come and join you as soon as I can."

Suki nodded and then instructed the other Warriors to go to the shrine of Kyoshi, the group's headquarters.

To Pagan I said: "Fly around for a bit and make yourself familiar with the area. But no heroics, you know what I mean by that!"

Pagan nodded and rose to the air, the villagers gazed after him in amazement.

I now turned back to Oyaji and eventually followed the old man to his hut in the village.

After we had arrived in the old man's hut he wanted to know more about me as he had already said.

I considered him trustworthy and therefore told him the entire story of my life: The death of my family, my affiliation to the Assassin Order, my adventures with Team Avatar and everything else.

I eventually concluded my story by explaining the reasons for me being here:

"Suki then asked me to become the new teacher of the Warriors because she thought that my Assassin skills could prove useful to the Warriors as well. And so here I am now."

The old man had listened attentively and repeatedly asked questions from time to time, now he said:

"Well, that is a really eventful life that you have led, Grand Master Yulizan. You have done many things that some people would undoubtedly consider cruel but you nevertheless are a truly honorable young man. I am certain that you will make formidable fighters out of the girls."

"Thank you very much, Oyaji, for being this understanding."

"That goes without saying, my boy. I know from experience that every person has their pitfalls, no matter of what kind. But to get on to another topic: How and where exactly did you imagine to live here on the island?"
"Well, Suki mentioned something about a big empty house on the outskirts of the village. I had hoped to move into this house together with Ty Lee, especially with regard to our child."

"Of course. To be honest, that would have been the option I would have suggested to you myself. Alright then, the house is yours."

The old man stood up and got a key out from a cabinet.

He handed it to me and said: "To a hopefully long and good living together."

"Thank you very much. But now I have to go, the Warriors are probably already waiting for me."

The old man nodded and let me leave.

I left the hut and started to make my way to the Shrine of Kyoshi.

For that I had to pass the harbor again but that was actually quite convenient for me.

I whistled and Pagan landed next to me only seconds later.

I said to him: "OK, my friend, I think the time has come. Please fly to the monastery and pick up the weapon shipment I ordered. The blacksmith should wait for you in the courtyard. Oh, and make sure that he gets this."

I got a scroll out from my own bag and put it into Pagan's neck bag.

The dragon asked: "What's that?"

"Just a list of things from my room in the monastery's tower which you also have to pick up. Make sure the blacksmith receives the list and packs up all the things together with the weapons."

Pagan nodded and set off.

I looked after him for a short moment, then I continued my way towards the shrine.

Shortly afterwards I reached the forest and the shrine within it.

It was a larger wooden building, richly decorated with carvings and other ornaments.

"This really is a suitable place for a training of this kind.", I thought to myself while I walked towards the door and eventually pushed it open.

Inside were Suki, Ty Lee and the other eight warriors who were part of this group.

They were practicing all sorts of techniques they already knew, I said in a loud voice: "Girls!", whereupon all of them fell silent and stopped their current activities.

I continued: "It is time to begin with your training."

The girls immediately understood and knelt down in several rows throughout the entire room.

I treaded through the rows until I reached the front end of the room, just in front of the actual shrine of Avatar Kyoshi.

I looked at the girls, they all knelt with their hands on their thighs and looked down, a good sign, they already showed me the due respect.
I folded my hands behind my back and began to pace up and down while speaking in a low but very authoritarian voice:

"Warriors of Kyoshi, you have chosen me, a Grand Master of the Order of the Assassins, to instruct you in the arts of the Assassins. Your choice was ... wise. We Assassins know secrets and techniques that no one else has even heard of. You know how battle four opponents, I will teach you how to fight forty! You can hide and disappear, I will show you how to become invisible! You will be let in on these secrets but first we need to clarify some things: By choosing me to be your teacher, you make a pact with the Assassins. The prize for me training you is high: You must commit yourself to obey and honor the rules and the Codex of the Assassin Order at all times."

I got a scroll out from my bag, unrolled it, rammed a throwing knife into one of the shrine's wooden pillars and hung the scroll, which displayed the Codex of the Assassins, up on it.

I proceeded: "The Codex is the law of the Assassins! Those who don't honor or disobey it sin against the Spirits and are condemned to burn in hell forever!"

The Warriors all swallowed heavily but maintained their posture.

I now began to recite the Codex while still pacing up and down:

"The First Commandment: Honor the Order! Bringing shame and dishonor, no matter of which kind, on the Order is the greatest sin an Assassin can commit! The Order is the sanctuary, the Assassin devotes himself to the Order and gives his life for it!"

"The Second Commandment: Follow the instructions of your master! He outranks you, you have to follow every single one of his commands! Any kind of refusal is considered a violation of honor and therefore a sin!"

"The Third Commandment: The Assassins are not subject to anyone except the Avatar! He is the greatest and highest peacekeeper, his word is law! If you meet the Avatar, he or she is to be treated with the utmost respect, every single one of his words must be obeyed!"

"The Fourth Commandment: Never harm an Assassin brother or an Assassin sister in any way! Do not steal from them, do not wound them, do not kill them, unless your master commands you to do so!"

"The Fifth Commandment: An Assassin knows no morality! Do not be afraid to kill an opponent when you get into a fight! The honor and anonymity of the Order takes top priority! If an outsider you cannot trust learns of your affiliation, he is to be eliminated immediately, without any exceptions!"

"The Sixth Commandment: Stay hidden for as long as possible! Do not show yourself before the act, otherwise you provide your opponent with too much knowledge and information about yourself and this leads to defeat! An Assassin does not rush into combat like a stubborn ox when the mission is achievable in a discreet way!"

"The Seventh, the last and most important Commandment: The Assassins have only one goal: Peace, in all things! Who does not strive for this goal, but instead simply abuses the Order for other purposes, is a traitor!"

The Kyoshi Warriors had listened to me attentively and took my words in.

"As you can see, these commandments differ the Assassins from other groups. We have something that many do not have anymore these days: Honor! If I am to train you, you must take the honor
and turn it into your strength! You must always keep the Codex in your mind! Is that clear?"

The Warriors all answered: "Yes, sensei!"

"Good. Now, to seal your bond with the Order, repeat after me":

"Zhiyou heping he rongyu, zhenli he daode shi huanxiang! The Codex unfolds in these words! Where others are blinded by ideals and opinions, always remember: There is only peace and honor! Where others are restricted by laws and rules, never forget: Truth and morality are illusions! We walk in the shadows to bring light into the world! We are Assassins!"

The Kyoshi Warriors repeated my words.

I said: "Rise, Warriors of Kyoshi, and welcome your new life!"

The Warriors stood up, Suki asked: "Alright, we went through with the ceremony but when does the training begin?"

"The ceremony already was the first part of your training, Suki, you now are familiar with the Assassin philosophy and ready to learn practical techniques."

At this moment I heard the sound of wings flapping from outside the shrine.

"Ah, that must be Pagan. Wait here, I'll be right back."

I stepped out of the shrine and saw my dragon friend landing only one second later, he had several sacks strapped around his neck.

I took the sacks which contained the weapons I had ordered in the monastery's blacksmith's shop from him and said:

"Thank you, my friend, please bring the other sacks to our new house, I will take care of them this evening."

Thereupon Pagan flew away again and I returned into the shrine with the sacks.

I put them down on the floor, Suki asked: "What's in there?"

"The foundation of your training."

The Warriors stared at me in surprise, I explained: "How do you want to learn combat techniques without the fitting weapons? I have had some new weapons made especially for your needs and abilities by the blacksmiths of the Assassin Monastery."

I opened the first sack, it contained several little crossbows, similar to my own old one.

I explained: "Assassins must always be able to defend themselves both in close and ranged combat. These crossbows are easy to use and transport, you shouldn't have much of a problem with them. In addition, there's also a quiver with bolts for each crossbow. Try to collect the bolts again after firing them whenever it's possible."

The Warriors nodded and all took a crossbow.

I opened the next sack, it contained the Assassins' signature weapon: The arm blades.

I handed every warrior her pair and they put them on.
Ty Lee inspected the vambrace on which the blade was attached from every side and then asked: "And how exactly does this work?"

I explained: "You have to hold your fingers like this and then flex your hand and wrist with a jerky movement, like this."

I showed it to the Warriors, they tried it themselves and after a couple of tries they all managed to do it, which left me satisfied.

Now it was the last sack's turn, it also was perhaps the most important one.

I opened it, took out one of the weapons and was satisfied when I saw that they were exactly how I had ordered them.

The Kyoshi Warriors looked at the object in my hand with astonishment: It was a fan, just like the ones they had always used.

However, there was a big difference: I swung open the fan and then pressed a small button. A soft click sound was heard and blades sprang out of the top end of the weapon.

The girls were visibly impressed, I said: "I knew that the fan is your preferred weapon. That's why I allowed myself to upgrade it a little bit. With these little companions by your side you will emerge victorious from every battle."

The Warriors enthusiastically took the fans, now every weapon had found a new owner.

I said: "Well then, let's begin with the training."

I spent the rest of the day teaching the Warriors the simple basic movements and attacks with fan, arm blades and sword.

I have to say that I was positively surprised, they really were learning fast.

As the day slowly began to come to an end, the sun was pretty close to the western horizon already, I said:

"Alright girls, that's it for today. From now on we will start to train every morning once the sun has completely risen, understood?"

"Understood!", all Warriors replied with one voice.

Thereupon the shrine gradually emptied, I waited for Ty Lee to take off her armor, then we walked to our new house together.

It was sitting on a large grassy area, a little secluded from the main village, just like Suki and Oyaji had described it to me.

It had a direct view onto the sea, the ways to both the shrine and the village were fairly short.

You could say that the house was part of the village but still had a very nice private feeling to it.

Next to the door were the other sacks Pagan had picked up from the monastery, mostly books, tools for my weapons and other little things.

I carried the sacks into the house and placed all the items in appropriate rooms and places.
While I was doing that I was also able to get a closer and better look at the house, especially from the inside. It was furnished very nicely and had many rooms, we definitely wouldn't have any lack of space even after the birth of our child.

While I was busy putting away all my stuff, Ty Lee prepared a small dinner for the two of us.

We ate together and thought about the good times that lied ahead of us before eventually going to bed some time later.

Ty Lee was lying with her back to me which allowed me to cuddle up to her from behind and put my arm over her belly, it was a wonderful feeling.

Just before I fell asleep my hand moved over to Ty Lee's lower belly where I was actually able to feel the tiny bump that had already formed there.

With the thought in mind that my hand was literally resting on top of my child, as if I wanted to protect it from harm, the sleep eventually overwhelmed me.

I dreamed of how I was holding our newborn child in my arms, how we were a happy little family.

My life was simply wonderful and I would not let anyone take it away from me anymore!

But unfortunately I found out some time later that unfortunately not everything in life could always be perfect.

An Assassin would never be able to rest, there always would be problems that would require his attention.

But no matter what would happen, I would face the danger and protect my family, my everything, with my life!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: The Lady of the Water
Over the course of the next few months our new life was quite pleasant.

I continued to train the Kyoshi Warriors, consistently teaching them new and more difficult techniques.

From time to time they headed out for missions on the mainland, I usually used those periods to devote myself to my scrolls.

I began to write down the knowledge I had accumulated over the course of my life to preserve it for my descendants so that the line of Assassins in my family wouldn't die out eventually.

Ty Lee's pregnancy also continued to go well, her belly grew steadily but actually stayed smaller than I had originally imagined.

Because of this she continued to go on missions with the other Warriors, the pregnancy still wasn't really limiting her yet, however I still always told her to take special care of herself and not do anything that could harm her or the baby.

She promised it to me over and over again but I knew her too well by now, I knew that she probably would still perform her risky maneuvers if the circumstances so required.

After all, she simply was a large bundle of energy that was hard to stop but that had also been the reason why I had fallen in love with her in the first place, which is why I always brought myself to turn a blind eye to it.

Pagan enjoyed his freedom as well, he now was flying through the skies around the island almost permanently but still was useful doing that because he kept in touch with our friends on the mainland and always provided us with news and information.

In addition to my activities in writing I also spent a lot of time with either meditation, playing my mandolin or training myself, because even though I basically had planned to retire from my position as an active Assassin after moving to Kyoshi Island I still wanted to stay in shape since it could always happen that I needed to go on a mission myself again.

And this actually happened earlier than I had thought.

The Warriors were busy studying a particularly complex technique that I had assigned them, which is why I decided to stretch my legs for a bit.

I left the shrine and started to make my way to the harbor, to get a breath of fresh sea air.

When I arrived there, the cargo ship of Duzhan, a merchant well-known on the island, was just
landing. He came by regularly to bring supplies and other goods that normally weren't available on Kyoshi Island.

I had become good friends with him over time, mainly because I could talk a lot about seafaring with him and show off the knowledge from my grandfather that I had memorized over the years.

He was instructing a couple of sailors to unload some crates from the ship when I approached and greeted him:

"Hello Duzhan, good to see you."

The middle-aged man turned around, I saw his friendly face on which wind and weather had left their mark over the years, and greeted back:

"Hello Yulizan. So, how's the training going?"

"Pretty good, the girls are great students, they follow my instructions without protest and they learn really fast."

"Good to hear."

"What about you? What's new at sea?"

"Well, the oceans are peaceful, like always since the end of the war, but there's this pretty crazy story from the Earth Kingdom."

I perked up my ears: "What story?"

The sailor took off his hat and scratched the back of his head for a moment, then he began to tell: "Well, you surely know the Lan He, right?"

"The Blue River? Of course. What about it?"

"For some weeks now, strange things have happened at a certain river bend. Several ships have either sunk or disappeared completely without anyone having any idea where to. Last week there was an instance where a fishing boat was found wrecked on the rocks on the riverbank. The crew was lying on the riverside in their own blood, completely massacred. Throats and guts slashed, eyes gouged out, stuff like that."

I gulped, that really sounded awful.

"And no one really has any idea who or what could be behind this?"

"Well, there's one small potential clue. One poor devil of the slaughtered crew actually did survive the whole thing. He fell overboard after he had drunk too much before the ship ran aground. He told of being almost scared to death by a mysterious apparition that apparently destroyed the ship and killed the men. We're not sure however if that was just his imagination running wild during the drunkenness."

I had listened attentively and eventually asked: "Is there any chance I could talk to this sailor?"

"You're in luck, he signed up for my ship after that experience, he thinks the sea is now safer than any river. I'll take you to him, come with me."

I followed Duzhan onto his ship and eventually under deck into one of the cargo holds where his crew was busy unloading more crates and other cargo.
Duzhan led me to a younger sailor, I estimated him to be around ten years older than myself.

Duzhan called: "Hey, Jigu!"

The young man turned around and asked: "What is it, captain?"

"My friend Yulizan here would like to talk to you about how you witnessed the sinking of your old ship."

I added: "Only if you agree of course."

Jigu visibly struggled with himself but then he began to tell:

"Well, what can I say? It's all still pretty blurry in my mind but I'm quite sure that it was a woman who caused the disaster. But she seemed so ... different, she didn't walk, it looked like she was floating, the water of the river seemed to obey her without her actually bending it. She grasped the ship with a huge wave and hurled it onto the reef, the force of the impact threw my comrades ashore. I don't know what exactly happened then, I only heard loud cries of pain and noises that sounded like drowning, their deaths must have been really agonizing."

"Do you happen to remember what that woman looked like?"

"As I said, the image is still very blurry in my head but I think she had fair hair in which however there was some seaweed or the likes. Her clothing was bluish-gray as if it was made of water. Oh, and she sang."

"And how did this singing sound?"

"It was an eerie voice, like when the wind whistles through cracks in a ship's hull. I couldn't understand her exact words however, sorry."

I encouragingly clapped the sailor on the shoulder and said: "Thank you, Jigu, you helped me a lot."

Thereupon the sailor returned to his work while Duzhan and I left the interior of the ship again.

When we were back on the deck I said to Duzhan: "I have a hunch who or better said what could be behind this whole thing. But I have to do some more research before I can be completely sure. I'll let you know when I got something solid. You're going to stay here for the rest of the day as usual, right?"

"Of course, the unloading will take a few more hours."

"Alright then, see you later."

I quickly left the ship and the harbor and made my way home. Even though I originally had wanted to relax for a bit, now I just could not stop thinking about this story, I sensed that it was a pretty big thing.

Once I had arrived in the house I immediately went into my study in which all sorts of books and scrolls were piled all over the room.

I searched for one specific book in one of the piles and eventually found it relatively quickly. I blew the dust away and read the cover: "Demons and legendary figures of the known world"
The book was subdivided into the individual elements, I searched for the chapter about water and then flipped through the pages.

After a short while I had found what I had been looking for and my hunch proved true: The description of the creature that had attacked the ships on the Blue River matched almost exactly with the fabled legendary figure that was called the River Queen.

The article in the book described it as follows:

"The River Queen. Some think of her as the ghost of a young woman who once drowned in the Blue River but most studies now assume that it is a water demon that attacks passing ships because it sees its realm threatened.

The actual form is unrecorded so far, according to some unconfirmed sailor stories the River Queen, in its true form, is a hybrid between human, dragon and fish, endowed with razor-sharp teeth and claws.

To most people however, she appears as a beautiful young woman with flowing blond hair with a few tussocks of seaweed hanging from it.

She has often been described as a powerful water bender, allegedly the entire Blue River is under her control.

A traveling scholar, who once allegedly saw the River Queen with his own eyes, composed a poem about the mystical creature:

Merrily we sailed along

Though the waves were plenty strong

Down the twisting Blue River

Following a voice

Oh, the legends we were told

They called her Nuwang

Oh, you would not believe

How her voice can seduce

But her promises are only lies

Dress of silver water, seashell in her hand

All the fish become her throne

The winds will cry

Many men will die

And all the waves will bow down

To her, the River Queen!
Despite the obvious dangers, certain people have repeatedly tried to deliberately meet the River Queen, to do homage to her or to offer her sacrifices.

One of these reports states that the River Queen will appear when one places a gold coin in a shell and then launches it into the river.

Neither this story nor the definite existence of the River Queen have been clearly proven to this day."

"Well, now there is some clear proof.", I said to myself as I closed the book and put it away again.

After that, I sat back in my chair and continued to think.

If this River Queen really did exist and she really was a demon, then my Assassin honor demanded that I would need to find and destroy her.

Also, if she really existed, she was a danger to innocent people; if it was true what Duzhan and Jigu had said about the massacred sailors, it was imperative that this creature was killed.

Therefore I decided that I would travel to the Lan He the following day and try to find and kill this River Queen.

I left the house again and returned to the harbor.

I had found Duzhan again pretty quickly and told him about my research.

He was quite skeptical when I told him about my plan: "If I were you, I'd tread warily. Demons aren't exactly fellows to be trifled with."

"Don't worry, Duzhan. First, this isn't the first demon I'm dealing with, and second, I've killed the Fire Lord, what's the worst that could happen?"

"Yeah, of course. But still, promise me that you'll take care of yourself."

"But of course."

I said goodbye to the sailor and then returned to the Shrine of Kyoshi. The warriors were still occupied with their exercise but their movements already looked much better and smoother than before.

I said loudly: "Alright, girls, that's enough. We finish a little earlier today."

Most of the Warriors were happy but Suki and Ty Lee asked: "Why?"

"Well, I want to go to bed early this evening because tomorrow I'm going to go on a mission."

"What kind of mission?"

"Well, there's a place in the Earth Kingdom where a demon is most likely living. I'll go there, take a closer look and destroy the demon if necessary."

The two immediately said: "Let us come with you! We can help you surely!"

But I immediately stopped them with a wave of my hand: "Absolutely not! It's not easy to deal with demons. You've only been in training for just over half a year, one needs at least the abilities of a master against a demon."
"But we've already made so much progress and..."

"I will go alone and that's that! The second commandment! Follow the instructions of your master! You stay here and continue your training, are we clear?"

"Yes, sensei.", the leader and my girlfriend replied disappointed.

I of course knew that they just wanted to help me but I just couldn't and didn't want to endanger them, especially not Ty Lee.

Later this evening, I once again performed my now almost obligatory listening on Ty Lee's belly.

For some time now I've been feeling more and more light kicks, the baby was definitely developing well.

I said jokingly: "With kicks like this it'll certainly be just as good a fighter as both of us."

Ty Lee and I laughed heartily and kissed before we eventually went to bed a little later.

The next morning we got up together and had breakfast.

After that, Ty Lee left the house and made her way to the shrine to continue her training along with the other warriors while I went into my study and opened the wardrobe in which I had stowed away my equipment.

I gently stroked the fabric of my robe with my hand, I actually had missed the feeling of it to be honest; my everyday clothes which I wore since moving to the island had never really given me this true sense of strength and security.

I slipped into the robe and then buckled on my weapons. The feeling was quite magnificent, it really felt great to move into gear again after all this time.

I checked one last time if I had everything important with me, then I left the house.

Outside I whistled loudly and shortly afterwards Pagan landed in front of me.

I said: "Good morning, my friend. Rejoice, we're going on a mission today!"

Pagan's eyes widened: "Oh, very nice! And where exactly are we going?"

"To the Earth Kingdom, more precisely to the Lan He. There we need to look for a particularly distinctive river bend with a large rocky reef."

Pagan nodded, lowered his head so that I could climb onto him and then rose to the air.

I hadn't flown on the dragon for such a long time that I actually struggled a little to keep my balance on his scaly neck at first but in the end everything went well and we began to make our way towards the Earth Kingdom.

A few hours later, when the midday sun was already high in the sky, we reached the Lan He.

It was a wide and torrential river, perfect conditions for shipping.

At some distance I eventually discovered the ominous reef on which there were still remnants of
various fishing boats slowly rotting away.

So here it had happened, but how could I seek out this infamous River Queen now?

Wait, what had that been in the book again? One should put a gold coin in a shell and then launch it into the river.

"It usually costs nothing to try but this time a gold coin goes on it.", I thought to myself jokingly as I got a coin out from my pocket and started to search for a shell on the shore, eventually finding one in the right size.

I put the piece of gold in and gently placed the shell on the water surface.

The little "ship" slowly but surely swam to the middle of the river and then along the current.

But then something strange happened: Suddenly the shell sank into the floods and the water at that spot began to vibrate strongly and cause ripples which eventually got stronger and stronger until a large portion of the river was bubbling heavily.

I drew one of my katanas, unsure of what would happen now.

The bubbling continued to grow stronger until eventually a large spout of water shot out of the river.

I raised my arm and held it in front of my face to not get any water in my eyes.

When I lowered my arm again, I saw her: She seemed to hover above the water surface, her loose blue dress seemed to be one with the river, the long blonde hair fell onto her shoulders in dense curls. In her right hand, she held the same shell I had put the gold coin into and looked at it with her sea-blue eyes.

Shortly afterwards her eyes wandered over to me, she smiled gently and said:

"Well hello there. Did you summon me?"

I answered determinedly: "That depends. Are you the River Queen?"

"That's what the humans call me, my real name is Nuwang."

"Well then, Nuwang, I have heard that apparently you are responsible for the numerous calamities with the ships on this part of the river."

The woman giggled softly and created a bridge out of water which she used to come to shore.

She walked towards me, I held my katana up in front of me to keep her at distance, I was still unsure what exactly was approaching me here.

Pagan also seemed to feel that something was odd since he moved a little closer towards me and uttered a little growl towards the mysterious female.

The woman said lowly: "Oh, my dear boy. Don't believe everything that people tell you. Look at me, how could a young pretty woman like me perform such misdeeds?"

I felt my heartbeat quicken as I answered: "You are ... a demon! That's why ... you have such great ... power."
I didn't know why I suddenly started to stutter but somehow something in the woman's voice had taken possession of me.

She giggled again and said: "Who has told you that? Also the bad people? Like I said, do not believe everything they tell you. However, you can believe me when I tell you: Let me free you, here with me you can relax, just let yourself ... fall."

Without me having any influence on it I lowered my katana whereupon the woman came even closer and touched my face with her water-like fingers.

I heard Pagan say: "Yulizan, what are you doing?", but my mind wasn't able to process the words correctly, I was like hypnotized by the woman in front of me.

"See? That wasn't so hard, was it? Only a little more, then you are completely relaxed."

My body wanted to relax, like she was telling me, but then my iron will finally managed to break the spell. Suddenly I was able to hear my thoughts clearly again, they practically screamed inside my head:

"Wake up! Come on! She's seducing you so that she can kill and gut you like she did with all those sailors! Fight it off! Kill the witch!"

I shook my head, my vision suddenly became clear again as well, I saw the River Queen mere inches in front of my face.

I pushed her away and said: "Nice try, but you'll have to do better than that to break the mind of an Assassin!"

The River Queen walked away, turned her back to me and said: "Hmm, too bad. I had hoped that you would play along nice and peacefully, but if you want it that way..."

Suddenly the figure changed: The young woman suddenly turned into a strange terrible-looking creature with piercing blue eyes, sharp teeth and sharp claws on her fingers.

"...then you will get it this way!"

Her voice had also changed, it now was screeching and shrill, so this was the true form of the River Queen.

I raised my katana again and stormed into the fight!

Pagan, who had been equally as shocked when he saw the demon's true form, uttered a loud roar and spread out his wings, ready for battle as well!

I lunged out and tried to hit the River Queen with many quick blows but she dodged every single one of them with the speed of the torrential river behind her; despite the fact that she was ashore now she still definitely had a very strong connection to the river.

As none of my attacks hit their target, the demon tried to counter with a couple of cuts of her claws which I was able to dodge quite easily.

However, it soon became clear to me that in the long run I could probably not do very much more with my ordinary weapons to try and kill the demon, which is why I eventually decided to resort to the apparently more reliable method: Fire bending!
Pagan seemed to have read my mind because he also now started to breathe several jets of fire towards the River Queen.

But the demon wasn't stupid, because as soon as we had hurled our first bursts of fire at her she bent water from the river, formed it into a giant wave and sent it directly towards us!

I was able to jump out of the way at the last second, but Pagan with his large body had no chance to react, the wave hit him with full force!

"Pagan!", I called, not able to see the dragon because of the enormous mass of water that was in place of where he had been only seconds before.

Thankfully the water ran off a few seconds later and Pagan reappeared, but something quite bad had happened to him: His snout and the tips of his wings were chained to the ground with big shackles made out of solid ice, he was practically immobile! And no matter how hard he tried, he wasn't able to break the shackles, the River Queen really had to be a very powerful water bender.

I knew that Pagan probably wouldn't be of any help in this fight anymore, since even though I probably would have been able to melt his shackles with my fire bending, I just didn't have the time for it, I had to stay focused on the demon.

Said demon now made the next attack, she got water from the river, formed it into several blades and tried to cut me with them, I visibly struggled to avoid the blades and destroy them with fire if necessary.

The fight continued for quite a while and was very evenly-matched, none of us managed to gain a clear advantage, until the decisive moment shortly thereafter:

I stormed towards the River Queen, my fists engulfed in flames, but suddenly the terrible demon had disappeared, instead there was the beautiful young woman again.

She begged: "Please no!"

I was taken aback by this twist so much that for several seconds I didn't pay any attention to what was happening around me.

It was not until I suddenly felt an incredibly sharp pain below my chest that I awoke from my rigidity.

I looked down, distorted with pain, and saw that there was an object sticking just below my left breast.

I grabbed it and pulled it out, it was a dagger that seemed to be made entirely of water, it had stuck in my body to the hilt.

I threw the strange weapon to the ground, it dissolved back into fluid water.

While I had done that I had already pressed my other hand to the wound from which blood was constantly pouring out now.

The pain was so intense that I wasn't able to keep myself on my feet anymore.

I sank to my knees and saw the River Queen, she was standing a few meters in front of me and had a diabolical grin on her now again-ugly face:
"Tough luck, boy! No man can defeat me!"

"Well, then it's good that we're not men!", I suddenly heard somebody say loudly.

I knew that voice only too well, it was Suki!

However, I didn't have any time to think about it, because only seconds later I felt sick and dropped completely to the ground, my world went dark.

The next thing I perceived was the voice of Ty Lee.

"Yulizan! Can you hear me?"

I opened my eyes and carefully looked around: I was lying in a bed again, it was our bed in our house on Kyoshi Island.

Wait, how had I gotten here?

I saw Ty Lee, Suki and an older woman, the healer of Kyoshi Village.

She said: "Careful, my boy, your injury is quite severe."

I finally found my voice again: "Injury? What happened?"

Suki answered: "Well, we had a bad feeling when you left on your own, therefore we secretly followed you. We arrived at the river at the same moment that witch stabbed you with that strange dagger. We of course immediately attacked and eventually managed to kill her. Then we took you and brought you back to island as fast as possible. Zheyi here took care of your wound, she says you were very lucky, it was a pretty deep cut that only narrowly missed your lung."

The old healer nodded and said: "However, the cut also seems to have released some kind of poison into your body. It had spread in your bloodstream quite a bit already but I have given you a special herbal tea that should expel it over time. You should get some rest and not exert yourself over the next couple of weeks, then everything should heal normally."

That was quite a lot of information at once, but right now I was just happy to be still alive.

I turned to Suki: "You know that you have disobeyed my orders by following me to my mission."

Suki looked to the ground with an ashamed face.

I continued: "But since you actually saved my life this way, I will condone it this time."

The leader's face lit up again, she smiled and said to the healer:

"Leave the important medicine here with him and then come with me, I think the two want to be alone."

The old woman nodded, left a few bowls on the small table next to the bed and then followed Suki out of the room.

Ty Lee waited for the door to close, then she took off her Kyoshi armor.

As soon as that was done, she crawled into the bed, snuggled up to me and whispered:
"I will make sure that you get better as quick as possible."

She kissed me gently, I returned the kiss.

Her closeness and warmth did wonders, I quickly became very relaxed.

As we lied there, my thoughts wandered over the events of the day.

I had been very seriously injured by an opponent for the first time in my Assassin career, I owed my life to the Kyoshi Warriors.

I touched the spot where the River Queen's dagger had cut me with my free hand, a thick bandage had been put on the wound.

And the Warriors of Kyoshi had really managed to kill the water demon...

That's when I realized that I perhaps should have had more trust in them.

Maybe it was still a long way to go for them to reach the level of master individually, but apparently they were already very efficient as a group.

I decided to send them on missions from now on that I previously had considered to be too difficult for them.

With a good sense of security for the future I fell asleep in Ty Lee's embrace shortly afterwards.

But I should experience that I eventually would regret my decision to let the warriors go on missions alone...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: A new family member
After my rather unsuccessful encounter with the River Queen our lives gradually returned to their usual course.

The injury put me out of action for a good three weeks; when everything finally was healed and I felt completely fit again, I finally continued the training of the Kyoshi Warriors.

The events surrounding my injury had shown me that I really had underestimated them until now, so for the next few months I was busy teaching them the quite difficult expert exercises and after a few initial difficulties they eventually had no real problems anymore with those as well.

Ty Lee liked to joke around and always tried to sneak up on me unnoticed and then scare me in the evening after a day of sneaking training but it almost never worked, I simply was too experienced.

Her pregnancy also continued to proceed without any problems and slowly but surely approached the exciting phase, her belly was clearly visible by now but still quite small considering that she was already in the ninth and therefore last month.

I knew that the birth wouldn't be long in coming, soon it was time, soon I would finally be able to hold my child in my arms!

Three months after my encounter with the River Queen, on a nice and friendly spring day, I watched the Kyoshi Warriors as they practiced various acrobatics exercises.

Despite her big belly, Ty Lee was still the best when it came to climbing or jumping between wooden pillars.

Although I had repeatedly expressed my skepticism that this type of exercise, especially in her current condition near the end of the pregnancy, couldn't really be that good for the child and its health, especially because she often hung upside down, she assured me again and again that the baby was fine and she knew what she was doing. I trusted her but a little uncertainty remained.

As I sat there on the wooden steps in front of the shrine and carved on a piece of wood with one of my daggers, I suddenly heard the call of a hawk.

I looked up from my work and soon discovered the source of the sound in the sky. It really was a hawk and it came right up to me.

I reached out my arm and the bird landed on it gently, it had a normal brown-colored plumage, so this was no message from the Order. Therefore it probably was a request for help from somewhere on the mainland, addressed to the Kyoshi Warriors.

I unbuckled the scroll from the hawk and then raised my arm a bit, the signal for the bird to fly
away again which it did one second later.

I unrolled the scroll and read it; I had been right, it was a request for help. The Kyoshi Warriors were asked by a former inhabitant of the island who now lived on the mainland in the Earth Kingdom to come to his village and settle a large-scale dispute between two hostile families to restore the peace in the village.

I nodded and rolled the scroll up again, the Warriors had received several of these kind of messages over the last few months, it was something that one really didn't need to shout from the rooftops, they probably wouldn't even need their newly-learned Assassin abilities.

I stood up and walked over to the training warriors. Just as I had reached them, Suki jumped off one of the wooden pillars and landed in front of me using the Assassin landing technique, one hand on the ground, the other one stretched out to the side.

I held the scroll out to her and said: "This just arrived, another small mission from the looks of it."

Suki took the scroll, read it as well, nodded shortly afterwards and said: "Yeah, I'm sure this won't take long."

She looked up to the sky, I followed her gaze, I knew that she was checking the position of the sun. It was still midmorning, the sun had yet to unfold its full power.

Suki thought for a moment and said: "The village we have to go to isn't far from the island's nearest mainland jetty. If we leave within the next hour we should reach the village around noon. Depending on how the mission goes we can set out again in the early afternoon and then be back here in the evening."

I nodded and said: "Then I would suggest that you set out as soon as possible, one should never waste more time than necessary on a small mission like this one."

"What did I just hear? A new mission?", Ty Lee chirped as she came up to us.

Suki explained the situation to her after which Ty Lee said ambitiously: "Well, then what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

But I had doubts. I grabbed Ty Lee by the shoulders and said: "Ty Lee, honey, are you sure you want to go? I'm honestly concerned. Don't forget, you're at the very end of your pregnancy. What if anything happens while you're gone? You would be nothing but a hindrance for your comrades."

Ty Lee grabbed my hands, removed them from her shoulders and said: "Yulizan, I've told you so many times before, the baby and I are fine, it's not quite time yet. Believe me, I would know it if I was no longer able to go on a mission. Trust me, nothing will happen to me or the baby, I promise."

I first looked at our hands, then into Ty Lee's eyes, in which, in addition to her sweet and bubbly energy, I also saw light signs of pleading.

Eventually I brought myself to give in and said: "Alright, fine. But this time you have to swear not to perform any dangerous moves, that would be just too risky."

Ty Lee raised her hand and said: "Kyoshi Warrior's honor!"

I smiled and kissed her, then I said: "Come on, get ready to go, you girls have to set out."
Ty Lee rejoiced and ran after the rest of the Kyoshi Warriors who were already heading towards the harbor.

Suki wanted to follow them as well, but I said: "Suki, please wait for a moment."

The leader stopped and turned around: "What is it, Yulizan?"

I grabbed Suki by the shoulders and said in a serious tone: "Listen: I have a pretty bad feeling about Ty Lee. I'm really scared that something is going to happen to her today while you're away on your mission."

"But she said that she and the child are fine."

"She always says that, but especially now, so close to the end of her pregnancy, the risk is just too big for my liking."

"And what are you going to do? You know how hard it is to talk her out of something."

"Yes, of course I know that, that's why I've already come up with a solution, you're the only one who will know about this. After you have set out, I will send Pagan after you. He will follow and watch your ship from the air. If anything happens to Ty Lee, he will land and help you bring her back here to the island as fast as possible. Got it?"

"Got it!"

"Good, but don't forget: Only two people on Pagan at once. If the worst comes to the worst, I would suggest that you fly back on Pagan with Ty Lee as fast as possible while the other warriors take the normal route. Would you be OK with this?"

"Yes, sensei! I will make sure that everything will go well."

"From your lips to the Spirits' ears, Suki."

We both laughed for a short moment, then Suki followed the other warriors to the harbor.

I looked after them and sighed, then whistled whereupon Pagan landed next to me shortly afterwards.

"Hello, my friend. I have a special task for you today. You saw the Kyoshi Warriors heading to the harbor?"

"Yes, why?"

"Well, they're about to set out on a mission and you're going to follow and watch them, unnoticed of course."

"But why?"

"Well, I have a strange feeling that something might happen to Ty Lee while they're gone. That's why I wanted to make sure that she'll be back here in time if the worst was to happen."

"Makes sense. So I'm supposed to watch them from the sky and land in case something happens, right?"

"Exactly. I also told Suki about this whole thing, she will know what to do. Now go, my friend, and
Pagan nodded and rose to the air, heading towards the harbor, following the warriors.

I gazed after him for a short moment and then looked at the tattoos on my fingers, I prayed that my feeling would turn out wrong today and that nothing would happen to Ty Lee.

But unfortunately my golden intuition should prove itself once again this time...

-POV change-

The mission of the Kyoshi Warriors went just as expected, they had reached the village that had asked for their help without any problems and were quickly able to solve the problem between the two families, it really was nothing special for them.

Now they were already on their way back to the jetty they had arrived on to take the ship back home to Kyoshi Island.

They walked together in a group, giggling softly and chatting about all sorts of topics, when it suddenly happened:

All of a sudden, Ty Lee's eyes shot wide open, her hands clutched her belly and she sank to the ground!

Suki was at her side immediately: "Ty Lee! What's wrong?"

The pregnant girl almost wasn't able to utter even a single word: "The baby ... it's ... coming!"

Suki was on the alert immediately: "Alright, Warriors, we have to..."

Her words were interrupted by a loud roar, the girls looked up to the sky: It was Pagan, the dragon of Yulizan, their teacher!

He dashed towards the ground and landed right in front of the group, then turned to Suki: "I saw from the air that you stopped walking, what happened?"

"Ty Lee has gone into labor! We have to bring her back to the island as fast as possible!"

Suki turned to the rest of the warriors: "Pagan and I will fly back to the island with Ty Lee, you others take the ship and follow us as soon as possible, understand?"

"Understood!", the other warriors replied and now started to run the rest of the way towards the coast where the jetty with the ship was located.

Suki helped Ty Lee, who was already writhing in pain, back to her feet and led her to Pagan.

With great difficulty she eventually managed that they both were sitting on the dragon's neck.

Suki shouted: "Fly! Let's go!", and Pagan soared into the sky, heading back towards Kyoshi Island with the highest speed he had ever reached.

In the air the dragon began to concentrate his thoughts, he needed to contact his master: "Yulizan, can you hear me? Come on!"...
I was sitting in my study and wrote a new scroll when I suddenly heard a voice in my head, it was Pagan: "Yulizan, can you hear me?"

I immediately focused all my thoughts on his voice and tried to answer: "Pagan! I hear you! What's happening?"

"I'm on my way back to the island with Ty Lee and Suki, Ty Lee is in labor, the baby is coming!"

I don't know how fast I had been but the next moment I rushed out of the house, ran to the village at the speed of a spreading bushfire and hammered on the door of Zheyi, the healer and physician.

She opened the door and said: "Easy, my boy, you..."

I didn't let her finish her sentence but instead called: "Ty Lee has gone into labor, she's on the way here, come with me, quickly!"

The old woman understood immediately, hurriedly collected some utensils from her house and then followed me to our house with a speed I honestly hadn't expected from her.

Not a minute too soon, because only moments after we arrived at the house Pagan landed on the large meadow next to it.

Suki jumped off, I rushed over to my dragon friend and saw Ty Lee, writhing in pain, sitting on the dragon's neck; I gently got her down and let her slide into my arms.

I flinched for a brief moment, despite the fact that her belly was not very big she had become quite heavy nonetheless.

I said to the other two women: "Into the house!", they followed me as I carried Ty Lee into the bedroom and laid her down on the bed.

As soon as she was lying there, I stepped away from the bed and let the women do their work.

Suki helped Ty Lee out of her Kyoshi armor, leaving her in her undergarments, whereat I noticed for the first time how much my love was sweating, she really had to suffer great pain.

Zheyi palpated Ty Lee's entire body and said: "Alright, the child is laying as it should be, everything should be fine."

Despite the old woman's positive words, I saw fear rising up in Ty Lee's eyes, which is why I now sat down at her side and took her hand, she looked at me, I said: "Everything will be fine, I'm here."

At first, she seemed to become a little calmer, but shortly afterwards she crushed my hand when she felt a strong contraction.

I tried to distract myself with positive thoughts: "Every birth is like this, the man suffers as well. But the reward is the most beautiful thing in the world, to hold your own child in your arms.", these thoughts quickly made me forget the pain.

Several hours later, after lots of walking around, even more hand-crushing and the eventual breaking of Ty Lee's water, the old healer finally said: "Alright, dear, I think you should be ready to push now."
"Finally!", I said to myself in my mind and uttered an inaudible sigh as I led Ty Lee back to the bed where she lay down again.

Zheyi helped Ty Lee to spread her legs, then she said: "OK, when I tell you to push, you push. One, two, three, push!"

Ty Lee pushed and crushed my hand once again in the process, but I didn't care, I was completely focused on supporting her in this moment.

I tried to encourage her again and again in between the individual contractions, saying things like: "Come on! You can do it! Soon we'll see our baby!"

Eventually, after a couple of literally painful minutes, the old woman said: "Alright, Ty Lee, one last time, then you have made it, so give it your all! And ... push!"

Ty Lee pushed as hard as she could, the feeling in my hand disappeared completely but that was worth it!

I saw the face of the old healer, it was beaming with delight as she walked over to the other end of the room, a little bundle in her arms.

I looked at her. Was that it? Was our baby born? Was it healthy?

Only a minute later my question was answered when the old woman came up to me and handed me the bundle with the words: "Say hello to your little boy!"

I took the bundle into my arms and suddenly looked into a little smiling face with two little gray-blue eyes.

I couldn't believe it! Our baby! It really was here! A boy! We had a son!

At the first moment I was simply deeply touched by the beauty of this moment, I reached out my finger and gently stroked his cheek, he chuckled softly.

I had to hold back my tears of joy when I said: "Welcome, little man, we have been waiting for you."

Meanwhile, Ty Lee had recovered from the worst exertions of the birth, I turned to her and said: "Look who's here."

I handed her the bundle, she also looked into his little eyes and smiled just like I did: "Oh Yulizan, he's perfect!"

"Exactly as he should be.", I said before I gently kissed Ty Lee on the cheek and then put my arm around her.

We looked down at the little bundle of joy, our little bundle of joy, we were just so happy at this moment.

But then Ty Lee suddenly turned to me and said: "Oh no! There's one thing we haven't thought about yet: His name!"

I was able to calm my love down when I said: "Don't worry, I have spent some thoughts on this matter and picked a name. Only if you agree, of course."

I paused for a moment, looked into Ty Lee's prying face and said: "I would like his name to be Jin,
like my late brother."

Ty Lee was all smiles and said: "That's beautiful!"

I smiled back: "Well, I guess that makes it official. Your name is Jin, little man."

We spent the rest of the day with our newborn son; Ty Lee continued to recover from the exertions of the birth, I often held Jin in my arms for a long time, I simply wanted to enjoy his closeness.

In the evening, when the moon was already up in the sky, we stood at the window together and looked out onto the ocean, Ty Lee was holding Jin, who was already fast asleep, in her arms, my right arm was resting over Ty Lee's shoulders like a shield.

We looked into the distance and thought the same thing: Now our life truly is perfect!

But of course we also knew: Sooner or later the everyday life of a family would hit us like a hammer.

But for now, we wanted to take advantage of the great times that lied ahead of us and enjoy them as much as possible.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Like father, like son
Family Life

Chapter Notes

Timeline: 11 years after the end of the war

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For the first time in my life my intuition actually did not end up being completely correct.

While our lives had indeed gained another wonderful experience through Jin's birth, the resulting family life was not how Ty Lee and I had expected it to be at all.

During my travels and in many pieces of writing I had learned that while a child would be the most beautiful experience of any couple, it would also bring lots of new and especially exhausting kinds of work.

But to my surprise the negative aspects mostly did not hit us and our lives remained as nice and pleasant as they had been in the time before.

Jin turned out to be an almost remarkably quiet baby, he cried or whimpered only very rarely, which is why Ty Lee and I almost never had to suffer from insomnia and the likes.

In the first months after the birth we took care of our son almost around the clock, the Kyoshi Warriors fulfilled their missions with their current abilities.

A good year after Jin's birth, Ty Lee and I eventually began to resume our duties.

While we were busy, we gave Jin into the care of Zheyi who always looked after him until we had finished our tasks and picked him up again in the evening.

In the summer of that year, my training of the Kyoshi Warriors ended, I had taught them everything in my power and they had mastered everything, some parts even better than I had expected.

With a small ceremony I appointed all the girls to the rank of Master and tattooed the Assassin seal onto their ring fingers, as well as their personal creeds onto their weapon arms; Ty Lee decided for "I protect those I love", which I considered a great choice.

From that moment on, the warriors carried out missions more and more often while I had basically nothing to do anymore, which is why I, while Ty Lee was away on a mission, tried to spend every spare minute with Jin.

Whenever I played or just spent time with him, I almost always felt that the connection between us was truly very strong, exactly how it should be between father and son.

I also realized quite early that Jin's soul emitted the same glow my own soul did, apparently my son was also destined to learn the ability to bend fire, a fact that made me very happy.

Thus, my son would have the best premises to succeed me and become an Assassin as well.
In the year 104 AG, four years after the end of the war, Ty Lee and I married in the Fire Nation capital, it was a nice little private wedding with only our friends as guests.

After Jin's birth, this was the happiest moment of my life, the love of my life was now also officially a part of me.

After our kiss to seal the vow, Ty Lee whispered in my ear: "Promise me that you will always love me."

"To the last breath.", was my answer, I saw the joy in Ty Lee's eyes and I knew that our lives would continue to be as wonderful as they already were.

And as fate willed, the wedding night turned out to be a very special night for us, because Ty Lee became pregnant a second time and eventually gave birth to a healthy girl nine months later.

We named her Miya, the "beautiful flower", because she was an almost spitting image of Ty Lee and I had given the latter the nickname "my pretty flower" at one point in the past.

So now we had two children and one might think that this would now start the terror, but our lives actually continued as calm and nice as before, because even though Miya was also very similar to her mother in character and therefore sometimes acted like a little whirlwind, during the first months of her life she had been as calm and quiet as her brother had been as well, a trait they both most likely had inherited from me, which made me quite proud.

Time passed, our children grew bigger and we older, of course.

As soon as Jin had reached the age when he began to actively perceive his environment and to properly understand words and information, I told him all sorts of stories, about my adventures, about the Assassins, just about everything he could use later in his life.

He was very excited and happy every time, I felt that he wanted to emulate me and also become an Assassin once he was older.

Although I was glad that my son was thinking about continuing the family tradition this early, I still wanted to let him enjoy the pleasant years of his childhood before the serious side of life would begin.

Miya on the other hand was an entirely different deal; she was always very close to her mother which was probably due to their almost identical personalities.

I had already sensed quite early in her life that Miya most likely did not possess any bending abilities, another aspect she shared with her mother.

Jin on the other hand already showed a certain fascination for fire at an early age, ever since then I was sure that my son would almost certainly become an Assassin.

When he was ten years old, he eventually expressed the wish for the first time, he came to me and said:

"Dad?"

"What is it, Jin?"

"Can I talk to you about something?"
"Of course, my son."

I saw that Jin struggled to find the right words, but eventually he said:

"I want to become like you!"

At first I was a little unsure what exactly he meant by that, but then it came to me.

I asked him: "You mean you want to become an Assassin?"

My boy's face was radiant with joy when he replied: "Yes! I want to be as big and strong as you and
have a cool sword!"

I laughed and said: "Easy, Jin. You will grow big by yourself over time and you're still too young
for a real sword like mine. But we might be able to do something regarding your strength. What do
you say? Would you like me to make you stronger and show you how to become a true Assassin?"

"Yes!"

I ruffled through my son's hair and said: "OK, then go to bed early today so that you're fit and ready
when we start tomorrow."

Thereupon Jin stormed into his room even though it was only late in the afternoon yet.

Ty Lee came into the room and asked me: "Huh? What's up with him? He normally doesn't even
want to go to bed late at night and we always have to carry him to his room when he falls asleep
somewhere else in the house."

I laughed and said: "Oh well, he's excited because I promised him that we'll start his training
tomorrow. He told that he wants to become an Assassin just like me, isn't that great?"

Ty Lee seemed worried: "At his age? Isn't that a little too early and too dangerous?"

I shook my head slightly, kissed Ty Lee on the cheek and said: "Remember: I'm not only his father,
but also one of the best Assassins the world has ever known. I'll make sure that nothing happens to
him."

"All right, I trust you."

I smiled and added: "If this continues, then sooner or later Miya is going to ask you to take her with
you to the Kyoshi Warriors."

Ty Lee smiled as well and said: "Maybe, but there's still more than enough time for that. She's a
bright girl, she will find her path when the time is right."

I nodded while my thoughts were already focused on tomorrow's training.

Jin was still too young to officially enter the Order, the minimum age for recruits was twelve years,
but if he really wanted to become an Assassin some prior knowledge couldn't hurt.

The next morning we all woke up with individual goals in mind.

Ty Lee had promised Miya to take her along to the village and the harbor for grocery shopping and
Jin could not wait for his training to start.
After a rather hasty breakfast we all set off individually, Jin practically pulled me out of the house, he really wanted to begin the training.

I laughed as we left the house, he definitely already had the necessary determination.

But as sorry as I was to curb his enthusiasm, the first steps of the training consisted almost entirely of theoretical explanations and the like while he of course had expected us to go all in immediately, he probably had thought that he could immediately grab a sword and start fighting.

I explained to Jin the basic Assassin knowledge which he had to know and also could understand at his young age.

Although he seemed a bit disgruntled at first because of the lack of practical activities he was still very eager to learn and absorbed my narrations well and with interest; I was satisfied with him, he was a good and fast learner.

Eventually, after a good hour of explanations, I said: "Alright, are you ready to receive your first weapon?"

"I am ready.", Jin replied with the tranquility of an old master, I was visibly impressed by this.

I brought out a light wooden sword from behind my back and handed it to Jin.

While he was already waving it through the air experimentally, I said: "This should be enough for the beginning. I mean, you're not going to go and slay demons immediately after all."

We both laughed, then we walked over the meadow on which our house was located, straight towards my personal training area which I had set up a few years ago to stay in shape and the likes.

It held targets for archery and knife throwing, obstacle courses and many straw dummies which one could use to practice close combat.

I now drew my own katana and said: "Alright, Jin, your first exercise is to learn and then perform this movement without any faults or problems."

I showed him the movement, it was a normal smooth swinging of the sword that ended with a powerful strike to the dummy.

When I had finished the movement, which I had done very slowly so that Jin could see and understand every single aspect, I asked: "So, do you think you can do this?"

Jin nodded, I said: "Well then, let's go!"

I stepped aside and left the dummy to my son.

And this is how things continued for the next couple of hours. I had Jin perform the exercise over and over again, corrected his mistakes and encouraged him again and again to never give up.

When it was around noon and Jin was knocked down once again by the force of the strike against the dummy, I walked over to him and said: "Wrong again. Did you forget? Your legs must be parallel to each other and stay on the ground firmly the entire time while you're lunging out for the strike, otherwise you won't be able to cushion the strike's recoil."

Jin said: "Yes, I know, I just forgot."

I smiled, patted my son on the back and said: "Chin up. The path to become an Assassin is long and
difficult, not something you can learn in one day."

"How long did you train to become this good, dad?"

"Well, my basic training took me four years, after that I traveled through the world and continued to improve my skills. I can tell you from my own experience, my son, and you should remember that for the rest of your life: Learning never stops, there is always room for improvement."

Jin nodded, I smiled and said: "Come on, continue, I know you can do it."

Jin turned to the dummy again and continued to try his luck, I walked over to the wooden fence, crossed my arms and looked out at the sea.

"Oh yes, this is a father's life.", I thought to myself.

Only a few moments later I was suddenly roused from my thoughts again when I heard a loud well-known voice:

"Daddy!"

I turned around and saw that Ty Lee and Miya had returned.

I jumped over the fence, got on my knees and spread my arms as Miya came running towards me.

I caught her in a wild embrace, lifted her up and whirled her around, she exulted loudly.

When she had calmed down a little again, I said: "Hey there, my little princess. How was your day, shopping with Mommy?"

Miya immediately started to talk a mile a minute, telling me all sorts of things she had seen during the day; while she was still babbling, I approached Ty Lee who was carrying a small basket filled with all kinds of groceries.

I said to Miya: "Why don't you go into the house already? I need to talk with Mommy for a second."

She rejoiced once more, jumped off my arms and ran straight through the door into the house.

I kissed Ty Lee, she asked: "So, how's the training among men going?"

I laughed and said: "Pretty good thus far, Jin is a very attentive student, he learns well and fast."

"Good to hear. I think I should go and take care of our little monster in there now.", she said as we heard Miya calling for her from inside the house.

I smiled, kissed her again and then went back to Jin.

The moment I arrived back at the training area, Jin managed to perform the movement and the strike to the dummy for the first time while also staying on his feet!

He could hardly believe it at the first moment: "I ... I did it!"

I walked up to him and said: "Very good. See, you can do it."
"Only because you showed me how to do it! Thank you, dad, you're the best!"

Jin dropped the sword and hugged me tightly.

This hug and his words were beautiful balm on my soul, I felt nothing but joy in this moment.

I now truly had a perfect life, a wife I loved like nothing else in the world and two children who were my everything, it could not be any better.

At that moment I swore to myself: My life should never change again, this was heaven on earth, I didn't want to live any other way anymore!

And indeed: This wish should come true...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: A great master steps down
Yes, my life indeed still had much in stock for me, but the days of my big adventures seemed to be over for good with the start of my family.

Because even though a lot of things happened over the course of the next years and decades, I only had to dig out my Assassin robe one last time, for an adventure that eventually showed me the true values of my calm and quiet family life and made it clear to me that my time as a warrior truly was over.

But as I slowly but surely began to retire, my succession was already in the making.

I trained Jin by myself for about two years. When he turned twelve years old and thus reached the required age for the official joining of the Assassin Order I took him to the monastery with me for the first time and there performed his initiation together with the other Grand Masters.

I had to shed a little tear when I saw him in his white recruit robe for the first time, he reminded me of myself on the day of my own initiation just too much.

Although the Order's rules usually dictated that recruits had to be trained directly in the monastery, the Grand Masters turned a blind eye to the rules in Jin's case and endowed me with all the necessary privileges to train Jin in all aspects of the Assassins at home on the island.

We were both very happy about this decision since a separation would have been very difficult for our entire family.

When the ceremony was finished I had said to my son: "Prepare yourself, the serious side of your life begins today!"

"I am ready!", had been his short and precise answer.

I was really pleased with him, his determination was very distinctive, he would definitely become a good Assassin.

After our return to the island we almost immediately began with Jin's training.

I had made it clear to him from the beginning that this part of the training wouldn't have much in common with the previous way of my teaching anymore, I would be much more strict and diligent from now on, during the training hours I would not be his father but his master, which meant that he had to follow every single one of my commands.

Jin had agreed uncomplainingly, I was pleased with that because it was sign that he truly was taking the entire thing thoroughly seriously.
Since he already knew the basic knowledge and abilities we immediately could proceed to the more advanced techniques, this included the art of fire bending, more precisely the mastery of the white flames and the purple lightning.

During his preliminary training I had always denied Jin to teach him fire bending with the reason: "You're not officially an Assassin yet, therefore I'm not allowed to teach it to you."

He had accepted this circumstance but I had always noticed that it practically preyed on his mind the entire time.

That's why he was all the happier and more focused when I eventually said that he was now ready for the first couple of fire bending lessons.

Just like the countless combat techniques he already had mastered, Jin also learned the basics of fire bending amazingly well and fast.

A large portion of this training also consisted of the two of us travelling to various places and locations that all had some relation to fire together so that Jin could study the fire's characteristics to learn to understand it better. Those places included volcanoes, hot springs, mountains with frequent thunderstorms and others.

If I had to document the progression of Jin's training, I probably would equate it with my own training, my son learned neither faster nor slower than I myself had.

For this reason his training continued without any problems until the big day finally came after six years.

We traveled to the monastery a couple of weeks after Jin's eighteenth birthday so that Jin could take the exam that would grant him the rank of Master.

And although he, in my eyes, struggled a little more than me when I had taken the exam myself all those years ago, he still passed the whole thing with flying colors.

I was allowed to appoint him as Master myself, I had to visibly hold back my emotions, also when Jin received the ritual tattoos.

He chose the following creed: "The greatest strength is achieved through inner balance", this underlined his level-headed personality, he always acted with caution and looked for the deeper meaning of battle.

I had always wondered what exactly Jin planned to do with his newly-acquired abilities and rank, but the answer followed much sooner than I had thought, because after we had returned home to the island Jin told me that he wanted to travel the world and further extend his knowledge and abilities now.

He said: "Do you remember? All these years ago you have told me that you did the exact same thing."

I countered: "Yes, but unlike you I didn't have a family that could have worried about me anymore. I had no home, where exactly should I have gone to?"

Jin laughed softly, put his arm over my shoulders and said: "Don't worry about me, dad, I will come back in one piece."

"I hope you will, otherwise your mother will bite my head off."
We both laughed heartily, despite everything I of course was incredibly proud of my son and what had become of him. I was sure that these journeys would eventually mold him into a true Assassin.

And Miya? What had happened with her during all the years in which Jin had become an Assassin?

Well, as I had foreseen, Miya did not possess any bending abilities, thus, even if she had wanted to, it would have been very difficult for her to become an Assassin, but this wasn't the path she eventually chose anyway.

Over the years Miya mainly retained her personality from her childhood, she still was a little bundle of energy that had to be in motion almost the entire time, a smaller second version of her mother if you will.

She also retained her closeness to the latter which is why it was no wonder that Ty Lee inducted Miya into the Order of the Kyoshi Warriors when she turned twelve years old and began to train her all the important aspects in the time that followed, just like I had done with Jin.

Soon Miya was able to wield the Kyoshi Warrior fan excellently, her mother even taught her the chi blockade ability, something she of course wanted to try out on Jin or me immediately, but it of course never worked, though it really reminded of when Ty Lee and I had first met all those years ago.

It was around the same time when Jin was appointed Master Assassin that Miya also became a full-fledged member of the Kyoshi Warriors and started to go on all sorts of missions with all the new members who also had joined over the years.

For this reason Ty Lee and I now had the house for ourselves with increasing frequency, a fact that came in quite handy, because even though we may had grown older, our love was still burning as strong as during our youth and we used every given opportunity to live it out.

One day I said to Ty Lee: "You know, it's kind of crazy to think that we already have two adult children, isn't it?"

She laughed and said: "Yeah, it kind of is. But now that you mentioned it, I have to say that the two really start to remind me of ourselves when we were their age."

I answered with a feigned reproachful tone in my voice: "You sound like we are already old as dirt, now really! Jin is twenty-two, Miya is eighteen, you are thirty-seven and I'm forty-one, we're still more than far away from the scrap heap! We could even become parents one more time if we wanted."

Ty Lee laughed, I laughed with her. But if I had known at that time what would happen in the next few years I probably would have reconsidered my choice of words again...

Because three years later, in the year 126 AG, my words actually became reality. Ty Lee became pregnant one more time, we had a third child, I became a father once again at age forty-four.

Although all of this was completely unplanned, we of course took the consequences upon ourselves without any doubts or the likes.

Ty Lee's now third pregnancy once again proceeded without any major problems despite her now quite advanced age for a mother, she eventually gave birth to a healthy boy.
Thus we now had a second son, Jin and Miya were incredibly happy about the new addition to our family since they had never really gotten to experience the baby and infant years of a little sibling.

Our choice of name was a little more liberal this time, we named our new son Chang, a name quite untypical for the Fire Nation, but it soon became apparent that "untypical" seemed to be the perfect word.

Because Chang was different from his siblings, at least in certain areas.

While he was just as calm and quiet as Jin and Miya had been, his interests were quite special.

From his earliest years, Chang was incredibly fascinated by water. As soon as he was able to walk on his own, he always wanted to go to the beach or the harbor, better said the sea.

I have had a hunch regarding the reason for this strange behavior for quite a long time but still had to wait until one of our many trips to the beach to get the absolute certainty: Chang was a water bender!

At the first moment I asked myself how this was possible since there weren't any water benders in my family as far as I could remember and Ty Lee's family tree didn't include any representatives of the liquid element either.

Thereupon I began to look into our families' histories to check if I had overseen something.

And I actually found something. It was so incredibly obvious and yet I still had always missed it: My maternal grandfather! He had not only been a sailor, but also an actual water bender!

"I should have realized this much sooner!", were my words after I had made this interesting find.

Thus there really weren't any doubts anymore: Our youngest son really was a water bender!

But this now presented me with a problem: How should I train him to become an Assassin? The only possibility that come to my mind was to send him to the monastery to train under one of the water bending Masters, but this was something that I really could not see myself doing, I loved my son way too much to just send him away like this for weeks or even years!

But thankfully I didn't actually need to make a decision on this whole matter, because when he was nine years old Chang came to me and said:

"Dad, when I'm older I want to have a real big ship and sail around the sea with it!"

With a surprised look in my eyes I asked my son: "So you want to become a sailor?"

"Yes!", Chang replied with a face that was practically glowing with happiness.

I smiled and said: "You know, your great-grandpa was a sailor as well. He took me on a couple of trips when I was your age. Do you want me to tell you a story about this?"

"Yes, please!"

Thereupon I told Chang the story about one of the trips my grandfather had taken me on with his ship; when I was finished I was sure that I had sparked his interest in seafaring even more.

But I was by no means sad that Chang didn't want to become an Assassin since his generation had already given rise to an Assassin in Jin, it was the next generation that had to give rise to the next Assassin of the family.
And it would be a very special one as we eventually would realize...

"Next generation" was the perfect keyword because my children had not been inactive in the field of family planning.

Jin had met and fell in love with a nice girl named Lira on his travels through the Earth Kingdom, the two married in the year 123 AG and four years later had twin girls, Tamiko and Hana, both non-benders.

Miya also found her love in the Earth Kingdom, in form of Hong, the son of a wealthy merchant. The two married in the year 127 AG and only a year later had a daughter, Natsuki, also a non-bender.

Although I of course loved all my three granddaughters, there still was some tension starting to grow within me, I didn't want the line of Assassins in my family to die out.

Therefore my hopes were pinned on Chang. He fulfilled his dream, signed up for a ship for the first time when he was seventeen and went to sea from that moment on.

Three years later he had saved up enough money to buy himself his own ship. This now became his source of income, he became a merchant and delivered all sorts of goods to everywhere in the world with his ship.

In the year 149 AG, he eventually met Sumire, daughter of a tearoom owner, in the Fire Nation, fell in love with her and married her.

And in the year 152 AG my prayers were finally answered, my daughter-in-law gave birth to a son who also was a bender, I had sensed this immediately when I had held him in my arms for the first time, something that was harder than one might imagine at first, I was already seventy years old after all.

My first grandson was given the name Razo, "the Strong", a very good name as I found, he had to be strong for the career that I had planned for him.

The following year was heavily split between light and darkness. Light because Chang and Sumire became parents for a second time, a second son named Hiru who in contrast to his brother was a non-bender. Shadow because deep grief struck us all when the news of the death of Aang reached us.

I was devastated when I learned of the Avatar's death, with his existence the final piece of Assassin honor that had remained with me now faded away as well, my task was finished, I had protected the Avatar to the end, the Spirits would be happy with me when they would welcome me in the Spirit World, an event that, as I felt, wouldn't be long in coming anymore.

Although it wasn't known yet who exactly the new Avatar was, at least we knew that, according to the cycle, it had to be a water bender.

While the other Grand Masters already philosophized about how and to whom exactly the position of the Protector would be assigned, I increasingly attended to Razo, my grandson.

I was able to convince Chang to let Razo spend as much time as possible with me and his uncle Jin so that he could come into contact with the work of the Assassins as early as possible.
At the same time, Chang often took him out to sea on his ship, thus my grandson was basically influenced from two different sides simultaneously.

Both seemed to be of avail, because just like Jin before him Razo also voiced his wish to become an Assassin, like his uncle and grandfather, for the first time when he was ten years old. I was incredibly delighted to hear this, the continuation of the tradition was secured!

Two years later Razo was inducted into the Order by me and Jin, who in the meantime also had been appointed the rank of Grand Master, we also conducted his training during the next couple of years.

Razo was a very good student, just like his uncle, but whenever I watched him train I couldn't escape the feeling that he was hiding something. I never followed up on these feelings and thoughts, probably also because of my old age.

The years passed and I felt that my big clock of life slowly but surely approached its final stroke.

I became weaker and weaker over time until I was almost completely confined to my bed.

But I regretted nothing. I had led a wonderful, eventful life, I had experienced things that other people couldn't even dream about.

Now the year is 169 AG, I am eighty-seven years old. My time in this world is as good as over.

I noticed that my family seemed to have realized the same, they all came together on Kyoshi Island to be by my side during my last days and I was deeply grateful for this.

Although most people probably didn't like to do it, I admitted that I had become old, sick and weak; I was able to amuse my family one last time with this.

I sat in my bed and saw them all standing or sitting around me.

My beloved Ty Lee, the ravages of time had visibly touched her as well albeit her health was in much better condition than mine.

My three wonderful children, my everything.

Jin, who had become an Assassin and had succeeded me in the Order.

Miya, who had followed her mother's footsteps and had become a Warrior of Kyoshi.

And Chang, the "maverick" of the family, the sailor.

I was proud that I had been able to give all three of them such a good life.

And finally, my five grandchildren, the crowning achievement of my life, they would make sure that the line of our family would continue for many years to come.

I gathered up some of the sparse energy that had remained me and said quietly:

"Would you please all leave the room for a minute, except for you, Razo, I want to talk with you alone."

I coughed as the rest of the family left the room, only my grandson stayed with me.
I said quietly: "Razo ... come here ... and take my hand."

My grandson did as he was told.

I looked into his blue-grayish eyes, which he definitely had inherited from me and his grandmother, and said:

"Listen closely, Razo, what I will tell you now is very important. When I'm gone, you have to carry on the honor of our family, you have to become as good an Assassin as I was."

"Grandfather, I will never be as good as you, you are the best Assassin of all time!"

I laughed softly for a short moment, coughed afterwards and said:

"I was good but definitely not the best. And you will become a very good Assassin as well, I just know it. But you have to promise me that you will always honor the Order, just like I did. You are my heir, Razo, so make it count. Promise it to me."

My grandson held my hand a little firmer and said: "I promise."

I smiled and said: "Good, very good. Then please go and let the others in again."

Razo stood up and walked over to the door.

I looked after him for a short moment, then I suddenly heard the sound of wings flapping in front of the window. I may have been very old but my senses were still just as sharp as they had been in my youth.

I knew this sound only too well, his head appeared in front of the big window and he smiled at me with his big green eyes.

I smiled back: "Hello Pagan, my friend. It's good to see you."

Pagan looked at me and said with a slight hint of sadness in his voice: "Is it what it looks like? Is this the end?"

I nodded and said: "Unfortunately yes. I have grown old and when man grows old ... you know. But you, my friend, you as a dragon still have almost your entire life ahead of you. But I know the commandments of a dragon rider, that is why I now tell you the following: I hereby release you from my command, you now can go wherever you want. But if one day a member of my family should find you, you have serve him or her just like you have served me, you understand?"

Pagan nodded, I continued to smile.

My dragon friend said: "Well, I guess this is it now. Goodbye, Yulizan, I will never forget you, my master, my friend."

Tears started to run down Pagan's scaly snout when I said: "Goodbye, Pagan, my best friend, I will never forget you and all the adventures we've been through together. Be safe and take care of yourself."

Pagan breathed one final little cloud of fire out of his nostrils, then he rose to the air and flew away towards the evening horizon.

I looked after him until I had lost sight of him, I would never forget just how good of a friend the dragon had been to me.
At the same moment the rest of my family returned to the room, they gathered around me once again, Ty Lee sat down on the edge of the bed and took my hand.

I looked her in the eyes with a smile on my face and asked:

"Do you still remember what I had promised you at our wedding? I would always love you, to the last breath. Now the time has come and I still love you, I will always love you, whether in life or in death."

I saw the tears running down Ty Lee's beautiful face but I couldn't do anything, my time had come.

I looked around in the circle of my family one last time and said with a quiet and weak voice:

"Goodbye, I love you all."

After that my head sank down into my pillow, I thought of my parents and my siblings.

My last words were: "I'm coming...", then my eyes closed.

The next thing I heard were friendly calls.

It took me a short moment to realize what was going on.

I was back in the house of my childhood and not only that but I also had my adolescent body again!

I of course knew that I now thoroughly was a part of the Spirit World, finally reunited with my family.

And there they were: My father, my mother, my sisters and my brother.

I walked towards them, my father said: "Welcome, my son, we have been waiting for me. Come, we have a lot of catching up to do."

I smiled as my sisters grabbed my arms and started to pull me forward.

I was happy, I was finally reunited with my family. Now we could all rest in peace here together.

My time on earth was over, my destiny had fulfilled itself.

But I knew one thing: There were loads of adventures lying ahead of my descendants, but they would emerge successful from every single one of them, because I was there and would watch over them all the time.

Especially over Razo. I already have had the feeling during my lifetime that my grandson would most likely succeed me in more aspects than we may have thought.

But no matter what would happen, I would watch over him, stay by his side the entire time.

I am Yulizan Huyan, the Flame in the Dark!
Next chapter: A new hero
The Next Generation (Epilogue)

Chapter Notes

Timeline: 70 years after the end of the war

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I was kneeling on the floor of the Great Hall of the Assassin monastery and listened to the words of Grand Master Jin, my uncle.

"Zhiyou heping he rongyu, zhenli he daode shi huanxiang! The Codex unfolds in these words! Where others are blinded by ideals and opinions, always remember..."

I completed his phrase: "There is only peace and honor!"

"Where others are restricted by laws and rules, never forget..."

"Truth and morality are illusions!"

"We walk in the shadows to bring light into the world!"

We spoke the final phrase together: "We are Assassins!"

My uncle said: "Rise, Master Razo, and receive the honors of your new rank."

I opened my eyes, rose to my feet and bowed to my uncle and the other Grand Masters.

My uncle continued: "It is now time for you to receive the ritual tattoos. Take your seat, Master Razo."

I sat down on the ceremonial chair at which my uncle had pointed.

Shortly afterwards an adept who carried a tray which several small instruments on it appeared. I of course knew that I would now receive the tattoos that every master received during his appointment.

The adept took my left hand and began to draw the seal of the Assassin Order onto my ring finger with a needle-like tool.

When this was done he changed sides and rolled up the right sleeve of my robe.

My uncle asked: "What is the creed you have decided on, Master Razo? I hope you have made your choice with caution, your creed will accompany you for the rest of your life."

I had spent enough thoughts on this matter and said with a determined voice:

"From this day on, I will live under the following creed: "I honor the tradition of my family"

My uncle said: "A good choice, young Master.", while the adept began to perpetuate my words on my arm.
When he was done and had left the hall again, my uncle said:

"Now it is sealed! From this moment on you are a Master of the Order of the Assassins! Rise!"

I stood up, all the Grand Masters bowed to me, I returned the gesture.

I actually had done it, I now was a Master Assassin.

I thought of my grandfather: "I did it! I will follow your legacy!"

Now that the ceremony was finished my uncle didn't need to comply with the traditional formalities anymore, he walked over to me, put his hand on my shoulder and said:

"Congratulations, nephew. Now you have officially continued the tradition of our family in your generation, just like your grandfather, may the Spirits rest his soul, had always wanted."

I smiled: "Thank you, uncle Jin, I have trained all my life for this. I'm going to follow grandfather's footsteps, I can feel it, I'm going to become as great an Assassin as he was."

"These are some noble goals, my boy. But never forget that every individual writes their own story, you will also find and follow your very own special path through life."

"I don't doubt that, uncle, I just ask myself what I'm going to do right now. I mean, I don't really have anything to do, except maybe help father on his ship."

"What about Hiru? You are both young, wild and free, how about you do something together as brothers?"

My uncle grinned and lightly nudged me with his elbow.

I of course knew what he meant. My brother Hiru and I both had always been two proper girl magnets, something we always had enjoyed, but weren't able to do anymore once I had begun my Assassin training.

I of course still tried everything to stay in touch with Hiru as much as possible, he was my brother after all, we shared an unbreakable bond and were always there for each other.

I was about to leave the hall when Qishen, the leader of the Assassins, called me back.

"Wait, young Master Razo, there is one more thing we have to show you."

A look of surprise appeared on my face as I followed my leader's words and walked back towards the Grand Masters.

Qishen clapped his hands twice and said: "Bring us the Map of Light!

I looked at my uncle with big eyes, but he said nothing and instead only gave me a serious look in return.

Another adept now entered the hall, he carried an ancient looking scroll in his hands and eventually put it down on the table in front of the Grand Masters.

Qishen said to the adept: "Unroll it.", the adept did as he was told.
I took a step closer towards the table, so this was it, the legendary Map of Light that showed the birthplace of every single Avatar in history.

We already knew that the new Avatar had to be a water bender, which is why the sigil of the Water Tribe glowed in a bright white light near the South Pole.

Qishen now turned to my uncle: "It is time.", my uncle nodded.

"Time for what? What's going on?", I asked completely clueless.

My uncle maintained the serious look on his face and began to speak with an equally as serious voice:

"Razo, my boy. We have waited a long time for this moment and now that you're a Master we can finally tell you."

"Tell me what?"

"As you know, ever since the foundation of our Order, whenever a new Avatar is born, one Assassin is chosen by the Spirits to become the Avatar's Protector. Your grandfather was the Protector of Avatar Aang, the last Avatar."

"I know the story, but what does this have to do with me?"

"Well, the Grand Masters have recently received word from the Spirits that they have chosen the Protector of the new Avatar. And they have chosen ... you!"

I was as if struck by lightning! I should be the Protector of the new Avatar? And basically follow my grandfather's legacy directly this way?

I felt a potpourri of emotions fighting for dominance in my body, but I fortunately managed to keep my composure and answered:

"Well, that is an incredible honor ... which I'm ready to carry!"

"Does this mean that you accept the position as Protector?"

"Of course! It is the will of the Spirits and one does not question their words."

"Very good, you have truly paid attention during your training."

"And what exactly does this mean for me now?"

"Well, you will travel to the Southern Water Tribe, find the new Avatar and start to accompany him or her. We may not be in times of war anymore but danger is existent all the time and the Avatar needs to be protected to maintain the peace in the world."

I had understood and said: "So be it. The Avatar is under my protection from now. I will set out as soon as possible and start to search for the Avatar."

My uncle nodded and said: "May you walk in the shadows, Razo."

"As may you, uncle.", I replied.

I bowed to the other Grand Masters one last time and then left the hall.
I went into my little room in one of the towers of the monastery, lied down my bed and stared at the ceiling.

I thought. I now held the same position my grandfather had once held which meant that I now had found my life goal.

Just like my grandfather before me I would be the Avatar's Protector from now on.

I asked myself if I maybe was going to experience the same kind of adventures of which my grandfather had always told me stories. His journeys with Avatar Aang had to have been a truly unique and exceptional experience, I tried to imagine how the new Avatar and I would go through similar situations.

This raised a question however: How exactly was I supposed to travel through the world?

My grandfather had Pagan, his dragon, but he had left us as well after the death of my grandfather, nobody knew where he was nowadays.

The only possibility that came to my mind and also seemed realistic at the same time was to emulate my father and buy a ship for myself. I would keep this thought in mind until I eventually would set out for good.

I stood up again, walked over to the window and looked outside, the sun began to slowly set at the horizon.

I sighed and looked up to the sky.

"You watch over me. I will not disappoint you! I will fulfill the same task that you had dedicated your life to!", I said in my mind while I thought of my grandfather.

My grandfather may have been the Flame in the Dark, but now it was time for the next generation!

I now carry the honor of my family and I will carry it on to the end of my path!

I am Razo Huyan, the Legacy of the Flame!

The End

Chapter End Notes

And that's it, the story is finished.

I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing/translating it.

About the sequel to this story: I don't know when or if I will ever translate it at all, mainly because it's not finished yet in German and this probably won't change in the foreseeable future since I have several other projects in the works already that I want to finish first. Therefore a big sorry to everybody who (eventually) was looking forward to read the sequel.

Leave a review with your opinion about this story if you want/feel like it, if you have
questions or something like that, send me a PM and I will try to answer them.
As for now, I wish you a nice day and I'll see you next time, peace out.

End Notes

Next chapter: The adventure begins

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!